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Community: Culture and Function in the Seventh-day Adventist Church Community

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Community: Culture and Function in the Seventh-day
Adventist Church Community

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A SENIOR RESEARCH PAPER UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF DENISE CHILDS
SUBMITTED TO THE SOUTHERN SCHOLARS COMMITTEE IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR SOUTHERN SCHOLARS

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Abstract

This study looks specifically at the purpose and function of religious communities in order to analyze the Seventh-day Adventist community as a system and communitarian organism that creates and sustains moral codes and social controls, which thereby is symbiotic with certain identity expressions/formations. My discussion takes place in a rapidly changing broader society of high mobility, internet connectivity, and cultural change. Within the larger global community exists an American community, and within, but also overreaching that community exists a Seventh-day Adventist community that is global. These communities interact with each other, crossing membership boundaries. Within the Seventh-day Adventist world-church, smaller subgroups emerge with unique social expectations.

**Community: Culture and Function in the Seventh-day
Adventist Church Community**

Introduction

The phenomenon of community in society (a group of people joining together for a mutual purpose) is truly ubiquitous. As such a commonality in society, many scholars have researched and elaborated on the forms and functions of communities throughout the world. I add my voice to this scholastic investigation in order to understand specifically the Seventh-day Adventist community in both structure and function.

My experience in many different Seventh-day Adventist communities gives me a voice as an untrained ethnographer. As I have been immersed in both domestic and international Seventh-day Adventist religious communities, examining how the various communities assert their collective identities, I found a broad spectrum of social expectations within the various Seventh-day Adventist communities. This leads me to my research question that asks: Does the Seventh-day Adventist religious community have its own unique moral codes and social expectations that deviate from the broader Seventh-day Adventist world-church community?

Through research on community and personal experience, I evaluate how moral codes and social expectations are

expressed within the Seventh-day Adventist church community.

Literature Review

Function of Community and Corresponding Theory

Among laws controlling human societies there is one more precise and clearer, it seems to me, than all the others. If men are to remain civilized or to become civilized, the art of association must develop and improve among them at the same speed as equality of condition spreads.

--Alexis de Toqueville
Democracy in America (p. 517).

The socialization of humankind, and therefore the establishment of communities, has been a part of human interaction since the conception of civilization. In the more primitive societies, such as nomadic tribes, humans group together for survival. Their food collection and sustenance is supported by group cooperation. The group in the nomadic case is typically composed of direct or extended family members working together to meet the needs for survival.

As societies grow, so do the complexities of our community organizations and the needs that communities must meet. We have evolved and developed a great distance since

the nomadic times, and now our society encompasses complex bureaucracies, governments, educational systems, religious structures, health systems, sanitation systems, and so on. These social structures meet much more than just the need for survival; social organizations meet a vast array of needs such as intellectual growth, spiritual growth, creating a sense of belonging, giving purpose, fostering civic participation, and providing entertainment. Humans create groups to fulfill individual and communal needs. We form communities, and in return communities help mold and create the culture of a society.

In the *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Townsend & Hansen (2001) discuss various expressions and functions of community. Their article *Expression of Community* explores the idea of community as a moral expression, as a balance of both individual and communal identity. It investigates the new frontiers facing the essential social structure of community in a postmodern society. The first important discussion is in the definition and function of community in society.

Social identities are made up of people's overlapping, mutually reinforcing, competing, and conflicting memberships in a variety of communities. When people

claim community membership they are simultaneously expressing their personal and social identities.

(Townsend & Hansen, 2001, p. 2355)

This means that personal and social identities are both expressed through and expressive of (via) the social order of a community. Many social groups (communities) have an element of cohesion and commonality that defines its members. That can be as abstract as shared values, religion, beliefs and so on, or it can be concrete like gender, ethnicity, race, national origin and other things that are not necessarily voluntary or chosen. However, not all social groups express community. Community occurs when people use what they have in common with others to establish an identity. People express who they are through community. Many communities are in competition, which creates a more rounded and diverse individual or collective identity.

Communities help to establish guidelines for judgments of moral standards and cultural orientations; these identifications are more often implied rather than overt. Much of the identity expressed by a community is definition by negation (Wilber, 1979). Separation from other communities expresses what they are not. For Seventh-day

Adventists, part of their social identity lies in *not* going to church on Sunday, *not* drinking, *not* smoking, and so on. The separation from other Christian denominations is part of the expression of moral judgments. Such moral judgments are powerful in controlling the social behavior of the group. That is why religious identities and religious communities are typically the strongest. Their identity is part of moral standards, which are typically absolute employing the "because God said so" argument to justify moral behaviors, in addition to deeply rooted culture and tradition. As religious scholar Wald (1987) asserts: "Religious ideals are potentially powerful sources of commitment and motivation and human beings will make enormous sacrifices if they believe themselves to be driven by a divine force" (p. 29-30).

Such religious motivations are very powerful and hard to argue with. This is part of the reason that religious communities have had such a strong staying power within a changing and growing society (Bellah, Madsen & Sullivan, 1991). Another reason lies in the power of symbolism that is so important to communities that are not physically/spatially linked (Townsend & Hansen, 2001).

