Accepting the Bare Minimum: How Students of Minoritized Religions Cultivate Belonging Amongst Christian Hegemony

by Julia R. Collett

B.S. in Animal and Poultry Sciences, May 2013, Virginia Tech
M.Ed. in Higher Education and Student Affairs, May 2015, Iowa State University

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Ashley Stone
Clinical Associate Professor of Higher Education, Southern Methodist University

The Graduate School of Education and Human Development of The George Washington University certifies that Julia R. Collett has passed the Final Examination for the degree of Doctor of Education as of June 1, 2022. This is the final and approved form of the dissertation.

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Julia R. Collett

Dissertation Research Committee:

Ashley Stone, Clinical Associate Professor of Higher Education, Dissertation Director

Dwayne Wright, Assistant Professor of Higher Education Administration, Committee Member

Sachi Edwards, Lecturer, Committee Member

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Dedication

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to Dolly Parton, who gave me permission to see the light of a clear blue morning. Everything's gonna be alright.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank and acknowledge my community of support that has helped make this achievement possible. First, I would like to acknowledge and thank my partner, Rob Winterfield. You supported me through the best and worst parts of this process. You helped me manage so much anxiety. Thank you for helping me stay focused on my end goal. This dissertation would not have been completed without your help. I'd also like to thank my dog, Belle, for knowing when it was time to take a snuggle break.

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Abstract of Dissertation

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This dissertation answers the following research question: How does Christian hegemony influence sense of belonging for students of minoritized religions on a college campus? Institutions of higher education claim to be secular and inclusive spaces for their students (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Joshi, 2020; Jun et al., 2018; Lang & Yandell, 2019). Some current research in this field tends to focus less on treating religious identity as a social justice issue and instead uses language such as ecumenical worldview and interfaith programming (Astin et al., 2011; Bowman et al., 2014). These are flawed because Christian hegemony is maintained by erasing nuanced differences amongst religious identities and focusing on similarities (Edwards, 2017b). The method was a critical instrumental case study, and data collection included a document analysis, student interviews, and staff interviews (Merriam, 2009). The research question was answered using Strayhorn's (2012) Sense of Belonging Model and Small's (2020) Critical Religious Pluralism Theory. Major themes and findings indicate that Christian hegemony makes it very difficult for students of minoritized religions to cultivate belonging outside of their personal religious communities. Additionally, secularism is a myth perpetuated to maintain Christian hegemony. While these findings are just one piece of understanding these lived experiences, there is plenty of room for furthering this research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Imagine you are a Christian, and you are asked to take a test on Christmas day. You might be angry the test was assigned on an important holiday, you might be frustrated that you must take time away from your family, and you might feel as though your cultural traditions or religious beliefs are being ignored and disrespected. Because academic calendars are developed around Christian holidays in United States higher education, students who practice Christianity are not asked to take tests on important holidays. This serves as a clear example of Christian hegemony, or the system of oppression caused by Christianity upon non-Christians, in the United States (Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020). However, students of minoritized religions must negotiate academic requirements with their religious holidays regularly. For example, the Jewish High Holidays (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) often occur in the fall around the time professors issue their first midterms. Jewish students often are asked to make the choice between taking a test and respecting their religious holidays. If a university has a policy for providing make-up tests, the student still must share their religious identity with their professor. This might be troublesome for students of minoritized religions because they need to disclose their religious identity to their faculty, find another time to take the test, and potentially may experience stereotyping and disrespect from their professor. This policy contributes to the unjust system of Christian hegemony and is just one illustration of how Christian hegemony is a pervasive cultural norm in the United States (Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020). Jewish students are not the only religious group that encounter this experience. This dissertation will focus on the role of religion in American higher

education, how students of minoritized religions are affected by Christian hegemony and White supremacy, and how they establish a sense of belonging on their college campuses.

Christianity is the dominant religious group in the United States both numerically and in terms of systemic power (Small, 2020). Christian holidays and practices often dictate the academic calendar, business procedures, and colloquial language (Blumenfeld, 2006). Further, the three major Abrahamic religions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam), with a focus on Christianity, are used to make sense of all other religions (Amorini, 2016; Chander, 2013). These examples demonstrate the power Christians have over other religious groups, leaving students of minoritized religions vulnerable to discrimination (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015). This reality is embedded in the history of higher education in the United States, where Christian hegemony meant the erasure and exclusion of students of minoritized religions (Blumenfeld, 2006; Edwards, 2018; Joshi, 2020). For example, non-Christian students were excluded from attending universities in the United States until the turn of the 20th century, when the United States experienced an influx of European immigrants (Rudolph, 1990; Thelin, 2011). Even so, universities created barriers to prevent non-Christian students from being admitted (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012).

The narrative around freedom of religion, especially regarding the separation of church and state, influences the lack of discourse about religion on college campuses (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015; Rudolph, 1990; Thelin, 2011), and serves to neutralize Christianity as the "norm" while erasing the existence of other religious identities (Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020). Currently, many college students are identifying as "spiritual" (Astin et al., 2011), so scholars are focusing research efforts on "ecumenical worldview" (Astin et al., 2011; Mayhew & Bryant, 2013; Small & Bowman, 2012). While this research

follows a growing number of students' self-selected religious label, it is problematic because it does not distinguish between the experiences of students of minoritized religions and students who benefit from Christian privilege. By focusing on a generic understanding of religious beliefs by using words such as "spirituality" and "ecumenical worldview", the experiences of students of minoritized religions are not recognized on campus or in scholarly literature, and it further marginalizes their identities. Additionally, many higher education professionals do not feel like they have the skill set or understanding to talk about non-Christian religious beliefs (Chander, 2013; Kocet & Stewart, 2011), leaving students of minoritized religions to navigate Christian hegemony by themselves on their college campuses.

This dissertation used Small's (2020) Critical Religious Pluralism Theory and Strayhorn's (2012) Sense of Belonging Theory to understand how Christian privilege influences the way students of minoritized religions experience sense of belonging on their college campus. Using a critical instrumental case study, I interviewed students of minoritized religions and the staff who support them and evaluated campus resources at an institution in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. This introduction provides a brief understanding of the proposed study and problem statement, the purpose of the research and research question, the significance of the study, and definitions.

Overview

To get started, it is important to understand the relationship between Whiteness and Christianity as it relates to students of minoritized religions. Christian hegemony is a power structure that maintains Christian values, beliefs, symbols, and language over all other means of religious expression (Blumenfeld, 2006; Joshi, 2020). Whiteness is a

construct that benefits White people, especially if they are Christian, were raised Christian, or practice cultural events and traditions related to Christianity (Blumenfeld, 2006; Edwards, 2018a; Joshi, 2020). Whiteness and Christianity are both dominant identities and hold systemic power over people of color and non-Christians (Blumenfeld, 2006; Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Joshi, 2020).

The oppression perpetuated by Whiteness is entangled in the narrative around Christian hegemony (Blumenfeld, 2006; Joshi, 2020; Lang & Yandell, 2019). The first Protestant European immigrants to the Americas used their White and Christian identities to justify oppressing Black and Indigenous non-Christian people (Blumenfeld, 2006; Joshi, 2020). Throughout the history of the United States, White Christian privilege has allowed Protestants to believe they have moral superiority (Joshi, 2020). This shows up in higher education in the form of reeducation institutions where White Protestants "taught" Black, Indigenous, and other people of color as a means of "saving the other" (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Rudolph, 1990; Thelin, 2011). To this day, higher education institutions connect Christian values to a racialized faith in order to create and maintain White Christianity (Lang & Yandell, 2019). Many students of minoritized religions also identify as a person of color (Blumenfeld & Klein, 2009; Joshi, 2013; Williams, 2013). Acknowledging this entanglement is important to understanding the plurality of student identities and their experiences with White Christian hegemony on their college campuses. This dissertation intentionally identifies the ways White supremacy influences Christian hegemony and how Christian hegemony influences White supremacy. To talk about one without the other is to ignore the historical ramifications done by White Protestants to continually reinforce their power within society and therefore, higher

education. Students of minoritized religions feel these ramifications in their everyday lives and on college campuses.

University students are more religiously diverse than they have ever been (Bryant, 2006), and non-Christian students continue to experience religious oppression (Edwards, 2017a; Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020). Religious identity is just as meaningful for student development as racial identity and gender identity (Small & Bowman, 2012), however scholars researching student development and professionals working with students of minoritized religions have paid very little attention to aiding students in their religious development (Patton et al., 2016). For example, the foundational student development theory handbook *Student Development in College: Theory Research and Practice* (Patton et al., 2016) extensively cites work from Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000), which is decades old and does not address the current issues facing students of minoritized religions today. It also cites the work of Astin and colleagues (2011) which addresses spirituality but does not address the systems of power that maintain Christian hegemony.

For this dissertation, I have chosen to use the phrase "students of minoritized religions" to describe research participants. Harper (2012) explains the word 'minoritized' is intentionally used in his research instead of 'minority' because of the social constructions that exist within the norms in the United States. While a person's religious identity may not be a quantifiable minority in their geographic or regional area, Christian hegemony has actively minoritized all religious, secular, and spiritual identities (RSSI) that are non-Christian (Edwards, 2018; Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020). Students of minoritized religions might identify with any of the following religions: Baha'i, Buddhism, Daoism, Hinduism, Indigenous traditions, Islam, Sikhism, Jainism, Judaism,

Pagan, or others. These are religious identities that do not benefit from Christian privilege (Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020), meaning that a university may not offer religious services to them, acknowledgement of their religious holidays, access to religious leaders, clubs or student organizations, or any recognition of their religion on campus.

Problem of Practice

Many factors contribute to the current problem of practice. Generally speaking, higher education professionals, both faculty and staff, do not know how to support students of minoritized religions. Second, many scholars ignore the cultural backgrounds of students of minoritized religions and use phrases such as "spirituality" and "ecumenical worldview" to erase religious identities. Lastly, this has a negative impact on developing policies and support for students of minoritized religions.

There are several concerns related to students of minoritized religions' well-being and success on college campuses. Faculty and staff do not know how to talk about religion, faith, or spirituality and consequently, do not know how to support students of minoritized religions (Kocet & Stewart, 2011). Christianity is the dominant religion in the United States, so it is assumed that people know the stories and teachings of Christianity, and therefore do not have to learn about other religious identities, their stories, and their teachings (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015; Joshi, 2020; Small 2020).

Many young people who practice a sect of mainline Protestantism, especially those with other marginalized identities, are learning about the role Christianity has in oppressive historical events such as slavery, The Trail of Tears, misogyny, and anti-LGBTQ policies (Joshi, 2020). As a result, many students raised with Christian or

Protestant religious identities are distancing themselves from those views and identifying as spiritual, Atheist, or Agnostic (Edwards, 2018). Because more undergraduate students are identifying as "spiritual", scholars are following the trend and moving away from examining specific religious identities to researching "ecumenical worldview" (Astin et al., 2011; Mayhew & Bryant, 2013). As a result, students of minoritized religions are not being specifically studied as often because scholars are using "spirituality" (Astin et al., 2011) and "ecumenical worldview" (Mayhew & Bryant, 2013) to discuss all religious identities.

This is a problem because some scholars are erasing religious identities for all-encompassing phrases that are intended to be inclusive (Astin et al., 2011; Mayhew & Bryant, 2013) but erase minoritized identities (Small, 2020). Scholarship about religious, secular, and spiritual students should be critical in order to accept the role of Christian hegemony within American higher education (Small, 2020). These two concerns point to a third concern. Higher education professionals are ignorant about non-Christian religious beliefs, rituals, and practices and do not know how to support non-Christian religious identities (Kocet & Stewart, 2011). This section identifies the importance of personal growth and development in religion, how students of minoritized religions struggle with their identities, and the gap in the literature.

A Need for Space and Dialogue

As students move through their college experience, they are less likely to engage in religious actions (Hartley, 2004; Rennick et al., 2013). Students living on campus are less likely to attend church services regularly compared to students who live with their parents and commute to campus (Hartley, 2004). Koenig (2015) identified that students'

belief in God also decreases during their collegiate years. However, students increasingly identify with being spiritual and express a desire to explore their spirituality (Astin et al., 2011; Hartley, 2004; Koenig, 2015; Rennick et al., 2013). Universities created interfaith dialogue groups to serve as a way for students to discuss their spirituality, but these discussions often fail to address the ways Christian hegemony exists on campus (Edwards, 2017a).

