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Exploring the Experiences of a Sense of Belonging of African American Students Who Attended
a Predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist Academy: A Retrospective Study

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Requirements for the degree

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Tangelia L Ingram

Dr. Robert K. Jabs School of Business

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has been approved by the Dr. Robert K Jabs School of Business in partial fulfillment of the
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July 2024

DocuSigned by:
Dr. Luciana Starks
8C1E3A2CC09D4ED

Lucian Starks, Committee Chair

DocuSigned by:
Denise Nixon
B76F9315A9DF4D8...

Denise Nixon, Committee Member

DocuSigned by:
Courtney Haun
AD2B978C01C4433...

Courtney Haun, Committee Member

DocuSigned by:
Tim Gramling
CA2DA3A6550845F...

Tim Gramling, LPD., FACHE, Dean, Jabs School of Business

ABSTRACT

Problem Statement: Attending predominantly White secondary schools is shown to have a significant impact on African American students' sense of belonging and well-being. These areas include social isolation, a lack of cultural pedagogy within the curriculum, and a perception of teachers' disengagement, negatively impacting their academic outcomes. The Seventh-day Adventist organization is organized with a representative form of church government beginning with the local church and laddering up to the General Conference. Historically, this hierarchical structure has been segregated at all levels of the organizational structure, which includes the organization's educational system. Therefore, it is important to understand the experiences of African American students and how those experiences are connected to their sense of belonging while attending predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies.

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the lived experiences of African American students relative to the development of their sense of belonging while attending predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies for their secondary education.

The Theoretical Framework: This study was informed by educational Critical Race Theory (CRT), which intersects racial justice in education and educational inequities. The CRT framework also argues that there is a historical pattern of racism ingrained in our society and that it is an institutional problem. In addition, this study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which views a child's development as being interconnected with their environment through five systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

Methodology. This qualitative study collected data through semi-structured interviews with 14 African American participants. The study sample included five men and nine women, who

ranged in age from 31-71 years and attended predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies for their secondary education. Interviews were conducted via Zoom, lasted 60-90 minutes, and allowed participants to reflect on their experiences attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. The analysis was conducted according to the literature on qualitative studies, and triangulation for credibility was utilized.

Findings. The findings revealed four major themes. African American students who attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy felt they received quality education from their academy but experienced bias, microaggressions, and discrimination. Their home environment helped them maintain their identity and self-esteem. All participants perceived their home and church as their “village.” Cultural pedagogy is essential for creating a positive experience for African American students attending predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies.

Conclusion & Recommendations. Three recommendations will encourage a new culture that facilitates a sense of belonging for African American students who attend predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies. Administrators, principals, teachers, and staff must follow a Transformational Leadership Model. Leaders must help teachers and staff apply the *HEAL* model in their personal lives, thereby continuously demonstrating the *HEAL* model to the African American students who attend predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies. Demonstrating humility, empathy, acceptance, and love will encourage a school culture of belonging and well-being. Second, implementing a cultural pedagogy is recommended, and there must be intentional hiring of African American teachers and other teachers representing the diversity of the student body. Applying these organizational changes can bring a sense of

belonging to African-American students who attend predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies.

Keywords: African American, Bias, Discrimination, Integration, Macroaggression, Seventh-day Adventist

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To all the respondents in this study, I acknowledge you for your bravery and trust in me to share your lived experiences of a sense of belonging while attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. May God continue to enrich your lives for His glory while we await His soon return.

DEDICATION

Words can not express my gratitude for the three individuals who have made this dissertation possible. First, I want to thank my mother for her financial support as a single mother raising me and supporting me financially as a little girl to attend Tri-City Academy, a Seventh-day Adventist day academy, and your encouragement throughout the process of matriculating through my doctoral program; I am forever grateful. I love you very much!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Seventh-day Adventist educational system is among the world's largest Christian private educational systems (Statistics, n.d.). The organization has 85,000 teachers, 1.8 million enrolled students, and 7,500 schools, of which 31 are boarding academies (Statistics, n.d.). Although the Seventh-day Adventist Church has the second-largest Christian educational system in the world, its organizational structure is divided, making the educational system divisive and segregated (Statistics, n.d.). This has a significant impact on racial equality and inclusivity within the school climate.

Parents and other individuals play important roles in shaping young people's self-identity and beliefs about their race. However, according to Watford et al. (2021), in the United States, like other societies where racial distinctions are significant, young people are exposed to various messages concerning the meanings and implications of belonging to different racial groups. These messages are deeply ingrained in the dynamics of all the environments where youth are active, such as schools, neighborhoods, churches, and playgrounds (Watford et al., 2021).

In fact, young people's surroundings serve as the groundwork for their racial identities, thereby crucially shaping their outlooks, encounters, and engagements with the world. Thus, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory guides this study's exploration of how self-identity influences students' sense of belonging, the school climate, students' teacher-to-peer perceptions, peer-to-teacher perceptions, and parent perceptions of the school climate that guide a child's ecological environment and sense of belonging. (Ajouch et.al, 2016; Bolgatz et. al., 2020; Boston, C. 2017).

According to the North American Division (NAD) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (n.d.), the goal of genuine education goes beyond mere academic knowledge – it aims to

transform individuals into the likeness of God. Adventist education nurtures the well-rounded development of the individual (Thayer, 2018). However, Thayer's (2018) study concluded that while Adventist education has positive benefits for students attending an Adventist school, it negatively impacts students' relationship with Adventist standards, such as social concerns and social action.

Thayer's (2018) analysis of the NAD used various studies addressing the problem of students' commitment to the Seventh-day Adventist faith and the denomination's beliefs and standards. However, this analysis lacked studies with diverse study samples, and it did not explore the sense of belonging for African American students who attend Seventh-day Adventist schools or academies (Thayer, 2018). Further, although the NAD encourages student well-roundedness as an educational goal, the report did not explore this concept (Thayer, 2018). Due to the segregated organizational educational structure of the Seventh-day Adventist school system, the significance of exploring African Americans' sense of belonging is paramount to African American students' social-ecological environment and a well-implemented critical race pedagogy to enhance African American students' learning (Adventist.org, n.d.; Pagan, 2020;).

There are practices and attitudes teachers can take to support a racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse learning environment, such as culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2012, as cited in Pagan, 2022). Thus, the theoretical lens of educational Critical Race Theory guides this study's exploration of the beliefs, disposition, and attitudes of teachers' behaviors that must be enacted to promote positive academic outcomes and a sense of belonging in African-American students who attend predominantly White schools (Bolgatz et al., 2020; Boston & Warren, 2017; Craig, 2019; Jaynes, 1999; Pagan, 2022).

The purpose of this study is to address a gap in the literature by exploring how the segregated structure of the Seventh-day Adventist educational organization contributes to African American students' sense of belonging while attending predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies (Statistics, n.d.). In addition, this study delves into understanding the spiritual and religious school climate of predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies and how those school characteristics impact African American students' experiences and the resulting implications for organizational change (Ajrouch et al., 2019; Windon & Stollar, 2022).

Background

The global Seventh-day Adventist organizational structure was established in the 1800s. It is organized into 59 divisions, each consisting of congregations grouped by missions, fields, or regions into unions of churches. This study will explore the North American Division (NAD). In North America, the organizational structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is further divided into conferences. Regional Conferences are primarily comprised of African American Seventh-day Adventists, and State Conferences consist predominantly of White Seventh-day Adventist congregants (Koranteng-Pipim, n.d.). One will find that the western states of the North American Division of SDA are without Regional Conferences; therefore, they have a ministerial department within the Union Conferences for predominantly African American congregations and other racial/ethnic minorities (Statistics, n.d.). The Black SDA Regional Conferences consist of the Allegheny East Conference, Allegheny West Conference, Central States, Lake Regions Conference, Northeastern Conference, South Atlantic Conference, Southeastern Conference, and Southwest Region Conference. The State Conferences consist of predominantly White congregants within a geographical area of the United States (Conference of North American Division, n.d.; Separate Black and White Conferences—Part I, n.d.).

An institutionally segregated organizational structure was established when people of color demanded equality during the civil rights movement from the 1940s to 1954, which still exists today (Miller, 1957; Seventh-day Adventist, n.d.; Separate Black and White Conferences, --Part I, n.d.). The segregation of the Seventh-day Adventist conferences has been a systemic problem within the denomination and has negatively affected its educational system. During the exponential growth of the Seventh-day Adventist educational system, African American students were admitted sparingly; however, the admittance of African Americans into schools has increased over time (Miller, 1957; Seventh-day Adventist, n.d.; Separate Black and White Conferences--Part I, n.d.).

Although it is contrary to the Seventh-day Adventist educational theological perspective, this academic structure rooted in segregation persists. The curriculum goals of primary and secondary education Adventist schools are establishing interpersonal relationships, fostering intellectual development, cultivating acceptance of God, encouraging a commitment to the church, instilling a sense of being called to serve, promoting understanding of scripture, teaching how to function in society, and developing responsible citizenship (Goals oriented, 2013). Although these are admirable core goals, it is the school climate and students' sense of connection that significantly impact their well-being and sense of belonging and are linked to academic success, positive school interactions, attendance, and emotional fulfillment (McNeely et al., 2002, as cited in Lester & Cross, 2015). Nevertheless, Craig et al. (2019) indicate that African American students experience a high level of institutional discrimination, low self-esteem, and depressive and somatic symptoms, combined with determinants such as school, family, and peer environment within predominantly White school climates, which are related to a

decreased sense of belonging and purpose (Boston C. & Warren, S.W., 2017; Craig et al., 2019; Walsemann et al., 2011; Watt, 2003).

Although these findings have been discussed in the context of secondary public education, this study aims to fill the gap by exploring the sense of belonging and school climate, focusing on African American students who attended predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist schools (Craig et al., 2019; DuPont-Reyes et al., 2021; Pagan, 2022).

So, what is a sense of belonging? In the context of the educational climate, it is the students' feeling of relatedness, connectedness, acceptance, validation, respected, and supported, especially by school administration, principals, teachers, and staff in their educational environment (Goodenow & Grady, 1993, as cited in Boston C. & Warren S.W., 2017).

Statement of the Research Problem

The primary problem this study addresses is the experiences associated with African American students' development of a sense of belonging while attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. Multiple problems lead to the need for this study, including the segregated structure of the Seventh-day Adventist organization. Previous studies revealed that African American students experience mental health crises, low self-esteem, poor student-teacher relationships, poor peer-to-peer relationships, and school climate while attending predominantly White schools (Craig et al., 2019; DuPont-Reyes et al., 2021; Pagan, 2022).

As a predictor of mental health in a faith-based school, Craig et al. (2019) explored the disparities in levels of meaning and purpose among students, approximately half of whom were non-Adventists attending an Adventist school in Australia. The study concluded that compared to both adults and younger children, adolescents who deviate from social group norms in

behavior or appearance might be more susceptible to social rejection and are frequently targeted, marginalized, or bullied.

Currently, African American students make up 6% of students attending predominantly White schools, and studies suggest that these schools are undermining the success of African American students (Bolgatz, 2020). Craig et al. (2019) delineated a multifaceted array of elements influencing the experiences of groups outside of societal norms. In addition to a sense of purpose and meaning, the mental well-being of students was assessed based on their status as social outliers and their academic performance in school. The mental health issues within these groups included depression, feelings of isolation, struggles with self-identity, family dynamics, and low self-esteem, all of which contribute to a student's sense of belonging (Boston, 2017; Craig et al., 2019; Walsemann et al., 2011). In addition, parents of students who attend a private, segregated, independent school have also faced challenges when sending their African American students to predominantly White schools (Bolgatz, 2020).

When we examine the home environment of adolescents, Bolgatz (2020) emphasizes the significance of various forms of discrimination on the psychological well-being of African American students, stating that characteristics of the students' neighborhood, such as the racial composition, can also influence African Americans' perception of racial discrimination and well-being.

Second, this study explores the religious experiences and behaviors of African American students who attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. Thayer (2018) purports that Seventh-day Adventist schools have positive outcomes regarding the spiritual behavior of their students, such as attending church, paying tithes, reading their Bible, and having personal prayer time; yet, there is also a negative relationship between Adventist

education and witnessing or evangelism. There is also a negative relationship between the years attending a Seventh-day Adventist school and their social life during attendance.

Although Thayer (2018) did not provide the demographics of the study population, the fact remains that the educational goal and philosophy of Seventh-day Adventist schools is to indoctrinate its students with Seventh-day Adventist beliefs (Adventisteducation.org, n.d.). Research suggests that indoctrination teaches one set of beliefs in the core religious curriculum (Harkness, 2002). Indoctrination doesn't always have a positive meaning in an educational setting and a voluntary participatory learning environment (Harkness, 2002). On the contrary, Ivan Snook (2015, as cited in Harkness, 2002) suggested that indoctrination is teaching a belief in courses regardless of the evidence and the fact that said "indoctrination" is morally reprehensible (Harkness, 2002).

Due to research indicating indoctrination within Christian education, this study aims to examine the inconclusiveness of previous studies of African American students attending Seventh-day Adventist schools' religious climate, social life, sense of belonging, and well-being while attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy, as well as African Americans students' social life, sense of belonging, and well-being while attending predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies (Harkness, 2002; Thayer, 2018). This study will conclude with implications for organizational change through inclusivity, school climate, and critical race pedagogy (Billings & Tate, 2021; Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences that contributed to a sense of belonging for African American students who attended predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies. This phenomenological study will examine the lived experiences of

students who attended a Seventh-day Adventist academy in the United States. At this stage of the research, the sense of belonging for African American students is the phenomenon.

Using the theoretical framework lens of the Critical Race Theory perspective of education developed by Ladson-Billings (2021), this study will bring meaning to critical race pedagogy (Billings & Tate, 2021; DeCuir et al., 2011; Pagan, 2022). Ladson-Billing's (2021) critical race theory of education concept asserts that educational inequities are central to American society and, by extension, the American educational system. The Critical Race Theory examines the intersection of race, education, and educational inequities and argues that there is a historical pattern of racism ingrained in our society and that it is an institutional problem (Billings & Tate, 2021).

In addition, this study applies the theoretical lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which addresses how various environmental factors and contexts influence human development (Leonard, 2011). It asserts that an individual's development is shaped by a series of nested environmental systems, with each level having a different impact (Leonard, 2011, p. 991). Bronfenbrenner's theory includes five microsystems. The first is the immediate environment and interactions that directly impact an individual. This includes family, friends, school, and other local social networks. The second is the mesosystem; this level considers the interconnections and interactions between various elements within the microsystem, for example, the influence of the child's family and school on one another (Leonard, 2011, p. 991).

The third level of Bronfenbrenner's system levels is ecosystems. Ecosystems involve environments that indirectly affect the individual, while the individual does not directly participate in those settings. The ecosystem level may include a parent's workplace or local government policies. The fourth is the macrosystem, the broader cultural and societal context in

which the individual lives. It encompasses cultural norms, values, laws, and social ideologies (Leonard, 2011, p. 991). The fifth system is the chronosystem; this level recognizes the impact of time and historical context on an individual's development. It considers how changes and transitions over time can influence development. Bronfenbrenner ecological theory encompasses a complex interplay of factors that affect human growth and behavior (Leonard, 2011, p. 991).

The methodology of this study is a semi-structured interview consisting of open-ended questions asked of postgraduates who experienced the phenomenon of a sense of belonging at a predominantly white Seventh-day Adventist academy.

Research Questions

This qualitative research addresses the question: What experiences contributed to a sense of belonging for African American students who attended predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies? The two sub-questions that will be explored are:

1. How was your experience attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy?
2. What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences?

Scope and Significance of the Problem

The scope of the segregated organizational structure within the Seventh-day Adventist community is not limited to a specific region. This structure originated in North America and now extends internationally across the Seventh-day Adventist Church, impacting the global membership of 21,912,161 congregants (Statistics, n.d.). The segregated organizational structure begins with the administration, pastors, and teachers. It affects the discriminatory hiring practices of 20,000 ordained and active pastors and the experiences of 2,023,844 students attending the

primary and secondary schools, as well as the 160,000 students enrolled in its post-secondary schools (Hollacid, 2016; Statistics n.d.).

Although this is a global issue, this study's scope will focus on the experiences of African American students who attended predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist schools in North America and explore the experiences that contributed to African American students' sense of belonging at those schools (Adventist.org, n.d.). This research will address a gap from previous studies on the climate of Adventist schools and the sense of belonging and religious commitment reported by African American students who attend predominantly White Adventist schools.

Racism is a discriminatory practice that occurs when one ethnic group excludes, mistreats, or eliminates another group based on their differences or superior beliefs (Fredrickson, n.d.). In 1957, the passing of the Fair Educational Act for the desegregation of schools highlighted evidence of institutionalized racism throughout the United States judicial system (Miller, 1957). Although there have been victories within the legislation of the desegregation of schools, which later included private schools, there is an institutionalized conscious and unconscious racial bias that marginalized students are experiencing that has contributed to adverse psychological effects on their mental health, identity, self-esteem, and social well-being in the school environment (Pagan, 2022; Seaton & Yip, 2008). According to previous studies, discriminatory practices are prevalent in public schools at all academic levels. Students spend most of their time in the school setting, and the environment and climate of the school are integral to the student's well-being. When they experience a threat to their social identity, their educational success is negatively affected (Easterbrook & Hadden, 2020).

One may infer that a parent or family investing in their African American child's ability to attend a small Christian or independent school will lead to a positive community experience;

nonetheless, this is not always the case, and children who experience mental health benefits in these environments are sparse (Watt, 2003). In fact, analyses of the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (Add Health) data show that children attending small private schools may harm an adolescent's mental health and contribute to social isolation (DeCuir-Gumby et al., 2011; Watt, 2003).