One could be an Adventist in Montana that has never been outside of his or her city, but that person is

simultaneously connected to all the other members of the Adventist churches in the world. The same individual in Montana is a member of a larger community that is specifically identified (Anderson, 1983) as an *imaginary* community because that person will probably never meet or communicate with most other members of his or her community; yet that person is assured a community of fellow believers. Imaginary communities are real, but do not have any physical proximity to its other members. Symbolism becomes very important to this type of community--whether it be a religious symbol of a crucifix, a prayer rug facing Mecca, a national symbol of a flag, or the cultural symbol of jeans--because people use symbols as an expression of identity (Townsend & Hansen, 2001).

Technology has changed the types of communities available making it possible for communities to thrive without locality or physical connectedness. There is an epidemic of new imaginary communities with the connectivity of the internet. The traditional idea of the imaginary community was established by Anderson (1983) with his example of a newspaper subscriber that reads alone, but is part of a broader community of other subscribers that read the same paper. In ancient times, communities were directly tied to the location, geography, and language of

the group. With the arrival of the World Wide Web, we can be in contact with any population from any country. Language can be translated on the web breaking down the language barriers that have been the most obvious obstacle for establishing cross-cultural communication. The only requirement is a connection. One does not even need a computer any more--a cell phone is adequate. This instantaneous connection has revolutionized the way we define community, and therefore indirectly personal and social identity (Wellman, 1999).

America has a history of individualism and in contrast to other nations in the East or Latino-cultured countries, is identified as an individualistic society (Hofstede, 1980; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). The whole concept of the individual rising above the obstacles is the very core of the American dream. This gives rise to a more ego-centered association of communities that are more personal in nature. Communities of this type lack the typical moral force of more traditional social groups because the individual ultimately answers to himself and the force of the ego. This has led to a discussion of a lost sense of community in the United States (Putnam, 2000; Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh & Vidal, 2001). Typically, social structures control and marginalize what society

labels as deviance. With the formation of the ego-centric community, demonizing outsiders becomes a much more arduous task for the broader culture of America (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto & Norasakkunkit, 1997). There is no longer a strong sense of community accountability and support and a diminished sense of "we" versus "they."

The face of society is changing around the world, as are the communities and corresponding collective and individual identities that the communities reflect. During this period of transformation, communities still play a vital role in the structure and function of society (Putnam, 2003). It is in the uniting and forming of community that social change is brought about, from the women's suffrage campaigns, to abolitionist movements, to the civil rights movement, society has been propelled forward via these strong networks of shared ideals (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999).

Communitarianism describes a theory of how societies pass on their traditions and cultures. In *Sociology of Communitarianism*, Etzioni (2001) discusses how many communities employ and find value in communitarian theory. This article presents communitarianism as a social philosophy that has been cultivated predominantly in the late 20th century by social and political theorists.

Responsive communitarianism was established in 1990 as a more democratic branch of the traditionally eastern communitarian cultural climates. Communitarianism asserts that a common good is defined by society and is passed on from generation to generation via its institutions and guiding principles. The community avows values that are reinforced by persuasion, leadership, indoctrination of various dogmas, and so on. The converse of communitarianism is liberalism, which asserts that individuals and not society, determine for themselves what is good, not society.

Under a responsive communitarian paradigm, liberalism discourages social responsibility because of the "excesses of individualism and rationalism" (Etzioni, 1995, p. 11). The egocentric community formation is a result of rampant individualism that is not in the best interest of society according to communitarian theory. Indeed we have seen much fragmentation in broader society. However, one can easily see communitarian theory acted out in religious communities such as the Seventh-day Adventist church or other religious pockets within the broader society. In a Seventh-day Adventist setting, one can observe a more or less cohesive group with a specific and shared culture,

identity, morals, and values. This community then acts as both administrator and reinforcer of behavioral codes.

Communitarians separate civic society from the "good" society. Civic society "tends to be morally neutral" while the good society that communitarianism adheres to promotes specific moral values as being more virtuous than others (Etzioni, 2001, p. 2337). Freedom of speech is a good example; a civically minded person will defend someone's right to free speech, while a communitarian may find some speech highly morally offensive and thus will not allow it within the community.

Topics like the egalitarian nature of social values or cultural relativism become particularly arduous when faced with cross-cultural moral judgments. Everyone wants to be right; everyone wants their culture to be superior to another. Sociologists however treat all values as conceptually equal; hence they employ neutral language calling racist and tolerant ideas both "values" in their own right. For instance, Hitler and his regime had superiority and anti-Semitic values while Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his followers had tolerant, non-violent values. Communitarianism, however, labels belief systems with terms of "virtue" or "aberrant" referring to what is better or worse for the good of society and the community.

According to Etzioni (2001), responsive communitarianism holds that, "Society should not be viewed as composed of millions of individuals, but as pluralism (of communities) within unity (of society). The existence of subcultures does not undermine societal unity as long as there is a core of shared values and institution," (p. 2338).