Most college undergraduates consider themselves spiritual beings, and religious beliefs help people manage multiple stressors (Reymann et al., 2015). However, that is not the case for students of minoritized religions in most college settings (Bowman & Small, 2010; Joshi, 2020). Students of minoritized religions experience a decrease in their religious engagement during their undergraduate years. Scholars Bowman and Small (2010, 2013) have used the CIRP Freshman Survey administered to 112,232 first-year students in the fall of 2004 and found that students practicing minoritized religions do not feel as strong of a sense of belonging to their institutions as Christian students. While they are not as engaged as Christian students, they seem to accept their minoritized status. Students of minoritized religions usually experience their minoritized status prior to college (Bowman & Small, 2013), and they are most likely to have the greatest gains in religious support at secular institutions where they are free to explore their options if the resources are available (Bowman & Small, 2010). A lack of respect for non-Christian religious identities and the opportunity to discuss them on campus leads many students of minoritized religions to feel like they do not belong (Blumenfeld, 2006).

Students need to feel like people care about all parts of their identities, including their religious identity, to be successful. Reymann and colleagues (2015) stated that

students connected to God or the divine feel they have a greater purpose in life. Bryant and colleagues (2003) report that students want to be spiritual regardless of declared religious identity, and that "religious participation and spirituality tended to predict one another," (p. 738). Institutions can improve religious campus climate by encouraging faculty and administrators to talk about religion with students, and students should have a place to practice religion (Small & Bowman, 2012). Bryant and colleagues (2003) encourage administrators to provide opportunities for students to connect and have discussions about religion and spirituality. Bowman and Small (2010) state administrators need to create spaces on campus for students to practice religious rituals, and their research indicates that unless universities invest in developing spaces for students of minoritized religions to engage in religious or spiritual development, they likely will not. While these research recommendations were made over a decade ago, these problems persist on college campuses today (Joshi, 2020; Neilsen & Small, 2019).

Gap in Literature

Only in the past 30 years have scholars published works documenting the pervasiveness of Christian hegemony in American higher education (Blumenfeld, 2006; Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020), but there is still a lot of work to be done in understanding the impact Christian hegemony has on students of minoritized religions and their sense of belonging (Small, 2020; Strayhorn, 2012). Scholars have conducted minimal research on how students make meaning of their minoritized religious identity within the context of Christian privilege (Small, 2020). Many quantitative studies examined how campus climate impacts well-being (Bowman & Small, 2012), the impacts of campus climate on "worldview commitment" (Mayhew & Bryant, 2013), and how students define their

spiritual and religious qualities (Astin et al., 2011). However, what remains to be explored is the qualitative aspect of if and how students of minoritized religions experience Christian hegemony on their campus and find belonging on campus (Small, 2020). Empirical evidence rarely examines how campus policies, resources, and programs influence students of minoritized religions sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). Quantitative research cannot explain how students make meaning of their religious identity and sense of belonging on their campus (Small & Bowman, 2012) because it lacks context and descriptive data (Merriam, 2009). Small (2020) argues that all research done related to religious, spiritual, and secular students should be done from a critical religious pluralism lens to "consider dynamics of power, privilege, marginalization, and oppression" (p. 79) related to Christian hegemony. This gap in the literature makes way for the purpose and research question for this dissertation.

Purpose and Research Question

Christian hegemony prevents students of minoritized religions from feeling connected to their university because there are limited resources for non-Christian religions on campus (Small, 2020). The purpose of this dissertation is twofold. First, I want to highlight how invasive Christian hegemony is at so-called secular institutions. Secondly, the purpose is to analyze how students of minoritized religions cultivate sense of belonging within a campus environment that upholds Christian hegemony. The power structure that will be explored throughout this study is Christian hegemony, which is generally defined as the system that allows Christians to "have more power than all minority religions combined on campus, which can create contexts where religious minorities are vulnerable to oppression and discrimination," (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015, p.

174). The dissertation's title was born out of this idea. The institution that was analyzed in this case study is certainly not the worst place to be for students of minoritized religions. However, because of Christian hegemony, the students interviewed in this research project conveyed their willingness to accept the bare minimum of support for their religious identity, explaining how it is worse at so many other colleges and universities. The goal of this research is to highlight inequities within higher education in order to make systemic change.

Students of minoritized religions need to have their voices amplified to understand how they are affected by Christian hegemony. This dissertation investigates how students of minoritized religions develop a sense of belonging on campus. When higher education administrators who have a better understanding of how students of minoritized religions experience Christian hegemony, they can more effectively support students and dismantle policies and practices that uphold Christian privilege. The research question states: *In what ways does Christian hegemony influence sense of belonging for students of minoritized religions on a college campus?*

The role of community is important for students of minoritized religions because it allows them to find others with similar experiences (Bryant & Astin, 2008; Parks, 2000). This research sought to understand the challenges students of minoritized religions experience in cultivating a sense of belonging and identify the barriers that prevent students of minoritized religions from feeling like they are part of the greater campus community. Students who come from religiously diverse areas or countries with dominant religions other than Christianity experience their university in different ways.

Answers to this research question may have a significant impact on how higher education professionals and scholars understand students of minoritized religions.

Significance

This dissertation is valuable for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers at institutions. Students of minoritized religions are a growing population (Bryant, 2006), and it is imperative for all persons working in higher education to support identity development and sense of belonging for marginalized students. Students of minoritized religions need their religious identities to be acknowledged and recognized to include their socio-cultural religious upbringing and their current religious beliefs (Edwards, 2018).

Scholarly literature will benefit from this research because it expands on two existing theories about marginalized students. First, the research will utilize Small's (2020) Critical Religious Pluralism Theory (CRPT) to understand how the campus environment and students of minoritized religions have been influenced by Christian hegemony. The CRPT lens analyzed the policies and practices on campus, and students reflected on their lived experiences within the context of Christian privilege. Secondly, this research expanded upon Strayhorn's (2012) Sense of Belonging Model. Strayhorn (2012) discusses the importance of sense of belonging for students who have marginalized identities. However, most of Strayhorn's (2012) work focuses on race and sexual orientation, giving little attention to marginalized religious identities. Lastly, this research attempted to understand how the experiences of students of minoritized religions relate to their religious identity and how the interaction with structures of Christian

hegemony enhanced or impeded their sense of belonging. Scholars will be able to think differently about students of minoritized religions outside the context of spirituality and ecumenical worldview.

Student affairs practitioners, faculty, and administrators benefit from this research because it provides detailed insight into the experiences and perspectives of students of minoritized religions so they might develop means for supporting them. Practitioners can assess campus programs and resources that are intended to support students of minoritized religions and encourage new and more inclusive programming. The data also highlights specific programs and policies that are rooted in Christian hegemony so that practitioners may create more inclusive programs and policies. Further, practitioners can advocate for policy and decision-making changes in higher organizational structures.

This research is meaningful because it encourages administrators to reevaluate organizational administration, including policies that support religious, secular, and spiritual students. This research can be used to create more inclusive trainings and resources for faculty and staff to assist them in recognizing Christian privilege and supporting students of minoritized religions. Higher education institutions can increase the funding for programs and resources needed to support students of minoritized religions and assessing student needs can inform appropriate budget allocations. Presidents and their cabinet members can examine ways that Christian hegemony impacts students of minoritized religions on campus at a policy level, and it may encourage changes in policies and procedures and the development of new jobs to support marginalized students.

Students of minoritized religions are an asset to the student body population and by validating them, they can better cultivate a sense of belonging. When students feel like they belong, they are more likely to be retained and graduate (Strayhorn, 2012). Dismantling systems of oppression within university systems is an important part of building inclusive communities for all students, regardless of their religious identity (Small, 2020). Therefore, the research expands upon existing theories, provides evidence for policy change, and aids practitioners in supporting students of minoritized religions.

Theoretical Framework

Students of minoritized religions must navigate how to cultivate a sense of belonging in an environment dominated by Christianity. This dissertation's phenomena include sense of belonging and Christian hegemony. Two theories are used to understand these phenomena and analyze the collected data. Small's (2020) Critical Religious Pluralism Theory (CRPT) was used to analyze Christian hegemony and make recommendations for future change, and Strayhorn's (2012) Sense of Belonging Model was used to analyze how students of minoritized religions cultivate a sense of belonging amidst Christian hegemony.

Critical Religious Pluralism Theory (Small, 2020) uses seven tenets to critically evaluate how an institution adheres to Christian dominance and how individuals at the institution do or do not support religious pluralism. CRPT helped to answer the research question because it used a critical lens to examine the campus culture around Christian hegemony. While CRPT is a new theory, it was selected because the theory uses a critical

epistemology to analyze religious identity and acknowledges the socio-cultural norms that allow Christians to have power and privilege over non-Christians (Small, 2020).

Strayhorn's (2012) Sense of Belonging Model uses seven core elements to describe the importance of sense of belonging, barriers to belonging, and how students can find belonging. Strayhorn (2012) argues that sense of belonging is essential for a student's success at their institution, and this claim validates the importance of ensuring that students' identities are respected and acknowledged on the college campus. Strayhorn's (2012) definition of sense of belonging analyzed the data collected in order to answer the research question. This theory was selected because it uses a critical epistemology to make meaning of the concept 'sense of belonging' and aligns with the epistemological approach to this dissertation (Strayhorn, 2012). Both theories and their components will be explained further in Chapter 2.

Summary of Methods

I believe reality is constructed and understood through socio-cultural power structures that marginalize and minoritize people with oppressed identities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 2009; Stake 2005). As a result, a critical epistemology is used to make meaning of the literature related to students of minoritized religions and the data collected regarding their experiences. The specific method of collection is a critical instrumental case study (Stake, 2005). I chose a critical instrumental case study so that I could analyze the power structure of Christian hegemony and get a full picture of the environment that students of minoritized religions are experiencing.

Data collection methods included a document analysis, student interviews, and staff interviews (Merriam, 2009). The documents analyzed include the university website, policies, newspaper articles, and program information related to religious identity. This data provided context for preliminary interview questions. Semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 2009) were used to ask students of minoritized religions about their experiences on campus regarding their religious identities. They were also used to interview higher education professionals who support students of minoritized religions. Interviews occurred over Zoom due to the impact of COVID-19 (Lobe et al., 2020). COVID-19 changed the way I was able to collect data. I was not able to interact face-to-face with research participants or conduct observations because data collection took place in a virtual environment (Lobe et al., 2020). All data was stored in multiple places under password protection to ensure confidentiality and protect research participants (Lobe et al., Merriam, 2009).

Data analysis took place simultaneously to data collection because the analysis informed how more data would be collected (Merriam, 2009). Data was coded and then sorted into overall themes (Merriam, 2009). A greater explanation about limitations and delimitations, data collection, and data analysis can be found in Chapter 3.

Positionality

My positionality impacts the way I approach this research because I identify with a minoritized religion. I was raised Pagan and Unitarian Universalist (UU), attended a UU church weekly, and participated in Pagan rituals. There are seven basic principles of Unitarian Universalism that have shaped my worldview. For example, the third principle

states acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth, and the fourth principle invites people to explore a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. I also regularly practice my Earth-based faith, which encourages me to believe in the interconnectedness of all living beings. These principles and practices guide me in my life and in my passion to pursue this research.

Because I was not raised Christian and do not know Christian values and teachings, I was able to connect with my research participants which aided in my trustworthiness (Merriam, 2009). I have personal experiences with Christian hegemony, and I could relate to those experiences when they showed up in the research. I was five years old when I was first told that I was going to hell, and I often do not disclose my religious identity as Pagan because of the stigma attached to it.

I am also a White woman, and this influences the way I approach my research. I was raised in a southern rural community that taught me values of White cultural dominance. While I have done personal reflective work to identify and dismantle these values instilled in me, I recognize I will always know, understand, and carry White cultural values, just as I will continue to benefit from White privilege. One of these privileges is the ability to conceal my religious identity. Because I am White, others assume that I am Christian, as if the two identities were synonymous. White Christians developed this narrative and White Christian supremacy perpetuates it. I believe my identities influence the purpose of my research and inform the reader of my perspective.

The assumptions that are present in this dissertation are influenced by my identities and worldview. For the purposes of this dissertation, the reader should assume that White Christian hegemony is a system of power that oppresses students of

minoritized religions. White Christian hegemony is present on American college campuses, and it impacts the lived experiences of non-Christians, especially people of color who are not Christian. The reader should also assume that students' of minoritized religions sense of belonging is affected by White Christian hegemony, either from campus or socio-cultural norms. Lastly, the reader should assume that sense of belonging is a basic human need (Strayhorn, 2012). Higher education professionals must improve the lived experiences of students of minoritized religions. When students feel supported and respected, they are more likely to be retained and graduate (Strayhorn, 2012). More information about positionality and trustworthiness can be found in Chapter 3. The next section of this introduction will define important terminology used throughout this dissertation.