The significance of addressing the negative psychological well-being experienced by African American students attending small private schools will be investigated through the perspective of African American students who have attended predominantly White Adventist academies. In addition, this study holds importance due to the Seventh-day Adventist educational faith-based philosophy, which advocates that students are children of God and deserve to be loved and accepted (Adventist education philosophy of, 2022)

Definitions

- *Discrimination*: unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people based on ethnicity (Miller, 1957).
- *Integration*: joining students or mixing with different groups of people (Miller, 1957).
- *Marginalized*: students from population groups and communities that experience exclusion because of unequal opportunity (DuPont-Reyes et al., 2021).
- *Microaggression*: everyday slights, insults, putdowns, invalidation, and offensive behaviors that people experience daily with individuals who may not be aware of their negative engagement (Walsemann et al., 2011).
- *Segregation*: the act of setting students apart from others (Fredrickson, n.d.).

Organization of the Study

Following this chapter, Chapter Two will provide a comprehensive literature review discussing the factors contributing to African American students attending predominantly White Adventist schools. This literature review will also describe two theoretical frameworks informing the study. The third chapter outlines and describes the study's convenient sampling methods and the data collection and analysis procedures.

Chapter Four represents the themes and responses to the interviews and will provide the qualitative study results, which encompass reflexivity and represent the participants' experiences through encoding and quotes, as well as the validity and limitations of the study. Chapter Five will include the discussion, implications for further research, and recommendations for systemic changes in the Adventist school structure and climate to enhance African American students' sense of belonging and mental well-being. Lastly, the conclusions will summarize the study's outcome and the recommended organizational changes recommended based on this study's findings.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction & Purpose

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has four structural levels: the local church, the local conference, the union conference, and the general conference. This representative governance functions as a hierarchical structure and with a sense of ambiguity as it relates to race relations within the Seventh-day Adventist organization (Boldman & Deal, 2017; North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, n.d.). Union and local conferences are segregated within the Adventist organizational structure. Due to this segregated organizational structure, the educational department of each local conference is segregated, thereby hiring administrators, pastors, teachers, and other team members of the predominant ethnicity of the local conference and its territorial churches (North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, n.d.).

This literature review aims to explore the experiences of African American students who attended predominantly White schools and explore factors contributing to their sense of belonging. This study delves into the ecological contribution to students' development and sense of belonging and well-being (Ajrouch et al., 2016; Craig et al., 2019). Previous studies suggest that African American students who attend predominantly White private and independent schools experience microaggressions, low self-esteem, and loss of identity and perceive teachers to be biased toward them. Similarly, parents of African American students have concerns about teachers' integrity and truthfulness concerning their students' academic success (Cavioni V., Grazani, I., & Ornaghi, V., 2020; Daftary et al., 2023; DuPont-Reyes et al., 2021). This study established the implications of organizational change for race consciousness and cultural change in Adventist schools.

The Search Description

This literature review was conducted by searching for relevant themes, main ideas, and keywords. The database used was through the California Baptist online library. The primary databases searched were Academic Search Premier, Christian Periodical Index, and Educational Research Complete. Other resources searched include Eric, Google Scholar, the Journal of Mental Health, and Sage Journals.

Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by two theoretical frameworks – Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory. CRT examines areas of social justice and argues that there is a historical pattern of racism that is an institutional problem ingrained in our society, which was founded by Derrick A Bell, Jr. and Alan Freeman in the 1970s. Critical race theory is also grounded in the civil rights movement, which emphasizes social justice, liberation, and economic empowerment(Billings G.L. & Tate I.V, W.F., 2021). Ladson-Billing (2019) expands this theory and intersects racial justice with education and educational inequities. Ladson-Billings (2019) argues that a culturally relevant pedagogy engages African American students within the curriculum, which is implemented by incorporating the African American students’ customs and heritage within the curriculum (Billings G.L. & Tate I.V. W.F., 2021).

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory provides a framework for understanding how various environmental factors and contexts influence human development (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022; Leonard, 2011). This theory asserts that an individual’s development is shaped by a series of five nested environmental systems, with each level having a different impact: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Leonard, 2011, p. 991). The microsystem includes the immediate environments and interactions directly impacting an

individual. This includes a person's family, friends, school, and other local social networks. The mesosystem represents the interconnections and interactions between various elements within the microsystem, for example, the interactions between a child's family and school and their influence on one another (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022; Leonard, 2011).

The exosystem involves environments that indirectly affect the individual, even though the individual does not directly participate in those settings. This might include a parent's workplace or local government policies. The macrosystem is the broader cultural and societal context in which the individual lives. It encompasses cultural norms, values, laws, and social ideologies (Leonard, 2011). The chronosystem recognizes the impact of time and historical context on an individual's development. It considers how changes and transitions over time can influence development. In short, Bronfenbrenner's framework encompasses a complex interplay of factors that affect human growth and behavior (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022; Leonard, 2011).

Review of Research

The factors parents consider when deciding whether to send their children to a Christian private school can vary. One husband and wife contemplated whether they should send their four children to a Christian private school to receive the values they would receive from home or wait until they went to college. They also contemplated their return on investment (*Why Choose Faith-Based Education*, n.d.). This couple is not alone; many parents consider whether to send their children to a Christian private school. Parents with Christian/biblical principles believe their children should be in an environment that prioritizes morals and values within the school culture, just as they would have in their Christian home. Another reason parents choose a Christian private education is because of the smaller classroom size and positive climate (*Why Choose Faith-Based Education*, n.d.).

Since the integration of Christian private schools in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, parents of African American students have chosen to enroll their children in Christian private schools at an increased rate of 10 percent. They have chosen to enroll their students in Christian private schools because they were dissatisfied with public schools. Attending a Christian private school is an investment. Still, tuition costs are lower than independent private schools and African American parents often agree with the conservative views (African Americans Turning to Christian Academies, 1996).

This study will explore the lived experiences of African American students regarding their psychosocial and social well-being, school climate, academic success, and spiritual well-being while attending predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies. There is insufficient research on African American students attending predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies and their well-being. Therefore, this literature review will include studies addressing these issues in non-Christian private schools.

Ecological Connection

A child's developmental years, from infancy through 24, are the most impressionable years of self-identity. During these years, individuals develop an awareness of their racial and ethnic identity and process who they are becoming (Ajrouch et al., 2016; Watford et al., 2021). Bronfenbrenner states, "...human development is the process through which a growing person acquires a more extended differential and valid conception of the ecological environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 27, as cited in Leonard 2011). Children may learn from exposure to parents, other adults, peers, institutional experiences, and socialization in their ecological environments (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022; Leonard, 2011). Media also influences youth

development through politics and events as an ethnic group and its associations and connections to political events (Ajrouch et al., 2016; Watford et al., 2021).

One example of how characteristics of the ecological environment affect self-identity development in youth is observed in a case study of Arab youth development. Arab youth are often marginalized because of their ethnicity. Arab Americans are not viewed as White or as a people of color. Nevertheless, Arab American youth development is influenced by the four identity statuses known as Erikson's ego-identity theory, which include diffuse, foreclosed, moratorium, and achieved. These identity models describe the psychological stages of self-identity (Leonard, 2011). Youths are in the diffuse stage when they have not considered their identity. Foreclosure is a commitment to an identity derived from parents, social influences, or values. The foreclosure state is characterized by the microsystem of Bronfenbrenner's framework (2011). On the contrary, the moratorium stage occurs when someone has not yet decided or committed to their identity. In the achieved stage, an individual has reached a clear sense of self by exploring their identity, ethnicity, and well-being (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022; Watford et al., 2021).

Ethnic identity relates to a sense of belonging to a particular group. In this case study, ethnic identity exploration involved youth learning about their Arab American background and talking to others about their ethnicity. Another study of child identity is of a brother and sister raised in the late twentieth century by an immigrant father living in their ethnic environment. The siblings attended Montessori school, where they were accepted by their peers. In contrast, later, the siblings attended a public school in their "White" neighborhood where they were stereotyped and looked upon as terrorists (Ajrouch et al., 2016; Watford et al., 2021).

A sense of belonging, particularly within a school context, has been a subject of examination in relation to students' educational outcomes for many years. Generally, it signifies the feeling of relatedness or connection to others (Goodenow, 1993; as cited in Baker, 2023). While various definitions of "sense of belonging" exist, most researchers agree that it is the "...extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others, especially teachers and other adults in the school social environment" (Goodenow & Grady, 1993, p. 80; as cited in Baker, 2023). Research consistently shows that students reporting high levels of belonging to the school environment tend to experience positive educational outcomes (Johnson, 2022). For instance, a high sense of belonging has been positively associated with academic achievement, high school graduation rates, and school satisfaction (Uwah et al., 2008, as cited in Baker, 2023). Conversely, a lack of belonging has been linked to depression, anxiety, alienation, and loneliness, which can lead to decreased academic motivation, engagement, and achievement among students (Booker, 2007; as cited in Baker, 2023).

According to Seaton & Yip (2008), African American youth are more likely to feel institutionalized discrimination within the school setting and neighborhoods where African American youth are the racial minority; however, research has revealed that Arab Americans are discriminated against as well. This discrepancy is due to the difficulty of Arab Americans' ethnicity within the United States census data collection (Ajrouch et al., 2015).

Young people's understanding of discrimination evolves over time. Youth are not born of conscientiousness nor recognition of racism or discrimination; rather, they learn these concepts through adults, peers, institutional experiences, and socialization (Watford et al., 2021). A youth's sense of belonging is interrelated with their self-identity; being accepted by peers, teachers, and the social environment strongly predicts a positive student outcome and life

satisfaction. When youth are firmly entrenched in their identity, they have a strong sense of who they are (Watford et al., 2021).

While Pagan (2022) suggests teachers develop three levels of barriers to effectively teaching students of color (i.e., racial bias, beliefs, and behaviors), other research purports there is a biological framework and psycho-educational development of middle-class African American adolescent students that supports their development when encountering negative racial socialization (DeCuir, Gunby, et al., 2011 p. 122). The mesosystem involves the student's racial identity, which develops through their family, their parents, and the neighborhood in which they are living. The next level is the microsystem, which includes support from the institutions or groups of people, such as church members and teachers, that influence a child's life (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, p. 211).

A key discovery of previous research is that centrality predicts one's development of a sense of belonging. This implies that students with a high centrality – those for whom their race is integral to their self-concept – tend to feel a stronger connection to their school. These findings align with the racial identity-as-promotive perspective, suggesting that centrality acts as a protective factor against negative racial stigma. This is attributed to the social support received from fellow racial group members who share similar experiences of discrimination (Okeke et al., 2009; Oysterman & Destin, 2010; as cited in Baker, 2023). Consequently, students may maintain a sense of connection to the school environment despite perceiving discrimination.

I am an African American parent of a biracial child whose father is White. My son attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy in Madison, Tennessee, and it was his mesosystem that helped shape his identity. My son's microsystem was experienced while attending the predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist school, in addition to attending the

predominantly White church that is affiliated with the school. To instill a balance within his identity and to appreciate the history of his African American heritage, we also attended one of the predominantly Black Seventh-day Adventist churches in the city so our son would be accustomed to both cultural worship experiences and to be culturally versed in both ethnic environments.

Like many other children of color, my son experienced challenges while attending the predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. One may ask why I would send my son to a school where its enrollment of students is predominantly White and where his own culture, nor any other culture, would be recognized or celebrated. As Bolgatz et al. (2020) stated, many African American parents send their children to predominantly White independent schools because they believe their children will have a better chance of getting accepted into a quality college, assuming their child receives a “better” education in a predominantly White school, and not taking into the consideration the school’s climate.

School Climate

Concerns have been raised about socioeconomic status (SES) risk factors, disparities, and inequalities affecting the education of students of color. These students often come from homes in poorer environments and lower-quality neighborhoods (Berkowitz, 2020). According to Berkowitz (2020), a low SES student in a positive school climate contributes to positive academic achievement, as it offsets the negative socioeconomic environmental risk students of color experience within their home environment.

In addition, students’ race, ethnicity, and culture contribute to their perceptions of school climate. An ecological theory suggests that several contexts influence different cultural settings. The school environment and peer-to-peer and individual interactions can create positive

outcomes in a religious or political setting (Berkowitz, 2020). Further, a positive school culture is advantageous not only for students of color and different ethnic backgrounds but also for teachers, including those in Adventist academies (Wobete et al., 2019).

Faith-based schools are expected to have a quality curriculum of higher standards than government-run schools. Different expectations exist between government and Christian private schools. One is that prospective teachers for faith-based schools have qualifications that must be met before their institutions employ them. This requirement is based on religious affiliations, which is unconstitutional for employment with a government institution (Wobete et al., 2019). According to Hans (2018), school-based hiring suggests that students from socioeconomic backgrounds are disadvantaged in the academic achievement gap. Autonomy school-based hiring equals inequality and teacher distribution inequality (Han, 2018). Therefore, when school administrators hire their own teachers (Having Autonomy), this type of hiring practice leads to inequality of qualified teachers in underserved schools (Han, 2018).

In comparison, the Seventh-day Adventist educational hiring system demonstrates autonomy in its teacher hiring practices. Black Adventist schools predominantly hire Black teachers, and predominantly White Adventist schools hire predominantly White teachers (ASTR, n.d.). When schools have an autonomy-based hiring system, the distribution of qualified teachers is compromised. Although Han (2018) suggests that school-based hiring is not associated with student performance, there is an achievement gap between high and low-socioeconomic students' performance. Therefore, the quality of teachers is associated with the school climate. School climate is essential because it impacts student learning, mental health, physical health, academic motivation, and achievement. It also impacts how teachers feel about their self-esteem and involvement with students. Further, it provides a healthy educational learning environment

and is closely interrelated with students' and teachers' psychological feelings about the school (Wobete et al., 2019).

In a quantitative study of the climate of 273 Ethiopian government and 97 Seventh-day Adventist schools, Wobete et al. (2019) examined teacher professionalism, which included the day-to-day interactions between teacher and principal; community engagement, the degree the school counts on the community; and academic press, which is the freedom of higher goals being set and objectives of the school, and the degree of teachers respecting students for their academic success. Teachers' perception of the school climate was healthier in Seventh-day Adventist schools compared to government schools. However, the teacher's professional judgment and willingness to go the extra mile were low (Wobete et al., 2019). In general, 53.47% of the Ethiopian government school teachers and 79.3% of Seventh-day Adventist teachers stated that their schools have a healthy school climate. Professional judgment was highly rated, and the academic press was the lowest for Ethiopian government schools and Seventh-day Adventist schools (Wobete et al., 2019). Both school types ranked low on community engagement. The study highlights the importance of knowing a school's climate, as well as understanding the areas of the school climate that need improvement (Wobete et al., 2019).

Teachers' Perception of Students

Teachers are most influential in students' school experiences. They are effective in their students' psychological development, identity, and academic success. Teachers intend to exhibit a positive classroom experience; instead, teachers often unconsciously demonstrate racial discrimination through their behaviors (Pagan, 2022). Teachers can learn to implement a culturally relevant pedagogy through a multi-level framework. However, as stated, there is a multi-level, race-conscious framework in which teachers develop racial bias, beliefs, and

behaviors. First is the macrosystem, which includes socio-stratification, racial narratives, culture of power, and ideologies. The second is the ecosystem, which includes district and state-level policies and practices. The third is the macrosystem, which comprises school policies and school and classroom culture (Pagan, 2022).

A lab-based study explored whether teachers' responses were more punitive to Black students for infractions, such as disrupting class. There were no discrepancies for the first infraction when both White and Black students were involved. For a second infraction, when only a Black student received an infraction, the teachers' emotions became more troubled, leading to Black students being likely to experience more severe punishment than White students. (Leath, 2019; Pagan, 2022).

In addition, previous research explored experiences of discrimination and unfair treatment among African American and White boys. This was a concern for one parent, especially after the school psychologist reported that African American boys were six times more likely to be expelled than White boys (Craig et al., 2019; Leath, 2019). Baker (2018) presents a different perspective and suggests that teachers can adopt a conceptual framework of visualization in positively perceiving African American students, thereby increasing a positive peer-to-teacher relationship.

In another study, researchers explored the experiences of African American students who are expelled or suspended more often than their classmates of other ethnicities for being defiant. Defiant is a subjective disciplinary classification for students who behave contrary to a teacher's expectations (Baker, 2018). According to this study of ninth and tenth graders, African American students' defiant behavior is the teachers' perception of African American students attending predominantly White schools (Baker, 2018). Contributing to this phenomenon is what Baker

(2018) refers to as “Deficit Thinking.” Some factors contributing to the defiance of African American students are a cultural mismatch with the school and conflicting school values between students' ecological or home values compared to the schools. Other deficit thinking characteristics of teachers' perceptions are race, achievement, the biased belief of the African American students' academic success, and the student's socioeconomic status (Baker, 2018).

A teacher's perception of an African American student contributes to microaggressions; thereby, the student's defiance is the response to the microaggression, predicting the expelled or suspension of the African American student (Lewis, et al., 2019). This cyclical process can differentiate between teachers and students (Baker, 2018). However, when students perceive teachers as caring and are conscious about their attitude toward them and their families, a bridge can be built to facilitate a meaningful learning relationship between the African American student and teacher (Baker, 2018; Pagan, 2022; Poos et al., 2021).

Teachers' perceptions of African American students often lead to lower expectations, causing more punitive consequences of disciplinary actions and more negative feedback than White students. A relevant pedagogy classroom is one where teachers are conscious of their attitudes and classroom practices within the context of the student race. Teachers will view or hold their expectations and behavior accountable. Culturally relevant pedagogy is a framework for teachers to have a race-conscious multilevel framework, including changing their beliefs, dispositions, attitudes, behaviors, practices, and student outcomes (Will, 2022). Some scholars and practitioners have proposed an approach to combat racial disparities and barriers through a culturally relevant pedagogy because culturally relevant pedagogy promotes positive racially conscious attitudes and practices in the classroom environment (Will, 2022).

