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Following Faith Commitments: Adventist Higher EducationTransitionTheory

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Adventist Higher Education Transition Theory

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Following Faith Commitments:

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Abstract

Christian universities are generally tuition-driven and thus enrollment dependent. This is true of the Seventh-day Adventist higher education system as well. Previous research on Seventh-day Adventist university enrollment revealed and underrepresentation of graduates from public high schools in comparison to graduates of Christian high schools. The purpose of this study was to develop a working theory to explain how graduates of public high schools successfully transition into Adventist universities. Using a pragmatic grounded theory design, we interviewed 18 participants who had experienced such a transition. Progressing in a constant-comparative manner, research team members analyzed the interviews through multiple rounds and types of coding. The resultant theory, Adventist Higher Education Transition Theory, *consists of a three-dimensional matrix of theoretical components. This paper focuses on the first dimension of this matrix, a five-step developmental pathway typically followed by public high school graduates as they matriculate at an Adventist university. The markers along this developmental pathway include Attractors, Adjustors, Detractors, Transitional Tasks, and Anchors. We constructed this substantive theory using language that transcends the specificity of its Adventist origins while remaining true to the study context. Thus, our theory approaches the stature of substantive theory of transition into Christian higher education, although additional data collection and analysis is required for verification. However, readers, based on their background, can identify implications from this theory for transition into other systems of Christian higher education, transition into Faith-based higher education, or transition into higher education generally.*

Following Faith Commitments:

Adventist Higher Education Transition Theory

Introduction

Christian universities and colleges often rely on enrollment growth and student retention for their operational budgets (Schuttinga, 2011). Limited financial support from state governments (Waller, 2008) and unpredictable enrollment patterns due to interdependency between Christian higher education institutions and Christian K-12 schools (Schuttinga, 2011) often compound the issues related to operational budgets. One approach to strengthening enrollment patterns involves increasing the number of public high school graduates who enroll in Christian higher education while still maintaining the beneficial, interdependent relationships between Christian universities and Christian K-12 schools.

In 2005, the Association of Adventist Colleges and Universities (AACU) conducted a study to examine the awareness and perceptions among Adventist college-bound youth regarding Adventist higher education. In this study, Sauder (2008) found that college-bound youth attending public schools had low awareness levels of Adventist colleges and universities. In addition, there were low contact levels from Adventist colleges and universities with these students. As a result of the study, a centralized marketing enrollment system was established that is managed by a full-time AACU employee in collaboration with the enrollment teams from member colleges and universities. This move strengthened one of AACU's strategic initiatives: collaborative enrollment management and marketing, including system-wide branding, promotion, and prospective student search efforts, particularly among Seventh-day Adventists attending public high schools.

While the results from the 2005 AACU study (Sauder, 2008) provided guidance for specific policy and practice decisions, AACU representatives identified the need for further research to inform their work. The leaders of AACU contracted with researchers at the Andrews International Center for Educational Research (AICER) to conduct a study of Adventist graduates from both Adventist and other types of universities. As the research design for the study was developed, stakeholders and researchers decided on a two-phase mixed methods approach. The first phase of the CollegeImpact study collected a broad range of data from University alumni via administration of an online survey.

The second phase of the study sought to expand upon the findings of Sauder's study (2008) and to provide actionable research to support AACU's initiative to increase enrollment of public high school graduates in Adventist universities. This paper reports on the findings from Phase 2 of the CollegeImpact Study. The purpose of this study was to generate a grounded theory, which identified experiences, processes, or conditions related to the successful transition of public high school graduates into Adventist higher education. We defined successful transition as occurring when an individual who (1) graduated from a public high school (2) completed a bachelor's degree at an Adventist university, (3) reported having a positive experience during the college years, and (4) self-identified as a practicing Adventist Christian at the time of the study.

Method

Research Design

This study used a pragmatic grounded theory design (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Pragmatic grounded theory design incorporates aspects of general qualitative data analysis, constructivist grounded theory approaches (Charmaz, 2011, 2014; Wertz, Charmaz, McMullen, Josselson, Anderson, & McSpadden, 2011) and classical grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Wertz,

et al., 2011). The purpose of grounded theory designs is to develop a theory derived from or grounded in empirical data. Inductive and abductive reasoning move data analysis beyond thick, rich description of specific cases to the conceptualization of general hypotheses and conceptualizations (Charmaz, 2011, 2014; Reichertz, 2010). The hypotheses and conceptualizations that best express the facets of a phenomenon and explain their interrelationships become the foundation for theory development.