The largest looming problem with communitarian social theory is who decides what the core substantive moral values are? Who defines the "good society" that communitarianism is supposed to perpetuate? While offering an example of communitarianism rejecting cultural relativism on the basis that some cultural practices are wrong (such as female genital mutilation¹), Etzioni (1998) refuses to acknowledge the possibility that the moral trendsetters could be, and indeed have been in the past, racist, bigoted, chauvinistic people that perpetuate corrupt practices under the guise of morality. We see hate crimes against homosexuals that are encouraged by communities that believe that they are acting in the moral interest of society. Communitarian theory has vast potential for marginalization and discrimination against individuals that do not adhere to community values.

While responsive communitarianism has many positive aspects, it is important to analyze this social theory carefully while realistically assessing its value. Society today is becoming increasingly scattered in community formation, making the importance of the individual, and the individual's right to choice even more imperative. While our choices are colored by the communities we adhere to, we still have a choice and an inherent accountability to personal identities in addition to communal ones.

The Religious Community in America

Most religious communities are communitarian in theory and are very important to general American society. French sociologist Alexis de Toqueville (1966) notes that

Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations. There are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but others of a thousand different types—religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute. Americans combine to give fêtes, found seminaries, build churches, distribute books, and send missionaries to the antipodes (p. 513).

As a gregarious species, we construct an array of communities, but as a uniquely spiritual species, we create organizations that reflect more than our need to survive and thrive: our need to self-actualize and find a deeper, more meaningful level of expression (Maslow, 1954). For thousands of years humans have continued to ask basic spiritual questions such as: *Where did I come from? Where will I go after death? What is the purpose/meaning of life?* and so on. These questions illustrate a spiritual nature within humankind. Because of this, we create religious communities and complex schemas for understanding the cosmos.

Being a part of a religious community can yield a great sense of security. It is comfortable to have well defined categories of right and wrong, good and evil, acceptable and inappropriate. Such binaries create structure, preventing chaos that can be very unsettling. There are also communal worship services that bring people together, perpetuating a sense of belonging and euphoria. But there is much more to a religious community than just worship activities.

Sociologist Putnam in his hallmark book *Bowling Alone* (2000) writes, "Religious institutions directly support a wide range of social activities well beyond conventional

worship" (p. 66). This is no exception in the Seventh-day Adventist community. For example, the Placerville Seventh Day Adventist church in California provides and/or sponsors a wide number of free services to the community such as heart-healthy cooking classes, programs to stop smoking, food drives, free health care days, day care services, the Coronary Health Improvement Project (CHIP) that offers free blood pressure readings, cholesterol screenings, and education by medical professionals, building projects, and other volunteer programs that are geared to secular audiences. Many other Seventh-day Adventist communities offer similar programs or services to the community. On a broader more inclusive level, Seventh-day Adventist community services such as Adventist Development and Relief Association (ADRA) provide global relief for underprivileged, third world, and war torn countries in need of humanitarian aid. Such a service provides non-religious and unbiased aid while promoting community cohesion of volunteering groups. Putnam (2003) shrewdly points out, "Churches provide an important incubator for civic skills, civic norms, community interests, and civic recruitment," (p. 66).

The religious community acts as a reservoir for social capital connecting people to groups, groups to form

networks and so on.² The amount that a community can achieve because of their social capital is much greater than what an individual can accomplish alone. For example, if a person wanted to feed the homeless she could make several lunch sacks and distribute them; but it would be much more effective if a community joined together to tackle hunger in underprivileged areas. An organized group of people could feed many more people than any given individual. There is much less social capital in privatized, individual religion even if it is more fulfilling (Putnam, 2000). That is why Putnam (2000) draws attention to the value of religious communities in America.

Religion is today, as it has traditionally been, a central fount of American community life and health. Faith-based organizations serve civic life both directly and indirectly, by nurturing civic skills, inculcating moral values, encouraging altruism, and fostering civic recruitment among church people (p. 79).

As we will discover later, this central "fount of American community" has been in decline, as are many types of communities in America. But for now we will continue to look at the roles of religious communities.

The corporate function of religious communities--and in this case I will speak directly to the Seventh-day Adventist community--when looking specifically within the organization is threefold on a very basic level: to control social behaviors by creating moral codes, to proselytize, and to retain members. Basically, ideas are conceived, turned into doctrine, taught as "truth" which attracts members, and then those ideas are reinforced. Simons (2001) illustrates how religions employ persuasion tactics to create a functioning community. In his text book, *Persuasion in Society*, Simons (2001) continually highlights the need for reinforcement as part of a persuasive whole. Clearly there is persuasive incentive for membership into the SDA community. For any given person this community may represent spiritual fulfillment, a sense of belonging, it may satiate the need to be right, and most importantly it offers a worldview that colors and shapes one's identity. Without going through the painful process of personal growth, one can pusillanimously ascribe to institutional values that give one a framework for decision making.