Perceptions of Parents of African American Students

According to the National Association for Independent Schools, in 2018, 6.8% of African American students were enrolled in independent, predominantly White schools. When African American parents enroll their children in a private school, it serves as an unspoken symbol of intellectual and economic advancement. However, African American parents have felt apprehensive about the social and academic experiences their children might be exposed to while attending predominantly White independent schools (PWIS). These concerns are derived from history revealing that private schools have been instituted for White students (Bolgatz et al., 2020).

Two prominent challenges African American parents face when enrolling their students in a PWIS are financial and cultural. The financial challenge is due to having to pay tuition, which can amount to \$40,000 a year, and the cultural challenge is parents' desire for their children to attend a PWIS rather than ensuring the school has a multicultural environment (Bolgatz et al., 2020). Further, African American parents are often concerned about their children experiencing overt forms of discrimination due to teachers embracing low expectations of African American students and the "culture racism," as school administrators often lack transparency in communications to the parents about their children's academic progress (Bolgatz et al., 2020).

Teachers' receptivity to Critical Race Pedagogy might help address African American parents' concerns about the cultural environment in PWIS. Bolgatz et al. (2020) conducted a phenomenological study as part of a more extensive ethnographic study from "Park Academy," a predominantly White K-12, non-Christian private school in the United States (Bolgatz et al., 2020). The study participants were 20 teachers, including one who identified as biracial (Asian and White), one Latina, and one African American teacher who left during the study. The

remaining teachers and administrators were White. Other participants in the study were 12 mothers and two fathers, with students of parents who identified as Black, African American, biracial, Hispanic, Grenadian, and Jamaican (Bolgatz et al., 2020). Parents of African American students had three primary concerns – the possibility of their student being asked to leave the school, parent-teacher communication, and student access to tutoring (Bolgatz et al., 2020). Teachers open to learning Critical Race Pedagogy were found to build positive relationships with their students, thereby building community within the school.

On the other hand, progressive White parents in urban communities want their children to experience the diversity of a multicultural school climate. In fact, they value African Americans attending a school of choice with their children and understand the most advantageous opportunity for their children is to attend a school with a “real world” (i.e., diverse) student population. Although these parents seek schools specifically where African American students attend, they are engaging in what Evans (2021) calls color-blind racism.

Evans’ (2021) Color-Blind Racism Theory asks, “How can there be racism if no one claims to be racist?” This theory suggests that urban White parents have a color-blind ideology by which they contribute to inequalities and racism. While they intentionally plan for their students to attend schools of choice where African Americans are enrolled, they do not acknowledge the existence of racism or inequality. At the same time, however, White parents strive for their children to have a progressive identity.

While African American students’ parents hope for an equitable educational experience, research suggests that White parents are inclined to seek schools that appeal to their students’ ethnic group more (Hailey, 2021). It is school choice that provides the freedom for African American parents to choose a predominantly White private school, and it is school choice that

often drives parents of White students to enroll their children in a predominantly White school (Hailey, 2021).

In Hailey's (2021) survey of eighth-grade students and parents explored what drove parents to choose a particular school for their child. The schools' safety ratings, graduation rates, and four school racial composition typologies defused the racial demographics of ethnic racial groups such as Blacks, Whites, Latinx, and the diversity of the particular New York City high school. In contrast, Boltz et al. (2020) suggest that African Americans enroll their student in predominantly White independent schools for a greater chance of acceptance into a quality college because some middle-class Blacks prioritize academics over making sure their student school climate is racially mixed (Boltz et al., 2020; Hailey, 2021).

According to Hailey (2021), there are racial stereotypes within the educational structure. These racial stereotypes are included within school policies and procedures. For example, teachers may provide more time for Asian students to complete their schoolwork or give more academic assistance referrals than Black students. Recommendations to address these barriers at the institutional level include creating policies that will support a positive school climate, valuing each student's linguistic culture, and developing and nurturing the whole child (Pagan, 2022).

Experiences of African American Students

Racial discrimination, like racism, is multidimensional. Individual racism consists of actions personally experienced by minorities that affect and promote their belief of inferiority. Cultural racism is racial discrimination that occurs when the beliefs and practices of the racial majority group are believed to be superior to the racial minority group. Institutional racism is demonstrated by differential access to services, goods, and opportunities, resulting in inequities toward the racial minority group. Finally, collective racism occurs when there is a denial of the

racial minority group's rights and restriction of their privileges (Evans, 2021; Seaton & Yip, 2008). Each of these dimensions can be experienced by African American students in predominantly White schools and other settings.

The narrative experience of Black graduates recounts racism and pain at private all-girls schools. These allegations were published on Instagram by Black girls who graduated from several prestigious schools in New York. (Shapiro, 2020). The experiences of the Black girls were usually kept among them, but due to the heightened racial tension in the United States after the killing of George Floyd, the girls wanted their experience to be known.

These Black girls attending elite schools experienced racism (Shapiro, 2020). One student stated she was ostracized for calling out her friend for repeating a racial slur. Another experience came from a woman who graduated from her school years ago, remembering her White classmates told her that Europeans "invalidated history." In 2016, a graduate of her school believed it was time for these schools to be honest and take a stand against racial discrimination. She challenged her school to do so, stating it was time for the school to be open and honest about overtly institutionalized anti-Black racism within the school. The head of the school apologized with deep grief for the anguish and frustrations the Black girls experienced in silence. The head of one school thanked the girls for their loyalty to activism (Shapiro, 2020). Other students also recalled experiences of racism. Another Black female student recalled experiencing racism when her White friends started rapping to a song and shouted a racial slur. After she questioned the White girls about using such a racial slur, they became silent and stopped speaking to her (Shapiro, 2020).

Some students expressed how awkward it was during admissions season and recalled being discouraged from applying to Ivy League schools. Then, when students were admitted into

the Ivy League school, White classmates made remarks about affirmative action to them. Another graduate recalled being accused of stealing money from her White teacher's desk. Although her teacher reassured her that she did not believe she had stolen the money, the teacher still called her about the money while her White classmate later found the money (Shapiro, 2020). Although these graduates did not believe much change would be made, they were glad they spoke out about their experiences (Shapiro, 2020).

Racial discrimination is often experienced early in adolescence when many students' schools and neighborhoods are non-Hispanic White. Racism is typically experienced on a macro level, resulting from residual societal and psychological experiences of segregation (Seaton & Yip, 2008). Bias towards adolescents is associated with low self-esteem and distress. Individual racism is related to their perception of the racial discrimination experience, and institutionalized discrimination is associated with their academic performance and grade point average (Seaton & Yip, 2008; Pagan, 2022). Seaton and Yip (2008) examined educational institutions and peers as sources of racial discrimination 252 African American students. The study findings revealed that African American youth experience more institutional and educational discrimination than their non-Hispanic White peers (Leath, 2019; Seaton & Yip, 2008).

The study also examined the neighborhood where students of color lived regarding their perception of racial discrimination, and the findings suggest that characteristics of the ecological environment, particularly segregation, significantly influence racial minority groups' perceptions or experiences of racial discrimination. In this context, segregation refers to the physiological separation enforced in restricted areas (Berkowitz, 2020; Seaton & Yip, 2008). African American students perceived 50% less discrimination when attending schools and living in neighborhoods where they were the majority. In other words, their racially discriminatory

perception decreases when they are the majority (Seaton & Yip, 2008). Therefore, this study revealed that adolescents' perception of racial discrimination and cultural racism decreases when school diversity increases (Seaton & Yip, 2008). Therefore, lower levels of African Americans in schools increase perceived racial discrimination from African American peers and their relationships with adults (Seaton & Yip, 2008).

Within educational institutions today, microaggressions and peer-to-peer racial conflict remain, and students are prohibited from experiencing a culturally diverse academic school climate. However, for two schools in the Midwest there was a different experience. A Midwestern public high school and a majority Jewish private suburban school participated in a civil rights program together that involved an eight-day journey to visit key civil rights locations (Poos et al., 2021). This experiment allowed students to learn about African American history together, crossing racial and cultural lines, and later incorporated digital tools within the educational enterprise for innovative learning about other cultures in face-to-face or virtual settings (Poos et al., 2021).

Experience in Small Religious schools or Non-Religious Schools

When parents of students of color think about choosing a private school, little is considered of the school's sociological context and how it can influence adolescents' mental health (Watt, 2003). According to Watt (2003), small private schools are believed to be more prepared to support adolescents emotionally than larger private schools. Research is scanty on that conclusion, and previous studies suggest the opposite – that private and small schools harm adolescents' emotional state (Watt, 2003). The emotional harm may be due to students' lack of a sense of belonging and social support. Nevertheless, Watts (2003) states that students who experience a sense of isolation may find acceptance within subcultural therapy. Subcultural

therapy occurs when a diverse group of students who do not fit into the dominant group find others who do not fit into the dominant group and thereby support each other (Watt, 2003).

Adolescents spend half of their day in school, and are impacted by school rules, peers, and programs, and are influenced by teachers. There is public concern over adolescents' mental health, particularly regarding violent acts carried out by adolescents. Tragedy and violence are associated with the school climate that fosters alienation and anarchy (Ajrouch et al., 2021; Watt, 2003). Watt's (2003) research sought to determine whether private and small schools offer a mental health advantage for students. The findings indicate that marginalized students attending small religious or non-religious private schools benefit from learning in a small classroom-size learning environment.

A sub-study used longitudinal adolescent health data to explore the behavior of adolescents in grades 7-12 in a dummy school of public school, private religious school, and non-religious private school. The primary analysis assessed depression, suicidality, and violence in private school versus public school student participants, with the school size ranging from small to medium. A separate analysis analyzed the effects of attending a small private school and the interaction of family problems, lack of social acceptance from a low-income family, and racial-ethnic minority background (Watt, 2003).

The results suggest that most interactions were insignificant for students attending large schools experiencing depression, suicide, and weapon use or threat. In addition, there are six significant results : (a) marginalized students feel they are at an advantage in attending a private school over a public school; (b) males who attended private religious schools were less likely to attempt suicide than those in public schools; (c) adults and males who attended non-religious private schools and had family problems or were from a low SES home were less likely to use

weapons and were less depressed than those who experienced the same in public school; (d) males and females who attend small private schools are less likely to be threatened with weapons than students who attend public schools; (e) males attending non-religious private schools are at risk of suicide than males in public schools; and (f) females of color are more likely to attempt suicide in small private schools than females attending public schools (Watt, 2003). This study noted no mental health advantages for marginalized students attending religious or non-religious schools (Dupont-Reyes et al., 2021; Watt, 2003).

Christian Education, Mental Health & Diversity

Students are conditioned to their learning environment in the adolescent years, from childhood to adulthood. It begins with cultural influences during infancy, and exposure to linguistic and cognitive processes is developed throughout childhood. Self-efficacy begins when their belief and capabilities of what they can achieve become reality (Bolgatz, 2020; Schunk, 2020).

When one has self-efficacy, the perception of their expected outcome is validated by their actions. For example, if a student is asked by their teacher to solve a mathematical problem, and they answer it correctly, the teacher praises them. This reinforcement creates positive self-efficacy. Another example is when the student answers a mathematical problem incorrectly, and the teacher is silent. In that case, the student's self-efficacy is lowered (Schunk, 2020).

A student's self-efficacy is essential to academic learning. Self-efficacy is vital to students' motivation and learning. According to Schunk (2020), self-efficacy fluctuates and can be a situational, specific, dynamic, and changeable self-concept. During childhood and through adolescence, cognitive processes and human development form, and the child searches for role models for who they are morally and spiritually. During this stage of life, belief patterns are

developed, and the child begins to internalize religious practices and values; mental health development also coincides with this stage (Bolgatz, 2020; Estrada et al., 2019).

According to Jeyne (1999), there is a positive influence on religious students whose families have spiritual practices and attend religious schools. They have a drive for academic achievement, and this influence has positive benefits for students. On the contrary, according to Estrada et al. (2019), in some cases, religious beliefs and practices can contribute to the development of certain disorders, such as obsession, anxiety, and depression. In some instances, religiosity forbids students from seeking professional mental help (Estrada et al., 2019).

Students may experience indoctrination in Christian private schools, and questioning of the teaching of any subject is restricted. Thereby, the student's intellectual consciousness of learning is restricted in a way that holds back certain beliefs, thoughts, or ideas. Students experience a transformational aspect of changed beliefs, values, attitudes, and personality, where the belief systems of the school system and others in authority and teaching methods leave little room for questioning and have been called "unreasonable manipulation" (Harkness, 2002, p. 34). James Dwyer (2001), as cited in Merry (2018), characterizes indoctrination as the following:

Are not permitted to question what they are taught on any subject or to express any opinion contrary to orthodox views that teachers, school administrators, and pastors aggressively impress upon them. To do so would constitute rebellion, a grave sin warranting harsh punishment. (pp. 24-25)

According to Thiessen (2004), indoctrination is the curtailment of a person's growth toward normal rational autonomy (1991, p.116, as cited in Harkness, 2002). Thiessen continues his contribution of indoctrination and compares the teaching environment of a Christian private school between a teacher and a student to a child in its development stage as to the parent.

Within this model teaching environment, the students take on the belief system in which they are educated (Harkness, 2002). It is because of the developmental modeling stage of the adolescent that liberal philosophers believe young children should not be taught a religious faith that does not provide autonomy (Merry, 2018).

Christian parents and teachers must recognize students' individuality and growing independence and establish personal identity to create their worldview (Harkness, 2002). This concept is embraced in Taiwan's approach to religious education. Taiwan's multicultural religious education for students in grades 7-12 is still in its infancy. However, at the university level, Taiwan believes it is to the students' advantage that they have the freedom to engage in learning about multicultural religious differences, which creates cultural competency of other religions within the country (Li et al., 2023). Taiwan believes that having rigid religious teachings results in poor learning. Researchers identified this conclusion from a quasi-experiment research test given to 24 third and fourth-graders. They concluded that an interactive technology-based religious education program provides a positive religious educational diverse outcome (Li et al., 2023).

Organizational Change & A New Culture

Since 1944, there has been a separation of Black and White conferences within the Seventh-day Adventist organization. Because of the segregated conferences, each conference has a divisional organizational structure. First, there is the General Conference, the headquarters of the world church of Seventh-day Adventists. Each Regional and State conference operates its campuses of academies or boarding academies within its Union Conference, continuing a top-down organizational structure of the local conference, which is comprised of local churches

within a territory or state (Bolman & Terrence, 2017; Hollancid, 2016; North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, n.d.).

Each local conference has a president and administration and is accountable to its respective division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The local conferences, along with other sub-organizations within the conferences, are obligated to report baptisms, tithes, and offerings and are accountable for each church within their respective conference. Each school within the local conference is accountable for reporting to the union conference, which then reports to the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists' Department of Education (Bolman & Terrence, 2017; Hollancid, 2016; North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, n.d.). Each division operates in a machine bureaucracy, where the strategic apex (i.e., General Conference) is responsible for creating policies and plans for the denomination and has an administration that engages in top-down decision-making processes (Bolman & Terrence, 2017, p. 79; North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, n.d.).

The concept of organizational change pertains to modifications implemented by an organization to enhance efficacy (Smith & Troppau, 2010; Stuckmeyer et al., 2019, as cited in Windom & Stollar, 2020). Organizational readiness for change, on the other hand, denotes the commitment and confidence of an organization's team members in executing such changes (Weiner, 2020, as cited in Windom & Stollar, 2020).

External and internal factors influence organizational change in an organizational change strategy. With a complex organizational structure like the Seventh-day Adventist Church, applying the evolutionary change theory model can support the different organizational changes needed within the denomination's school system. According to Kezar (2001, as cited in Baker &

Roger, 2014), this model offers a glimpse into how organizations inherently modify themselves to align with their surroundings.

To ascertain the extent of change or the nature of the change taking place, Kezar (2001 as cited in Baker & Roger, 2014) uses two categories: first-order change, such as minor modifications or improvements, and second-order changes, which have a transformative essence and result in modifications to the mission and values of the organization. The evolutionary model of change considers the timing of change, the magnitude of change, and the organizational elements influenced by the change. Within this model, it is also essential to consider the “what,” “why,” and “how” – what needs to be changed, why it needs to be changed, and how it will change (Baker & Baldwin, 2014).

The organization’s responsiveness toward change is contingent on how change will occur; it is then that the organization begins to change (Baker & Baldwin, 2014). One case study explored three liberal arts colleges to understand the changes that are taking place by incorporating more vocational training in their college programs (Baker & Baldwin, 2014). All three colleges responded differently to external and internal stimuli, but each achieved homeostasis in their responsiveness to the change (Baker & Baldwin, 2014).

The Seventh-day Adventist organization can benefit from several changes, such as a team-based strategy. The team-based approach is one where human capital, the pastors, teachers, and administrative leaders win through collaborative leadership. Optimal collaboration is imperative for promoting innovative, multi-ethnic hiring processes between divisional conferences and Seventh-day Adventist higher education institutions (Hickman, 2016). This type of collaboration is implemented when a small group of critical leaders links shared interests in the organization’s culture and encourages other team members to build trust and sustainably for

systemic change. Innovating educational hiring practices within the Seventh-day Adventist Church will create global team leaders who possess cultural competence and can execute and maintain the change process (Hickman, 2016).

In addition, Church leaders may adopt a transformational leadership approach, as described by James MacGregor Burns, by first modeling the change of inclusivity and race consciousness (Northouse, 2021). Leaders would then build teams to meet the followers' (i.e., teachers) needs to reach their goal of becoming race-conscious and create a school climate of consciousness of the presence of a sense of belonging for African American and other students of color attending predominantly White Adventist academies.

Therefore, innovation is to be executed by creating new processes and business models that incorporate the strategy for a multicultural organization within the hiring practices and denominational inclusiveness that will lead to a new era within the Seventh-day Adventist organizational culture (Byrd & Scott, 2016; Hickman, 2016). Similar to the case studies of the three liberal arts colleges that implemented change by facing the challenges achieved by homeostasis and thereby created new vocational programs (Baker & Baldwin, 2014), the Seventh-day Adventist church may also face challenges as it implements change.

