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ASIA

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Spirituality and Life Skills and Their Relationship with Reasons for Attending at Four Selected
Adventist Universities in Asia

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Abstract

The purposes of this study are: (a) to report on the reasons for attending four Adventist universities in Asia; and (b) to describe the universities' perceived influence on student development of spirituality and life skills; and (c) to determine if reasons for attending and perceived influence on development of religiosity and life skills may be related. Survey research methodology was the design used to collect data using printed questionnaires. We designed the questionnaire to elicit information on reasons for attending the universities, engagement in curricular and extra-curricular activities, and the extent to which the university influence student development of life skills, spirituality and altruism. One thousand nine hundred and ninety-eight (1998) students participated in this study. Approximately 50% selected these universities for their spiritual atmosphere and spiritual values. Students generally agree that the universities have positively influenced the development of their life skills ($M=4.05$, $SD=0.59$) and spirituality ($M=4.15$, $SD=0.69$). There are no significant class status or gender differences on these variables. There is some variation among the universities but the effect size is small ($\eta^2 \leq .05$). Approximately 15% of the variance on the linear combination of the development of religiosity and life skills are associated with the reasons for selecting Adventist universities.

Literature Review Background and Rationale

By understanding the reasons people attend universities and specifically SDA universities, universities can better reach those individuals and enrollment can be increased. As Seventh-day Adventists, we also have a vested interest in understanding how well our higher education programs are inspiring the next generation to live in a Christ-like way. Knowing if spirituality plays a role in developing life skills is also a vital question when considering the role colleges play in the lives of emerging adults.

Higher Education Attendance Reasons

Previous research has indicated that emerging adults enter college to attain higher paying jobs, improve levels of self-esteem, and to gather knowledge. Students make their decision to attend college based off of location, financial cost, faculty quality, class availability (i.e. someone working in the day needs the option to involve themselves in night classes), and whether or not the programs a college offers match with individual interests (Broekemier, 2002). Interestingly, students are demonstrating behavior that is similar to customer behavior more frequently. Students in high education are demanding value from their institutions and putting pressure on higher education institutions to provide them with benefit for their sacrifices (Woodall, Hiller, & Resnick, 2012).

While some skeptics have questioned the legitimacy of the expectations students of higher education have about increased economic returns upon graduation, both a bachelor's degree and an associate's degree tend to earn a return of 15 percent (Abel & Deitz, 2014).

Research looking specifically into reasons women failed to continue their academic journey to higher education discovered that women are conditioned by society to put the needs of their loved ones before their own. Oftentimes, a woman's personal development is put on hold

as they take on caring responsibilities and face financial constraints (Heenan, 2002). Kennett, Reed, and Lam (2011) asked students about their reasons for attending higher education and found that students reported both internal and external reasons. Towards the beginning of higher education, younger students indicated that they sought out higher education in order to prove they could earn a degree, while more seasoned students listed reasons like self-improvement, societal contribution, and satisfaction. The internal reasons cited most often were achieving life goals and self-improvement while the external reasons cited most often revolved around career and family.

One study discovered that a positive correlation exists between parental education levels and adolescents attending higher education to satisfy societal expectations (Schlechter & Milevsky, 2009). Another study found that attending college leads to a slight increase in skepticism towards religious beliefs. However, this shift in belief is likely due to how secular faculty are, how engaged in academics students are, and the different social identities they develop in college (Hill, 2011).

Reasons for Attending Parochial/Religiously Affiliated Tertiary Education

Despite the increase in skepticism towards religious beliefs that tends to develop in college students (Hill, 2011), Christian higher education has continued to expand and grow, despite the common belief that people are turning more towards secular education (Glanzer, Carpenter & Lantinga, 2010). The reasons for attending Adventist schools (K-12) were analyzed because of declining enrollment in Seventh-day Adventist schools in North America. While there was not a significant relationship between school proximity and parental choice, significant relationships were discovered between parental school choice and education cost, academic program, and the value parents place on spiritual education (Mainda, 2002). While these are not

statistics about emerging adults, they do reflect the environment from which most Seventh-day Adventist collegiate students come from and perhaps it is indicative of the sort of relationships the current study hopes to find.

Location, something that, according to previously mentioned research, is an indicator of college choice, was discovered to be significantly less of a factor in choosing a college when that college was religious in nature as opposed to public or private non-religious colleges (Moss & Cockriel, 1990). Another study found that people who considered themselves to be greatly committed to spirituality were, as a whole, more worried about society, more tolerant towards the views and existence of others, and genuinely more content with their individual lives than people who did not consider themselves to be “highly spiritually committed” (Gallup, 1985). Individuals who reported more intrinsic religious values volunteered significantly more during their college experience than people who reported lower levels. This study acknowledges the link between altruism and religion, but it goes further to note that altruism likely varies with how an individual orients themselves to religion (Bernt, 1989).