For many individuals, their identity is strongly tied to their religious community and sometimes identities are prescribed based on the values system handed down. People use moral codes to evaluate themselves and derive meaning

from life. These are people, as Rand (2002) writes, "For whom religion shapes the very ways that they 'know' and make sense of their lives and others' lives" (p. 9). For instance, if one believes that there is a benevolent God figure in opposition with a malevolent Devil figure (Seventh-day Adventist believers call this the "Great Controversy"), the way that individual understands and sees the world revolves around that basic tenant of belief. An entire worldview can be born out of that one fundamental idea. There is suddenly an explanation for why there is pain and suffering in the world and Seventh-day Adventist doctrine goes a step further and defines one's individual place in the cosmos in relationship to these warring deities. (The individual's identity as described in the church doctrines, which is stated in the 27 *Fundamental Doctrines*, is that of a naturally sinful/selfish person that is saved by grace through Jesus Christ, 1988.) That creates the potential for a strong sense of identity, both individual and corporate. As Dively (1993) writes,

Many [Christians] who have been fed [a] narrow view of subjectivity may perceive themselves as rigidly defined by belief in the tenets of holy scripture and of faith in the existence and saving power of Jesus Christ. A 'literal' interpretation of scripture

becomes their rule book for living a 'pure' and productive life, and God becomes the center of their universe, the ideal against which all thoughts, behaviors, and actions should be judged (p. 94).

Because truth is already spelled out, this closes the door for the quest and pursuit of truth, therefore limiting who members of the community can become.

This highlights a particular balance between growth and stasis. In order to maintain social control over its congregants, the church must limit who individuals may become. For instance, anyone is welcome to join the Seventh-day Adventist church regardless of race, social or economic status, gender, and so on; however, the church wants to shape the identities of its members into becoming moral people. The Seventh-day Adventist church would have a problem if a church member started making open sexual advances or acts toward random other members on Saturday morning, even though ancient Corinthian "worship" practices in Bible times incorporated sex into the religious practice. Hence, the church seeks to control and limit the negative aspects that a person may assimilate into her identity, while enhancing that person's moral potential.

The problem with this is that with the arrival of postmodernism in addition to societal growth and evolution,

there is increasing relativism. What the pastor considers an essential moral absolute, I may find an unimportant shade of gray.

Relativism is an essential component in a democratic society. As MacMullan (2005) asserts,

Democracy has little or no hope unless we accept that no one culture or doctrine can legitimately claim authority over another. While this is reasonable to most tolerant people, the very crux of the problem is that the religious, national, or racial absolutist thinks his or her views are authoritative and thus has no reason to accept diversity (p. 130).

Ideas of relativism and contextualization are imperative to the American zeitgeist because of pluralism and the great diversity within the United States. We coexist as a society because of tolerance and relativism.

It is therefore important to highlight the different ways moral order is achieved in the community because relativism can give rise to a variety of moral codes. Indeed that is clearly seen in American society, which has proved fertile soil for the development of many diverse religious denominations (Finke & Stark, 1992). The hundreds of Christian denominations in the United States stand to

illustrate how communities can diverge even with the same basic premises (Broadway, 2001).

An example of one type of community is the fundamentalist community that exists in many different religious denominations. Religious communities that use a literal translation of the Bible are traditionally called fundamentalists. Religious extremism is typically derived from literal interpretations of scripture. The fundamentalist view is very dogmatic with the necessity of being morally correct. Fundamentalist groups both in the Islamic world and in America hold to the "truth" that their principles and beliefs are supreme. They believe in a God that lives separate from humanity (in the sky) and that absolute, literal truth exists. As Marion (2004) puts it in his book, *The Death of the Mythic God*, "They believe that God is on their side and that they are charged with converting the entire world to their beliefs, even if they have to use force to do so" (p. xv).

This rigid view has led to the violence we see in extremist suicide bombings and terrorist attacks, both of which are met with opposition from Western society by Christian fundamentalists, and/or rational level thinkers that do not necessarily believe in God. The first group is in opposition because their enemy is not Christian, while

the latter that do not necessarily believe in God are opposed because of their more tolerant worldview. The people that do think on a higher level of consciousness (in this case the rational level) are not understood by the fundamentalist level thinkers and vice versa.

"People do not simply disagree about issues. People at different levels of consciousness actually see the world differently. They have different values. They have different moral codes. They behave differently" (Marion, 2004, p. xiv).

This idea is essential to understand if we are to influence religious communities and persuade society to progress. Communities must reach people at their individual levels of consciousness. To promote change, the community must communicate persuasively with the goal of mutual understanding and thought progression (Turner, 1985). Also, a great deal of patience is necessary in understanding that the identity and therefore the reality of a person with a different awareness than one's community is completely different. This is the basis of effective communication and persuasion. Religious communities employ persuasive communication to keep their communities together.

Regardless of the variances in dogma, religious communities exist in part to create and perpetuate moral codes and social control. The rules and moral codes define the community. The community in turn enforces the rules and moral codes among its constituents (Kanter, 1972; Putnam, 2000). For instance, before becoming a baptized member of the Seventh-day Adventist church, one must publicly profess some of her beliefs that make her compatible with the community identity (*Seventh-day Adventists believe*, 1988). She is then expected to uphold such standards to the best of her ability. The same is true for the entire community. In that way and others, the group creates the individual and not the other way around (Lipset & Raab, 1970; Lipset 1990; Berger & Neuhaus, 1970). The work of Robert Putnam (2003) in his more recent book, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community* highlights this idea. When studying Saddleback Church, one of the largest church congregations in the United States, Putnam found a large reservoir of social capital in this mega-church. But the challenge, "is how to turn the 'crowd' into a 'congregation'" that is active and adherent to the community's identity and moral codes (p. 126). The strategy of operating a huge community comes back to a smaller group within the community.