This new era will require a commitment to building an organization that adopts a religiously sanctioned concept and practice as a moral duty and essential component of sound conduct and race consciousness (Syed et al., 2017, p. 118). A new principle in race consciousness avoids harming others, such as students of all ethnicities attending Seventh-day Adventist academies, colleges, and universities. Syed et al. (2017) state that moderation is the second foundation for diversity and should be implemented realistically and beneficially (p.118). The slightest notion of ethnic superiority denies the theological reality of justification. In fact,

Paul also provides a message of race consciousness, unity, and justice in Galatians 3:28:“There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female; you are all one in Christ Jesus” (King James Bible, 1769/2017, Galatians 3:28).

Summary

The Seventh-day Adventist organizational structure became segregated when people of color demanded equality during the civil rights movement from the 1940s to 1954; that structure still exists today (Miller, 1957; Seventh Day, n.d.). Due to this segregated organizational system, the Seventh-day Adventist educational system lacks inclusion and diversity in its teacher hiring practices. However, research suggests that when teachers in predominantly White academies lack race consciousness, African American students may experience a school culture of isolation, low self-esteem, and mental health crises, as well as a lack of a sense of belonging (Pagan, 2022; Seaton & Yip, 2008).

The concept of belonging, particularly within a school context, has been a focal point of studies concerning students’ educational achievements for numerous years. Generally, it denotes the sense of connection or relatedness to others (Goodenow, 1993; as referenced in Baker, 2023). While various definitions of a sense of belonging exist, most researchers concur that it reflects the “extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others, especially teachers and other adults in the school social environment (Goodenow & Grady, 1993, p. 80; as cited in Baker, 2023). Consistent research indicates that students who express a strong sense of belonging in the school environment tend to encounter positive educational outcomes (Baker, 2023; Johnson, 2009).

A positive school culture is beneficial not just for students of color and individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds but also for teachers. Educators are pivotal in shaping students’

school journeys, impacting their psychological development, identity formation, and academic achievements. Despite teachers' intentions to foster a positive classroom environment, instances of unconscious racial discrimination may manifest through their behavior (Pagan, 2022; Wobete et al., 2019). Teachers can adopt a culturally relevant pedagogy using a multi-level framework to address these unconscious behaviors. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the existence of a multi-level, race-conscious framework influencing teachers' development of racial biases, beliefs, and behaviors (Pagan, 2022).

African American students attending religious schools experience significant benefits, such as gaining positive academic achievement outcomes and religious locus of control. Furthermore, research suggests that African American students' ecological environment may contribute to their locus of control and the religious commitment of their parents rather than the religious schools' influence on the African-American student (Estrada et al., 2019; Jeynes, 1999). In some cases, however, religious beliefs and practices may contribute to the development of disorders such as obsession, anxiety, and depression, with a few cases of religiosity hindering students from seeking professional mental help (Estrada et al., 2019). A large, global organization, such as the Seventh-day Adventist church, can implement changes to enhance the experience of African American students attending predominantly White Adventist academies by implementing an evolutionary change model that emphasizes the significance of external influences, offering valuable insights into the pursuit and adaptation of responsiveness to external and internal factors in achieving homeostasis and institutional change (Baker & Baldwin, 2014).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methods used to conduct this study, including the purpose statement, research questions, protection of human subjects, research design, population, sample, instrument data collection and data analysis, design and limitations, and the summary.

Developing a comprehensive study of African American students' lived experiences is the goal of this qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thus, this qualitative phenomenological study will explore the experience of a sense of belonging for African American students who have attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. The interviews were conducted as open-ended questions through Zoom/video conference. During the interviews, participants reflected on their lived experiences while attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy for 1-4 years. In this context, the qualitative research fulfilled a descriptive design of African American students' lived perspectives.

This qualitative design was selected because of its utility and applicability to humanities and evaluation. In addition, qualitative research provides the ability to gain insight into the perception and narrative rather than hypothesis testing (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, a phenomenological design is appropriate to address the experiences of African American students who attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. This study gives a structural description by identifying the phenomenon's conditions, situations, and themes. The sample is a criterion sampling of African Americans who were former students at a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist school is a bounded system in which students attend during the day or a boarding academy where students live on campus. Although the

participants have graduated, they have reflected on their experiences, involvement, and participation within the system.

Purpose Statement

This qualitative study explains factors contributing to a sense of belonging for African American students who attended predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies. This research is informed by the critical race theoretical perspective of education, which asserts that educational inequities are central components of American society and the educational system (Ladson-Billings, 2021). This theory examines the intersection of race, education, and educational inequities (Billings & Tate, 2021). The study is also informed by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theoretical framework, which provides a basis for understanding how various environmental factors and contexts influence human development. It asserts that an individual's development is shaped by a series of nested environmental systems, with each level having a different impact (Leonard, 2011, p. 991).

This study addresses the factors that influenced African Americans' experiences while attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. It is designed to provide implications for how predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies can create a positive school climate for African American students. Its implications can also assist teachers in consciously developing a mindset of positively perceiving marginalized students and a Christian educational climate that embraces a safe space for exploration and curiosity, uncoerced with independent thought (Craig et al., 2019; Hawkness, 2002; Miller, 1957; Pagan, 2022).

Research Questions

This qualitative research addresses the question: What experiences contributed to a sense of belonging for African American students who attended predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies? There are two sub-questions:

1. How was your experience attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy?
2. What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experience?

Protection of Human Subjects

The research involves the study of human subjects. The participants are African Americans who formerly attended predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies in the United States. Participants were selected using a criterion sampling process, which was conducted using a demographic questionnaire (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This research required permission from the human subjects and approval from the Institutional Review Board. The researcher and committee members were required to complete training on protecting human subjects. The participants were volunteers identified by an invitation from the researcher's Meta social media page. Meta, more commonly known as Facebook, is an online social network website that makes connecting and sharing with friends and family easy. Once the voluntary invitation was posted on the researcher's Facebook page, volunteers were directed to fill out an information form for the researcher to contact them. Participants completed their informed consent for the study and were advised of their rights.

An informed consent was obtained by each respondent to ensure ethical considerations for study participation. A sample of the interview questions was emailed to the participants before their scheduled interview. The interviews took place via Zoom in a private location where

participants were undisturbed. Potential risks were described to participants, including psychological risks; human subjects may become emotional when recalling their experiences. Participants did not need help working their Zoom application from their computers. The researcher did not have to mitigate the risk of emotional harm by rescheduling the interview with the participants who were unwilling to continue the study. One respondent needed to reschedule due to technical difficulties.

Research Design

This research design is a qualitative study. This design was chosen to bring a voice to the experiences of marginalized students who attended predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies during their secondary education. A qualitative design was chosen because of its historical applications for studying anthropology, sociology, the humanities, and the evaluation of human subjects (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13).

This study is phenomenological and follows a practical, systematic process of interpreting transcript interviews and identifying common themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The data represent the participants' experiences in a chronological narrative format. Other forms of data were observed, such as participants' nonverbal and verbal communication (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data were analyzed and coded for common themes to gain insight into the experiences that contributed to African American students' sense of belonging while attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy.

Population

Participants were selected using criterion sampling. With a criterion sampling method, participants represent people who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.

157). A sample of 3-4 to 10-15 individuals is recommended for exploring a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, pg. 76).

Recruitment

Participants were recruited through the researcher's social media Facebook account. The researchers distributed a flyer on the Facebook account. The flyer (see Appendix A) stated the inclusion criteria and invited respondents to scan a QR code if they were interested in participating or learning more about the study.

Study criteria

There were five inclusion criteria for the study. Study participants must:

- identify as African American,
- have attended a predominantly U.S.-based White Seventh-day Adventist academy for 1 to 4 years for their secondary education,
- have access to the Internet,
- be willing to be video recorded and
- be willing to share their experiences.

No organizational permissions were needed due to all respondents being selected voluntarily.

Sample

The final sample included 14 African Americans who met the inclusion criteria. There were five men in the 51 - 71-year-old range and nine women in the 31 - 68-year-old range.

Instrumentation

A qualitative study does not rely on one source of information; instead, a protocol is developed for recording various types of observations. An observational protocol may be

descriptive notes of the setting, accounts of events, and notes from reflective events (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study sought to identify common academic, psychological, and social themes of the experiences of African American students who attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy for their secondary education. Thus, the primary data collection instrument was a semi-structured questionnaire emailed to the respondents before the interview (see Appendix E). The instrument was designed according to the study's base research questions, with additional questions and probes to delve deeper into the participants' experiences. Prior validation established the credibility of the instrument to eliminate weaknesses and ensure clarity of the questions (Pessoa et al., 2019).

Participants were contacted to schedule their interviews, which lasted 60 minutes and were conducted over one month. Each participant completed a demographic form, which included questions regarding age, gender, how many years they attended the predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy, the type of school they attended (i.e., a boarding academy or day academy), and the highest level of education attained.

Data Collection

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews that facilitated the exploration of the contexts and experiences related to African American students' sense of belonging while attending predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies for their secondary education. A semi-structured interview allowed participants to share their experiences freely. The data were collected and analyzed for common themes to gain insight into African American students' experiences of belonging while attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. The interviews addressed six categories of questions: a sense of belonging at home, expectations about the predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy, a sense of

belonging at school, academic expectations, religion or indoctrination, and African American students' reflective recommendations (Pessoa, 2019). Three questions were included in each category.

The principal investigator conducted qualitative research. The interview protocol was followed to ensure participants had privacy to respond to the interview questions. Each participant completed an informed consent form before the interviews. The completed forms were stored in a secure location to protect the confidentiality of the participants. The semi-structured interviews were recorded and verified by participants at the end of the interview for validity. The interviews were conducted using Zoom, with the camera function on for the researcher and participant. The transparent data provide this qualitative research with an in-depth description of the phenomenon of interest. Once interviews were completed, transcripts of data were collected and stored securely electronically. The data will be stored for seven years and then demolished (Creswell, 2018).

Data Analysis

Data from the interviews were collected and analyzed for common themes and coded to gain insight into African American students' experiences of belonging while attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy (Dovetail Editorial team, 2023). The face-to-face interviewing protocol permits the observation of emotional expressions. While the interview was taking place, the principal investigator wrote memos and began data analysis, which was ongoing throughout the interview process.

The researcher used Moustakas' (1994) qualitative approach to analyzing phenomenological data and systematically interpreting and extracting common themes and conceptual links (Creswell, 2018, p. 11). The data analysis process was sequential – transcribe

interviews, type notes, and categorize and sort data. Each transcript was reviewed in detail and analyzed for the participants' general ideas and significant themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Categorizing and sorting data involved interpreting and hand-coding the interview transcripts. The researcher interpreted text to assign specific codes, identify interrelated codes, and organize the data (Creswell, 2018; Dovetail Editorial team, 2023).

Once all data analysis procedures were complete, the data were interpreted by summarizing the overall findings and comparing the findings to the literature. The limitations and lessons learned from the interviews were stated. The theoretical lens of this research is an ecological theory and educational critical race theory, with a transformational approach. Therefore, the research analysis and interpretation will be used for a call to action for reform (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Design and Instrument Limitations

Although a qualitative approach is appropriate for this study, it is not without limitations. The participants' experiences came from attending different Seventh-day Adventist academies, which introduced various school systems into the study. Further, the sampling of former students is a small, convenient sample from social media and is not representative of all African Americans who attended predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies. Finally, the researcher's personal experiences may introduce bias and influence the interpretation of the participants' experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher mitigated bias by being aware of personal experiences and bracketing (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Summary

Today's Seventh-day Adventist organization, established in the 1940s, has a segregated, top-down structure. This organization is directed by the General Conference and divided into

union and local conferences. The organizational structure impacts the division of education, where school administrators and teachers are hired. As a result, segregated hiring practices are imminent (North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, n.d.; Statistics, n.d.).

According to previous research, a positive school climate is imperative to a healthy school culture and a sense of belonging for African American students attending predominantly White private schools. Teachers should increase their race consciousness and implement a multicultural pedagogy to enhance marginal students' academic outcomes (Berkowitz, 2020). While research does suggest religious schools are a benefit to African American students, Christian schools need to be cognizant of the teachings of religion versus indoctrination, which may compromise African American students' well-being during the developmental stages (Hawkness, 2002; Leanard, 2012)

To address these issues, the researcher designed a qualitative study with semi-structured interviews to capture the lived experiences of African Americans who attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. Data analysis included interpreting interview transcripts for themes and coding them in a systematic format. This study was designed with the aim of recommending innovative changes to enhance the organizational climate and hiring practices of Seventh-day Adventist academies (Bolman & Terrance, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Hickman, 2016).

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

This study examined the experiences contributing to a sense of belonging for African Americans who attended predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies. This chapter presents the results of the qualitative research to answer the question: What experiences contributed to a sense of belonging for African Americans who attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy?

The results presented in this chapter include a description of the study sample and the results of the semi-structured interviews. This chapter also includes the results of the thematic analysis of the participants' experiences, with a detailed description of the process and data collection.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of a sense of belonging of African American postgraduates who attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy for one to four years (Creswell, 2018). This research's theoretical framework is a critical race theoretical perspective of education by Ladson-Billings (2021) and Bronfenbrenner's ecological theoretical framework (Bronfenbrenner's, 2011). Ladson-Billings's (2021) critical race theory of education concept asserts that educational inequities are central to American Society and, by extension, the American educational system.

The Critical Race Theory examines the intersection of race, education, and educational inequities (Billings & Tate IV, 2021). The Critical Race Theoretical framework also argues that there is a historical pattern of racism ingrained in our society and that it is an institutional problem. In addition, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theoretical framework suggests that various

environmental factors and contexts influence human development. Bronfenbrenner's (2011) theory is a comprehensive human development system shaped by a series of nested environmental systems, each level having a different impact (Leonard, 2011, p. 991).

There are five ecological systems of Bronfenbrenner's theory; they include microsystems, the immediate environment and interactions that directly impact an individual. This includes family, friends, school, and other local social networks. Second is the mesosystem; this level considers the interconnections and interactions between various elements within the microsystem, for example, the child's family and school's influence on one another (Leonard, 2011, p. 991).

The third level of Bronfenbrenner's system levels is the ecosystems. The ecosystems involve environments that indirectly affect the individual while not directly participating in those settings. The ecosystem level may include a parent's workplace or local government policies. Fourth is the macrosystem, the broader cultural and societal context in which the individual lives. It encompasses cultural norms, values, laws, and social ideologies (Leonard, 2011, p. 991).

The fifth system is the chronosystem; this level recognizes the impact of time and historical context on an individual's development. It considers how changes and transitions over time can influence development. Bronfenbrenner ecological theory encompasses a complex interplay of factors that affect human growth and behavior (Leonard, 2011, p. 991).

The methodology of this study is a semi-structured interview consisting of open-ended questions regarding the factors that contributed to a sense of belonging to African American students who attended predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies.

Research Questions

This qualitative research will propose the hypotheses of the experience of African American students who attended a predominantly white SDA academy and did not experience belonging. The research question: What experiences contributed to the sense of belonging of African American students who attended predominantly white Seventh-day Adventist academies? There are two sub-questions:

1. How was your experience attending a predominantly white SDA academy?
2. How would you describe your interactions with teachers?

Research Methodology and Data Collection Procedures

This qualitative phenomenological study uses semi-structured interviews consisting of semi-open-ended questions to collect data from African Americans who experienced the phenomenon of a sense of belonging while attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy for their secondary education. The interview guide contained six categories: a sense of belonging at home, expectations about the predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy, a sense of belonging at school, academic expectations, religion or indoctrination, and African American students' reflective recommendations. For each category, one to seven questions were posed to delve deeper into the participants' experiences (See Appendix C). The interviews were conducted via Zoom/video conference (See Appendix E). Participants reflected on their experiences of attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. In this context, this retrospective qualitative research design fulfilled a descriptive design of African American students' perspectives. A comprehensive study of

African American students' sense of belonging was the goal of this qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The decision to use this design is based on the applicability of qualitative research to humanities and evaluation. In addition, qualitative research provided the ability to gain insight into the perception and narrative rather than hypothesis testing (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A phenomenological design is appropriate to address the experiences of African American students who attended predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies. This study provides a structural description by identifying the phenomenon's conditions, situations, and themes. The participants were a small sample of former African American students (Creswell, 2018). The predominantly White Christian private Seventh-day Adventist school is a bounded system in which students attend. Although the participants have graduated, they can still reflect on their experiences, involvement, and participation within the system.

Population

A purposeful criterion sampling was used. Participants were African Americans who attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy for their secondary education from one to four years. Participants were recruited through the researcher's social media platform. Participants voluntarily participated. The participants' criteria for participation were to have access to the internet and the ability to access the Zoom application on their computer with functionality capabilities.

Sample

Participants were recruited through the researcher's social media page via purposeful criterion sampling. The study sample included five males and nine females, a total of 14

participants. The females ranged in age from 35 to 65, and the males ranged in age from 52 to 71. All participants met the study's inclusion criteria.

Table 1. State Conferences Represented by Participants' Seventh-day Adventist Academy

State Conference Represented	Number of Participants
Carolina Conference of SDA	1
Florida Conference of SDA	2
Georgia Cumberland Conference of SDA	1
Kansas/ Nebraska Conference of SDA	1
Kentucky/Tennessee Conference of SDA	2
Missouri/Iowa Conference of SDA	1
Ohio Conference of SDA	1
Potomac Conference of SDA	3
Southern New England Conference of SDA	1
Texas Conference of SDA	1

Of the 14 participants, 40 % attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy from middle school through high school, 20% attended a mixed-race Adventist academy from middle school through high school, and 10% attended a predominantly Black middle school, then attended a predominantly White Adventist academy.