Participants

The participants in this study were recruited from a pool of volunteers who completed the online survey during Phase 1 of the CollegeImpact Study. These volunteers included alumni of Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities in Canada and the United States. Approximately one-third of the 6125 participants who completed the survey volunteered to sit for a 30-minute to 40-minute interview and discuss their undergraduate experience in Adventist higher education institutions. We used a combination of purposeful and theoretical sampling to accomplish the goals of this study. We anticipated needing to complete approximately 20 interviews in order to develop a meso-level, substantive theory specific to Adventist higher education. All persons who volunteered for participation received an email to thank them for their willingness to participate and to determine if they met the study's criteria. In an effort to assure an adequate number of participants, we purposefully selected 30 potential participants whose email responses that indicated which volunteers met the sampling criteria expressed in our definition of successful transition (see above).

Participants in this study came from ten of the fourteen Adventist universities in Canada or the United States. We conducted 22 interviews. However, one interview was lost due to recording malfunctions. We discovered during the interview process that three of the subjects

did not fully meet the sampling criteria. Thus, the theory presented in this paper is based on analysis of 18 alumni interviews.

Initial theoretical components began to emerge during data analysis. Once a nascent theory coalesced, we began to use theoretical sampling techniques in addition to criterion-based sampling. Theoretical sampling involves the process of adding targeted questions to previous interview protocol to explore and expand understanding of proposed theoretical components.

As is true with all research, grounded theory research is data dependent. However, creation of a grounded theory does not require the collection of vast amounts of data from a large number of participants. Rather it relies on the saturation of theoretical categories in the emerging theory. As theoretical saturation is the key criterion for judging the quality of a grounded theory, no agreed-upon guidelines exist for an "adequate" number of participants in a grounded theory study. Some authors stress that it is unlikely to be able to reach theoretical saturation with samples of twelve or less. Additionally, the researcher uses professional judgment to determine theoretical saturation. Thus, it falls to the authors of a grounded theory to provide evidence to support their claim of theoretical saturation, regardless of the number of research participants. Perhaps one of the strongest evidences for theoretical saturation is the level of confidence placed in the theory by individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under study. We are currently in the process of conducting a series of interviews where study participants and non-participants share their perceptions on the adequacy of the theory to describe their experience in transitioning to Adventist higher education. Additionally, we support our claims of theoretical saturation in two ways. First, we present our theory in language that is accessible and understandable both to those who work in the higher education field and to the college-educated reader. This allows any reader who has experienced the transition from public high school to a

faith-based institution of higher learning to judge the adequacy or inadequacy of the theory to explain their experience. Second, we provide a graphic presentation of the theory to help readers visualize the interrelationship of the five markers along the developmental pathway students travel during their transition. These two strategies should help readers better identify any gaps or inconsistencies that may exist in the theory.

Data Collection and Analysis

Research team members contacted sampled participants by email or telephone to set an appointment for the interview. Participants completed and returned a consent form to the interviewer. A semi-structured interview protocol guided data collection (Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Each interview was transcribed verbatim (Halcomb & Davidson, 2005; Merriam, 2009) and checked for accuracy by a second team member. We met regularly as a research team to debrief what we had heard during each interview. This helped accelerate the initial analysis process and advance understanding of the findings as the study progressed (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Constant-comparison techniques were used to analyze data as they accumulated (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These techniques involved an iterative process of data collection and analysis in which researchers revisit and reanalyze previous interviews as new concepts arise during later interviews. Thus, the data analysis process involves constant movement between new data sources and earlier data sources, as well as movement between types and cycles of data coding. The constant-comparison process ensures rigor in the analysis process, requiring that each concept or code *earn* its way into the emerging theoretical structure because of its presence throughout the data. Constant comparison helped us move analysis beyond rich description toward theoretical conceptualization (Charmaz, 2011, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Analysis included a series of iterative coding sequences. Initial coding (Charmaz, 2014; Saldana, 2013) helped us create codes as they emerged from the first few interviews. We discussed each potential new code, approved or disapproved the proposed code, defined the approved codes and added them to the codebook. At first, coding focused on the interviewee's experiences and was more descriptive than conceptual; we then attempted to identify all potential analytical pathways leading from these initial codes that showed potential for theory development.