Warren (1995), founder of Saddleback Church and author of *The Purpose Driven Church*, states "People are not looking for a friendly church as much as they are looking for friends" (p. 312). The need for socialization is the primary reason why humankind creates and joins communities in the first place. That socialization is a component of value.

As Finke & Stark (1992) suggest in their book, *The Churching of America 1776-1990*, "the real basis of the moral order is human relationships" (p. 31). We conform to our communities because to do otherwise would risk our relationships with others that are valuable to our socialization. In our communities we form relationships and certain rules govern those relationships. If we violate community codes, we may first feel a feeling of guilt and/or remorse (Maltby, 2005; Faiver, O'Brien, & Ingersoll, 2000). But why is guilt/remorse the first response to community code violation?

The reason resides in the symbiotic nature of expression in community as tied to personal identity, which is interdependent on group identity. There may be great fear associated with offending one's community because of negative feedback. The community could marginalize or ostracize the offender of the moral codes. This could be

publicly humiliating, lead to a loss of respect and reputation, or threaten one's membership within the community. Such actions in many cases lead to the conformity of the individual to the group thereby sustaining and perpetuating both group and personal identity as tied to moral conduct.

The degree of stringency in adherence to the social codes varies from community to community. Smaller groups form within larger group-contexts and there can be great diversity even within the larger community. Putnam (2003) affirms this in *Better Together* by citing the small-group necessity in mega-churches like Saddleback. In looking directly at the Seventh-day Adventist community, one can compare the world-church to the individual churches in that there are many groups within the larger context of a world community.

This background in community theory leads me question the way the Seventh-day Adventist community functions. In looking at the Seventh-day Adventist religious community, I seek to better understand the phenomenon of community cohesion and purpose. This is important because how one thinks and perceives reality and identifies one's self is directly correlated to the types of communities that person is embedded in (Kapitzke, 1995; Rand 2000). However, it is

difficult to identify what is culturally typical in broader world-communities because of the spectrum of difference within the smaller subgroups that are still a part of the larger community. My guiding research question asks: Does the Seventh-day Adventist religious community have its own unique moral codes and social expectations that deviate from the broader Seventh-day Adventist world-church community? I also seek to understand how these codes and social expectations are communicated.

The Seventh-day Adventist Communities

In my travels to over 32 different countries, I have encountered Seventh-day Adventist communities in almost each country. There are churches, schools, clinics, etcetera all dedicated to the larger SDA global community. The only place that I did not encounter an Adventist was in Antarctica. My point is that the Seventh-day Adventist church is quite global and far-reaching. According to the global statistical reports in 2005, there are over 13 million Seventh-day Adventist church members in the world (Kelner, 2003). The Seventh-day Adventist community is broad and can be all-encompassing once within the community. This community provides not just once-a-week worships but education from kindergarten to seminary to medical school. It is possible for a person to grow up in

the church, be schooled by the church, and work for the church, thereby building her entire life around the church, and being solely exposed to things through an Adventist filter. The Seventh-day Adventist system is all-encompassing from the cradle to the grave. As Rand (2002) observed in her interactive study with students and employees in a Midwestern Adventist community, "for so many of them, religious faith shaped the very core of who they imagined themselves to be: their primary identities were as Seventh-day Adventist Christians" (p. 48).

This type of identity cultivation can be enveloping. As such, one's perception of the world cannot help but be influenced by experience, culture, and identity. Rand (2002) also notes, "Adventist Christians are socialized with the hope that they will become... 'witnesses' for their faith and that this kind of identity may influence the ways that they think, read, and write" (p. 51). Every interaction is colored by who we think we are; and the communities we join reflect our identity.

Kapitzke (1995) underlines in her research study, *Literacy and Religion: The Textual Politics and Practices of Seventh-day Adventism*, that "religious experience is often understood in terms of silence or stillness, an inner-directed, isolated, and individualized practice" (p.

5). Yet, in her study of an Adventist community in Australia she concludes that religiosity in many Adventist communities is not just individual, but rather social and collective. In the same study, she highlights how a person's religious belief and community takes place not just in the mind, but externally. The types of materials read, social gatherings, indeed the very way someone thinks is strongly tied to one's religious community. A person's reality, the ways one understands/sees things and how they relate is embedded in their religious community. Kapitzke (1995) draws attention to various religious experiences shaping identity:

Religious experience may well include union with a divine being, but mostly it entails everyday communication between ordinary people. Parents pray for and with children; families, friends, choirs, and congregations sing together; church members share testimonies; priests and pastors sermonize; penitents confess; church boards hold meetings; Sunday school teachers tell stories; ministers celebrate weddings and conduct funeral services. Religious affiliation is delineated not only by discursive inclusions but also by exclusions: by prohibitions on speaking (blasphemy and profanity), on reading and viewing

(heretical or 'undesirable' books, movies, plays); or on shunning certain social, sexual, and political relations (incest, adultery, homosexuality, slander, and betrayal). Such prescribed and prohibited behaviors constrain and constitute social and discursive practice (p. 5).