The total years the students attended a predominantly White academy ranged from 1 to 4. Those participants who attended for less than four years had fewer years of attendance due to unforeseen circumstances. Ninety percent of the participants are college graduates, and 10% have an associate's degree. Nine state conferences were represented in the study. Five participants attended a Seventh-day Adventist boarding academy, and nine attended a day academy.

All participants completed a demographic form about their age range, gender, ethnicity, and whether they attended a predominantly White academy. Due to the sample size being a criterion sampling, the demographic information form supported the research data, with 14 out of

20 potential participants being eligible. Interviews were transcribed immediately, and after three interviews were completed, themes were coded and analyzed.

The interview data was collected through a thematic analysis. The analysis and representation of the data involved five steps: (1) organizing and becoming familiar with the data; (2) reading the memoing of information to make sense of them; (3) searching for groups of words that connect to themes; (4) reviewing the themes; and (5) making meaning of the themes. (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach was used to delve deeper into the understanding of the participant's experiences of belonging. Open-ended semi-structured interviews were conducted to answer the research questions and to allow participants to be open to the central breakdown of the questions into parts, providing additional experiences as they reflected. Two sub-questions and six categories of central questions and probes were used to break the questions down into parts (Creswell & Poth, 2018) (See Appendix C).

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Sense of Belonging at Home (Ecological Connection)

All the participants in this study grew up in homes where one or both parents were members of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. Three participants (25%) noted that they had one parent who was not a member of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. One of those participants reported that the other parent eventually became a Seventh-day Adventist while they were attending a predominantly White Adventist boarding academy. One participant recalled how she found out about her parents becoming Seventh-day Adventists. Respondent # 1 recalled her concern about her home climate changing,

My father converted to Adventism while I was attending a boarding academy. I was about 16 years old. I remember talking to him on the phone, and he said, “So I got baptized.” I had a type of feeling about that. I liked bouncing between the two with different opinions. Mom would have hers and I could get both perspectives about things. So, once he joined, I said, “Oh man,” now they will be on the same team. I acted like I was thrilled, but I wasn’t. There were specific conversations I could have with my dad that I could not have with my mom. But later, I realized he still kept his personality.

Several participants had fond memories of having a sense of belonging at home. As Respondent #3 describes, “It was my mother and extended family, my cousins, my grandparents on my father's side, and a lot of cousins on my mother's side that was my village that raised me and my brother.” Similarly, Respondent #4 recalled, “Our village was close; they were basically the same people I went to school and church with.”

When asked if they felt “heard” as a child, all participants mentioned their family culture of being raised in a Seventh-day Adventist home environment characterized by a “do as I say” expectation and one where their voice wasn’t “heard” as a child growing up in the home. Respondent #11 explained how her relationship with her parents was: “My mother was 40, and my father was 44 when they had me, so they were old-fashioned people. There was no talking back; you just did what they said.” Similarly, Respondent #3 explained, “My parents were charming outside of the house, but inside the house, they would be what many would call authoritarians. Communication with me and my parents was less extensive than other people's relationships outside the house.” Other participants, like Respondent #6, described somewhat more relaxed home environments: “It was a very open relationship with honesty. It was a very God-centered relationship. They did a great job.”

Four participants (29%) grew up in a multicultural neighborhood. Two participants (14%) grew up in a low-working middle-class neighborhood, whereas 57% of the participants in this study were raised in a middle-class neighborhood. Respondent #5 described his experience of growing up in a low-working middle-class neighborhood:

Where I grew up, it was probably 70% black and 30% White, depending on where you were. Working-class, working-class poor is where we were. It was the hood where we grew up in the hood then; however, it is different from the hood now. The hood was where there were a lot of poor people, but they worked. I didn't know I was poor until I got to high school.

While all the participants grew up in a home where at least one parent was a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, all participants reported that their family, church, and neighborhood were an integral part of their ethnic identity during their adolescent years. While few participants (21%) felt heard when communicating with their parents or guardians about adverse school experiences, most participants (57%) also recalled their parents using their adverse experiences as a learning opportunity for resilience. For example, Respondent #6 recalled what her parents said to her when she spoke to them about the microaggressions she was experiencing at school, "This is a good experience for you so you will know how to navigate your life. This is how it is." Similarly, Respondent #10 recalled what her dad instructed her to do when others mistreated her, "Their idea was to get along. My dad said that people can be ignorant and people can be cruel. People can be insensitive towards your needs, but you do what You are supposed to do."

Expectations About Attending a Predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist Academy (Students Perception)

When asked how they decided to attend a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy for their secondary education, three participants (21%) noted they had attended a predominantly White middle school. Therefore, the decision-making was a matter of location (i.e., which school was the closest to home) rather than whether they would attend a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. For others, attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy was automatic for the respondents due to their Black Adventist middle school only providing education for grades 5-8. Respondent #14 recalled how her parents made the decision to enroll them in a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy:

I went to public school up to the fourth grade, and I guess my parents didn't like the trajectory of what was happening with me behavior-wise. So, they took my brother and me out of public school and put us in church school, which was a 3x3 room church school where teachers taught multi-grades. We were there until eighth grade. Once I graduated from eighth grade. Next, I attended the school that the state Conference ran for the ninth grade and then, from the tenth through the 12th grade, a boarding academy.

Seventy-five percent of the participants who attended a Black Seventh-day Adventist middle school attended a predominantly White Adventist academy for high school. For most of those participants (90%), their mother made the decision for them to attend a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy for high school. In comparison, 10% of the participants recalled the decision being made by their father. Respondent #11 explained how the decision-making played out between their parents and what their expectations were:

My mother was an Adventist, but my father was a Methodist. But he always wanted me to attend a private school, which had to be Adventist. My father intended that I go to a

private school. Why it had to be Adventist, I don't know. The only Adventist school in our city was 17 miles away, and it was an all-White Adventist School. It was a multi-grade situation, and I was the only one of color from grades 1-4. I didn't have any expectations.

Many of the participants lived far from a Seventh-day Adventist day academy. Therefore, five participants (35%) attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist boarding academy, while 65% attended a day academy. When participants were asked what their expectations were about attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy, most (86%) did not have any expectations related to going to a predominantly White Adventist academy because they knew they did not have the option to attend another school. A Seventh-day Adventist academy was the only type of school their parents would allow them to attend. While most were neutral in their expectations, Respondent #3 recalled being apprehensive about the idea of attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist boarding academy:

For two years after attending a predominantly upscale public school about 20 to 25 miles south of Boston, my parents transferred me to a predominantly White parochial Seventh-day Adventist school outside of Boston. Honestly, I was not looking forward to attending this school. I told myself these people will not like me either, and I didn't necessarily care for them.

Only two participants had positive expectations about attending their boarding academy. These positive expectations stemmed from the knowledge that the school offered more extracurricular activities and had more to offer students than what they had experienced in their Black Seventh-day Adventist elementary and middle schools. Respondent #5 recalled his emotions about attending a predominantly White Adventist academy, "I was excited to go to the

predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy because it had more activities, more sports.” Similarly, Respondent #1 remembered how excited she was about what she perceived to be a great opportunity, “I was excited; it was different from anything that I knew of. To go away for high school? I felt it was prestigious and elite about it.”

Sense of Belonging at School (School Climate)

When asked whether they experienced a sense of belonging while attending their predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy, all participants stated they did not experience a sense of belonging at their school. However, even without a sense of belonging, they all indicated they knew how to adapt to the school environment. Respondent #12 described the school climate at her academy:

It was tolerable; we tolerated one another. I wouldn't say that I had friends, friends. I never went over to anyone's house; I wasn't invited over to anyone's house, not of the Caucasian persuasion unless it was in a group setting. My whole thing was to keep my head down as best I could. I already knew I had no say in this. So, the faster I got out, the better, without any issues.

Other participants, such as Respondent #11, recalled more engagement with their classmates: “I knew some people from my middle school, and they introduced me to the other Black people who were their friends. I built my relationship with them. Then there were people in my class who I was cool with.”

Most participants described navigating their two primary environments – home and school – by putting on a different “face” or switching different personality types on and off when going back and forth from home back to school. While this was challenging, some participants

recalled the school making an effort to address cultural differences and help African American students feel welcomed. For example, Respondent #10 recalled:

The PE teacher was really good. He was there for the boy's dorm and tended to relate to us well. He seemed to have taken some of the Black guys under his wings. I wondered if he had been assigned to them or what? Then, we had another lady who was the wife of the history teacher. I think she was assigned to the Black girls. They tried to do some positive things to help us feel good.

In other instances, participants felt compelled to address cultural differences and cultural sensitivity issues head-on. Respondent #6 recalled having to mentor her teacher on cultural sensitivity and the impression that made on the teachers:

I remember one of my Bible teachers was talking about something racial, and he used the “N” word...and I had to pull him aside and try to tell him that's not something you say, especially with everyone who is White in the classroom and I'm the only African American. So, he apologized for his language. I would constantly have to pull people aside and correct them on how they navigated through black history, stereotyping, and just correcting how they were trying to teach because it wasn't to my standards. Many of them would apologize, and I did it respectfully. By the time I was a junior, the teachers elected me and voted for me to receive the Caring Heart Award. I was a Junior. That said a lot because I thought they didn't like me.

Most participants (86%) recalled feeling tolerated rather than welcomed at their schools. Even when they perceived the environment as being generally “good”, there was still a sense of being tolerated rather than feeling as though they belonged, and there were recollections of White students making negative racial comments. As Respondent #5 stated, “As long as I was a

good Negro, I was fine. Everything was okay if I was not ruffling feathers or rocking the boat. But if I were to show my blackness, then there is a problem.” He further explained how the composition of the faculty contributed to his feeling tolerated rather than like he truly belonged or was welcome at the school:

We were tolerated. I think even to this day, Black kids are tolerated. They are trying to be inclusive. We did have a Black teacher when I was there, and they ran her off. The sad thing about it, is that she was new to Adventism on top of that. We advocated for a Black teacher. We asked, “Why don’t you have teachers of color or anything like that?” “Why do you have only White teachers?” We did have a minority teacher, and she was our Spanish teacher. We could sympathize with her, and I believe she left the faith.

Eleven participants (78%) engaged in an extracurricular activity at their academy. The activities included playing in the band, singing in the choir, and playing sports, which helped participants feel a sense of belonging. For example, Respondent #5 recalled:

That part was good because I was the choir president and section leader. That was a good experience because I liked to sing at the time, so that was a good outlet, and to be voted as president by all those White kids.

Several participants described their school as having clear race-based divisions. While they were part of the student body, they felt a sense of segregation from their White counterparts. Respondent #14 described this in their memories of their school’s culture:

There was a Black culture and a White culture. So, I belonged to the Black culture, which was a subculture that existed within the larger, which was a subculture that existed within the larger context of my high school, and we only interacted with the White part of that culture only if we needed to. Two (20%) of the respondents recalled having a subgroup

not only with their African American schoolmates but also having a closer friendship, mainly with one White friend, than with their African American schoolmates.

In many instances, participants described the culture as not only being segregated but also characterized by racism or racial discrimination that were evident in teachers' expectations and microaggressions. This was evident in one participant's memory of the culture of her boarding school:

At school, there were consistent reminders that we were different. The expectation is that we couldn't do well in school. So, when we got good grades, it was treated as if it was a fluke. It was like, Wow! I didn't expect you to get the top grade in the class.

All participants recalled the teachers being unnurturing, not motivating, and having a perspective of them as unable to achieve. Only two participants recalled their teachers trying to relate to them culturally. However, the participants sometimes took the initiative to help the teacher relate to them. As one participant recalled:

So, it was tough because many of my teachers were extremely ignorant of Black culture, and I was constantly having to pull them aside and basically educate them or correct them. And I was only 17. I was just a kid. So, I got tired of doing that, correcting the ignorance that they would display in class. I would complain, but my parents would just encourage me and say, "Well, this is preparing you for the real world to be assertive and not aggressive."

Participants had a range of experiences with overt and covert racism. In the case of Respondent #11, much of what she experienced was covert racism:

I would say, aside from the principal, most of the teachers were all right or hid their racism; it was not overt. The teachers themselves were not bad, and I think it may be

again that I excelled, and I was even part of all the White kids. So, I think I would like to believe there was less overt racism. And I suspect, in retrospect, again, I was less racially conscious. Again, if you're growing up within a village that is affirming and supportive, you don't necessarily know the challenges that are there.

Similarly, Respondent #4 described an experience of his boarding school administration's resistance of having a Black commencement speaker:

In our senior year, we wanted a Black speaker for our graduation weekend, and there was resistance and I kept lobbying for it. The speaker came on the shortlist to be asked. I remember being in the principal's office, and the principal questioned why the speaker wanted to come to a small school and speak for commencement, being a popular person. On graduation weekend, my guest was the consecration speaker. He spoke without notes and tore down the house, and I heard people saying he was the best speaker they had ever had at the school.

For some participants, there was a realization later in life that what they were experiencing at their predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy was racism. One participant noted that because of his young age, he did not realize he was experiencing racism and microaggressions while he was enrolled: "I was younger, and my sensitivity was not the same. I'm sure there were more microaggressions that took place there, and if you talk to some of my friends, they probably could share some stories as well."

Academic Expectations

All of the participants attended a Seventh-day Adventist school for their elementary education and, therefore, did not have any expectations of the curriculum or academics they would receive during their secondary education. Eighty-five percent of the participants expressed

experiencing support, encouragement, and a belief in their academic capabilities while attending their Black Seventh-day Adventist middle schools, which positively influenced their academic achievement. On the contrary, when the students attended their predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy for their secondary education, their educational attainment was not met in some classes, and most experienced bias. Respondent #1 recalled her experience in one course and her parents' reaction:

I had a "D" in American History, and my father was livid. He was so upset because he was always used to me getting good grades. And you know what my mom was doing, making so many sacrifices, and I didn't know everything she had to deal with to pay the tuition. My dad also stated that I would have to come home if I didn't get my grades up.

The participant continued explaining that she had to get an "A" since it was the school year's first quarter, her hard work to earn that grade, and the teacher's biased perspective on her efforts:

So, I studied and made an "A" on the final. So, the rest of the time, I had not been doing that great, so when I earned this "A." the instructor just flat out and said, "You must have cheated."

The participant continued to explain that there were two other African American classmates whom she studied with, and they also made an "A" on the American History test, but the teacher made all three of the students retake the final, even though they were not sitting near each other when taking the test:

So, one of us was in one corner, one in another corner, and another in another corner to make sure we didn't cheat. And, of course, we all made precisely the same score again.

The teacher said, "Well, you earned it, and I was thinking, really?"

Other participants noted that teachers did not go out of their way to help African American students at their schools. Respondent #4 recalled his perception of the teachers' expectations:

The teachers were okay primarily if they weren't prejudiced, and some of them were, or they hid it very well. But they were not necessarily mentoring, taking a genuine vested interest in you. If you were smart, you did okay; if you weren't, you sink or swim. I happened to be smart, so it didn't bother me. A lot of the Black students struggled. The teachers did the basic stuff. They did not go above and beyond.

He went on to describe how there was racial bias and discrimination, even when African American students performed exceptionally well:

I was the most celebrated graduate. I should have been co-valedictorian, but I was made salutatorian because they had never had a Black valedictorian before; and in talking with people in the generation before that, I suspect there were probably people who had qualified and still hadn't done it. The straight two years I was there. I had straight "As" except for one "B," ironically in high school, and what did they do to justify not having a co-valedictorian, they went back to my transcripts from a previous high school and incorporated them into my transcripts at my current high school. So that kept the distinction between us. And so, I was a Salutatorian instead of a co-valedictorian. And again, my parents didn't fight it.

Respondent #12 recalled a similar experience with her high school counselor when she was going into her senior year at the boarding school and preparing for college:

In high school, I was on the dean's list considered honorable. So, when we got to our Senior year, we had to meet with our counselor about our next year to prepare for college.

Well, there was another student who was White, whose grades we would say a fluke who got “C’s and “D’s.” She was not a good student. The counselor told her she should be in the medical profession. When it was my turn, I knew she would say I should be a nuclear physicist or something like that. When I sat down, she said she would reach out to Red Roof Inn for me so I could get a maid’s job. She said, “That would be a perfect job for you.”

Some participants also described navigating cultural insensitivities and expressed that teachers were not empathetic to Black culture. This had an impact on their learning experience. For example, Respondent #6 described an experience of a teacher showing a film on slavery and how that made her feel:

I feel my learning was a little impaired; for example, there was a teacher who showed a video on slavery, and it made me very uncomfortable because I was the only Black person in there, and everyone in the class would look at me. I thought, why is everyone looking at me? I’m not a slave. So, I remember my parents requesting I not stay in the class while a film like that was being shown because it was very uncomfortable, it made me cringe. So, I didn't have to stay in the classroom when they showed the film.

Religion or Indoctrination

Many participants perceived their Bible class as one where no questions were to be asked outside of the subject matter. As Respondent #13 simply stated, “You can't separate the curriculum and the Bible because it’s all intertwined.” Respondent #9 explained that she did not challenge what she was taught in bible class because “...It was best to ‘go along to get along.’” In other cases, participants like Respondent #3 felt comfortable asking questions because “...I was asking safe questions. It didn’t occur to me to ask any radical questions.” Still, there were

other participants who were more vocal during their Bible class and found themselves challenging the teacher. For example, Respondent #8 recalled:

We had Bible class, and in one of our Bible classes, the teacher tried to bring out that black people were the sons of Cain, and that's the reason why we were going through all of this sin. So, he was trying to use the Bible to fight against us to say we were inferior; we had to school him.

Eleven of the participants recalled their Bible classes as reinforcing Adventist doctrine. Because all of the participants grew up in a conservative Seventh-day Adventist home, they stated they just took the class without any spiritual value. Some noted that they developed a sense of spirituality through other means. For example, Respondent #4 recalled:

My spirituality came from that of home and church, and the village in the village and my association with that. I would dare say, it was good or bad. It was more an issue of religion than it was spirituality. I think now, I consider myself a spiritual person, and it is a result of lived experiences.