Definitions

Religion, faith, belief, and spirituality are often used interchangeably although their differences are many. To those unfamiliar with critical religious scholarship, these differences may seem negligible, but to critical religious scholars, the differences are significant. There is danger in using these words as synonyms because power structures within current literature perpetuate confusion about critical religious scholarship and maintain the status quo.

Religion

There are multiple definitions for religion, but a critical understanding of religion will be applied to this dissertation. Edwards (2018) describes the needs for a functionalist definition for religion to explain the role it plays in our society. Mutakabbir and Nuriddin

(2016) define the social functions of religion as threefold: to provide meaning and purpose in life, a "social cohesion and sense of belonging" (p. 2), and a way to control people to support systems of authority, such as the government. Defining religion solely based on theistic beliefs is dangerous because those definitions are typically rooted in a Christian understanding (Edwards, 2018). Scholars must acknowledge that while religion may be a personal identity (Patton et al., 2016), it also is used as a construct for systemic power and a tool for oppression (Edwards, 2018; Mutakabbir & Nuriddin, 2016). For example, White Protestants used Christianity to "civilize" people who practiced Indigenous religions such as Africans and Native Americans (Joshi, 2020; Jun et al., 2018). Fowler (1981) believes that religion encompasses faith, belief, and spirituality, but critical scholars understand these concepts as nuanced and existing within their own definitions (Edwards, 2018; Small, 2020).

Faith

Fowler (1981) has historically been understood as the expert in faith development, and states that faith is connected to the values that guide our lives. His exact words are "faith is a person or group's way of moving into the forcefield of life," (p. 4). Faith is the action or expression of religion or self; it is a verb or something one does (Fower, 1981). Parks (2000) states faith is about comprehensive meaning-making that occurs when human beings "compose a sense of the ultimate character of reality and then stake [one's life] on that sense of things," (p. 20). It is the dynamic act of "composing and being composed," (Parks, 2000, p. 20) constantly working on one's understanding of the self and living within that narrative. Faith leads to an ultimate truth, or the act of constructing such a thing (Parks, 2000). Both Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000) argue that faith exists

outside of religious identity, and the conflation of the concepts is a misrepresentation of the role faith serves in one's life. For the purpose of this dissertation, faith exists within the adherence to one's religious teachings. An individual's faith "is the ongoing dialogue between the self and world, between community and lived reality," (Parks, 2000, p. 23).

Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000) agree that faith is separate from belief, although often conflated. Faith is connected to the values that guide one's life and leads them to action. Faith is the center of one's moral code and deeply personal (Fowler, 1981). A person may have a range of beliefs, but all of them do not dictate the way one makes life decisions (Fowler, 1981). Faith is the act of one's beliefs (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2000). Fowler (1981) states "belief may be one of the ways faith expresses itself," (p. 11). Understanding this distinction is critical to recognizing the nuance of language around religiousness. "Faith ... involves vision," (Fowler, 1981, p. 11) meaning that it requires give and take amongst people and their environment. Spirituality, however, is more abstract.

Spirituality

Spirituality is the most nebulous concept within this grouping. Patton and colleagues (2016) define spirituality as individualized and personalized, stating it may be related to a religious tradition or disaffiliated from a religious tradition. Secular students may or may not identify with being a spiritual person (Patton et al., 2016). Spirituality includes experiences that are abstract such as "intuition, inspiration, creativity, and sense of connectedness to others and the world," (Astin et al., 2011, p. 40) and a multidimensional concept that is difficult to measure (Astin et al., 2011).

The definition for spirituality is so far from religion that it cannot be used to understand students of minoritized religions (Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2013). Because any student can identify with being a spiritual person, to group students of minoritized religions with Protestant students as being "spiritual" erases the oppressive system of Christian hegemony that ensures that students of minoritized religions have different experiences on campus. Therefore, "spirituality" will not be used to make meaning of the data collected throughout this critical instrumental case study.

Christian Hegemony

Christian hegemony is simply "society's unacknowledged and/or unconscious adherence to a dominant worldview," (Joshi, 2020, p. 3). Hegemony indicates the dominance and power of one idea over another, and Christianity is the dominant religious identity in the United States and has societal power (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015). In the United States, Christian practices, symbols, beliefs, and values are understood as normal and intrinsic to the cultural fabric of America (Adams & Joshi, 2013; Joshi, 2020). Christian hegemony shows up in the myths about United States culture such as secularism, freedom of religion for all, and separation of church and state. Many people who practice a minoritized religion fear persecution for their religious beliefs (Adams & Joshi, 2013). For example, Muslims are depicted as terrorists and extremists, and Muslim students do not want to be seen engaging in prayer on campus (Joshi, 2020). Jewish communities still face synagogue bombings, and Jewish students are targeted with swastikas and hateful language (Joshi, 2020). Laws and policies are influenced by Christian practices and understandings (Adams & Joshi, 2013), including *Edwards v. Aguillard*, 482 U.S. 578 (Powell, 1986), a Supreme Court case regarding teaching

creationism theory alongside the theory of evolution in Louisiana public schools. The Court ruled it unconstitutional to make such a requirement, however the fact that the case was seen before the Supreme Court is an example of Christian hegemony (Adams & Joshi, 2013; Joshi, 2020). A case regarding the teaching of Indigenous world origin stories as scientific fact would not have been entertained, because Indigenous peoples of North America are seen as exotic, mythical, and historic, and their religious beliefs are treated with a similar approach (Joshi, 2020). Christian supremacy, Christian normativity, and Christian privilege exist in the United States because of Christian hegemony (Joshi, 2020).

Christian Supremacy

Christian supremacy differs from Christian hegemony in one specific way: supremacy implies superiority. The dominance and systems of power acquired through Christian hegemony leads to Christian supremacy because systems of power allow the oppressors to believe they are superior (Joshi, 2020; Jun et al., 2018). Christian supremacy is the notion that Christians, especially Protestants, have more power over all religious, secular, and spiritual identities (Small, 2020). To take this concept a step further, White Christian supremacy is the idea that the only correct way to practice Christianity is the White way (Joshi, 2020). White Protestants have colonized most of the world, and in the process of "civilizing" non-Christian people of color with Jesus, they have dictated how to "properly" practice Christianity (Jun et al., 2018). Religion and cultural are connected (Edwards, 2018), therefore it stands to reason that the people impacted by colonization would find ways to incorporate their culture into their practice of Christianity (Jun et al., 2018). However, White cultural norms often dictate what is

considered “acceptable” and “unacceptable” ways to practice Christianity (Jun et al., 2018). Western ideologies can be found in music, the depiction of a White Jesus, and acceptable forms of prayer. These examples are clear visuals to identify White Christian supremacy (Jun et al., 2018). Because Christian supremacy has so much power, its dominance is viewed as normal and expected in United States culture (Joshi, 2020; Jun et al., 2018).

Christian Normativity

Joshi (2020) explains that Christian normativity “makes Christian values intrinsic to [the United States] national identity, conveys the states of truth and rightness on Christian culture, and makes Christian language and metaphors and their underlying theology the national standard,” (p.3). Christianity is seen as expected and normal, while any other religious imagery is seen as “exotic or illegitimate,” (Joshi, 2020, p. 3). It is because of Christian normativity that the phrase “separation of church and state” exists (Adams & Joshi, 2013), as opposed to “separation of religion and state” or “separation of worship and state”. Christian normativity asks, “Is Diwali like the Hindu Christmas?” (Chander, 2013) instead of “What does the holiday Diwali celebrate?” When Christianity is centered as the status quo, every other religious identity and their practices, faiths, and beliefs get cast as “other” (Joshi, 2020). In this way, Christian normativity allows for the perpetuation of Christian privilege.

Christian Privilege

Christian privilege is so ingrained in United States culture, it is often unrecognized and seen as normal (Joshi, 2020). It can be defined as the conscious and

unconscious advantages that show up in academic calendars, policies, chapels on campus, dining hall options, and lack of physical space to practice one's religion on campus (Mutakabbir & Nuriddin, 2016). Christian privilege is "experienced at the individual level," (Joshi, 2020, p. 2), and Christian students have more social power on campus than students of minoritized religions (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015). Next, the theoretical term "sense of belonging" will be defined.

Sense of Belonging

Strayhorn (2012) states sense of belonging refers to a feeling of mattering to others in a community or group. It allows for a student to be seen as their authentic self and a place where a student can be vulnerable. As a part of a group, they are equally invested in the other members as members are invested in them. Sense of belonging does not have to refer to a tangible community but can be understood as a student knowing their identities are valid, accepted, and valued. The opposite of belonging is alienation (Strayhorn, 2012). Sense of belonging is a concept to keep in mind in order to make sense of how the research findings may enhance or hinder how respected and valued students of minoritized religions may feel on campus.

Conclusion

The most important takeaway from this chapter is the purpose of this research. The purpose of this research is to understand how students of minoritized religions cultivate sense of belonging in an environment dominated by Christian hegemony. By using a critical instrumental case study, the data answered the proposed research question: *In what ways does Christian hegemony influence sense of belonging for*

students of minoritized religions on a college campus? This research fills a gap in the current literature about critical religious scholarship because it specifically centered how students of minoritized religions experience sense of belonging on their college campus (Small, 2020; Strayhorn, 2012). Because White Christian hegemony has the power to construct the narrative around religious identity and its subsequent values, this specific research is timely in reconstructing that narrative and dispelling stereotypes about students who do not identify with a Christian religion. By committing to religious equity on college campuses, university professionals can build more inclusive communities for all students (Blumenfeld, 2006; Edwards, 2018; Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020).

The second chapter of this dissertation will serve as a literature review. I provide a brief history of American higher education and explain the functionality of Christianity in higher education. Next, I examine the literature depicting the current state of religious pluralism and the common experiences of students of minoritized religions. The relationship between White supremacy and Christian hegemony is discussed. Lastly, the chapter describes Small's (2020) Critical Religious Pluralism Theory and Strayhorn's (2012) Sense of Belonging Model, how they apply to the research question, and how they will be used to analyze the data.

Chapter 3 of this dissertation provides an in-depth description of the methodology used to conduct this research. It provides an overview of the critical paradigm and a critical case study. I describe the data collection, data analysis, and data storage processes. Specific instructions about the timeline, ethical treatment of human participants, and research procedures are included in this chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The United States has plenty of myths about religion (Joshi, 2020). One of these myths is the importance of religious freedom. Religious freedom allowed for early colonizers to spread Protestant sects of Christianity, and while people disagreed about the way to practice Christianity, they were all Christians at the end of the day. To practice another religion outside of Protestantism was seen as savage, sacrilegious, or exotic (Joshi, 2020). As a result, people who did not practice Christianity experienced discrimination, prejudice, and sometimes legal trouble (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015; Joshi, 2020). These myths about religion persist today and show up in multiple ways on college campuses.

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the current literature about students of minoritized religions and to understand where the gap in the research lies. The research focuses on the impacts of Christian hegemony, the experiences of students of minoritized religions, and how universities are attempting to be more inclusive of students who practice marginalized religions. The way students of minoritized religions interact with their campus environment affects their personal growth and academic success (Bowman et al., 2015). Policies, practices, and attitudes towards students of minoritized religions influence their ability to cultivate a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). The goal of this literature review is to highlight the power structures within campus environments that maintain Christian hegemony and acknowledge the plurality of religious identities on United States' college campuses. The research cited in this literature review intends to align with the following research question: *In what ways does Christian hegemony influence sense of belonging for students of minoritized religions on a college campus?*

The reader will learn about the historical context of religion and White Christian hegemony in higher education in the United States. Christian hegemony, the historical impacts of Christian privilege, and religious oppression are some of the common experiences of students of minoritized religions. Other common experiences of students of minoritized religions include feeling like an outsider, the importance of community, and inhospitable campus climates. Universities are attempting to create programs to engage students of minoritized religions, which often do not address the structural power dynamics supporting Christian hegemony. The literature review analyzes how the experiences of students of minoritized religions on their college campuses influence their sense of belonging within the context of Christian hegemony.

I would like to note how scarce literature is on these topics. Only a handful of scholars are using a critical epistemology to understand White Christian hegemony's role in higher education, the experiences of students of minoritized religions, and the history of higher education. The reader may notice I lean heavily on a few authors for some of the sections in this literature review. The reason for this is twofold. First, there are few scholars to cite, so when I could find supporting evidence, I reported it. Second, I believe the direction of research should be to use a critical approach to White Christian hegemony, and current research is focused on spirituality and ecumenical worldview (Astin et al., 2011; Mayhew & Bryant, 2013). This is not the focus of my research because it erases the nuance within minoritized religions. Additionally, most of the research is not constructed from a critical epistemology. This research needs to focus on the power structures within religious identity to address the greater systemic issues that students of minoritized religions are facing. The focus of this literature review is not on

Christian normativity because that is clearly embedded in the research that currently exists. The focus of this literature review is to highlight how White Christian hegemony is present on campuses, in policies, and in the lived experiences of students of minoritized religions.