Seventh-day Adventism is not just a religion, but a community with day-to-day social practices and social controls. As such, Adventism may attract a plethora of diverse people each with their own cultural backgrounds.

Indeed it is essential for a global church to be tolerant of cultural variance and flexible when a wide range of beliefs are coexistent. As Craven (1984) acknowledged in her essay *The Wall of Adventism*, "here [there] are ...SDA fundamentalists and liberals, cultists... mainstreamers, and even a few agnostics" (p. 20). Within the larger world-church SDA community, there are many smaller communities that express their values differently depending on where they are located.

I have observed this first hand during my own immersion in the Seventh-day Adventist collegiate communities: Columbia Union College (CUC), Pacific Union College (PUC), Instituto Adventista Villa Aurora (ACA

Italy), Walla Walla College (WWC), Southern Adventist University (Southern), and Universidad Adventista Del Plata (UAP, ACA Argentina). Each community, although they are all Seventh-day Adventist, had its own unique moral codes and social expectations. This influenced everything from the type of worships offered and/or required, the educational requirements and classes offered, the ideas inherent in the classrooms, the rules in the student handbooks, the right way to dress, and so on. Some of these communities were so different that one might not realize they are indeed part of a greater cohesive community.

As an individual born into the Seventh-day Adventist church and cultivated in that community for my entire life, I grew up in Northern California in a progressive and fairly liberal Seventh-day Adventist church community. When it came time to go to college I could not decide which college I wanted to attend, primarily because I was aware of the different collegiate cultures and could not decide which context would be most appropriate for my growth. So I packed my bags to go to Florence, Italy where I was shocked by the different culture, in spite of the fact that it was part of the Seventh-day Adventist world-community.

The ideology of the Seventh-day Adventist church remained intact in Florence, but the expression and social aspects of the religion were very different. There was a great deal of publicly expressed affection that I had never encountered in a religious community before, such as faculty members kissing their partner passionately in the halls. Indeed it was equally shocking when we were allowed to dance during carnival and stay in the city until three in the morning.

Another example of variance in social expression is of the director taking a small group of students, myself included, to dinner in Florence and having wine at the meal. This was particularly surprising because the consumption of alcoholic beverages is forbidden in the 27 *Fundamental Doctrines* (1988) of the Seventh-day Adventist church; yet because of the setting and cultural significance of wine in Italy, most people considered drinking wine permissible and not in violation of what it is to be an observant Adventist. These examples illustrate the classic communication theory that communication cannot exist outside of context (Simons, Morreale, & Gronbeck, 2001). Likewise, as I learned by being immersed in several different Adventist communities, the Seventh-day Adventist world-community does not exist without the multiple

contexts of the smaller localized Seventh-day Adventist communities. The Seventh-day Adventist community and identity, both local and global, is contextually constructed. Kondo (1990) notices that,

[People] cannot be easily separated from specific situations, from culturally specific narrative conventions, or from abstractions we label history, politics, and economics. Identity here is not a unified essence, but a mobile site of contradiction and disunity, a node where various discourses temporarily intersect in particular ways (p. 17).

At the Instituto Adventista, the Seventh-day Adventist College in Florence Italy, the community identity was different than in my California community; therefore the social and moral codes were different as were the expectations of behavior. The culture was very different than my culture, but it was still a Seventh-day Adventist religious community.

An example of uniting a broader community despite cultural differences is in celebrating mutual familiarities. One of the most obvious cultural differences is that of language. When strangers establish commonality, they are trying to connect in a broader community. I will

never forget singing for church in English, at that time my Italian was not very good, the song *Amazing Grace*. By the end of the song the entire congregation was singing along with me in their language while I sang in mine. Though culturally there were many differences--the most basic being that of language--our broader world-community brought us together because of a familiar Christian tune.

At Columbia Union College, near Washington D.C., much of the community reflected its location. There was a great push for urban ministry, which makes sense because of the locality of various homeless shelters, urban renewal projects, etcetera. Being near a large city impacted CUC's community context and identity. Some students were drawn because there were more jobs in the surrounding city, some came for internships, and some came because it was close (or far) to/from home.

Metropolitan areas, as CUC's environment was, tend to be more liberal as city areas are exposed to more diversity and therefore must actively cultivate more tolerance and understanding because they are in contact with many diverse cultures and people. Many students obtain internship positions in the surrounding area and become active in politics, the media, or music because there is a nearby outlet for such interests. When students step outside of

their religious community and are involved in other non-religious communities, indubitably interaction with other people that hold different values takes place. This promotes much more than an exchange of job experience or conversation, an exchange of ideas takes place. This religious/secular community interaction promotes noninterventionist, tolerant thinking and the social expectations at CUC reflect that. It is interesting to note that the dress code emphasized "modest dress" that many people interpreted as allowing jewelry, flip-flops, strapless shirts, and spaghetti-strapped tops for women. Such a policy in the Seventh-day Adventist broader community is considered more liberal.