Similarly, Respondent #9 stated, "My home base gave me a closer experience with Jesus." The participant also stated that the reason the Bible class did not encourage a closer walk with Jesus was because, "It didn't feel genuine. They were saying the right thing but not acting the right way."

For others, the connection between their experience attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist, particularly attending Bible class, and their feelings of closeness with Jesus was more complex. As Respondent #12 explains:

No, but from their standpoint, yes, that's when I read the Bible, I see how much He loves Me. I know that He died just for me. I learned to hold on to that. No matter what they

were saying. I saw in the Bible my roots. I saw where we were created from the dust of the earth. So, some of the things I learned is that Black has every color in it, White is absent of color. It was like, believe it or not, you all came out of us. So, in many ways, it was the foundation and the beginning of my relationship with Him. I wasn't getting that from Bible class or from the people who were supposed to be in charge of me.

There was a range of responses when participants were asked whether attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy encouraged them to attend church regularly. For many, this decision to continue attending church was more about their broader religious experience as a child. One participant explained why she continues to attend church:

It has been, but it was not because of attending an academy. It was because of the church I grew up in. It was a small church, and anyone who came in there was embraced. So, I feel like I have taken in on that.

In contrast, another participant's childhood experiences led to her choosing not to attend church regularly:

I was going for a while, but I'm not now because I no longer feel comfortable; it's not that I don't love the Lord type thing. I just don't like going. It may be an act of rebellion type thing. The church seemed more for the family. It was not my thing. I needed to find who I am. Surprisingly, I still paid my tithe even when I wasn't going.

African American Students' Reflective Recommendations

All participants expressed a need to hire more African American teachers in predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist schools because students need to see teachers who look like them and can relate to them. The respondents also recommended that administrators

and teachers learn to have more empathy and concern for African American students. One respondent also expressed the hiring of progressive White teachers who are qualified:

Progressive means that they are willing to leave behind the stereotypical and historical beliefs about race, how black people learn, how we interact, or how we should interact because they bring all that stuff into the classroom when they come. There also needs to be progressive black teachers too, who will be willing to work with the White teachers as allies.

The curriculum used in predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies does not relate to all students. Therefore, all participants also recommended having a curriculum that is reflective of multiple races and cultures rather than just one race or culture. They also noted that administrators should be inclusive in their teaching. Respondent #11 described how Critical Race Theory should be in the curriculum:

They should embrace CRT (Critical Race Theory). They should deliberately disrupt any microaggression, or subtle suggestion that we are black, that we may learn differently. Our exposure may be different, and our intellect and capacity are different. But, there must be deliberate steps to say we are going to be inclusive, understanding that there may be some deficits, but we will be intentionally inclusive.

After these things, I looked, and behold a great multitude which no one could number, of All nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb,

They are clothed with White robes, with palm branches in their hands.

Revelations 7:9

Summary

This chapter aimed to answer the research question: What experiences contributed to the sense of belonging of African American students who attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy? Fourteen participants were interviewed for this qualitative study. The interview questions were semi-structured, allowing participants to delve deeper into their experiences.

The participants consist of five males and nine females ranging in age from 35 to 71. Five participants attended a boarding Seventh-day Adventist academy, while nine attended a day academy. Nine divisional conferences were represented in this study. This includes the Carolina Conference, Florida Conference, Georgia-Cumberland Conference, Iowa-Missouri Conference, Kentucky-Tennessee Conference, Mid-America Union Conference, New England Conference, Ohio Conference, and Potomac Conference.

Data analysis took place simultaneously with data collection. As new developments were presented, memos and the write-up of the findings were analyzed. Due to the text being so dense, the data was also winnowed. Winnowing is a process where some of the data is focused on, whereas other data is not used, which is a consistent process with dense qualitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The six themes resulting from this study encapsulate what contributed to a sense of belonging for African Americans while attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. The factors contributing to a sense of belonging within each theme are outlined below.

1. A Sense of Belonging at Home:
 - a. My church and home life were my foundation of connectedness and identity.
 - b. I lived in a Black neighborhood.

- c. Grew up in a middle-class home.
 - d. My teachers cared for me and expected excellence in my all-Black Seventh-day Adventist elementary and middle school.
 - e. My mother was the one who wanted me to go to the predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy.
 - f. I felt heard, but my opinion did not matter to my parents; do as I say.
2. Expectations About Attending the Predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist Academy
- a. Excited to be away from home.
 - b. The percentage of African American students attending the predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy ranged from 1% to 15%.
 - c. I expected the same treatment as in my predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist middle school.
 - d. I felt a sense of prestige and privilege going away to school.
3. A Sense of Belonging at School
- a. Being in an extracurricular activity helped me to associate with White students.
 - b. Limited socialization.
 - c. The teachers were insensitive and didn't care if we got it or not.
 - d. Teachers stereotyped African Americans' learning capabilities.
 - e. I had a negative experience.
 - f. The culture of the school was catered to them.
 - g. Experiences microaggression and discrimination.

h. I felt unwelcomed, just tolerated.

4. Academic Expectations

a. No culture in the curriculum.

b. I had a sense of openness to learn.

c. Discrimination of grading practices.

d. Yes, my academics prepared me for college or my career choice.

5. Religion or Indoctrination

a. Family's religious belief is Seventh-day Adventist.

b. The teachings of my bible class were indoctrination.

c. Limited of what could be discussed in bible class. 4.)

d. Attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy did not encourage a closer experience with Jesus. 5.

e. No, I do not attend Seventh-day Adventist church regularly.

There were two outliers within the themes. Two participants are from socioeconomic classes- poor to the middle class. Additionally, two participants expressed that they experienced depression while attending the predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy

While these 14 participants attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy, this research shows how these African Americans experienced their sense of belonging while attending Adventist academies. Chapter Five includes significant findings of themes, conclusions, action implications, and further study recommendations.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must Love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you.

Love one another.

John 13:34-35

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter explores the significant themes arising from the current study, which delves into the lived sense of belonging of African American students who attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. These themes have been identified through an analysis of participants' responses and are characterized by their recurring presence through their interviews. The major themes included a sense of belonging at home, expectations about attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy, a sense of belonging at school, academic expectations, and religion or indoctrination. Additionally, the chapter provides a conclusion, implication for action, recommendations for further study and reflections. An organizational change strategy will be discussed as part of the recommendations for future research on the experiences of African American students who attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy, the research study limitations, and the conclusion.

Due to the scarcity of prior research exploring the experiences contributing to a sense of belonging for African American students who attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy, this study aimed to formulate a hypothesis for answering the research questions. In the subsequent section, each research question will be delineated, accompanied by a discussion of the study's findings corresponding to each question.

Sense of Belonging at Home (Ecological Connection)

The significance of parents/guardians raising their children in a home with Seventh-day Adventist traditions and beliefs is paramount. All participants expressed how church and home were integral parts of their community or village. It was their "safe" place when returning from school after attending their predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy, whether they were attending a day school or boarding academy. Although the participants came from poor to

middle-class homes and neighborhoods, they all expressed they felt they were “heard” by their parents, but attending anything other than a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy was not an option whether they wanted to attend it or not, which was a decision that was not up for discussion.

Three participants who lived in a diverse neighborhood from childhood through their teen years expressed that it was nice to be raised in a diverse neighborhood; it allowed them to get to know other ethnic groups. Although these participants grew up in a diverse neighborhood, their home environment was where the foundation of their identity as African American children was nourished.

The participants’ home bioecological experience models Erikson’s ego-identity theory. As an adolescent a child grows into adulthood, future goals are influenced by having a secure identity and a sense of self that is integrated with a sense of wholeness. Erikson’s ego-identity theory proposes four identity statuses: diffuse, foreclosed, moratorium, and achieved, which are discussed in detail in Chapter Two (Marcia, 1980, as cited in Ajrouch et al., 2015). This becomes more meaningful when compared to Phinney's (1990, 2003) position, in which a child’s ethnic identity affirms their sense of belonging and connection so that they learn and are involved with their ethnic background. In addition, positive ethnic identity is associated with a positive attitude about their ethnic group and is correlated with academic success, intrinsic motivation for learning, and increased self-esteem (Carlson et al., 2000; Costigan et al., 2010; Okagaki et al., 1996; Supple et al., 2006; Umana-Taylor et al. 2009, as cited in Ajouch, et al., 2015).

Thirteen participants (93%) expressed that it was primarily their home life, neighborhood, and church where they received their sense of connection and attachment. This is where we find Bronfenbrenner's (1989) theory encapsulating the participants’ lived experiences,

where there is a combination of the microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem that contributed to their development as adolescents. In other words, their personal traits interacted with environmental elements to shape their development.

The ecological model of human development links family, peers, school, and community as the child's microsystem. The thematic presence of the importance of home and church in this study still supports the idea that home and church are where these students who attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy received their sense of belonging (Ajourch et al., 2015).

Expectations About Attending a Predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist Academy (Student Perception)

All participants understood that they would be attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. Two participants perceived this as a privilege because they thought the predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy had more to offer, such as participating in extracurricular activities, living independently in a boarding school, and attending a better-equipped school than the Black Adventist academy they attended for middle school.

Eleven participants did not have any expectations about going to a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. It was the school of choice for their parents, and there were no other options. According to the participants, the dedication and persistence of their parents to ensure they attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy was of great importance. However, when they were children, the participants could not understand why it was vital for them to attend the predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy; they just knew there would be no questions asked. The decision had been made. Seven participants traveled

between 1 and 1 ½ hours to their academy daily by car or the school carpool. Six participants attended a boarding academy, where they lived on campus, at least three hours away from home.

Two participants recalled their home socioeconomic status as poor and later becoming middle class, whereas 12 recalled growing up in a middle-class home. In both types of homes, the mother was responsible for paying their tuition. Two participants (14%) recall both mothers and fathers having financial responsibility for their tuition. Several participants are still amazed at how their parents paid their tuition and chose to work a second job to do so.

The economic hardship of African American parents sending their children to private schools supports the literature informing this study. Although African American parents generally value the social and academic advantages offered to their children by enrolling them in predominantly White institutions, research indicates that many also encounter substantial financial burdens, feelings of disempowerment, and instances of low teacher expectations or racial microaggression (Bolgatz et al., 2020).

A Sense of Belonging at School (School Climate)

The transition from primary to secondary school can be a pivotal period in students' lives, impacting their psychological, social, and intellectual well-being. It is often called one of the defining development parameters in the second decade of life. While this time is meaningful, the participants experienced a lack of a sense of belonging at their predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies. Twelve participants recalled feeling tolerated and isolated at their schools. One participant attended the same academy from fourth grade to 12th grade and had become accustomed to the climate of the academy she attended. Most participants had a coping mindset of "getting in and getting out."

Social relationships and developing new friendships help establish students with a new social status. It is about the number of friendships gained, the number of groups they are a part of, and close relationships with teachers that support a sense of belonging and feelings of safety at school (Lester & Cross, 2015). All participants felt a sense of belonging at school with their core group of African American friends; they were often middle school friends who matriculated also attending the predominantly White academy. Further, all participants felt a sense of belonging in their academy while participating in extracurricular activities, such as singing in the school choir, playing in the band, or being part of intramural sports.

As they reflected on their time at predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies, all participants expressed experiencing overt racism while they were enrolled. Many of the participants in the study stated that because they were not racially conscious at the time, the overt racism was not apparent. Everyone expressed that they experienced racism and microaggressions from other students and teachers.

Hung et al. (2014, as cited in Lester & Cross, 2015) examined student perceptions of school climate as indicators of victimization, emotional issues, and behavioral challenges during the transition from primary to secondary school; this research revealed that the school climate elements “authoritative structure” and “student order” were each distinctly and inversely correlated with emotional and behavioral problems, as well as victimization. Although they were outliers, two participants reported experiencing depression and anxiety symptoms while attending their predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies, which were characterized by “authoritative structure” and “student order.”

Academic Expectations

None of the participants had any expectations regarding their academy's academics. All transitioned from a Seventh-day Adventist middle school into a predominantly White Adventist academy and, therefore, believed nothing was going to change as far as a challenging curriculum and the lack of a positive school climate. Most participants said they did not feel their teachers, principals, and other school leaders related to them culturally. One participant reflected on how her school celebrated Black History Month by having the entire class read *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou. Another respondent recalls her class viewing a movie on slavery, which was very uncomfortable for her as the only African American in her class.

Two participants reflected on an experience of having discrepancies with their grades where the teacher accused them of dishonesty on exams due to the teacher's perception of their academic capabilities. The participants' experiences reflect two themes: Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Relevant Pedagogy. Critical Race Theory asserts that racism permeates all levels of society (Bell, 1992, as cited in Alvere, 2018), including educational institutions, which covertly perpetuate and reshape White supremacy in numerous ways. CRT serves as a valuable tool for dissecting racially unjust practices and provides a framework for rigorously assessing attempts at reform (Wallace & Brand, 2012, as cited in Alvere, 2018). Some racial ideologies and expectations suggest that African American students do not prioritize education as much as their White counterparts do or that they avoid putting effort into schoolwork to avoid being labeled as "acting White" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, as cited in Alvere, 2018). In this case, the participants experienced inequality in the teachers' expectations of academic excellence and were required to retake their exams, and the teacher was still unsure if they could achieve educational achievement on their tests.

Some researchers have disputed that Black students generally do not hold oppositional attitudes toward schooling, perceive academic achievement as exclusively for White individuals, or marginalized Black peers who excel academically, and research spanning over a decade across various schools supports this, concluding that the association of academic success with Whiteness predominantly arises in schools where Black students are disproportionately underrepresented in advanced or honors classes (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Harris, 2011; Lewis, 2013 & Tyson 2011, as cited in Alvere, 2018). Another finding from this study we can support is that the curriculum in the participants' academies needed culturally relevant content. Several other studies have validated Ladson-Billings' (2019) conclusions that implementing culturally relevant teaching methods can result in enhanced academic achievement, greater involvement in learning, improved attendance, and a more robust perception of themselves as capable learners.

There are three components to CRT in education: (a) student learning, which is at the core of why students attend school; (b) cultural competence, which refers to students' ability to leverage their backgrounds, languages, histories, customs, and experiences while becoming proficient in at least one other culture; and (c) teachers' critical consciousness, which demonstrates to students how the knowledge they acquire can be applied to address the challenges they encounter in their everyday lives (Ladson-Billings, 2019; Will, 2022). It is important to note that cultural competency is not about accommodating the White middle class; they, too, need to develop the skills to interact effectively with diverse people and situations (Will, 2022).

Twelve of the respondents (91%) stated they only had White teachers while attending their predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. One respondent stated they only had

one teacher of color while attending their predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy, and that was a Hispanic person teaching Spanish. Most participants described experiencing an unwelcoming classroom and overall school environment, except while participating in extracurricular activities.

Participants noted they were unaware they were experiencing microaggressions from their teachers. As one respondent stated, “Back then, there were no terms for the slights or feelings of oppression done.” Dr. Chester Pierce introduced the term “microaggressions” in 1970, defining it as frequent, subtle, often unintentional, and nonverbal actions that serve as belittling remarks toward Black individuals by perpetrators (Perez Huber & Solórzano, 2015, as cited in Daftary et al., 2023). As a result, microaggressions are pervasive within the education system, perpetuating institutional racism (Daftary et al., 2023). When the participants experienced these microaggressions, they often told their parents. Still, they were instructed to look at the microaggressions or discrimination as lessons to be learned for later in life when dealing with the “real world.”

Religion or Indoctrination

All participants enrolled and participated in a Bible class, a required course for students attending Seventh-day Adventist schools. Because all participants were members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, they all recalled that their Bible class covered information they had already been taught from growing up in an Adventist home and attending their Adventist church. Two participants stated they enjoyed the Bible classes that dealt with real-life situations, such as planning for a wedding and role-playing caring for a baby. Respondent #10 recalled a different method of teaching her Bible class, “As a Freshman, the Old Testament of the Bible was taught a lot of the stuff we grew up with all our lives. I think sophomore year, we might have done the

New Testament.” Similarly, Respondent #6 reflected on the Bible class she took during her senior year, “It was more progressive. We got to talk about things such as racism, death and dying, and about marriage and family. It was more of an open discussion. We dealt with more of the practical things.” Respondent #11 remembered a Bible activity that was impactful to her:

Our Bible teacher had us choose a denomination. I chose the Unitarian Universalist church, and me and my dad went on Sunday morning to the local Unitarian Universalist church and sat through the service. I had to write a report about the service and what we saw and answer all the questions about it. I loved that activity. I thought it was great!

Three participants recalled their Bible teacher occasionally integrating racism into their lessons, which made an impressionable impact as they matriculated in their Bible classes.

Previous research shows that religion sometimes functions as a hidden curriculum, and the approach adopted in religious education, be it confessional or multicultural, can significantly influence the shaping of religious identity formation (Niens et al., 2012). Further, studies exploring children’s acculturation, a process in which an individual adopts a majority culture or new environment, and attitudes indicate that individuals from ethnic minority and majority backgrounds generally embrace integrationist perspectives. Therefore, students from racial-ethnic minority belief backgrounds may be inclined to assimilate into the dominant religious culture, often influenced by a desire to synchronize with curricular norms. This assimilationist approach in religious education has prompted apprehension (Merriam-Webster, n.d.; Niens et al., 2012).

All participants also described their Bible class as being prohibited from discussing anything other than the topic discussed in class. As stated in the literature review, scholars have described the negative aspects of indoctrination differently (Thiessen, 1993, p. 24, as cited in

Harkness, 2002). Whereas Snook characterizes it as teaching any subject matter with the aim of belief regardless of evidence, denouncing it as morally reprehensible, Hill offers a more moderate definition, framing it as teaching or learning that leads to holding certain beliefs without critical awareness of their truth status and evidential strength (Harkness, 2002). This aligns with the view of indoctrination as the imposition of beliefs and belief systems by authority, allowing little room for questioning (Harkness, 2002).