The second coding iteration involved more focused coding techniques (Charmaz, 2014; Saldana, 2013). In this phase of coding, we looked for codes that were similar to each other in order to explore the possibility of merging related codes into one conceptually rich code. We split other codes into two or more new codes to differentiate between nuances of concepts. As we worked, the coding structures became more complex and conceptual in nature (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 2002).

To move analysis even further away from description and into abstract conceptualization, we implemented axial coding (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and abductive reasoning processes (Charmaz, 2014; Reichertz, 2007). During this phase of coding, researchers looked for core codes or identified new categories to serve as organizing concepts. Axial codes served as central, organizing concepts with clusters of other codes organized around them to explain relationships within the category or the functioning of processes.

We used memo writing (Charmaz, 2014; Saldana, 2013) and verbal debriefing throughout the analysis process to aid the development and refinement of coding structures. Final coding processes utilized a non-linear process of memo writing, further coding, and graphic representation of the emerging theory. The iterative process of coding, visual representation, and

memo writing helped us move from the specifics of the study context to the abstract

conceptualization of theoretical propositions related to the transitioning of public high school

graduates into Adventist colleges and universities (Charmaz, 2014; Saldana, 2013).

Confirming Findings

Multiple techniques exist for ensuring a grounded theory is objective, dependable,

credible, and fits the context of the study. We used several tactics suggested by Miles,

Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) to confirm the structure and content of our theory. These tactics

included (1) getting feedback from participants, (2) checking for representativeness, (3)

triangulation, and (4) checking for the meaning of outliers.

Protection of Human Subjects

Approval for this study was granted by the university's Internal Review Board (IRB). No

risks or liabilities were associated with participation in this study. Records and data were stored

in the researchers' locked offices, stored on password-protected computers, and backed up on

protected servers. Pseudonyms were created for all participants and are used in this article to

identify quotations from specific study participants.

Adventist Higher Education Transition Theory

The Central Concern

Public high school graduates who enrolled in an Adventist college or university and went

on to complete at least one degree there tended to share one central theoretical issue or concern:

"Following Faith Commitments." Because of the personal faith commitments made while in high

school or shortly thereafter, these students shared a common desire to study at a faith-based

university. Their desire was to immerse themselves in a campus environment that would expand

their understanding of the Christian faith, affirm their prior faith commitments, and promote

development of their faith. Thus, it appears that the single most important factor in contributing

to the successful transitioning of public high school graduates into Adventist higher education is

the student's personal faith commitment at the time of college enrollment. The importance of

faith commitment is true whether the high school graduate was a member of the Seventh-day

Adventist Church or of another Christian denomination at the time of enrollment.

> *After I went through the Bible study process and was actually baptized, somebody mentioned Andrews University and suggested that I should go to Andrews. And I was kind of—it jumped out at me, and I was like: "Excuse me, why? Why should I go to Andrews? Years ago I had already applied for admission there and was admitted, but you are telling me about going to Andrews; why?" And they said, "Because that's one of our schools. And you need to know more about your faith." And I was like, "Oh, Andrews University is one of your schools? I didn't know that!"*
>
> Phillip Watson, Andrews University, 1996 Spanish for International Trade

Dimensions of the Theory

The Adventist Higher Education Transition Theory consists of a three-dimensional

matrix of theoretical components. The first dimension, the topic of this paper, is a five-step

developmental pathway consisting of the following markers: Attractors, Adjustors, Detractors,

Transitional Tasks, and Anchors (see Figure 1). The second dimension of the theory comprises

three domains of student experience: Social, Spiritual, and Intellectual. The final theoretical

dimension is the timeframe for enacting the first two dimensions.

Insert Figure 1 about Here

Markers along the Transitional Pathway

Attractors are influences that serve to draw high school students toward Adventist higher

education and help them make the decision to enroll in an Adventist university. Attractors

include *a priori* relationships with significant others such as family members, church leaders and

peers; and *a priori* experiences the university, including recruitment processes. *Adjustors* refer to

Comment [LB1]: Is this true. I think we present all three of the dimensions

elements of the Adventist college experience that help ease the transition process for all new students, both freshmen and transfer students. While designed to aid all students, these adjustors are critical for the successful transition of public high school graduates into the Adventist college environment. *Detractors* refer to a variety of negative experiences that public high school graduates are likely to encounter, particularly early in their Adventist college experience.