Pacific Union College has a similar dress code policy to CUC's, and a reputation for being a liberal west-coast school. While its location is significantly more remote than CUC, its reputation persists. There is evidence for this reputation. In the fall of 2004 the social-work and psychology departments hosted an event featuring the *Vagina Monologues* by Eve Ensler. In the student center the Grind serves coffee and although the Grind does not sell its own caffeinated drinks, students can bring their own caffeinated coffees that will be made for them, which is considered in the 27 *Fundamental Beliefs* (Ministerial

Association, 1988) to be a stimulant which is not good to consumption based on the health message of the church. There are student association sponsored fashion shows and controversial art in the galleries. These things stretch the boundaries of the traditional Seventh-day Adventist community, creating a smaller localized Seventh-day Adventist community relative to the PUC campus.

One way of dealing with the community boundary areas is in the creation of even smaller groups within the existing group. For example, two church services are provided at the PUC church. The 9 a.m. service provides more traditional worshipers with more traditional cultural elements of religious community such as musical styles during worship, while the 11 a.m. service offers a more progressive worship style. On a broader level, the Seventh-day Adventist community understands that there are many cultural differences within the community and employs organizational tactics to combat problems and address concerns of local constituents. Therefore the structure of the church is divided into 13 world divisions, several regional conferences depending on the division, many local church communities (58,919 churches world-wide) under one general conference, and within many churches there are smaller groups within that (Seventh-day Adventist Church

General Conference: Office of Archives and Statistics, 2006). This fragmentation into smaller groups within the community allows for divergence from the main communal culture, which is essential in a world-community.

Coming to Southern from the more liberal environment of PUC was in many ways a culture shock for me. I was still in the United States and still in a collegiate Seventh-day Adventist community, but so many aspects of the community were different that I felt a strong culture shock. I noticed instantly that there seemed to be more rules about dress codes, more worship requirements, and more traditional worship services. I was once asked to remove a rubber band that was on my wrist because it was considered in violation of the dress code's no-jewelry policy. The religion classes seemed to be much more literal in the interpretations of the Bible than PUC or CUC. Many things at Southern seemed to be on the opposite end of the religious-cultural spectrum from the more liberal communities; yet, this too was part of my broader Seventh-day Adventist religious community.

The Seventh-day Adventist community at Universidad Del Plata, Argentina was the most interesting community that I studied and was immersed in. Being in the UAP community was like taking all of the Seventh-day Adventist religious

ideas and stepping back in time about 10-15 years. It was not as though technology or modernity of society was all that different than in the United States, but the ideas and religious cultural elements were the same things I remember thinking about and being discussed at a very young age, but then growing out of as my church community also grew and evolved. Issues such as the role of women in the church and the necessity of vegetarianism were strongly represented by the moral codes and rules established. A strict dress code was enforced, several mandatory worships were required, and a strong emphasis placed on communal worship/religious observance rather than on individual spiritual disciplines.

I was reading from the Christian Bible in my room one afternoon and my roommates came in and asked if I was studying for a class or for a group study. When I replied that I was reading for myself they were confused and said, "*Pero eso es qué culto es para,*" *But that is what [group] worship is for.* It was automatically assumed by my roommates that I would only read the Bible if it was required or part of a group activity. There was less emphasis on individual spirituality, but more importance placed on the spiritual community.

Culturally, the idea of corporate worship makes sense in the Argentine context because the culture, and indeed

Latino culture is more collectivistic than the United States, which is typically considered an individualistic society (Schimmack, Oishi, & Diener, 2005). This reflection of collectivistic community worship style creates a strong community because there is so much emphasis on the corporate. The Latino-Adventist culture, including the Inter-American Division and South American Division, reflects the highest number in Seventh-day Adventist church memberships (Seventh-day Adventist Church General Conference: Office of Archives and Statistics, 2006). This is not surprising given the strong ties/loyalty to community a collectivistic culture carries (Hui, 1988; Oishi, Schimmack, Diner, & Suh, 1998). It is also interesting to note that many Latino cultures have religious roots in the Catholic community (Maltby, 2005), and Argentina's dominant religion is Catholic. That religious community also has a strong emphasis on corporate worship.

The UAP campus itself was surrounded by a fence with barbed wire on top making it impossible to leave without sliding one's student identification card before passing through the gates any time after seven in the evening. If one had not completed all of the required group worships, that person could not leave.

Worship services, therefore, had a captive audience. This yields the perfect opportunity to endorse institutional and community values. Many sermons addressed not only religious dogma and specific beliefs of the UAP-Seventh-day Adventist community, but basic behavioral expectations for the community such as appropriate male to female relationships, acceptable activities on the Sabbath, appropriate dress, what a woman's role in the church and family is, and so on.