Seventy-eight percent of the participants interviewed in the study suggested that their Bible class was a mix of Seventh-day Adventist doctrines taught along with the life and teachings of Jesus that related to their personal lives. Due to the respondents' family background as Seventh-day Adventists and attending their local Adventist church and, elementary school, and middle school, learning more about Adventist doctrine was seen as a ritual. However, when the Bible classes related to life lessons, they were perceived as being more relatable.

In another study, Thayer (2018) identified negative and positive outcomes related to Adventist education fostering beliefs in the Seventh-day Adventist doctrine, faith, and underlying ideals and aspirations for the future. The findings of the current study revealed the impact attending a Seventh-day Adventist school had on participants' spiritual experience with Jesus. For example, Respondent #8 explained why the bible classes were not inspirational for her: "At that time, I hated religion. It was a deception in my mind at the time. You're creating conflicts that I'm not able to understand." Further, many of the respondents believed that there was a conflict between the administrators' and teachers' actions toward them and the purpose of their parents sacrificing for them to attend a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy.

Few participants felt that attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy encouraged them to have a closer experience with Jesus. In fact, 11 said that the experience did not encourage or facilitate greater spirituality for them. Respondent #6 explained, “It was those hard times that I was having in getting those teachers to see what they were doing is what drew me closer to God.” Similarly, Respondent #13 stated, “No, I think it was just something that we did. I guess I didn’t have enough struggle in life to form that relationship.” Respondent #2 provided greater context for why attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy did not encourage a closer experience with Jesus:

No, when you’ve been treated that bad, I honestly turned that off because it was; that you must go to church, you must be there. So, did it affect me later in life to help me think? It made me think about what Christ means to me. At that time, I hated religion; it was a deception in my mind at the time. They’re creating conflicts that I’m not able to understand. No one gave definitive answers. The only answer is that “you have to.”

African American Students’ Reflective Recommendations

All participants believed the Seventh-day Adventist academies’ administrators need to have a mindset of inclusivity and there should be more African American teachers hired by predominantly White Adventist day and boarding academies. As Respondent #14 noted: “As a parent, if you do not see many people who look like your children, I would not want to put my kids there. Teachers and staff of African American ethnicity in the academies are paramount.”

Similarly, Respondent #5 expressed:

Hire more progressive White folks and hire more black folks who are qualified...That means that they are willing to leave behind that stereotype about how Black people, learn about how we should interact or could interact because they bring all that stuff to the

classroom when they come. You know, they don't think that there are still those teachers who think that black people are inferior or that we have been given some privilege that we don't deserve. You would have to have some progressive White teachers, too. What I mean by that is that they could keep their identity and be willing to work with the Black folks, making the white teachers, as allies.

Respondent #6 recommended:

I think you need to have a diverse staff. I think you need to set up cultural sensitive clubs for students and give them a choice to have, like extracurricular activities. My school only offered a few curricular activities they just had, cross country running for the young men. There are significant parts of history we contributed to. Don't just stereotype and only focus on Slavery; that's extremely myopic thinking.

Respondent #14 stated, "Having an administration that is open to being inclusive," and

Respondent #9 recommended, "Offer diversity classes so that the staff can be more culturally sensitive to other students of color and African Americans." Finally, Respondent # 8 expressed:

There needs to be a real-world perspective and worldview within the curriculum. I feel that you are placing on all these people in all of these different regions of the world, and we have yet to figure out how to incorporate the customs of other people of other ethnicities into this religion.

Table 2. Emergent Themes Identified by Six Research Questions & Percentages of Participants

Research Questions	Emergent Themes	Percentage
How was your sense of belonging at home?	Theme 1: Authoritarian parents	92%

Research Questions	Emergent Themes	Percentage
	Theme 2: Positive environmental influences from home, church, and school	100%
What expectations did you have about attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy?	Theme 3: No expectations; the experience would be the same as middle school. There was no other choice but to go to a predominantly White Adventist academy.	86%
	Theme 4: Had positive expectations	14%
How was your sense of belonging while attending your predominantly White academy?	Theme 5: Did not experience a sense of belonging	100%
	Experienced a sense of belonging by participating in extracurricular activities	78%
	Theme 6: “coding,” two personalities, at home, at school,	85%
	Theme 7: Felt tolerated	92%
What was your perception of your teachers?	Theme 8: Un-nurturing	100%
	Theme 9: Teachers trying to relate culturally	14%
How were your academic experiences at your academy?	Theme 10: Academic bias, discrimination	78%
	Theme 11: Non-cultural sensitivity in the curriculum	100%

Research Questions	Emergent Themes	Percentage
How would you describe your bible class: indoctrination or religion?	Theme 12: Already knew what was being taught religion and indoctrination	100%
	Theme 13: Teachers are unclear of biblical history, race, and the Bible	100%
Has attending a predominantly White Adventist academy enhanced your relationship with Jesus?	No Home and my church	100%

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the experiences contributing to African American students’ sense of belonging while attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. This section discusses the three primary conclusions of the study – the bioecological connection, school climate, and the need for pedagogical relevance.

Previous research suggests that students who attend Seventh-day Adventist schools have positive outcomes related to their spirituality or religious practices, such as going to church, paying tithes, reading the Bible, and having personal prayer time; however, research also suggests a negative relationship between Adventist education and witnessing or evangelism (Thayer, 2018). In addition, adverse outcomes regarding the relationship between the number of years an individual attends a Seventh-day Adventist school and the quality of their social life while attending the school have been observed (Thayer, 2018). This study addresses a gap in the literature regarding African American students who attended predominantly White Seventh-day

Adventist academies, the relationship between their Adventist education and the Adventist Church, and the relationship between their attending an Adventist school and their social life while attending.

This study hypothesizes that African American students would not experience a sense of belonging while attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. This study's findings conclude that all 14 participants in this study experienced a lack of a sense of belonging while attending predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies, which were representative of nine state conferences. The findings revealed that two of the participants (14%) in this study described experiencing depression, two participants experienced poor self-identity, and all participants experienced racism, bias, microaggression, and discrimination. This aligns with previous studies reporting that African American students who attended predominantly White private schools experience mental health crises, low self-esteem, poor student-teacher relationships, and poor peer relationships (Craig et al., 2019; DuPont-Reyes et al., 2021; Pagan, 2002).

The Ecological Connection

Many participants were raised in a middle-class home with Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. As is the case in many Christian households, it was primarily the mothers of the households who were integral to Christian beliefs and principles, believing their children should be in a school environment and culture that prioritizes morals and values just as they would have in their Christian home (Why Choose Faith-Based Education, n.d.). The home/family, church, and school environment were essential to rearing all participants. Seventy-one percent of the participants expressed a bioecological development that was supportive and nurturing with high expectations for them at home, church, and while attending Black Seventh-day Adventist

elementary and middle schools. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework, which asserts that an individual's development is shaped by a series of nested environmental systems, with each level having a different impact (Leonard, 2011, p. 991).

During the developmental stage of their lives, the participants experienced an environment of love, care, and support, with high expectations of them, at home, church, and school, which represented their microsystem. When the participants entered their predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist school, their microsystem became more integrated into the second-level mesosystem. This level considers the interconnections and interactions between various elements within the microsystem, in this case, the influences the student's family and school have on one another (Leonard, 2011, p. 991).

The results from the bioecological environment and climate of the participants' predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies reflected racial bias, influencing their mental health, identity, self-esteem, and social well-being according to the outcome of this study (Seaton & Yip, 2008; Wobete et al., 2019). It was the participants' Christian home and church that provided them with a sense of self-identity and well-being and taught them how to cope with the racism, microaggressions, and discrimination they experienced in their predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies. Many of the participants expressed that due to the discrimination and racial bias they experienced, it was their African American church and home environment that influenced their spiritual growth, not attending a Seventh-day Adventist academy (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022).

This study is in alignment with Thayer's (2018) study, which concluded there can be adverse outcomes on one's social life while attending a Seventh-day Adventist school. The respondents in this study's social life, as it relates to the overall school experience, depended

highly on their participation in extracurricular activities and the subculture of other students of color. Additionally, four students in the current study had difficulty connecting with their race and establishing other friendships outside the Seventh-day Adventist community after graduating from due to attending a predominantly White Adventist academy and living in a sheltered boarding academy.

School Climate

School climate plays a vital role in the academic success of students of color. As stated in the literature review, according to Berkowitz (2020), a positive school climate contributes to positive academic achievement for students of color. It can offset the negative socioeconomic risk factors students of color experience at home (Berkowitz, 2020). In the current study, despite the authoritarian home environment, many participants described their home climate as positive and their school climate as negative. Thus, we can conclude that the students' bioecological development from the nurturing environments of their homes and churches enhanced their resilience and academic achievement during their adolescent years. We can also conclude that the religious faith of the participants impacted academic achievement due to the possible nature of religious beliefs within the participants' homes and churches (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022; Jeynes, 1999).

Many of the students in this study experienced isolation from the racial majority (i.e., White students) while attending Seventh-day Adventist academies. The African American students created their own subculture by sitting together in the cafeteria or, if they attended boarding academies, being together in their worship services. This study also identified two participants who created their own subculture outside their racial minority subculture. In these subcultures, the respondents expressed their comfort in making friends with students who were

White but treated as “outsiders.” Other research shows that students who experience a sense of isolation may find acceptance within subcultural therapy, a diverse group of students who do not fit into the dominant group and can find others who do not fit into that group and thereby support each other (Watt, 2003).

Three of the five African American males in this study experienced higher punitive consequences for an infraction compared to their White counterparts. One male’s consequence for an incident was that he was forbidden to participate in graduation with his high school class. At the same time, the White student who was also involved in the incident received a lesser punishment. The literature review suggests that African American students are more likely to experience more severe punishment than White students due to teachers’ perceptions and lower expectations of them, which often leads to more punitive consequences and disciplinary actions and more negative feedback than White students receive (Pagan, 2022). In the current study, 21% of the participants experienced higher punitive consequences for infractions.

Lack of Cultural Pedagogy & Relevance

All participants expressed that their classroom curriculum lacked cultural relevance to the African American student or any other students of color, which, at times, caused their academics to become mundane. Along with the curriculum lacking cultural relevance, the respondents experienced overt forms of discrimination and institutionalized conscious and unconscious racial bias from their teachers. The Critical Race Theory examines the intersection of race, education, and educational inequities (Billings & Tate, 2021). The CRT framework also argues that there is a historical pattern of racism ingrained in our society and that it is an institutional problem. The participants’ observing a lack of cultural relevance within the curriculum while experiencing

racial bias in their educational processes demonstrates the intersection of race, education, and educational inequities (Billings & Tate, 2021).

Implications

The Seventh-day Adventist organization has 85,000 teachers, 1.8 million students, and 75,000 schools, of which 31 are boarding academies. Whereas Seventh-day Adventist academies in state conferences predominantly have White teachers, Adventist academies in the regional conferences are staffed with Black teachers and are attended by predominantly Black students (Statistics, n.d.). The education department of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination is a divisional department within the North American Division.

The Seventh-day Adventist organizational structure is hierarchical, with divisional departments within the North American Division, which includes divisional presidents, school superintendents, and other denominational departments (Boldman & Deal, 2017). In divisional organizational structures, there are risks that headquarters encounter. Namely, headquarters wants oversight, while divisional managers try to evade corporate control, and headquarters may lose touch with divisional operations (Boldman & Deal, 2017). Operations in this study relate to the operational strategies, policies, school climate, and actions of the academies' superintendents, teachers, and school staff personnel at the state conference level.

From an organizational perspective, Wheatly (1992, 1999, as cited in Hickman 2016) encourages a scientific leadership shift in complex organizations where leadership links up to produce a powerful change simultaneously around the system. This approach is not about control or command but about sharing information and generating connections. Leadership in this approach is not a formal structure but an interconnectedness of individuals acting out of personal values or vision and engaging with one another through dialogue (Hickman, 2016, p.229).

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, Faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Galatians 5:22-23

Implications in Action

The study's conclusions present three significant themes for organizational change. The first is to instill a Christlike character to heal racial disharmony. This can be done by teachers becoming more nurturing, inclusive, and culturally sensitive to African American students. The second is to provide a culturally relevant pedagogical learning experience to prepare a multicultural relevant curriculum from a worldview perspective. The final theme for change is to increase equity in the recruitment and hiring of qualified African American teachers in the state conferences of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for its predominantly White academies.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is a controversial conversation topic in educational institutions in today's society. This is because it encourages self- and organizational reflection (Donovan & Kaplan, 2019, p. 105.). There is often resistance to the controversy happening within the organization, and it creates cognitive dissonance among well-intentioned people when asked about mistreating others (Donovan & Kaplan 2019, p. 105).

This study has concluded that African American students do not experience a sense of belonging or experience a positive school climate while attending predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies, which may have adverse outcomes for their psychological well-being. You may ask, "How can the Seventh-day Adventist educational state conferences make a systemic and institutional change in creating a school climate where African American students experience a sense of belonging?" It is by the power of a Christlike character.

The Eight Stage Process (Strategy)

The state conferences, educational administration, and principals will implement this eight-stage change strategy through a transformational leadership model. Transformational leadership involves the administrators influencing the followers (teachers) through their actions to model the change strategy. The strategy begins with the administration (Educational Superintendent) (Northouse, 2022). It is important to note that this eight-stage process may be implemented in an individual conference or academy; however, for a total conference-wide cultural change, it is recommended that all state conferences' educational departments be involved.

1. **Establishing a sense of urgency:** Urgency rules out complacency. The conference superintendent and principal (Leaders) must feel a sense of urgency for the change.
2. **Creating the guiding coalition:** At this stage, the superintendent will form multiple teams of people to reengineer the new strategy. These team members are the superintendents from the other state conferences. The team members must have trust, shared goals, and transparency to be effective. The team members must be credible and able to drive the change.
3. **Developing a vision and strategy:** The vision for change provides the direction you want your schools to go in regarding change. It also motivates the coalition and followers (teachers) to action.
4. **Communicating the change vision:** Effective communication about the vision should be simple and clear. It is also important that the superintendent and principals lead by example. When teachers see superintendents and principals acting out the vision, it provides credibility for the change.

5. **Empowering employees for broad-based action:** Superintendents and principals remove any barriers that may prohibit the teachers from being completely effective, making sure the teachers feel empowered in the change process.
6. **Generating short-term wins:** Major change takes time, but when the students start seeing changes in their school climate, the wins are justifiable and worth it. Leaders are to provide positive feedback to teachers and help adjust any part of the vision and strategy, as building momentum is a part of short-term wins.
7. **Consolidating change and producing more change:** Due to the interconnectedness of the Seventh-day Adventist educational organization, all state conferences will be in the process of organizational change period at the same time.
8. **Anchoring new cultural approaches:** Culture refers to norms of behavior and shared values among a group. Education superintendents and principals have created a new culture within the predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies.

The HEAL Model

Using a model of God's grace that He (God) offers, common grace is the change model that can only create the school climate and educational experience leading to a sense of belonging for African American students attending predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies (Vasquez et al., 2023). As we look at racism in a Christian worldview and biblical principles, we should understand seeing ourselves as the likeness of God and that we all are created in His image. However, due to sin, we struggle to do so. This is when we need our restorer, God, to redeem us from our brokenness and restore our unity. Vasquez et al. (2023) remind us that the kingdom of God includes all people for every tribe, nation, and language (Revelation 7:9, as cited in Vasquez et al., 2023). One of the critical healing factors in cross-

racial relationships is cultural humility. A person engaging in cultural humility recognizes that it is a life-long process of healing and learning about cross-racial relationships (Vasquez et al., 2023)

The HEAL model is a spiritual transformative model for healing conversations on race that centers our understanding of race relationships and racism on God. In other words, it pivots from a focus on self to a focus on others and God. Thus, it changes us from disunity to unity and from judging others to having a Christlike love dependent on God (Vasquez et al., 2023, p. 28). The goal for using the HEAL model for the transformational change for the education department of the North American Division and its state conference academies is to leverage healing conversations on race to develop an ongoing model of Christlikeness and love, ultimately implementing change that will lead to positive outcomes and a sense of belonging for African-American students who attend predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies.

Implementing The HEAL Model

Humility – Having the same mindset of Christlikeness, such as the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. (King James Bible, 1769/2017, Galatians 5:22-23). The Apostle Paul encouraged the church at Philippi to value others above themselves. To understand others' hurts, pains, and ideologies. That is what Jesus does for us. He dwells among us at the level of where we are to understand us to the cost of Him dying on the cross for us. Humility is the goal, and sanctification represents the fruits of the Spirit in our lives (Vasquez et al., 2023). “When we look at cultural humility, it is understanding the experiences of other races and ethnicities of people who share the same culture, language, and traditions, and understanding of connectedness” (Vasquez et al., 2023, p. 53).

Empathy – To implement empathy, administrators and teachers must first consider God’s model of drawing themselves into a relationship with Him. It is an emotional and behavioral connection. In the story of the Samaritan woman in John 4, Jesus demonstrated humility and empathy, emptying Himself to supply her needs (King James Bible, 1769/2017, John 5:1-42). Jesus gives the example of engaging and being concerned about the Samaritan woman through His behaviors and how He engaged with her. It is an example for administrators to be responsive. Despite the challenges, patience and emotional understanding is required in cross-racial relationships (Vasquez et al., 2023, p. 77).

Acceptance – Embracing the fact that the topic of racism and race-related topics can be uncomfortable topics that can stir a variety of emotions when hearing about them or in conversations. It is accepting one's differences and understanding each other's uniqueness in Christ. Christlikeness is to love humankind and to be in a relationship with others. It takes emotions to love others and to show compassion as Jesus did when He lived on earth. He experienced sadness and anger. Therefore, as followers of Christ, administrators and teachers should take up God’s human love (Vasquez et al., 2023, p. 103).