Emerging adulthood brings with it many changes. One study found that while religious participation does decrease during the collegiate years, religious students still hold their beliefs dear to their hearts and place a great deal of value on them. Perceived importance and competence were both found to be significantly higher in college students who considered themselves religious. Religion plays a strong role in how emerging adults relate to the world, even serving as a protective factor against failures that would otherwise prove to be more damaging to self-worth in non-religious emerging adults (Barry & Nelson, 2008). While consistent participation in religious activities decreased in emerging adulthood, young adults who avoid college tend to decline more than their peers seeking higher education. This fact

undermines the idea that education is what leads young adults to abandon the religion of their childhood (Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007).

One study found that prayer styles expressing aspects of personal relationships with God were the strongest predictors of the intention participants had to volunteer. While having a belief in God was not a predictor of volunteering in women, it was for men. However, women consistently volunteered more than men and expressed a greater desire to do so again (Ozorak, 2003). Current research has started to suggest that altruism is correlated and influenced by religion (Inaba & Loewenthal, 2011). Given that religion strongly promotes altruism, this relationship is not surprising. However, research has yet to be conducted on the role religious education plays in developing altruism in students.

One study using the Gallup World Poll found that people who identified as religious and people who belonged to countries with more than one standard religion self-reported a stronger likelihood of helping a stranger than people who didn't identify as religious and people who were part of countries where religiosity wasn't as diverse. Interestingly enough, people living in religiously devout places showed an increased likelihood in helping strangers regardless of their religious or non-religious identity. The results of this study strengthen the view that religion encourages and promotes altruism—even among people who are simply exposed to but not part of that religion (Bennett & Einolf, 2017).

The majority of young American adults believe that religion and spirituality have an important part to play in their lives. One study found that students who choose to attend faith-based college tend to participate less in activities associated with secular education while engaging in more spiritual practices. Their data also suggested that when students take the time to participate in activities that strengthen spirituality, they also tend to participate in more

collegiate activities (Kuh & Gonyea, 2006). Regular religious attendance has previously been shown to indicate a higher level of extracurricular participation among college students (Glanville, Sikkink, & Hernandez, 2008; Mooney, 2010). Interestingly enough, Mooney (2010) found that students who regularly attended religious services not only had higher levels of academic achievement, but also reported higher levels of satisfaction in college than their peers.

One study discovered that secular volunteering is not something that can be predicted by levels of intrinsic religiosity among emerging adults (controlling for religious service attendance and extrinsic religious factors). Some religions with a stronger emphasis on community (Mormons, for example) report that volunteering in a family or religious setting is a more common occurrence than in religions where people tend to be more individualistic. These findings suggest that religious culture plays a large part in the kind of volunteering emerging adults engage in, as well as how often said volunteering occurs (Johnson, Cohen, & Okun, 2013).

A second study supported these findings further stating that, while extrinsic indicators of religiosity decrease significantly during emerging adulthood, the importance those religious beliefs hold in the hearts of emerging adults does not shift (Stoppa & Lefkowitz, 2010).

One meta-analysis examined spirituality and religiosity by analyzing several studies. They found that religiosity was significantly correlated with decreased risk behavior, increased openness, increased conscientiousness, increased agreeableness, increased self-esteem, increased well-being, and decreased depression. Across multiple studies, results consistently showed that religiosity and spirituality had strong positive effects on the lives of emerging adults (Yonker, Schnabelrauch, & Dehaan, 2012).

Related Lit in Asian Context

Dr. Kijai mentioned a dissertation that may relate to the current study.

Relationships Between Higher Education and Other Variables

One study found that while Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh-day Adventists grew as religious groups in many countries from the 1960s to 2006, religious growth slowed significantly once countries begin to develop socioeconomically. Development leads to a more secular worldview and religious growth momentum slows as a result of economic growth (Cragun & Lawson, 2010). One longitudinal study explored the relationships between adolescent development and participation in extracurricular activities. The results of their study indicated that "greater involvement in extracurricular activities is associated with academic adjustment, psychological competencies, and a positive peer context. The results were strongest for the oldest group of youth" (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006).

One study examining almost 600 higher education students found that academic self-efficacy, organization, and attention to study were strong predictors of academic success. The researchers also discovered that the way students handled stress, their time, activity engagement and emotional satisfaction regarding academics were predictive of how highly students in higher education rated their satisfaction with life (Krumrei-Mancuso, Newtown, Kim, & Wilcox, 2013).

Introduction Summary

In summary, it seems as if there is something else drawing students to locations most students would not consider—whether that's parental influence, community/culture, religious beliefs, or something else. Regardless of what it is, people who find themselves immersed in religious cultures/communities have higher levels of altruism by affiliation. The way individuals orient themselves toward their beliefs can also be a determining factor in how spiritual and altruistic they are. Students enrolled in religious higher education tend to involve themselves in more curricular and extra-curricular activity which may lead to better developed life skills.

Lastly, it's important to emphasize that previous research states many positive psychological benefits from being involved in a faith-based community, one of which is the protective factor of spirituality on self-esteem.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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