Historical Context

Early American institutions of higher education were built on Christian values (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Rudolph, 1990; Schmalzbauer & Mahoney, 2018; Thelin, 2011), as Christianity is fundamental to the colonization of North America (Jun et al., 2018). The role of religion in higher education has waxed and waned throughout the history of the United States, and it is influenced by social activism, politics, and international conflicts (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Schmalzbauer & Mahoney, 2018). Jacobsen and Jacobsen (2012) describe three eras of religion in higher education: the Protestant era, the privatization era, and the pluriform era. Without doubt, these eras capture the social norms of their time and reflect general opinions of the people in power.

To better understand these three eras in higher education history, it is important to recognize that Christian hegemony and White supremacy are threads of the same tapestry. They are so interconnected that distinguishing one from another might be impossible to discern. White Christians intentionally created this relationship, using the Bible to excuse the violence of war, the enslavement of Africans, and the epistemicide of Native Americans (Joshi, 2020; Jun et al., 2018). Epistemicide is defined as the "mass destruction and murder of knowledge," (Jun et al., 2018, p. 59). This concept goes beyond book burning. Epistemicide is about destroying a way of orienting ourselves to a

way of knowing and making sense of knowledge. Understanding the history of higher education and its relationships with Christian hegemony and Whiteness are necessary in understanding how students of minoritized religions are impacted by these systems in current times (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Joshi, 2020; Jun et al., 2018; Schmalzbauer & Mahoney, 2018).

The Protestant Era

The Protestant era begins with the opening of Harvard College in 1636, when the purpose of college in the United States was to teach about religion and train new clergy (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Rudolph, 1990). Harvard was the first of many colleges built in the Protestant era. The significant growth of higher education institutions was due to Protestant religious sects building their own colleges in their communities (Rudolph, 1990; Thelin, 2011). During this time in the United States, religion meant Protestant, and "Protestantism defined the ethos of the nation as a whole," (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012, p. 17). Simultaneously, as White theologians and college founders were developing these institutions, they were incorporating a framework for White Christian privilege. Whiteness permeated Protestant Christianity to cultivate superiority over non-Christians and Black and Indigenous people of color (Blumenfeld, 2006; Joshi, 2020). This is a cornerstone of American higher education and was used to justify the exclusion of women, people of color, and non-Protestants from higher education (Jun et al., 2018). Values began to shift as a result of the American Civil War (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012).

American higher education continued to be influenced by White Christian hegemony throughout the American Civil War but took on new values after the emancipation (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). Southerners used Protestantism to justify the

purpose of the war for states' rights and uphold the myth that Confederate soldiers did not die in vain because they were fighting for a just cause. Northerners used Protestantism to rally Americans around its values in hopes of building a unified nation. After the United States passed the 13 and 14 Amendments to the constitution, White Christians continued to lean on Biblical scripture and language from pastors to support Jim Crow segregation, lynching, and the exclusion of non-White and non-Protestant immigrants (Joshi, 2020; Jun et al., 2018). However, there was a turning point in education after the Civil War because formerly enslaved Black Americans and White women were given access to higher education for the first time (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). It also paved a narrative that allowed Protestant educators to, in their opinion, do good by saving people of color, especially Black and Indigenous people, from damnation (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012).

Multiple values systems were being created and intertwined during this time. The intersection of White Christian dominance paved the way for Christian values to be claimed as American values, cloaking the United States under the guise of religious neutrality (Joshi, 2020). Scientific racism explained who was considered "civilized", a code word used to identify those practicing Christianity and buying in to capitalism (Jun et al., 2018). The Morill Land Grant Act of 1862 put value on agriculture and mechanical education (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Rudolph, 1990; Thelin, 2011). While institutions were still inherently Protestant and required students to attend religious services, agriculture and mechanical education led to the Industrial Revolution which perpetuated capitalism (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Rudolph, 1990; Thelin, 2011). These values culminated in a succinct message: to be non-Christian is to be un-American, and the

experience of being non-White and non-Christian is seen as a threat to American values and morality (Joshi; 2020; Jun et al., 2018).

Protestantism values the belief that faith is voluntary and individualized (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). This is a clever way to shift the responsibility of religious privilege from the system of White Christian supremacy to the individual. Protestants argued that the purpose of a Protestant education was to advance society, do good for communities, and make graduates better people (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). This rhetoric is still central to the values put on graduates of the American higher education system, and therefore allows mainline Protestant Christianity to remain in control and maintain a system of Christian hegemony (Joshi, 2020). The Privatization era and influx of immigrants indicates a decline in that power.

The Privatization Era

Civil religion is one of the most important values of the Privatization era. Civil religion is a concept that ignores violent events done in the name of Christianity to oppress people of color (Joshi, 2020). It was used to perpetuate patriotism and devolved into ethnocentrism and nationalism by claiming the United States as a morally pure Christian country (Jun et al., 2018). The Privatization era began in the early 1900s and is marked by a time when Americans began to see religion as a personal matter (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). Christian beliefs were no longer taught in higher education. Education was sanitized because it did not connect historical events such as slavery, colonization, and Manifest Destiny to Christianity (Joshi, 2020; Jun et al., 2018). Universities adopted a German educational model that focused on research and discovery, which also led to privatization. Institutions' presidents shifted from being clergymen to businessmen, and

this became the standard for American higher education (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). As colleges received increased federal funding, they felt pressure to adhere to the "separation of church and state" and shed their religious affiliation (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015). As a result, colleges and universities attempted to become more secular in their iconography, curriculum, and research (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015), and religious identities became more private and individual, aligning with Protestant values and civil religion (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Joshi, 2020). At the same time, the United States was experiencing an influx of immigrants from eastern Europe and East Asia.

An increase of immigrants resulted in a growing religious diversity in the United States (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Schmalzbauer & Mahoney, 2018). Universities experienced a growth in Catholic and Jewish students, and because religion was viewed as a private matter, universities developed covert ways of excluding non-Protestants. Student applications required headshots so admissions counselors could determine if an applicant looked Jewish, a racial group viewed as non-White (Brodkin, 2009). Students had to speak non-accented English to earn admittance, and universities put quotas on the number of Catholic and Jewish students they admitted (Brodkin, 2009; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Schmalzbauer & Mahoney, 2018). Furthermore, fundamentalist Protestants found an unassailable way to keep Jewish and Catholic students out of their universities. They moved their institutions to the suburbs, where the communities were largely upper-middle class, White, Anglo-Saxon Protestants (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Jun et al., 2018). Fundamentalist Protestants could not stop the increased focus on math and science education, so they made the argument that science represents facts and religion represents values and ethics in education (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012).

Maintaining religion as a private matter reinforced Protestant values and civil religion because discussing religion with others was viewed as impolite, and this belief extended onto the college campus (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). The United States was creating a guise of "religious neutrality" by keeping religion behind closed doors (Joshi, 2020). This societal norm was born out of Protestantism, so Christians were able to control the narrative around religious identity. If religion is a "private matter" then universities encouraging discussions around religious diversity would be a taboo. By not talking about religion, universities were able to maintain Protestant values as the status quo (Schmalzbauer & Mahoney, 2018). This stance on "religious neutrality" is a clear example of Christian supremacy in American society and on college campuses (Joshi, 2020; Schmalzbauer & Mahoney, 2018; Small, 2020).

However, as talking about religion became a greater social taboo, Protestants began to experience a loss of power in society because it meant people could not talk about religion at all. Catholic, Jewish, and other Dharmic religions were popping up in communities all over the country. People were beginning to identify the United States as a "Judeo-Christian" country. In 1960, John F. Kennedy was elected the first Catholic president in the United States, and academics and politicians alike agreed that any Judeo-Christian religious identity was acceptable. However, Jewish people in the United States were privileged in rhetoric alone. While they were given access to being considered White (Brodkin, 2009), they were not granted religious privilege (Blumenfeld, 2006; Joshi, 2020). The term "Judeo-Christian" is a smokescreen to imply religious pluralism without doing anything meaningful to promote religious pluralism or dismantle Christian hegemony in society (Blumenfeld, 2006; Brodkin, 2009; Joshi, 2020). As a result,

Protestants needed to find a way to maintain Christian supremacy, so religion became important again in the 1970s when fundamentalist Protestants entered the political arena. Protestant Americans were concerned with the rise of Communism in Western Europe and East Asia and its threat to Christianity (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). Christian hegemony was built by oppressing non-Protestants and people of color and by separating Christianity's role in that oppression (Joshi, 2020). Communist beliefs were a major threat because "civil religion" sanitized United States' history and paved the way for moral superiority (Jun et al., 2018). With religion back on the discussion table and an influx in college admissions, universities saw heightened diversity, and higher education entered the Pluriform era.

The Pluriform Era

The Pluriform era has changed the way religion is expressed on college campuses. While talking about religion as an academic subject is not taboo, proselytizing in the classroom is viewed as a violation of an individual's right to freedom of religion (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). Now, religious and spiritual identities can be connected to multiple beliefs without someone having to declare a religious identity. Colleges and universities began to reclaim religion through discussions about multiculturalism, a growth of professional studies, and a curricular shift to student-centered learning (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). Long gone are the days of *en loco parentis,* and students come to college to make connections and find a deeper purpose in life. Answers to questions about hope, trust, meaning making, and what really matters are deemed "functionally religious" (Fowler, 1981; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Parks, 2000). University educators, faculty and staff alike, have adjusted the ways they talk about

religion on campus. Now, universities have conversations about spirituality instead of religion, they teach about religion instead of teaching religion itself, and they encourage students to engage in difficult dialogues and ask big questions (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012).

However, this does not mean that colleges and universities have eliminated Christian hegemony from their policies, procedures, and programming (Lang & Yandell, 2019). Acknowledging the presence of religious diversity does not lead to disrupting Christian hegemony on campus. When universities use language articulating their commitment to diversity, instead of a commitment to equity or justice, they minimize the systems of oppression that maintain power imbalances. For example, if a swastika is spray painted in the student union building, a university could react to this act of violence by stating the action does not align with the university's long-held value of diversity. By not addressing the system of power that maintains Christian privilege and not seeking to dismantle it from the institution, this behavior is seen as the action of a "bad person" as opposed to the structure of Christian hegemony on campus. Calling out the individual instead of the system that oppressors can act within is the work of civil religion. Jun and colleagues (2018) write, "One product of American civil religion is a combination of Christian values and White values," (p. 42). When universities respond by dismissing "bad actors", students of minoritized religions feel further alienated by their institutions (Lang & Yandell, 2019).

Not only have universities changed, so have the students who attend them. The number of students who identify as Atheist or Agnostic has increased significantly in recent years (Bowman et al., 2014). Additionally, the college student demographic has

become more racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015). More students come to college identifying as Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Mormon, Unitarian Universalist, Pagan, and others than ever before (Bryant, 2006). However, most higher education institutions do not acknowledge how structures of Christian hegemony affect the experiences of students of minoritized religions (Lang & Yandell, 2019). The statement "Protestantism defined the ethos of the nation as a whole," (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012, p. 17) is still true to this day. Historical events influence the way people view religious identities and rhetoric about non-Christian religious beliefs often reinforce Christian hegemony.

Christian Hegemony

Joshi (2020) defines Christian hegemony as a dominant social norm that people unconsciously adhere to, despite their own personal beliefs. For example, the phrase "In God We Trust" is printed on all United States currency, and people accept this as a norm regardless of their religious beliefs. Christian hegemony and White supremacy are pervasive throughout students of minoritized religions' collegiate experiences (Joshi, 2020). The university calendar aligns with Christian holidays, leaving students of minoritized religions to choose between attending class and paying respect to a holiday (Blumenfeld, 2006; Goren, 2014). Dharmic, Indigenous, and Earth based religions are often seen as exotic, weird, or "lifestyles" as opposed to valid religions (Edwards, 2018; Joshi, 2020). Often these religions are Christianized and Westernized so that White Christians can make sense of the practices (Blumenfeld & Klein, 2009; Chander, 2013; Edwards, 2018; Goren, 2014; Joshi, 2013; Joshi, 2020; Williams, 2013). Finally, a lack of understanding about minoritized religious traditions leads to a lack of university support

(Blumenfeld & Kelin, 2009; Bryant; 2006; Chander, 2013; Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Goren, 2014; Mayhew et al., 2018; Maples et al., 2021; Rockenbach et al., 2017; Sharma & De Alba, 2018). Inexperience in supporting, understanding, and celebrating students of minoritized religions is a byproduct of Christian hegemony.