Love – Administrators and teachers are to love the students with a deepening relationship through Christlike compassion. The biblical perspective of love is through building loving relationships. Matthew 22:37-40 instructs, “...love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself” (King James Bible, 1769/2017, Matthew 22:37-40). Consider this verse to prompt reflection: “Are my actions reflective of the love Jesus showed me? Do I extend the same love to others, especially to my fellow African-American students?”

Christian love goes beyond mere words; it entails selflessly attending to others' needs and fostering their well-being and growth (Vasquez et al., 2023, p. 137-138). Embodying Christlike love involves internalizing and manifesting it through actions that reflect His love and character. When students have different views than the administrators or teachers instead of teachers taking their stand or view, demonstrate love with a patient attitude. Love also includes showing compassion to African American students. Compassion demonstrates concern, empathy, support, and concern about their emotional needs and listening (Vasquez, 2023, p. 143).

Forgiveness is also a demonstration of love. Forgiveness is said to be one of the most critical disciplines in healing the conversation of experiences on race because it tends to promote positive emotions. Therefore, administrators and teachers must encourage forgiveness of past racial injuries or unforgiveness through Christ's love (Vasquez et al., 2023, p. 142,143).

Justice – Administrators and teachers must treat African American students fairly without favoritism. Justice seeks to do the right thing while embodying Christ's love in the experience or if the administrator or teachers witness wrongdoing. Demonstrating justice to an African American student motivates the administrator or teacher to accept and forgive the wrongdoing. God's word admonishes us. In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 describes the nature of love. Love actively waits for others without resentment, even when hurt or mistreated (King James Bible, 1769/2017, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Kindness involves acting for the good of others, even when it doesn't benefit oneself (Vasquez, et. Al., 2023 p.144).

Cultural Pedagogy

Implementing a culturally relevant pedagogy is teaching a system that is equitable and prepares students to be change agents. Culturally relevant pedagogy was created by Ladson-Billings (2019). It comprises three components: student learning, cultural competence, and

cultural sociopolitical or critical consciousness. Student learning is what the student knows when they begin school and what they know when they leave in the spring (Clark, 2021).

Cultural competence is students' learning of their culture, traditions, beliefs, and customs; these learning categories can be interweaved throughout the curriculum while learning of other cultures, so students have a worldview based on a diverse set of ethnic groups and cultures. Socio-politicism uses diverse knowledge in real-world situations. This could be role-playing an experience of police brutality; what literacy concerns can they use to address this social problem? According to Ladson-Billings (1999), teachers must use all three components to teach what her research reveals as cultural pedagogy. In addition, teachers open to learning Critical Race Pedagogy were found to build positive relationships with their students, thereby building community within the school. (Clark, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 1999).

The Hiring of Black Teachers in Predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist Academy

The hiring of African American teachers in predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies has been a systemic problem of the state conference schools. This study represents 14 respondents from nine state conferences, and a change in the hiring practices of African-American teachers is essential.

Drawing from data collected from 295,416 students across 34 countries who took part in a 2012 program for International Student Assessment, Han (2018) reported a significant correlation between school-based hiring practices and an amplified disparity in teacher quality across advantaged and disadvantaged schools. Additionally, the study uncovers a link between school-based hiring and inequalities in academic achievement based on socioeconomic status. These findings indicate that school-based hiring initiatives could potentially worsen disparities in

educational opportunities and reinforce the influence of family background on academic success (Han, 2018).

The hiring system of the educational departments in the regional conferences and teachers that represent the racial majority of congregates in the state conferences are hired within those conferences. The Seventh-day Adventist educational system of recruiting teachers would be comparable to the school-based hiring of teachers. This system leads to unequal distribution of qualified teachers within or outside their subject specialty. Therefore, the distribution of teachers in an autonomy system, which is a system where the school has freedom in making decisions on hiring and firing, teachers' salaries, the curriculum, and the school budget, may contribute to student academic achievement and inequality of African American teachers in predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies (Han, 2018).

Multiple investigations, primarily conducted in the United States, indicate that aspiring teachers tend to gravitate towards schools where the student body reflects their social background. Highly qualified educators are disproportionately present in schools attended by academically and economically privileged students. Despite efforts to implement more school-based hiring practices, there remains a lack of significant progress in achieving an equitable distribution of teachers across all schools (DeArmond et al., 2010 as cited in Han 2018). To achieve equity in hiring or recruiting teachers in the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, it should be intentional to hire African American teachers into the state conference Adventist academies.

The Recruitment Strategy

The recommended recruitment strategy involves two primary steps.

1. A committee is formed from the state conferences, including principals of different

- state conferences, and a recruitment process will take place through strategic decision-making. This process will rule out any biases in hiring practices.
2. From the pool of qualified teachers or leaders, the state conference then recruits their teachers strategically by each school's needs by equity, subject expertise that's needed, and the number of years of experience each teacher has

Limitations & Recommendations for Further Research

The qualitative methodology chosen in this study introduces certain limitations that are crucial to consider when interpreting the results. First, the research questions were crafted by the researcher. They were exploratory in nature, lacking the specific aim to validate or challenge existing research on the experiences of African American students who attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. Also, due to using a criterion sampling method, the sample lacked randomization and did not incorporate a control group for comparative analysis.

The small sample size prevented the generalization of findings to broader populations of African American students who attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy in North America. Additionally, the study's susceptibility to examiner bias was heightened due to the researcher and her son attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy, including the formulation of the study's findings.

Due to its limitations, this study's findings should be interpreted as limited data for the foundation for future research. A qualitative study of the perception of White teachers of African American students. This study will allow delving into an understanding of their experiences teaching African American students attending predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies. Other research may include a qualitative study of the experience of African American parents who send their children to Seventh-day Adventist academies.

Recommendations

The Hiring of African-American Teachers

The major themes analyzed in the data indicated in the findings coincide with the recommendations of the response. All participants noted that hiring African American teachers in the state Seventh-day Adventist academies is an area that needs to be recommended and acted upon.

School Culture

School culture is vital to African American students developing a sense of belonging when attending a predominantly White school, and this study's findings support improved school culture for African-American students as a recommendation. All participants experienced racism, bias, and microaggression while attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. Students' sense of belonging while attending a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy may be improved collectively by administrators, teachers, and staff, who will be modeling the *HEAL* model outlined within this study (Johnson, 2022; Vasquez, et al., 2023).

Once the *HEAL* model is implemented broadly, African-American students should experience a sense of belonging. They should feel supported, cared for, treated with respect, and have a positive mentorship with their teachers (Johnson, 2022; Vasquez et al., 2023).

Cultural Pedagogy

Having a curriculum that incorporates a multicultural pedagogy that embraces African-American history is essential. Education must integrate inclusive, anti-oppressive methods and provide classrooms and platforms for questioning power dynamics, self-reflection, and contemplating age-appropriate, socially responsible responses to address injustices. Curricula have typically overlooked power imbalances between marginalized communities and the

dominant society, diminishing the significance of persistent issues like racism, discrimination, slavery, and colonial exploitation by portraying them as events of the past rather than contemporary societal problems. Training for administrators and educators may be provided to facilitate implementing cultural relevance pedagogy (Barrel et al., 2022, p. 388; Will, 2022).

Reflection & Conclusion

As an African American student, my journey in conducting this research project has been God-driven. As a Seventh-day Adventist having attended a predominantly White Adventist academy, it has been imperative to allow this research process to be sacred and research-driven. Having matriculated through California Baptist University to obtain my master's in educational leadership and now my Doctor of Education in Organizational Change and Administration, the professors and staff have demonstrated a Christlike character and have been more than encouraging and supportive. I have learned from a positive experience at California Baptist University. The university and professors demonstrated what I have learned throughout my coursework.

As I reflect on my matriculation in my doctoral program, reading and searching peer-reviewed articles in developing my research problem of the Seventh-day Adventist academies, I was experiencing a positive school culture at California Baptist University because of my professors and interactions with the school staff. They demonstrated the HEAL model and the fruits of the Spirit to me. At the same time, as I collected and analyzed the data for this research study, my heart was heavy from the participants' experiences.

There were times when I needed to take breaks from listening to and analyzing the data due to the emotional fatigue and dismay I was experiencing. However, I still had to press through because, by the grace of God, I believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Academy's culture can

improve through the recommendations outlined in this study. We can make a change with my assistance as an organizational change practitioner!

The change begins with administrators forming a coalition of leaders to establish their vision and goals for a positive school climate for African American students. The administrators will demonstrate transformational leadership, and principals, teachers, and staff will work together to establish a culture that is knowledgeable, understanding, and caring of African-American students' brilliance and possibilities.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

A Qualitative Study
Exploring The Belonging of African-American Students Who
Attended A Predominatly White Seventh-day Adventist Academy



ELIGIBILITY

- *Age:18 & Up
- *Have attended an SDA high school for 1 year or more
- *African-American/ Black
- *Participate in a one hour interview

Tangelia L. Ingram
EdD Candidate
California Baptist University
Email: blackstudentbelonging@gmail.com

Dr. Luciana Starks, Advisor

Appendix B: Demographic Form

Name: _____

Preferred contact phone number: _____

Email address: _____

Age: _____

Gender: _____

School attended: _____

What was the ethnic demographic of your faith-based high school? **Circle the one that applies:**

Predominantly Black

Predominantly Asian

Predominantly White

Predominantly Latino/Hispanic

Other

Year of graduation from high school: _____

Number of years attended your high school: _____

Was your school a boarding school? YES or NO _____ If yes, please
state the name of the city and state the school is located: _____

Did you receive financial assistance to attend your high school? YES or NO _____

This study will preserve confidentiality. I will assign a pseudonym for you. If you'd like to select
your own, please write it here: _____

Appendix C: Informed Consent Agreement

INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT

African-American Students who Attended a Predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist Academy/ School: Exploring the Experiences of African-American Students' Belonging who Attended a Predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist Academy.

You are invited to participate in a research study. Before you agree to participate in this study, you should know enough about it to make an informed decision. If you have any questions, please ask the investigator. You should be satisfied with the answers before you agree to be in the study.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to Explore the Experiences of African-American Students' Sense of Belonging who Attended a Predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist Academy. The study will explore your experiences, expectations, and perceptions of predominantly White schools, the ways in which you were involved in your education, and your relationship with the school. In addition, I want to learn your suggestions for other African-American students who attend predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies/schools and what suggestions you may have for predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies/schools.

As a doctoral student at the California Baptist University Jabs School of Business, this study is being conducted to fulfill dissertation and doctoral degree requirements. There will be between 15 to 20 individuals who will participate in this study.

Study Procedures

You will be interviewed about your thoughts and opinions related to your experiences as a student who attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy with the purpose of providing further direction for black students and schools who seek to support them at predominantly white schools. The interview will take about 60 minutes to complete.

Interviews will be audiotaped to contribute to the authenticity of the study. Interviews will be transcribed, and recordings will be destroyed after transcription. Any recordings, transcripts of interviews, or other data collected from you will be maintained in confidence by the investigator in a locked file cabinet and destroyed at the end of the study.

Risks

The interview focuses on your past experiences as a student who attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy/school. Recalling some unpleasant memories may cause discomfort to you. If you experience major distress related to the study, don't hesitate to contact the researcher so that she can provide you with the necessary referrals.

Benefits

Your experience and knowledge have tremendous value in furthering the understanding of the experiences of belonging of African-American students who attended a predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academy. In addition, the opportunity to share your experience and expertise related to this topic may be valuable to you.

Confidentiality

All records will be stored in a digital file and kept confidential to the extent the law permits. The data about your interview will be stored on an electronic data file in the researcher's personal computer to be kept confidential. The data will be available only to the research team, and no identifying information will be disclosed. Audiotapes and other paperwork will be assigned a case number.

As a participant in this study, you will also be providing information about some experiences you experience. Your responses will be grouped collectively with other responses.

All common identifying information will be disguised to protect your confidentiality. This will include changing your name and other demographic information, such as occupation.

Research Standards and Rights of Participants

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, or if you decide later to stop participating, you will retain all benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Also, if you refer other individuals for participation in this study, your name may be used as the referral source only with your permission.

I understand that I may contact the investigator or the investigator's dissertation chairperson at any time at the addresses, telephone numbers, or emails listed below if I have any questions, concerns, or comments regarding my participation in this study.

Tangelia L Ingram (Investigator) Dr. Luciana Starks (Chairperson)

California Baptist University

Jabs School of Business

8432 Magnolia Avenue

Riverside, CA 92504

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Sponsored Programs Administrator at California Baptist University. Email: irb@calbaptist.edu

I have read and understood the contents of this consent form and have received a copy of it for my files. I consent to participate in this research project.

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Investigator Signature _____

Date _____

I Give My Permission for the Interview to be Audiotaped.

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol for Qualitative Study on Exploring the Experiences of Belonging of African-American Students Who Attended a Predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist Academy

Researcher: Tangelia L. Ingram

Faculty Sponsor:

Date: February 2, 2024

Introduction

This interview protocol encompasses the entire process of participant recruitment and data collection. It will be applied consistently to each participant to ensure the highest level of data integrity throughout the study. This comprehensive approach includes detailed guidelines for my role as the researcher, the initial outreach to potential participants, and the execution of semi-structured interviews.

Role of the Researcher:

- **Data Collection Integrity:** As a researcher, I am committed to maintaining data integrity. I will conduct all interviews following this standardized protocol to ensure consistency and avoid bias.
- **Relationship with Participants:** I have no personal or professional connections with the study's participants. They will be recruited from various social and professional networks, including LinkedIn, a restricted Facebook group, and through referrals from other professionals. The participant sample will be strategically identified using purposive and snowball sampling methods to ensure effective outreach and selection.
- **Neutral Data Collection and Reflexivity:** During interviews, I will employ journaling to actively set aside any preconceived biases or prior knowledge related to the study. This will be complemented by practicing reflexivity, which involves heightened self-awareness, critical reflection, and seeking peer input to ensure an unbiased approach.

- **Initial Contact**
- **Invitation to Participate:** I will post the invitation (as outlined in Appendix A) on the Facebook group, directing interested individuals to Google/Microsoft Forms to complete a Participant Eligibility questionnaire (as outlined in Appendix B).
- **Informed Consent:** Interested individuals will receive an email containing the informed consent form. They will provide electronic consent by replying with "I consent." (as outlined in Appendix D).
- **Scheduling Interviews:** Upon receiving consent, participants will be assigned a unique code for anonymity. A follow-up email will be sent to schedule the semi-structured interview, offering time slots within 7-14 days (about two weeks).
 - **Semi-Structured Interviews**
- **Setting Up Interviews:** Interviews will be scheduled at a mutually agreed-upon date and time.
- **Interview Process:**
- **Introduction and Rapport Building:** I will establish rapport with the participant by introducing myself. I will confirm their informed consent and review the Participant Eligibility questionnaire responses.
 - **Recording Consent:** Participants will be requested to consent to audio and video recordings, although participation is allowed without these recordings. I will take detailed notes as an alternative.
- **Conducting the Interview:**
 - **Open-Ended Questions and Probing:** I will ask open-ended questions, probing for more detail when needed, and journal my observations during the interview.
 - **Time Management:** I will inform the participant of the interview's scheduled duration, provide a 5-minute warning before the end, and discuss the need for extended time or a follow-up interview if required.
- **Closing the Interview:**

- **Member Checking Process:** I will invite participants to engage in member checking for data accuracy. I will interpret the interview data, synthesizing responses in a document sent to participants for their review and feedback.
- **Referrals:** I will thank participants for their time and contribution and ask for referrals to potential new participants.

Ending the Interview: Once the interview is complete, I will confirm that the call, along with any audio and video recordings, are properly terminated. Additionally, I will seek the participant's permission for potential future contact should there be any clarifying questions or a need to follow up to ensure that the interview process has not resulted in any unforeseen harmful effects.

Appendix E: Interview Guide

Exploring the Experiences of African-American Students' Sense of Belonging Who Attended a Predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist Academy

What experiences contributed to the sense of belonging of African American students who attended predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist academies?

PART 1 – A Sense of Belonging Home

1. Did you grow up in a predominantly Black or White neighborhood? If Black, how was your experience? If White, how was your experience?
2. Were both parents SDA? If so, did they attend an SDA academy? If not, what type of school did they attend?
3. How was your relationship with your parents/guardians? Did you feel “heard “when it related to school problems?

PART 2 – Expectations About Attending a Predominantly White Seventh-day Adventist Academy

1. How did you come to the decision to attend a predominantly White SDA academy?
2. What was approximately the percentage of African American students related to the total student body?
3. What were your perceptions about attending a predominantly White SDA academy?
4. How was your experience attending a predominantly White SDA academy?

PART 3 – A Sense of Belonging School

1. Were you able to make friends easily?
2. Did you participate in school extracurricular activities? If so, what were they? If not, why not?

3. How did your teachers, principal, and other school leaders relate to you?
4. How would you describe the culture or environment of your school?
5. What was your positive experience or negative experience?
6. Can you tell me about an experience in your school that made you feel welcomed or unwelcomed?
7. Did you ever experience racial discrimination at your school?

PART 4 – Academic Expectation

1. In what ways do you recall your school intentionally including African American culture and history within your classroom or school learning experience?
2. How was your classroom culture experience with your teacher? Did you feel a sense of openness to learn?
3. Did your academics prepare you for college or your career choice

PART 5 – Religion or Indoctrination

1. Did you grow up in a family who are members and lived the Seventh-day Adventist beliefs? If so, how was your upbringing?
2. How would you describe the teachings of your bible class?
3. Were you able to ask questions and inquire about bible topics that interest you?
4. What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of your experience?

PART 6 – African American Students’ Reflective Recommendations

1. What changes should predominantly white SDA academies make to reassure African American students’ sense of belonging while attending predominantly White SDA academies?

2. Has attending an SDA academy been beneficial to you? If so, in what way? If not, in what way?