
**THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF CONVERSION IN THE BROADER
CONTEXT OF EXPERIENCE OF FAITH FORMATION: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THIRD- AND
GREATER-GENERATION SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST YOUNG ADULTS**

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Problem

While the New Testament Scriptures describe the characteristics of first-generation conversion, they do not describe how the children of believers come to Christian faith. Moreover, while there has been considerable empirical research on conversion, very little of it addresses conversion in the lives of those nurtured in faith. As a result, many second- and greater-generation Christians may feel that the term “conversion” does not describe their spiritual experiences. The purpose of this study was to describe the lived experience of conversion in the lives of those nurtured in faith from childhood.

Method

This study adopted a phenomenological approach to qualitative research. The sample for this study included Seventh-day Adventist young adults who had grown up within an Seventh-day Adventist family and faith context, who were at least third-generation Seventh-day Adventist, and who were currently members of Seventh-day Adventist faith communities. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with fourteen participants, who were asked to describe both their formational faith experiences as well as their conversion experiences. A hermeneutical approach to analysis was then implemented; this involved weaving codes and categories together with ideas generated through analytic memo-writing, and then organizing them into recurring themes.

Results

Across the 14 interviews, the experiences of both faith formation and conversion were identified. From the pattern of overlapping themes that emerged from data analysis, the experience of faith formation can be described as a dynamic process that integrates the intellectual, affective, and behavioral domains of life, is facilitated by community, and necessitates personal choice. Within this broader context of experience of faith formation, the participants in this study experienced conversion, which they described as a gradual, ongoing process, facilitated by multiple significant moments or events that occurred across the course of their lives. This process involved movement toward integration of childhood, adolescent, and young-adult experiences in both the intellectual and affective domains, and was accompanied by behavioral

choices that resulted in greater congruence between the intellectual, affective, and behavioral domains of faith.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that third- and greater-generation believers experience conversion as a gradual process of change in the intellectual, affective, and behavioral domains that in many ways parallels the experiences of first-generation believers; however, while for first-generation Christians these are new experiences, those who have grown up within the context of faith experience conversion as an integration of formational and later experiences, frequently resulting in a less dramatic experience. These findings provide second- and greater-generation believers with a framework for understanding their spiritual experiences, as well as with a language for articulating a conversion narrative, both of which may facilitate a more authentic faith.