The Role of White Jesus

Christianity was not created under an ethos of Whiteness; however White Christians coopted the teachings of the Bible in order to gain power for White people (Jun et al., 2018). The purpose of this section is to explain how Christianity became White and the role that White Jesus plays in White Christian hegemony. Christianity embeds ideologies of Whiteness into its structure through systemized oppression including slavery, systemic racism, sexism, and economic pursuits. These oppressive actions maintain White peoples' power. Christianity became White because the Bible was used to defend the violent actions, beliefs, and values committed by White Christians (Joshi, 2020; Jun et al., 2018). Thus, White Christians created the narrative of a White Jesus to maintain a superior version of Christianity (Jun et al., 2018).

"White Jesus is a reflection of a historical scaffolding of dominance in the construction of knowledge, legitimacy, power, and ownership, and its construction has been and is being protected by a sacred canopy – a theological expression of White dominance," (Jun et al., 2018, p. 4). A White Jesus narrative has been baked into the United States' psyche through history, imagery, and storytelling, and these symbolic representations of religious images are socially constructed to maintain White supremacy (Jun et al., 2018). The biblical Jesus of Nazareth was committed to ending economic inequality and withholding judgement of others. This is a very different depiction

compared to a modern-day White Jesus who is used to defend racism and economic free will (Jun et al., 2018). People from Western cultures created this architecture of White Jesus to maintain White dominance (Jun et al., 2018). This has had a lasting impact on the United States' cultural values.

White Jesus influences the way Christian Americans view "the other" (Joshi, 2020). For example, the United States' first naturalization laws incorporate race and religion. Immigrants had to prove they were "White enough" to become a citizen, and religion was often a defining factor in determining if someone was White or not. Every non-Protestant and non-White group who immigrated to the U.S. has experienced some form of oppression. When the number of non-Protestant Americans rose, ethnic differences became less important than racial differences so that Christianity could maintain its majority. As a result of this Whitening of immigrants, many non-Christian religions adopted their traditions, beliefs, and language to sound more Christian, and therefore be less threatening (Joshi, 2020).

Higher education institutions are not void of these cultural values of White Christian dominance (Small, 2020). Many students who attend college also come to campus with these values instilled in them. These values are often unacknowledged because they are viewed as normal (Joshi, 2020; Jun et al., 2018). Christian higher education faculty are unlikely to discuss religion at all, and certainly unlikely to address the racism perpetuated by the Christian church (Jun et al., 2018). These are hard truths for "good people" to acknowledge under the guise of civil religion. It stands to reason students of minoritized religions struggle to navigate an environment that tells them they

do not belong on campus. Christian normativity and White Jesus rely on each other to maintain White Christian hegemony (Joshi, 2020; Jun et al., 2018; Small, 2020).

The Functionality of Christian Hegemony

Understanding the multiple ways Christian hegemony presents itself in society allows one to recognize how higher education institutions often perpetuate it (Blumenfeld, 2006). Blumenfeld (2006) identifies five ways that Christian privilege and oppression are expressed in society. This section will briefly explain each of these strategies and expound upon the hierarchy of Christian privilege within Christian denominations. Christian hegemony is so powerful that even some sects of Christianity experience discrimination (Blumenfeld, 2006).

Christian hegemony is a system of power that allows for the perpetuation of privilege and oppression. The first strategy identified by Blumenfeld (2006) is powerlessness. Christians have power in the United States because colonizers divided land by religious sects and killed Native Americans who were non-Christian. Powerlessness is still a driving force in the U.S. because of the work of White Christian supremacists. The next strategy employed is exploitation. White Christian men used God as the justification for enslaving, killing, and exploiting non-Christian Black and Indigenous people of color. Exploitation serves as the driving factor behind Manifest Destiny as well. The third strategy is marginalization, which was used to deny non-Christians any access to labor forces and prevented non-Christians from contributing meaningfully to society. This lack of representation can lead to low self-esteem and even have non-Christians view themselves through the dominant Christian lens. The next strategy is cultural imperialism. Cultural imperialism allows Christians to control the

beliefs and conversations about non-Christians. Finally, violence is used to destroy the other. The United States has a long history of violence towards non-Christian American immigrants and citizens. Most notably, Muslims have experienced more policing, discrimination, and hate crimes since September 11, 2001 (Blumenfeld, 2006). Demonstrations of these strategies are abundant in the higher education examples that will be shared throughout this literature review. Lastly, understanding how some Christians experience prejudice is important in realizing that Christian hegemony damages all religious, secular, and spiritual identities, including themselves.

Blumenfeld (2006) highlights the hierarchy within Christian sects based on "historical factors, number of practitioners, and degrees of social power" (p. 195). Mainline Protestant Christianity is the group that holds the most power, followed by Catholics. The next group are Black and Latinx Christian churches because they do not benefit from Whiteness. The Christian sects with the least power, putting them at the bottom of the hierarchy, include "Amish, Mennonites, Quakers, Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, adherents to Christian Science, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints," (Blumenfeld, 2006, p. 196). These groups experience prejudice within Christian communities because their beliefs are seen as extreme, abnormal, and outside of American values (Blumenfeld, 2006; Joshi, 2020). However, it is important to remember they still benefit from Christian privilege (Blumenfeld, 2006). The following sections will provide examples of how students of minoritized religions experience Christian hegemony on campus and how it influences their sense of belonging.

Language and Culture

The societal model of Christian normativity assumes that everyone understands Christianity and therefore uses it as a measure to understand other religious holidays, rituals, and beliefs (Joshi, 2020). Blumenfeld (2006) would classify these examples of Christian hegemony as cultural imperialism because Christianity dominates the language around religious practices. Many Christian rituals are rooted in normal American culture (Edwards, 2018), so anything outside of that standard is viewed as "other". To illustrate, Hindu practices are "Christianized" so that Westerners can make sense of their faith traditions (Chander, 2013; Joshi, 2013; Joshi, 2020). For Western Christian students to make sense of Hinduism, Hindu practices are conceptualized in terms such as "mass" and "hymns" highlighting Christian privilege. Hinduism is not a monolith, and there is cultural variety in Hindu practice. Christianizing the faith makes it challenging for Hindu students to explain their beliefs to their peers (Chander, 2013). Often, Hindu students are asked if Diwali, the festival of lights, is 'the Hindu Christmas' (Chander, 2013; Joshi, 2013). Because Hinduism is not an Abrahamic religion, it is seen in opposition to other religions (Chander, 2013). This lack of understanding about Hinduism may make Hindu students feel like their religious beliefs and holidays are weird or obscure and that they must speak on behalf of all Hindu students, indicating they do not belong on campus (Chander, 2013; Joshi, 2020; Riggers-Pehl & Lehman, 2016).

Culture and religion can be viewed inextricably, but some religious groups were pressured by Christian hegemony to convert and assimilate into United States culture (Edwards, 2018). For example, Buddhist Japanese Americans were forced into internment camps in the 1940s, and while this violation of human rights had more to do with the internees being Japanese and less to do with being Buddhist, White Americans

saw these as linked identities (Williams, 2013). White Christians believed that practicing Buddhism was un-American, so many Japanese Americans converted to Christianity and destroyed their Buddhist possessions (Williams, 2013). This example of White Christian hegemony would be categorized as powerlessness by Blumenfeld (2006) because Japanese Buddhists believed they did not have another choice.

Powerlessness and marginalization (Blumenfeld, 2006) shows up on college campuses in several ways. Specifically, Buddhist students are not given space on campus. Buddhist students, while seen favorably, often have their religious beliefs misunderstood or experience ignorance from others about their religious traditions (Maher et al, 2008). Most campuses lack a specific space for Buddhist students to meditate (Mutakabbir & Nuriddin, 2016). Many Buddhist students identify as Asian American, and many articulate their identities are not recognized on their campuses. For instance, holiday celebrations are often done through Asian Student groups because student organizations dedicated to Buddhist students are rare. Further, most faculty and staff lack knowledge about Buddhism (Park & Matias Dizon, 2017). Although, this trend goes beyond Buddhism.

Policy is a cultural cornerstone of each higher education institution. Each university has their own policies they use to create institutional culture and climate, and policies can indicate how inclusive an institution is to students of minoritized religions (Maples et al., 2021). When colleges make accommodations for one religiously affiliated group, it tends to spark debate about other religious minority groups. This often leads to inconsistent treatment of students of minoritized religions, leading to policies favoring Christianity. Maples and colleagues (2021) analyzed religious accommodation policies at

over 40 institutions across the United States. They found that 83% of policies require a student to disclose their accommodation needs to their professor, 47% of institutions required students to declare their religious identity to their professor or their professor could ask for more information, and 33% of institutions requested that students justify their sincerity of their religious identity, such as a note from a religious leader on campus (Maples et al., 2021, p. 281). These results are disturbing, considering Christian students almost never need to ask for the day off to celebrate their holidays and they are never asked to prove how sincere their religious beliefs are to them. Most institutions' policies were not inclusive of religious, secular, and spiritual identities and their language was Christian-centric. When the burden of responsibility for religious accommodations relies on individual students, institutions ignore the power dynamic between professor and student and require a student to choose between their academics and their religious identity (Maples et al., 2021). This is yet another way Christian hegemony shows up on campus. All students of minoritized religions experience Christian hegemony, but it does not always show up in the form of language and culture discrimination.

Hateful Stereotypes and Violence

Students of minoritized religions encounter a lot of violence and hate on their college campuses as exemplified by experiences the Jewish and Muslim students face. Students of other religious beliefs are more likely to have hostility towards Jewish students if they believe the stereotypes about them (Mayhew et al., 2018). Goren (2014) discusses the problematic nature of having to qualify religious leaders by putting a religious identity in front of their title. To call someone a "Jewish Chaplain" calls attention to its otherness, as if to say "Chaplain" automatically implies Christianity. This

serves as another example of cultural imperialism (Blumenfeld, 2006). By doing this, colleges and universities signal to students of minoritized religions that they are outsiders. Hateful stereotypes are not an uncommon feeling for Jewish students, because Jews have been persecuted for centuries. One of the first lessons Jewish students learn about themselves is that their religious identity has been the target of oppression and murder throughout history (Blumenfeld & Klein, 2009). Jewish students continue to endure this hate and violence on their college campuses.

Recent expressions of anti-Semitism on college campuses and resurgence of "Neo-Nazism" in the media make Jews feel unwelcome (Mayhew et al., 2018) and contributes to a lack of sense of belonging (Riggers-Piehl & Lehman, 2016). These examples of Christian hegemony are acts of violence as defined by Blumenfeld (2006). Blumenfeld and Klein (2009) report that many college administrators are ignorant about Jewish practices. Further, Jewish students feel excluded from fully participating in their college experience because their university does not intentionally create ways for them to celebrate their religious holidays, and Jewish students struggle to find community with other Jews (Goren, 2014). Jewish students are not the only marginalized religious group to experience hateful stereotypes and violence.

Islam is the second most practiced religion in the world and the third most practiced religion in the United States of America (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010). Although Islam is the fastest growing religion globally (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010), most Muslim students experience Islamophobia through micro-aggressions, fear, and distrust (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Joshi, 2013; Mir, 2014; Rockenbach et al., 2017). Islamophobia fuels stereotypes and misinformation about Muslim people, and these false narratives trickle

into college communities. Maher and colleagues (2008) found that many college students have negative opinions about Muslim students, which they believe is influenced by stereotypes in the media. Muslim students often report hearing more negative rhetoric about Islam than any other religious minority student group, and this negatively affects their self-view and sense of belonging (Riggers-Piehl & Lehman, 2016). To demonstrate, Muslim women who choose to wear their hijab experience alienation and hostility on campus because their religious identity is easily identifiable (Mir, 2014; Mutakabbir & Nuriddin, 2016). At best, many campuses are host to a chilly and unwelcoming environment for Muslims (Rockenbach et al., 2017), and at worst, campuses are places where students experience violence (Joshi, 2013). Most research about the Muslim student experience was conducted after September 11, 2001 (Mutakabbir & Nuriddin, 2016), and Blumenfeld (2006) would classify these examples of Christian hegemony as marginalization because of the lack of representation of Muslim students on campus. These examples demonstrate tangible cases of Christian hegemony, while other patterns are more covert.

Cryptic White Christian Dominance

White Christian dominance maintains its power by inserting language, beliefs, and values into American vernacular so that it no longer looks or feels like racism and Christian supremacy. For example, most Evangelicals and Christians will articulate an appreciation for Black Americans, but when asked about their individual beliefs, researchers find that White Evangelical Christians hold more racist opinions than they are aware of regarding Confederate symbols, economic inequality, criminal justice systems,

and perceptions of racial discrimination (Jones, 2020). There is a clear cognitive dissonance.