Detractors force students to face negative issues or incongruences they encounter while adjusting to an Adventist college or university. *Detractors* require some type of individual response – the completion of *Transitional Tasks*. *Transitional Tasks* in this theory are similar to developmental tasks identified in many common psychological theories (Chickering, 1993; Erickson, 1970; Fowler, 1981; Maslow, 1943; Piaget, 1983). One common thread in many of these development theories is the transformative nature of development, a progressive growth process contingent on prior experiences. There is an upward growth trend from one level of functioning to a higher level of functioning, even though experiences and growth on different levels sometimes occur simultaneously. Students may choose to either ignore or complete tasks within each level. The successful student responds by working to resolve the *Detractors* they encounter. If *Detractors* are ignored or *Transitional Tasks* are not successfully completed the potential for the student leaving Adventist higher education increases. However, when successfully completed, *Transitional Tasks* can lead to the creation of institutional *Anchors*. *Anchors* serve to help public high school graduates adhere and persevere in Adventist higher education in spite of any challenges or incongruences they encounter. They stabilize the student's college experience and contribute to their retention and degree completion. In some cases students may move directly from *Attractors* to *Adjustors* and then to *Anchors* without encountering *Detractors*. As there are many potential *Attractors*, *Adjustors*, *Detractors*,

Transitional Tasks, and *Anchors*, students pass through this cycle multiple times during the

course of their university tenure.

Examples of Markers along the Transitional Pathway

Friends Aid the Transition

In our analysis of the interview data, the importance of positive peer relationships

emerged early in our study and earned its place in our theory. We found multiple examples of all

five markers within the construct of friendship. Here are examples of each type of marker.

> **Attractor.** *Well, I had some friends that . . . took me up to PUC one Sabbath and so I was able to see the area and the campus and I was impressed. I'm a person that likes being out in nature, and even though probably La Sierra College would have been closer for me . . . I liked the more rural environment at PUC.*
> James Stuart, Pacific Union College, 1970 Theology

> **Adjustor.** *I met some older students that did some things to help me out. And they took me under their wing so to speak. So that made it good.*
> Jason Williams, Oakwood University, 1993 Social Work

> **Detractor.** *I do remember initially, when I came, I was thinking all the freshmen would be new and on equal footing, but once I got there, I realized that most of them came from* [Adventist high schools]*, so they already large groups of friends from [there]. So at the very beginning, I remember feeling a little bit out of the loop.*
> Marsha Lawrence, Union College, 1995 Elementary Education

> **Transitional Task.** *A lot of kids that went to academy together already knew each other, so it was hard to break into some of those groups.* [So I] *kind of made friends with the kids that were in my same situation, that had gone to a public high school.*
> Mary Boyce, Washington Adventist University, 1993 Elementary Education

> **Anchor.** [The most important thing] *would probably be meeting my friends, like my closest friends. We all met in the same place, we all started working in the same office. And even now, after we have graduated, and even though they have moved away, we are still really good friends. I would think that that is kind of important to me.*
> Janet Pereda, La Sierra University, 2011 Fine Arts

Romance and Transition into Higher Education

The emergence of Romance as an important construct in our theoretical structure has surprised some of our colleagues from public universities, but it seems obvious to those of us who have spent years in Adventist education. While some participants emphasized the role of Romance more than others did, it remains a strong component across almost all interviews. Here are examples of all five markers within the construct of Romance.

Attractor. *I wanted to go to a Seventh-day Adventist school . . . And I wanted to find a wife.*
Jason Williams, Oakwood University, 1993 Social Work

Adjustor. *There was a sense of community there, but I was not in the dorm. I lived in the village. And although we did some activities with the student association, we were dating, and so we mostly hung out with my [future] wife's brother and close friends…Well, like I said,* [my girlfriend and I] *saw each other in the library a lot.*
Justin Kunst, Southwestern Adventist University, 2004 Religion and Psychology

Detractor. *During the end of freshman year, I met a young lady there, we got married in December, and then it turned out that she had other ideas, and our marriage ended up dissolving.*
Phillip Watson, Andrews University, 1996 Spanish for International Trade

Transitional Task. *So within two years of high school graduation,* [I] *pretty much* [found] *my career,* [and] *my husband. So those two things were taken care of.*
Marcy Johnson, Andrews University, 1971 English

Anchor. *Meeting my wife was definitely a contributing factor in changing my whole attitude about school and being consistent with my work, trying to do better and all that.*
Lawrence Smith, Southwestern Adventist University, 2003 Broadcasting, 2012 Nursing

Faith Commitments and Transition

While the participants' central concern seemed to be "Following Faith Commitments," additional facets of the theory emerged with the domain of Student Spiritual Life. Here we share examples of how matters of faith or spiritual development served as markers along the transitional pathway.