Many American Seventh-day Adventist students attend UAP to learn Spanish and be immersed in Argentine culture. The culture that is there however is distinctly separate from Argentine culture and prohibits many cultural practices that Argentina is famous for such as Tango dancing. The Tango dance is a hallmark of Argentine history and culture, but because it is also a very sensual dance, it is at best frowned upon and at worst forbidden in the Seventh-day Adventist community. The religious community enforces the social controls that build a strong global community for Seventh-day Adventists, but does not mirror its local culture.

All of these are examples of the cultural diversion within a global community. The cohesion of such a large

group is not possible without the formation of smaller sub-groups.

Tides of Change

In the United States religious communities on the whole are losing membership. Between the years 2000-2005 about 1.5 million Seventh-day Adventist members left the church (Adventist Statistics, 2006).

Religious and evangelical communities are sinking in the tide of changing external culture. Society is evolving and threatening to leave the fundamental religious community submerged under the waters of progress. Many religious communities in America are facing the quandary: change or die. That is how evolution works, and social/community theory discussed in this paper supports this idea. Institutions, communities, people, organisms, etcetera are continually faced with changes in their ecosystem and as the zeitgeist gradually shifts to more progressive thinking, every system will either adapt or be phased out. But not all people are ready to change, and not all communities are facing the same pressures under the tide of cultural and intellectual change.

Conclusions

In looking toward the future of community, it is important to understand that humankind is a gregarious

species that has historically found and continues to find significance and meaning in group/community settings. It is in these communities that people formulate ideas and expressions of self. Communities provide boundaries and structure for forming new ideas and collectively progressing.

The Seventh-day Adventist community is diverse and one can observe a wide spectrum of ideology even within the broader world-church community. It is clear that each individual Seventh-day Adventist church community has both unique moral codes and social expectations that vary depending where on the spectrum within the Seventh-day Adventist world church one looks. These unique cultures are expressed in the way people dress, how they socialize, how they worship, their interpretations of scripture/doctrine, and even how they think, process, and construct their reality.

Moral codes and social expectations are communicated via positive/negative feedback channels. This process is fundamental to community function and acts as the glue that holds community social behaviors together. The many diverse smaller Seventh-day Adventist communities will have different positive/negative feedback channels.

However, the individual church components are the building blocks of the broader world-church community. As such, it is important to understand that there is no real world church culture, but rather a fractionalization of many smaller community groups. According to my research I found that local culture dictated norms for the community and a spectrum of social expectations is observable in the Seventh-day Adventist world church community. Hence, moral codes and social expectations are grown individually out of the soil of native and demographic culture with the common seed of Seventh-day Adventist doctrine. While there are doctrinal norms and expectations, there is no literal world-church community that smaller communities can deviate from.

It can be argued that the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference acts as the world-church culture, but I would argue that the General Conference is merely responsive to the smaller group communities. In that way, the General Conference acknowledges all of the smaller Seventh-day Adventist communities while attempting to cohere many smaller communities to the idea of a broader world-church.

Suggestion for Further Study

One function of the church community is to propagate its doctrine, which leads to a question on Seventh-day

Adventist education: is Adventist education an oxymoron?

Can one really educate freely and promote freedom of thought while attempting to maintain social and moral controls over its students? Can education be truly objective with religious motivations? This question may be perused in further research.

Notes

¹Female genital mutilation is a practice that is deeply imbedded in Ethiopian culture, but can be very harmful to the female who is between the ages of 5-8 years old when the procedure is preformed. It involves the removal of the clitoris and/or outer labia.

² Social capital is a term used by sociologists championed by Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone*. Social capital theory is comparable to financial or physical capital, only in a social context thus meaning that social networks have value. Putnam states that "social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups," (19). A network can be established that has great social value that implies a system of reciprocity. Social capital can harnesses the group's capacity for power and therefore change or movement.

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**Southern Scholars Honors Program
Senior Project**



Name April Evans Date 3/17/06
Major Intercultural Communication

Southern Scholars
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A significant scholarly project, involving research, writing, or special performance, appropriate to the major in question, is ordinarily completed the senior year. The project is expected to be of sufficiently high quality to warrant a grade of A and to justify public presentation.

Under the guidance of a faculty advisor, the Senior Project should be an original work, should use primary sources when applicable, should have a table of contents and works cited page, should give convincing evidence to support a strong thesis, and should use the methods and writing style appropriate to the discipline.

The completed project, to be turned in in duplicate, must be approved by the Honors Committee in consultation with the student's supervising professor three weeks prior to graduation. Please include the advisor's name on the title page. The 23 hours of credit for this project is done as directed study or in a research class.

Keeping in mind the above Senior Project description, please describe in as much detail as you can the project you will undertake. You may attach a separate sheet if you wish:

Please see attached page.

Signature of faculty advisor [Signature] Expected date of completion 4/14/06

This project has been completed as planned (date) 4/14/06

This is an "A" project This project is worth 2-3 hours of credit

Advisor's Final Signature [Signature]

Chair, Honors Committee _____ Date Approved _____

Dear Advisor, please write your final evaluation of the project on the reverse side of this page. Comment on the characteristics that make this A "quality work."