White Evangelical Christians hold onto a belief in “freewill individualism”, which is defined as “the idea that people can create their own destinies, meaning that individuals are responsible for their own outcomes in life,” (Jun et al., 2018, p. 45). This belief aligns with one of Bonilla-Silva's (2010) frames of colorblind ideologies, “abstract liberalism”. “Abstract liberalism” uses “ideas associated with political liberalism and economic liberalism in an abstract matter to explain racial matters,” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, p. 28). Simply put, abstract liberalism states that all individuals have equal opportunities to get ahead in life and the economic freedom of choice. Meritocracy is a tenet of abstract liberalism because it states that all people can be successful in life if they work hard and stay out of trouble. The concept of “freewill individualism” is born out of ideals held by White Evangelical Christians and has transcended into the values of mainline Protestant Christianity (Joshi, 2020; Jun et al.,2018).

These ideas ignore all the socio-cultural factors that influence a person’s ability to get ahead. They erase any notion that systems of power work to continually oppress marginalized and minoritized groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). When “freewill individualism” and “abstract liberalism” are overlapped, it is clear to see how White supremacy and Christian supremacy work in tandem, especially after the Civil Rights Movement (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Jun et al., 2018). The myth of the American Dream is rooted in cryptic White Christian dominance because it puts the blame on the individual when people cannot make enough to get by. This also serves as an example of cultural imperialism because White Christians dictate the narrative about non-Christian people of

color (Blumenfeld, 2006). The narrative is that non-Christian people of color are a threat to the moral fabric of American values (Jones, 2020; Joshi, 2020). Cryptic White Christian dominance upholds these values, creating a culture that inherently tells non-Christian people of color that they do not belong in the United States. If they do not belong in the United States, they certainly do not belong on college campuses (Joshi, 2020).

There are several examples of Christian hegemony in the United States and on American college campuses. While the examples presented above articulate Christian hegemony's existence, they fail to identify how it influences sense of belonging for students of minoritized religions. This dissertation strives to find the relationship between the sense of belonging for students of minoritized religions and their experiences with navigating Christian hegemony on their campuses.

Religious Identity and Holistic Well-Being

Christian hegemony is a product of social power and allows Christianity to be seen as the natural order in the United States (Blumenfeld, 2006). This dominance can translate into academic success for Christians and academic struggle for students of minoritized religions (Bowman & Small, 2012; Bryant & Astin, 2008; Li & Murphy, 2018). Preliminary research indicates that a student's religious affiliation influences success and well-being outcomes. For example, students who practice Christianity are more likely to be supported by their peers, do well academically, and have better mental health than students who practice a minoritized religion (Bowman & Small, 2012; Bryant & Astin, 2008; Li & Murphy, 2018). The students who experience the most positive impact on academic performance practice Christianity. Students who practice Judaism,

Buddhism, or Hinduism are not impacted in their academic performance, while students who practice Islam are most negatively impacted in their performance (Li & Murphy, 2018). However, Kuh and Gonyea (2005) found that when students engage in spiritual activities (defined as worship, meditation, or prayer), it only deepens their commitment to their spirituality. They found no connection to improvement in grades or a deeper learning experience (Kuh & Gonyea, 2005). Researchers have not been able to discern the relationship between academic success and religious identity, but that does not mean that a relationship does not exist.

While academic success is not directly connected to sense of belonging, doing well academically is an important part of retaining and graduating students. Christian students do not have their religious identities misinterpreted, tokenized, or exotified in a classroom environment, but students of minoritized religions are likely to experience this (Edwards, 2017a; Joshi, 2020). These examples illustrate Christian hegemony's strategy of marginalization (Blumenfeld, 2006). Part of the gap in the literature is how students of minoritized religions experience their classroom environments and those experiences influence their sense of belonging. This dissertation aims to fill part of that gap.

Further complicating this relationship, scholars have not come to a central verdict about the holistic well-being of students of minoritized religions and how their lived experiences on campus impact their sense of belonging. Kuh and Gonyea (2005) reported when students "frequently engage in spirituality-enhancing practices" (p. 6), they are more likely to be involved in other facets on campus. This means that religious identity and engagement in faith practices has a positive impact on students' holistic well-being, but Kuh and Gonyea (2005) do not explain why this might be or how this varies amongst

different religious identities. Some researchers have concluded that students who practice minoritized religions are more likely to struggle on college campuses than students who practice Christianity (Bowman & Small, 2012). One of the reasons for this is that Christian students get to choose how actively religious they are without having their identity questioned, whereas students of minoritized religions are stereotyped and more likely to be openly questioned in their devotion by their religious peers. In addition to lower levels of academic success, students of minoritized religions are more likely to encounter poorer physical and mental health (Bryant & Astin, 2008). This lack of attention on the specific experiences of students with different religious identities is a byproduct of Christian hegemony (Blumenfeld, 2006) that clearly has negative impacts on sense of belonging for students of minoritized religions.

Therefore, there has yet to be an answer to understanding the relationship between religious identity and holistic well-being. Researchers know that Christian students have the greatest sense of belonging (Bowman & Small, 2012), which aligns with values of Christian hegemony on college campuses (Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020). Bowman and Small (2012) used data from the Spirituality in Higher Education survey conducted by the Higher Education Research Institution (HERI) and CIRP Freshman Survey. Using a longitudinal sample from a wide range of universities, they were trying to understand the connection between some religious minorities and their self-rated and eudaimonic well-being on campus. Eudaimonic well-being is defined as academic and social self-confidence, cooperativeness, and understanding of others (Bowman & Small, 2012). They found that students of minoritized religions have a decreased sense of well-being, but the correlation is not significant. Bowman and Small (2012) encourage future

researchers to understand the role of campus religious climate in fostering well-being to understand why students of minoritized religions are most likely to struggle with their well-being. In their literature review, Small and Bowman (2012) encouraged future research on how religious identity is internalized and leads to growth, the effects of engaging with religion, and what those engagement practices are. While this dissertation cannot accomplish each goal, the purpose of this research is to understand how Christian hegemony influences how students of minoritized religions engage with their religious practices and its significance to their sense of belonging.

Religious Pluralism

Religious pluralism refers to the diversity of religions on college campuses, and it is important in understanding the nuanced differences between religious beliefs. University student bodies are becoming more religiously diverse (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015; Bryant, 2006; Joshi, 2020; Small 2020), and this pluralism has led to the study of "spirituality" and "ecumenical worldview" as opposed to the unique experiences of students of minoritized religions. These phenomena are not interchangeable. Bryant (2006) distributed the College Students' Beliefs and Values survey to 112,232 first-year students from 236 institutions using the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey. This literature is particularly important because the purpose of this research is to showcase the beliefs and values of non-Christian students without comparing them to Christian students. However, only 17 % of students identified with a non-Christian religion, and only 4% of students identified as Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, or Unitarian Universalist, which will be referred to as religious minorities to explain this research (Bryant, 2006, p.6). While this self-reported survey data clarifies

some of the beliefs and values of religious minorities, it cannot stand alone in understanding students' of minoritized religions theistic traditions or help to contextualize the meaning one can glean from the statistics. Bryant (2006) calls for future research to be focused on the qualitative experience of students' of minoritized religions development of themselves and their religious traditions during their college years. This study is very important because it highlights the nuanced beliefs and values amongst non-Christian students, however, it approaches the questions from a Christian lens and does not delve into how religious beliefs are exercised (Bryant, 2006).

Bryant (2006) highlights the differences in the data among religious identities related to religious practices, spiritual beliefs and perspectives, and ultimate spiritual quest. Muslim and Hindu students are more likely to pray daily while less than half of Jewish, Buddhist, and Unitarian Universalist students pray daily, but the survey does not indicate where students are praying or define what is meant by "prayer". Roughly 20% (p. 10) of religious minorities state that religion and spirituality are frequently discussed in class. Unitarian Universalist students are the most likely (42.8%) group to discuss religion and spirituality with their friends, while Buddhist students are the least likely (22.5%) to discuss religions and spirituality with their friends (Bryant, 2006), but the survey does not indicate which religions are discussed. Hindu and Muslim students are most uncomfortable discussing religious matters compared to Buddhist, Jewish, and Unitarian Universalist students (Bryant, 2006), though the article does not discuss why this is the case. Muslim and Hindu students (98.5% and 81%, respectively) indicated a belief in God, while 61% of Jewish students, and 31.8% of Buddhist students reported such a belief (Bryant, 2006). However, without defining "God" and capitalizing the word,

the data cannot determine how the survey respondents interpreted its presentation. Additionally, between 30% and 40% of respondents strongly agree they integrate spirituality into their lives (Bryant, 2006). This begs the question of how students define spirituality. If religious minorities are more likely to report a belief in God than to strongly agree that they integrate spirituality into their lives (Bryant, 2006), one could argue that there is a difference in these phenomena. This data comparison may indicate that spirituality is related to religious identity, but spirituality alone does not equate to a religious identity.

Replacing students' of minoritized religions identities with the study of spirituality alone is dangerous because it does not capture the true lived experiences of students of minoritized religions. In this way, Astin and colleague's (2011) research on spirituality and Mayhew and Bryant's (2013) research on worldview commitment does not do enough to capture the experiences or elevate the voices of students of minoritized religions. This dissertation will illuminate the experiences of students of minoritized religions, their experiences with Christian hegemony on campus, and how the intersection of those experiences alters their sense of belonging. Understanding the nuanced experiences of students of minoritized religions helps illustrate how oppression influences their sense of belonging on college campuses.

Experiences of Students of Minoritized Religions

This section will focus on the experiences of students of minoritized religions within the contexts of the United States. Christianity is the dominant religion in the United States (Bryant, 2006; Cole & Ahmadi, 2010) and therefore influences the ways

students of minoritized religions can express their religious identity in their communities and on college campuses (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015). Literature cited highlights overarching themes experienced by all students of minoritized religions. These themes include feeling like an outsider and the importance of community.

Individuals' experiences of oppression and marginalization are different, but collectively they have similar effects and elicit similar feelings (Blumenfeld, 2006; Riggers-Piehl & Lehman, 2016). Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism are the four largest religious groups globally outside of Christianity (Bryant, 2006) so research regarding these identities is cited most frequently. However, all students of minoritized religions experience oppression on campus in some form as a result of Christian hegemony (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015; Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020) so this literature review includes experiences of students of minoritized religions beyond Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Students of minoritized religions are not a monolithic group, although they are often categorized as "other" (Bryant, 2006). Understanding the experiences of students of minoritized religions on college campuses allows faculty and administrators to recognize these students as more than just "other", but as a group of collective and unique identities that should be acknowledged and supported. All students have an individualized experience with their religious identity, but there are several common experiences that students of minoritized religions share.

Outsiders in Their Own Land

Many students of minority religions must grapple with the intersectionality of their race and religion. Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and Jews experience racism but in different ways. Whiteness and Christian hegemony are two sides of the same coin (Joshi,

2020). Because the relationship between these concepts is so interconnected, students of minoritized religions often experience racism connected to Christian hegemony (Blumenfeld & Klein, 2009; Joshi, 2020; Williams, 2013). Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists are usually not White, so Westerners assume they are immigrants who do not belong (Joshi, 2013). Jews, who have a range of racial identities, must navigate the complex racial identity of being Jewish and another race (Blumenfeld & Klein, 2009). Regardless, to be non-White and non-Christian in the United States is considered by many to be un-American (Williams, 2013). Hence, students of minoritized religions often are made to feel like outsiders in their own country.

Hindu and Buddhist students have similar experiences because of their intersecting identities. Hindu students often feel like outsiders because many Christians do not understand non-Abrahamic religions (Chander, 2013; Joshi, 2013). Many Hindu students are first generation Americans, immigrants, and people of color, so the intersection of race and religion amplifies the oppression they face on campus (Joshi, 2013). Buddhist students experience the intersection of their race and religion, and Western Christians make them feel like outsiders because Buddhist religious beliefs and practices are unknown (Joshi, 2013).

Even other Abrahamic religions experience racism within their religious identities. For example, most Muslims living in the United States also identify as being a person of color, and as a result, the intersection of race and religion plays a role in the general distrust and unwelcome environments that Muslim Americans face (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Rockenbach et al., 2017). Historically, Jews are perceived as religious and cultural outsiders. One third of Jewish students do not feel comfortable discussing

religious matters with peers (Bryant, 2006). Jewish students must navigate their racial identity. To illustrate, Ashkenazim Jews are from Eastern Europe and tend to be White, but "Jewish" has been identified as a race. Because of the Jewish Diaspora, Jewish people are many races and ethnicities (Blumenfeld & Klein, 2009). Identifying with a "Jewish race" is empowering for some Jewish people, but for other Jews, acknowledging a "Jewish race" was how Hitler and Nazis justified the Holocaust (Blumenfeld & Klein, 2009). This complex racial identity adds to the confusion that Jews and others have about Jewish culture and religious practices.