Attractor. *When I decided to go back to school in 99, I was at a point where I wanted more of a Christian influence in my life so it seemed like a proper fit at the time to go to Southwestern.*
Lawrence Smith, Southwestern Adventist University, 2003 Broadcasting, 2012
    Nursing

Adjustor. *Maybe if I had gone to a different school, a public school, I would learn the same ideas, but would want to leave* [the church]. *At La Sierra the teacher showed me I could have these new ideas, these new ways of thinking, without abandoning my faith. I think that's why, if I did it all over again. I would go to La Sierra.*
    Eugene Umar, La Sierra University, 2008 Religious Studies

Detractor. *I remember having a lot of conversations with Adventist students who had been Adventist their whole life, who grew up in the Adventist church, but weren't necessarily practicing as an adult. And a lot of them had questions as to why I was deciding to become Adventist.   Because it would seem like they would start fighting it.*
    Crystal Hopkins, La Sierra University, 2006 Social Work

Transitional Task. *Okay. So I would have to say it was at a worship we had, like a required worship we had on Thursdays, you know? I think it was my sophomore year or so. I was kind of going through things like depression and stuff like that. And they had a guest speaker come; well I don't remember his name or anything. But his stories really touched me and made me realize that life wasn't so bad, and that God loved us, and it was just a life-changing moment.*
    Janet Pereda, La Sierra University, 2011 Fine Arts

Anchor. *And it was during my sophomore year, it was a student week of prayer that I made that adult commitment to the Lord. I had been baptized when I was 13, but to make that adult decision my sophomore year … Very significant.*
    Marcy Johnson, Andrews University, 1971 English

Mental Maturity and Transition

Within the intellectual domain of a student's life we identified several participants'

experiences that indicated a process of mental maturation was important for the student's

transition into Adventist Higher Education. Some arrived and did not know how to establish

boundaries for themselves or to structure their lives for academic success.

Attractor. *Well, my brother-in-law at that time, he suggested that I go there to find a wife. But I looked in the bulletin and far more interested in their theological*

program, so I ended falling in love with the idea of studying theology and went there for that reason
          Matthew Carson, Walla Walla Univesity, 1987, Theology

Adjustor. *I was a fine arts major. I think that the department, like the faculty there,* [were] *very supportive and very helpful*
          Janet Pereda, La Sierra University, 2011 Fine Arts

Detractor. It was a hard transition, though, because I remember my freshman year, I was up till 3 or 4 in the morning just because I could be up that late (chuckling). And there was no one to tell me, "You have to go to sleep."
          Crystal Hopkins, La Sierra University, 2006 Social Work

Transitional Task. *So for me, I had to struggle. Especially in the first year* [the challenge] *was just balancing my time, because I wasn't accustomed to that. I felt that a lot of my friends who had gone to [Adventist high school] had a little bit advantage in that way, because they were more familiar with the routine, how to live in* [a dorm] *environment and function in that way.*
          Janelle Short, Andrews University, 2004 Physical Therapy

Anchor. *When I was in high school, I felt that I was closed-minded. Narrow-minded, you know? Only talking in black and white. I think the biggest revolution for me* [happened] *in college. It helped opened up my thinking, came up with new ideas – new ways to look at the same issues. So I think that was my biggest transformation: being more open minded about engaging with different people who have different beliefs, different ideas.*
          Eugene Umar, La Sierra University, 2008 Religious Studies

Confirming Findings

Feedback from the Participants. To check for possible researcher bias in the findings, we re-contacted NUMBER of our study participants to get their feedback on the draft version of the theory. To ensure we received the best possible feedback, we sent each member of our follow-up group a list of questions we would use to guide our conversation with them, a short narrative explaining the theory and a table presenting the theory visually (see Appendix A). In discussing the theory with us, our participants overwhelmingly confirmed its representativeness for their experience. With one exception, all participants who gave us feedback on the theory felt it was

complete and represented their experience. The one exception was a participant who suggested

an addition to the theory. That is discussed in Checking the Meaning of Outliers below.

Checking for Representativeness. In addition to getting feedback from several of our original

participants, we also enlarged our sample to include NUMBER additional persons who had not

participated in the original round of interviews which were used for theory construction. For

these new persons, we followed the same process with the same materials (see Appendix A) used

to collect feedback from some of our original participants. These new participants were

unanimous in their affirmation of the theory and its components. They had no suggestions for

additions, deletions, reorganization, or reinterpretation of the theory.

Checking the Meaning of Outliers. In our follow-up interviews with several of our original

participants, one informant suggested an addition to our theory. She indicated that we did not

include anything about the health practices and standards associated with Adventist universities.

However, she was the only one who mentioned this aspect of her college experience. We

postulate that is due to her self-identified lack of exposure to Adventist health practices before

her arrival on the college campus.

Triangulation. Our method provided for triangulation in the following ways. First, we

triangulated by researcher. The three co-authors were equally active in the research process,

including literature review, data collection, analysis, and theory construction. Second, we

triangulated by interviewing alumni from 10 different Adventist universities. Third, we

triangulated across time by interviewing alumni who graduated between 19?? And 20??.

Situating the Theory in the Literature

Comparison to Other Developmental Theories

Even though the public high school graduates we interviewed had purposefully chosen an Adventist Christian university for its faith-based atmosphere and mission, these individuals still had to adjust to the Christian campus environment. Our substantive theory revealed that successful transition from public high school to Adventist university matriculation proceeds along a development pathway. As such, it shares some characteristics of other developmental theories.

Two of Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development inform our theory. The first stage typically covers the ages of 13-19. During this age range, adolescents work on resolving the Identity vs. Role Confusion psychosocial crisis. The most important relationships for adolescents are with peers and role models. A key task during this stage is the development of social relationships.

The second stage of Erikson's theory that informs our theory typically spans the ages from 20-39 years. During this phase of life, the newly minted adult relies on relationships with friends and partners. The psychosocial crisis that begs for resolutions it Intimacy vs. Isolation. The development of romantic relationships is one of the typical outcomes of this stage as the individual seeks to answer the question, "Can I love?"

The theory of emerging adulthood aligns with key aspects of our theory as well. While Erikson's two stages discussed above covered an age range from 13 to 39 years of age. Emerging adulthood is the period of transition from adolescents to adulthood among those between the ages of 18 and 25 years (Santrock, 2009). Many members of this age group transition from high school seniors to freshmen in college. This population seems to experience a lengthy period of challenges and triumphs as they develop into adults. One common challenge seen during emerging adulthood is stress over personal adaptation during transition to adult life.

> Although students may feel more grown up and be intellectually challenged by academic work, for many the transition involves a focus on the stressful move from being the oldest and most powerful group of students to being the youngest and least powerful group. (Santrock, 2009, p. 439)

The emerging adulthood period sets the platform for opportunity and positive changes in life course (Masten & Burt, 2006). Healthy adaptation during the transition time is crucial for emerging adult population. Several factors facilitate positive adaptations and outcomes for this age group. These include community engagement, strong parental and peer relationships, and academic skills in relation to future employment (O'Connor, et al., 2011).

Our theory indicates that students sometimes move from Attractors to Anchors simultaneously in multiple domains of student experience. This is also the case with Chickering's Seven Vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Chickering and Reisser proposed that college students develop their identities across seven vectors or recurring processes. While students' movement along the transition pathway may occur simultaneously across multiple domains, this movement does not typically occur at the same time for all students. Previous research has shown that students experience growth at different rates depending on how they negotiate and resolve issues stemming from the interaction between their personal habitus and the institutions' environments (Blimling, 2010).

<div align="center">Situating the Theoretical Markers</div>

Attractors

Specific examples of Attractors in our theory show how others (peers, parents, and other adults) influence a student's decision on college choice. Other studies also document that relationships with parents and other significant adults are key influencers of college choice (Chapman, 1981; Kinzie, et al. 2007, Noel-Levitz, 2012). Some argue that these individuals' influence harks back to their role in developing the student's cultural capital and habitus, or

dispositions, toward choice and aspirations (Bourdieu, 1990; Navarro, 2006; Noel-Levitz, 2012; Swartz, 1997, Vezina, 2009). These findings are consistent across both public and Christian universities, two-year and four-year schools, and in Canada and the United States. One component of Van Gennep's theory of rites of passage, "separation" from past associations (cited in Tinto, 2012, p. 93), aligns with one aspect of Attractors: pre-separation decisions about which college to attend.