The connection between Whiteness and Christianity influences how students of minoritized religions experience sense of belonging and are made to feel like outsiders. Because most students of minoritized religions are people of color, they experience being othered by their race and their religion. Their identities do not fit into "traditional American norms and values." Many people assume they are not American simply by existing. They are also assumed to be non-Christian because they are not White. These compounded experiences lead to students of minoritized religions feeling like they do not belong on campus (Joshi, 2020; Jun et al., 2018). Christian hegemony is also at play because students of minoritized religions may experience powerlessness as defined by Blumenfeld (2006), and this explains why finding community is so important for these students.

Importance of Community

Institutions play an important role in making students of minoritized religions feel like they matter and belong, and scholars indicate the importance of having a faith community where peers can rely upon each other (Amorini, 2016; Astin et al., 2011;

Blumenfeld & Klein, 2009; Bryant; 2006; Chander, 2013; Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Goren, 2014; Mayhew et al., 2018; Rockenbach et al., 2017; Small & Bowman, 2012). Students are more likely to experience spiritual development if they have a faith community and spiritual leaders they can trust (Amorini, 2016; Blumenfeld & Kelin, 2009; Bryant; 2006; Chander, 2013; Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Goren, 2014; Mayhew et al., 2018; Rockenbach et al., 2017). However, the "disregard for the needs of religious minority students has caused trauma," (Nielsen & Small, 2019, p. 182). College administrators need mass education around the beliefs, values, and practices of students of minoritized religions (Kocet & Stewart, 2011) and training to understand the religious rights and freedoms of religious, secular, and spiritual students (Nielsen & Small, 2019). By understanding the basics of each faith practice, administrators can support students through challenging times (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2018; Kocet & Stewart, 2011). Lastly, institutions need to create spaces where students can practice their religious beliefs together and provide programming and human resources to support students (Blumenfeld & Kelin, 2009; Bryant; 2006; Chander, 2013; Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Goren, 2014; Mayhew et al., 2018; Nielsen & Small, 2019; Rockenbach et al., 2017).

Many students of minoritized religions struggle to find a community where they can practice their religious beliefs. For example, Buddhist students struggle to find others to practice their faith with and will often move to places that have a Buddhist support network nearby (Amorini, 2016). Further, Jewish students struggle to find opportunities to learn about their culture outside of historical accounts of atrocious violence (Blumefeld & Klein, 2009). Compared to other religious groups, Jewish students are the most likely to perceive anti-Semitism on college campuses, which makes sense because they are the

population most harmed by it (Mayhew et al., 2018). Some institutions have started offering college credit or money to Jewish students who come to Jewish classes to learn Hebrew and cultural values and form community. Lastly, given their participation, presence, and oppression on campus, providing Muslim students with resources, prayer space, and religious role models will increase their engagement on campus, religious identity development, and create more inclusive campuses (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Rockenbach et al., 2017).

When students experience spiritual struggle, they often feel abandoned or unloved by God(s) or inflicted by the Devil or demons, and this has a negative effect on those students' self-esteem, confidence, and mental health (Bryant & Astin, 2008). If students have support systems on campus such as interfaith dialogues or religious counseling available to talk about their feelings and concerns, they are more likely to develop a positive relationship with their well-being and religious engagement (Bowman & Small, 2012). Bowman and Small (2012) found a positive relationship between religious engagement and well-being, indicating that students should get involved in their religious community and spend more time reflecting on their beliefs. Religion provides a coping mechanism for its followers and improves eudaimonic well-being.

Interfaith dialogues can expose students to diverse worldviews, lead to openness about others' religious rituals and practices, and encourage difficult discussions about life's big questions (Edwards, 2017a; Edwards, 2017b). Student affairs practitioners can create encounters to foster greater empathy building across religious beliefs (Rockenbach et al., 2017). Students can learn how to engage with difference and find similarities

across religious experiences. Ultimately, students should feel challenged to accept others' religious beliefs, in addition to their own, as truths (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2018).

Campus climate is a measure to determine if students are experiencing positive or negative influences related to their religious identities (Burchell et al., 2010; Mayhew & Bryant, 2013; Riggers-Piehl & Lehman, 2016). If students of minoritized religions do not have a religious community on campus, this may affect their interpretation of the campus climate. Mayhew and Bryant (2013) analyzed data from the Campus Religious and Spiritual Climate Survey, comparing the effects of campus climate on the worldview commitment of religious majority, religious minority, and non-religious students from two universities, a public and private comprehensive university. Seventy-five percent (p. 66) of the respondents were from the private comprehensive university, and most respondents were White, Christian females. Mormon students were included in the religious minority group, and Mayhew and Bryant (2013) found that "worldview commitment construct was difficult to measure in an inclusive way that represented perspectives from all religious traditions," (p. 76). They found that students who engaged more in religious and spiritual co-curricular activities were more committed to their worldview than those who were not, but the research does not explain which religious identities had access to religious and spiritual co-curricular activities. They concluded that there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of religious minority students and places for all students to talk about their worldview ideologies (Mayhew & Bryant, 2013). This dissertation intends to fill that gap.

Engaging Students of Minoritized Religions

Universities have a responsibility to engage students of minoritized religions, but there is limited literature available about it. Patten and Rice (2009) found that students who felt more spiritually integrated into a college campus were more likely to persist from the first to second year of college. The following section will examine current practices institutions are using to engage students practicing minoritized religions and how students within their groups are supporting each other.

Increased Dialogue

Many scholars discuss the importance for increased dialogue regarding students of minoritized religions to better understand students' beliefs and experiences (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2018). Intergroup dialogue and faith discussions are suggested methods to have conversations where students can learn about their religious and spiritual beliefs and traditions. Student affairs professionals should be able to cultivate an environment where students practicing a non-Christian religion feel welcomed and integrated.

Intergroup dialogue is discussed in multiple ways throughout the literature. Edwards (2017a) and Fairchild and Blumenfeld (2007) encourage true theoretically based intergroup dialogue, where students unpack their understanding of personal identity, privilege, and marginalization. This is challenging for many students because understanding their privilege or marginalization for one identity does not equate to understanding their privilege or marginalization for all their identities (Edwards, 2017a; Edwards, 2017b). Because religion is discussed so infrequently, many students do not get to fully explore and reflect upon their personal beliefs and worldview commitment by the time they graduate from college (Mayhew & Bryant, 2013). Jacobsen and Jacobsen

(2018) stress the importance of students leaving their comfort zones so that they might be critical of their deepest held beliefs. In this way, students can learn from their peers about different personal and cultural religious beliefs and traditions. Correctly performing intergroup dialogues and unpacking systems of oppression regarding Christian privilege, minoritized religions, and non-religious identities can create an inclusive space for students of minoritized religions to feel safe discussing their religious traditions and beliefs (Edwards, 2017a). When identities are left unexplored, students of minoritized religions may still be marginalized in the process of interreligious dialogue (Edwards, 2017b). Other scholars took a broader approach to the concept of interreligious dialogue and felt that a campus roundtable would be more suitable to address stereotypes and stigma related to minoritized religions (Riggers-Piehl & Lehman, 2016). However, if not done correctly, interreligious dialogue groups and campus round tables may cause more damage and isolation to students of minoritized religions (Edwards, 2017a). If students of minoritized religions are tokenized in the dialogue groups, they are more likely to not feel comfortable contributing to the conversation which could influence their sense of belonging on campus (Edwards, 2017a; Strayhorn, 2012). Therefore, researchers suggest that in order for students to learn more about other religious identities, dialogue needs to be inclusive, religiously diverse, and a space where students speak only from their religious identity.

Student affairs professionals spend a significant amount of time with students, which allows for one-on-one conversations about religion and faith. Because of the notion of separation of church and state (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015; Burchell et al., 2010; Riggers-Piehl & Lehman, 2016), many professionals take a hands-off approach to

discussing religion and spirituality for fear of crossing a legal line (Burchell et al., 2010; Riggers-Piehl & Lehman, 2016). Many professionals felt comfortable talking to students about religion if the student brought it up or they shared similar beliefs but felt that their department chairs would not be accepting of the discussion (Burchell et al., 2010). Because of this, student affairs professionals are hesitant to engage students in dialogue regarding their religious, secular, and spiritual identities.

Creating Space for Students of Minoritized Religions

Many institutions are working hard to create space, literally and figuratively, for students of minoritized religions. Johnson and Laurence (2012) found that some institutions were developing and reutilizing physical space on campus to establish multi-faith religious spaces for students of all faiths to have a place of worship. They found that if spaces connote a feeling of spirituality without a specific religious practice, the space could be manipulated in a way that students of all religions could utilize it for meditation and prayer (Johnson & Laurence, 2012). Additionally, Nielsen and Small (2019) articulate the need for two forms of infrastructure for students of minoritized religions. There should be a designated space for private meditation and reflection, and there should be a community space for programming and office hours. These should be safe spaces where students of minoritized religions do not have to hide any part of their identity (Nielsen & Small, 2019).

Students of minoritized religions also need figurative space such as inclusive policies and practices in order for them to cultivate a sense of belonging. This can include professional development materials for higher education professionals and advocates for students of minoritized religions on campus. Seeing the need for a better understanding of

religious and spiritual development, Kocet and Stewart (2011) developed a competency for student affairs professionals, using the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion competency as a framework. They argued that many professionals were poorly equipped to help students in understanding their religious and spiritual development (Kocet & Stewart, 2011). Nielsen and Small (2019) indicate that students of minoritized religions need a university appointed advocate that students can go to when they have concerns about issues on campus. Most students of minoritized religions often feel that they do not have an advocate on campus (Nielsen & Small, 2019).

However, this has not stopped students from requesting religious accommodations. Accommodations range from physical needs such as foot baths for Muslim prayer and Kosher options in the dining hall for Jewish students to emotional needs such as seeking out faculty to support students and peers to talk about their experiences on campus (Johnson & Lawrence, 2012; Small & Bowman, 2012). University policies need to accommodate students of minoritized religions in order to create figurative space for them to cultivate sense of belonging.

Conclusion of the Literature

To sum up the foregoing, the history of higher education in the United States in rooted in White Christian hegemony (Blumenfeld, 2006; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020). Early colleges were founded on Christianity to educate future ministers (Rudolph, 1990). The privatization era encouraged universities to no longer engage in discussions about religion, and the pluriform era encouraged universities to reintroduce discussions on religious diversity. Each era engaged in actions that aligned

with the current societal norms, but they helped Christianity maintain its power and dominance over non-Christians (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). Christian hegemony is a system of power that uses multiple oppressive strategies to dominate non-Christian Americans (Blumenfeld, 2006). It influences the way we think about religious identity (Joshi, 2020), talk about religious beliefs, rituals, and practices (Chander, 2013; Edwards, 2018; Joshi, 2020; Riggers-Pehl & Lehman, 2016), and prevents students of minoritized religions from being as successful as Christian students in the classroom (Bowman & Small, 2012; Bryant & Astin, 2008; Li & Murphy, 2018). Whiteness also holds significant power within Christianity, and White Christians control the narrative around Christianity, creating symbols, values, and beliefs that represent White people.

Universities are more religiously diverse than ever before (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015) and understanding the nuanced differences between the beliefs and practices of students of minoritized religions is important in supporting them while on campus (Bryant, 2006). Students of minoritized religions are not a monolith but share similar experiences while on campus including feeling like they are outsiders (Joshi, 2013), needing a community of people who share their religious beliefs (Amorini, 2016; Astin et al., 2011; Blumenfeld & Klein, 2009; Bryant; 2006; Chander, 2013; Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Goren, 2014; Mayhew et al., 2018; Rockenbach et al., 2017; Small & Bowman, 2012), and not feeling welcome on campus (Mayhew & Bryant, 2013; Riggers-Piehl & Lehman, 2016). Universities should find ways of engaging students of minoritized religions by developing meaningful interfaith dialogue groups (Edwards, 2017a) and creating physical space on campus where students of minoritized religions can feel safe to engage in

religious practice or prayer (Johnson & Laurence, 2012). The following section will consider the two theories that will be used to analyze the collected data for this research.

Theoretical Framework

The theories selected for this dissertation use a critical approach because critical research questions who has power and how it is negotiated (Merriam, 2009). Small's (2020) Critical Religious Pluralism Theory and Strayhorn's (2012) Sense of Belonging Model apply to understanding the phenomenon of how students of minoritized religions cultivate sense of belonging on their college campus. These theories will be explained in depth to understand how they function and apply to this research. This section will discuss the pros and cons of both theories, why both are used, and how they can aid in answering the research question.