Adjustors

Literature and accepted best practices support the importance of our second theoretical marker, Adjustors. Institutions of higher education (IHEs) annually invest millions of dollars into the delivery of Freshman Orientations and First Year Experience (FYE) programs in an effort to aid student adjustment to college life (Krause and Coates, 2008, Tinto, 2012). The creation of peer relationships among students is one of the major purposes of implementing Freshman Orientation programs, yearlong FYEs or other types of community-building programs. The literature shows that these types of intentionally designed programs do in fact help build peer bonds and friendships (Tinto, 2012). Our study revealed, that in addition to friendships begun through such programming, peer relationships were sometimes started or nurtured through informal opportunities to interact in campus social spaces, such as dormitories and student centers, and through co-curricular activities such as dormitory worship sessions, chapel services, and weekend retreats.

Faculty and staff relationships with students are another type of important Adjustor. This finding is consistent with Astin's findings (1997) that positive student-faculty interactions and faculty commitment to student success were strong indicators of a student's success in

college. Astin's work indicated that the degree of student college success was "proportional to the quality and quantity of the student involvement in the program" (p. 519).

Van Gennep's conceptualization of separation intersects certain aspects of our theory's Adjustors: the actual arrival on campus and participation in college-sponsored events to aid the new student in their new environment. His portrayal of "transitions" interfaces well with our conceptualization of Adjustors as events, interactions and relationships that facilitate interaction with students, faculty and staff.

Detractors

One of the reasons for conducting this study was to develop an understanding of the challenges faced by public high school graduates entering Adventist Christian universities, with the intention of using the findings to increase retention and completion rates of these students. Our Detractors theoretical marker is in harmony with Tinto's (2012) findings related to retention and persistence to graduation. He identified three interactional outcomes that contribute to early college exit: "adjustment difficulty, incongruence, and isolation" (p. 37). All three of these factors are evident in the Detractors marker.

Transitional Tasks

The markers labeled Transitional Tasks in our theory share similarities with Piagetian concepts and processes. According to Piaget, a child (or in the case of our theory, the emerging adult) holds specific schema, or systems for interpreting and organizing new experiences as they occur. As long as the individual's schema are able to accommodate their new experiences, the individual remains in a status of equilibration. However, when a person's schema is unable to process and create meaning from a new experience, equilibration moves into disequilibration. This state of disequilibration, or cognitive dissonance, requires the individual to move through a

process of schema adaptation. According to Piaget, adaptation involves two complementary processes: assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation involves the intake of new information and experiences beyond that which originally created disequilibratioin. Accommodation, is the process by which an individual alters their schema in order to make sense of the new experiences or information which created disequilibration. Once the individual's schema has been altered, the state of equilibration returns.

Anchors

The Anchors marker in our theory was developed from several specific types of examples. One type of anchor, for example, becoming an active, contributing member in new groups such as the academic department, aligns well with Van Gennep's rite of passage concept of "incorporation" (cited in Tinto, 2012, p. 93). An additional Anchor we found in our study was minority students having minority faculty mentors or advocates. This corroborates previous findings by Campbell and Davis (1996). The current and other studies provide evidence that even in the absence of minority faculty members to serve as role models and advocates, minority students can succeed when they have a mentoring relationship with some faculty member, feel a sense of belonging, and are able to explore their educational options (Burton, 2011; Musoba, Collazo, & Placide, 2013).

Tinto also identified a factor that anchors college students and contributes their persistence to graduation: "obligations" to groups or communities external to the university, such as family members or church responsibilities (2012, p. 38). Similar to Tinto's assertions concerning "obligations," in the Relationship Subdomain our participants perceived they had obligations to family, peers, and faculty members.

While our theory "fits" well into the general literature on transitioning into college, it provides a unique look into the experience of public high school students entering Adventist Christian universities and can positively affect recruitment, enrollment and retention of this group of students, who are underrepresented in the Adventist college population.

Limitations

We are confident that we achieved adequate levels of theoretical saturation to produce a substantive theory of transition specific to Adventist higher education. While the language of the current theory is abstract enough to apply to Christian contexts other than Adventist, we do not claim that our theory represents a substantive theory of transition into Christian higher education generally. Establishing that claim will require collection and analysis of additional data to see how the current theoretical structure holds up to the influx of additional, diverse data.

Implications for Practice

Public high school students chose Adventist universities for their "faith-based" atmosphere and mission. The findings of this study indicate that these individuals still needed to adjust to the Christian campus environment. Adventist universities need to develop action plans to help public high school students deal with Detractors and move through Transitional Task. These action plans could include items such as the following. Increase faculty awareness of their important role in students' spiritual growth, learning success and educational retention. Require faith-development courses for all incoming freshmen since faith commitments were a primary motive for enrollment. Provide opportunities for new students to make new friends early in the academic year. Implement strategic, school-specific interventions throughout the college years to aid smooth transition and retention of public high school students in Christian universities.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study has discovered key concepts that can improve public high school graduates experience in Adventist universities. We envision the results of this research study as the first step toward creating a robust, substantive theory of transition from public high school into Christian higher education, regardless of the denominational affiliation of the university. Thus, participants in future studies should include alumni from a wide range of Christian universities. Expansion of the study to other Christian universities would test the current theoretical structure and potentially create richer and more inclusive recommendations for practice. Conduct research on the experiences of graduates from Christian high schools who transitioned into Christian universities. Finally, the experiences of alumni of Christian universities who did not have a positive experience or left the institution before graduation could also be included in future research to help Christian educators understand situations in which the transition process is not successful. This data has the potential to help Christian educators serve all students on their campuses in better ways.

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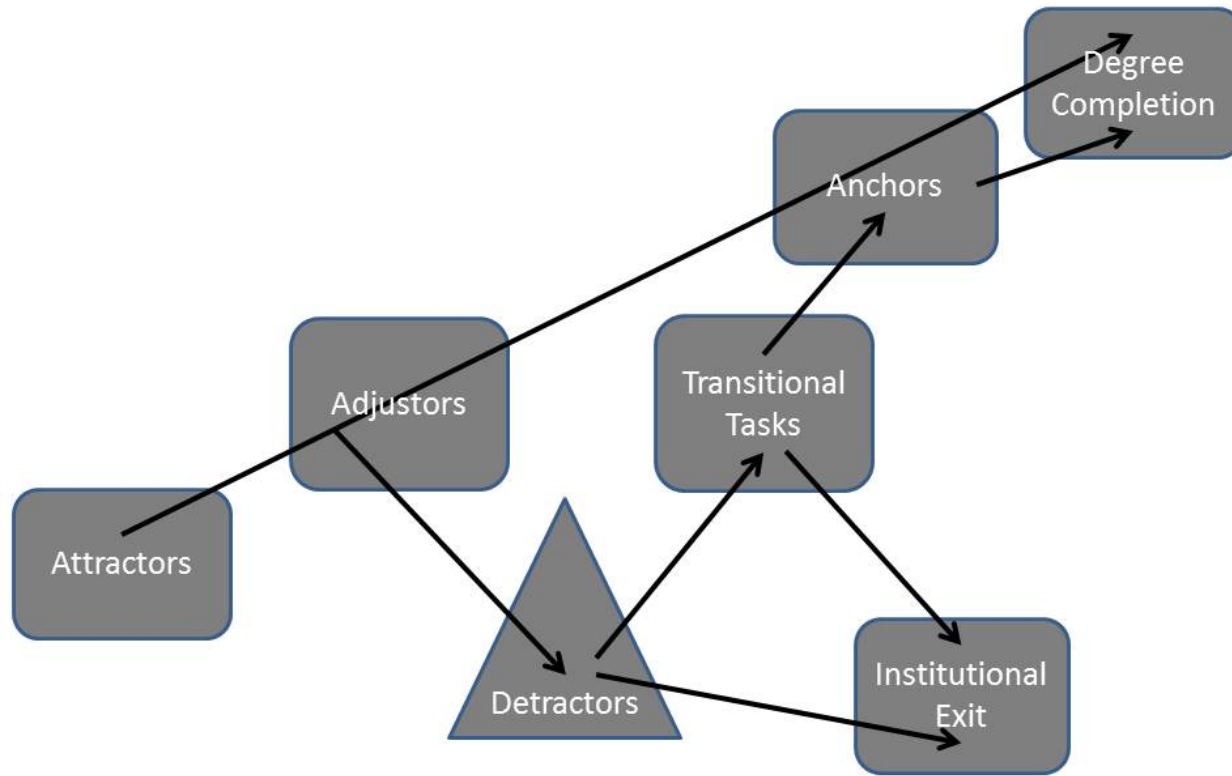
Figure 1. Public high school graduates' potential transition pathways in Adventist universities.