Critical Religious Pluralism Theory

Small (2020) developed Critical Religious Pluralism Theory (CRPT) as a social justice response to religious, secular, and spiritual student identities. The purpose of the theory is to highlight the ways Christian privilege is present on college campuses and to pose solutions to make campuses more welcoming for students of minoritized religions. To develop the theory, Small (2020) conducted a literature review of articles that related to religious, secular, and spiritual students and developed a rubric to determine at what level the articles addressed religious identity from a critical lens, addressed the role of Christian privilege, and sought to understand the experiences of students of minoritized religions (Small, 2020). CRPT is the answer to creating more inclusive campuses for students of minoritized religions and is used as such in this dissertation.

CRPT in Context

Small (2020) argues that scholars do not know the impact of Christian hegemony on universities and their students, and CRPT intends to address multiple needs. The first goal of CRPT is to understand the role of intersecting identities and how that impacts the way religious, secular, and spiritual identities show up in students' lived experiences. The second goal is to understand how Christian privilege and Christian hegemony impact students who do not practice Christianity. Thirdly, CRPT is connected to and based on other critical theories. Lastly, CRPT was developed as a social justice endeavor to elevate secular and religious minority students in university settings, so they are not oppressed by Christian hegemony (Small, 2020).

Critical theories stand in opposition to neutrality because neutrality favors oppressors. Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and Latina and Latino Critical Theory (Valdes, 2005) were used as a framework for CRPT's critical approach to religious identity. Small (2020) found that almost all critical theories leave out religion and Christian privilege. There are four elements that Small (2020) incorporates to develop a third-wave critical theory of religious identity. The first is to focus on religious pluralism to see all religious identities as valid and legitimate instead of exotic or weird. The second element is to pay attention to the power structures that allow Christian supremacy to dominate socio-cultural values in the United States, which leads to inequality within religious identity. The third element is to aid scholars and practitioners in understanding how to support religious, secular, and spiritual students on campus. Lastly, the theory should understand that religious identity is often a cultural identity

rather than an individual choice for personal development (Small, 2020). The combination of these factors led to the tenets of CRPT (Small, 2020).

The Seven Tenets of CRPT

Based on the literature review and review of critical theory, Small (2020) developed seven tenets that would encompass Critical Religious Pluralism Theory. The intention of the tenets is to use them to analyze existing systems of Christian hegemony and the experiences of religious, secular, and spiritual students on their campuses.

The first tenet states "CRPT declares that the subordination of non-Christian (including nonreligious) individuals to Christian individuals has been built into the society of the United States, as well as institutionalized on college campuses," (Small, 2020, p. 62). This tenet sets the foundation of the theory, stating that Christian hegemony is baked into the foundation of and fundamental value system in the United States. Other scholars have provided empirical data to confirm this (Ahmadi & Cole, 2015; Blumenfeld, 2006; Bowman & Small, 2012; Joshi, 2020), so it does not need to be proven again.

Small's (2020) second tenet states "CRPT critically examines the intertwined nature of religion and culture and embraces an intersectional analysis of religious identity with race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, dis/ability, immigration status, socioeconomic class, and all other forms of social identity," (p. 63). Intersecting identities will influence the ways students of minoritized religions make meaning of their lived experiences. CRPT recognizes that religious identity does not exist in a vacuum, and other social identities play a role in how religious identity is experienced.

The third tenet states "CRPT exposes Christian privilege and Christian hegemony in society, as well as the related concept of the false neutral of secularism," (Small, 2020, p. 63). Because Christian hegemony contributes to the values and belief systems taught and normalized in United States culture, secularism cannot be separated from Christian supremacy. Christian hegemony is so pervasive that elements of Christianity are seen as normal or part of the natural order of things. For example, printing "In God We Trust" on United States currency is not questioned as an act of oppression. Having the university Chaplain say a non-denominational prayer at convocation or commencement is not questioned as exclusionary, isolating, or a violation of religious freedom. These acts represent the "false neutral of secularism" (Small, 2020).

The fourth tenet states "at the individual level, CRPT advocates for a pluralistic inclusion of all religious, secular, and spiritual identities, recognizing the liberatory potential of these identities upon individuals' lives," (Small, 2020, p. 63). Religion can be used to oppress and ignore other religious identities. This tenet calls for people to be consistently critical of the way Christianity is used to maintain power and be inclusive of other minoritized religions. Students of minoritized religions cannot experience liberation from Christian hegemony until the system of power is challenged by individuals.

Small's (2020) fifth tenet states "at the institutional level, CRPT advocates for the field of higher education to utilize a religious pluralistic lens in all areas of research, policy, and practice, accounting for power, privilege, marginalization, and oppression," (p. 64). Christian hegemony is institutionalized and therefore appears on college campuses. This tenet indicates the importance of making sure the critical work being

done around religious, secular, and spiritual identities does not marginalize other oppressed identities while attempting to dismantle Christian hegemony.

The sixth tenet states "at the systemic level, CRPT advocates for religious pluralism as the means for resolving religious conflict in the United States," (Small, 2020, p. 64). Religion has been used to justify oppression for centuries, but it has also been used to cultivate community and bring people together for a greater common purpose. In order to dismantle Christian hegemony, scholars and practitioners must appreciate and understand the duality of religion in order to use it as ideology that can bring peace.

Small's (2020) final tenet states "CRPT prioritizes the voices of individuals with minoritized religious identities and those with pluralistic commitments in the work toward social transformation," (p. 65). Through this tenet, the goal is to celebrate the voices of students and scholars of minoritized religions in order to be normalized, validated, and appreciated in their nuance. By bringing these voices to the forefront of the conversations around critical religious pluralism, individuals and society can transform the way students of minoritized religions are viewed.

Selecting CRPT

CRPT was selected for several reasons, including its content and its ontological approach. Small's (2020) CRPT was selected for this project because it provides a framework to understand the role of Christian hegemony in institutions of higher education. The theory outlines how institutions can become more inclusive and how individuals can contribute to making meaningful change from policy and practical

standpoints. Application of CRPT aids in filling in the gaps in the literature about students of minoritized religions, specifically in how Christian hegemony impacts their experiences on college campuses (Small, 2020).

Secondly, Small (2020) uses a critical ontological approach which aligns with the purpose of this dissertation. The goal of CRPT is to transform the way scholars and practitioners view students of minoritized religions and to dismantle Christian hegemony. The aim of this dissertation is to do the same. Small (2020) focuses on the voices and experiences of students of minoritized religions, without comparison to Christian students or minimizing religious identities. Again, this aligns with the purpose of the research for this dissertation. However, understanding the impacts of Christian hegemony on the experiences of students of minoritized religions only covers half of the phenomenon being studied in the research. Strayhorn's (2012) Sense of Belonging Model will be examined next.

Sense of Belonging Model

Sense of belonging was first coined by Hurtado and Carter (1997), referring to students of color and how they experienced feelings of welcome and belonging on the college campus. Strayhorn (2012) states "sense of belonging generally refers to a feeling of connectedness, that one is important or matters to others," (p. 1). Not having a sense of belonging leads to feelings of marginalization. Therefore, the people connected to a student, such as teachers and peers, can influence sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012). Strayhorn's (2012) model of sense of belonging intentionally critiques Hurtado and Carter's (1997) theory by stating that sense of belonging is a basic human need. This "refers to a student's perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of

connectedness, the experiences of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group or others on campus," (p. 3). In essence, sense of belonging relies on relationships, a student's capacity to need and be needed, and to see others and be seen on an authentic level (Strayhorn, 2012).

Sense of Belonging in Context

There are multiple definitions for sense of belonging, and most scholars can agree that it refers to an individual feeling valued or needed within a system in their environment (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012). Strayhorn (2012) conducted a literature review on sense of belonging and found that when students feel like they belong, they are more likely to experience positive outcomes such as happiness, joy, and calmness. They experience increases in their academic outcomes and are more likely to be retained at their institutions. Students will function better in environments where their needs are satisfied, and Strayhorn's (2012) approach to this theory is that belonging is a need. The opposite of belonging is alienation, which leads to withdrawal from people and the community. Alienation also impacts academic performance, especially in cases where students do not feel prepared to learn the material (Strayhorn, 2012). Sense of belonging is especially important for students with marginalized identities (Strayhorn, 2012). As Small (2020) states in CRPT, institutions of higher education are rooted in Christian hegemony, therefore cultivating a sense of belonging for students of minoritized religions is important for them to achieve academic success and have a positive experience with their college environment. Strayhorn (2012) explains that membership to a community, including religious clubs or organizations, increases sense of belonging. However, Strayhorn (2012) does not identify which religious clubs and organizations students

attended. Additionally, if a campus does not have a club or organization that caters to religious identities this may be a moot point. Fortunately, membership organization is not the only way to cultivate sense of belonging.

The Core Elements of Sense of Belonging

Strayhorn (2012) identifies seven core elements of sense of belonging. The first is the idea that "sense of belonging is a basic human need," (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 18). It is a hidden need that is not often expressed out loud, but subconsciously. Strayhorn (2012) argues that belonging fits into Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, coming after physiological needs and safety needs.

Strayhorn (2012) states "sense of belonging is a fundamental motive, sufficient to drive human behavior," (p. 19). The core element indicates that in order to belong, people may do a variety of activities that may or may not be good for themselves. For example, sometimes people stay in unhealthy relationships or join a group that does not align with their values in order to feel like they belong somewhere. Students of minoritized religions are a diverse group, so their behavior to find sense of belonging will likely show up in different ways. Buddhist students may have an altar set up in their room, or Muslim students may commute home to pray at their mosque.

The third core element states "sense of belonging takes on heightened importance (a) in certain contexts … (b) at certain times … and (c) among certain populations," (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 20). Students will struggle to succeed academically until they develop a sense of belonging. Context matters in every situation, so a student may feel a sense of belonging on campus, but if they are not academically prepared for class they

may feel like they do not belong there. That lack of sense of belonging in class may lead a student to question if they belong at college. College students going through a significant life transition, such as coming out as transgender, may seek out a group to gain sense of belonging. When people feel vulnerable, they are more likely to seek belonging (Strayhorn, 2012).

"Sense of belonging is related to, and seemingly a consequence of, mattering," (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 21). This fourth core element relates to the idea of people needing to see others as authentic people and to be seen as an authentic person. Students must believe that others care about them and be in a place where people celebrate their success and mourn their failures in order to belong. Mattering can mean several things including "attentions, importance, dependence, appreciation, and ego extension," (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 21).

Strayhorn's (2012) fifth core element states "social identities intersect and affect college students' sense of belonging," (p. 22). Small's (2020) CRPT is similar to this aspect of Strayhorn's (2012) model that a student is all parts of their identities at once, so their identities working together impacts their sense of belonging. Some identities may experience sense of belonging while other identities are alienated. True sense of belonging goes beyond fitting in and delves into the importance of living as one's authentic self (Strayhorn, 2012).

The sixth element states "sense of belonging engenders other positive outcomes," (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 22). When a student feels like they belong, they are more likely to persist to graduation, which leads to increased well-being, success, and active engagement in community. Students of minoritized religions come into college at a

disadvantage because higher education institutions perpetuate Christian hegemony, however policy reform, programs, and practices can mitigate oppression to increase sense of belonging.

Strayhorn's (2012) final core element states "sense of belonging must be satisfied on a continual basis and likely change as circumstances, conditions, and contexts change," (p. 23). As individuals change, their needs related to sense of belonging shift. For example, if a bus route stops going in the direction of a place of worship or a club supporting students of minoritized religions disbands, that could have a significant impact on those students.

Selecting Sense of Belonging

Strayhorn's (2012) sense of belonging was selected based on its ontological approach and its content. Strayhorn (2012) uses a critical ontological approach to the Sense of Belonging Model, and specifically conducts research with students who have marginalized identities. However, the research related to sense of belonging does not focus on students of minoritized religions. This research will build upon the body of literature about sense of belonging and students of minoritized religions. It will also aid in transforming the way students of minoritized religions are thought about and should be given more attention by higher education scholars and practitioners.

Sense of Belonging Model was selected because it directly addresses the other piece of the phenomenon being studied in the research. Small (2020) states that a gap in the literature is to understand how Christian hegemony impacts students of minoritized religions. There are multiple ways that Christian hegemony impacts students of

minoritized religions, and one research project will not fill that gap. However, by focusing on how students of minoritized religions cultivate sense of belonging in an environment built upon Christian hegemony, this research will begin to answer those questions. Additionally, it will open the door for future research on sense of belonging for specific religious identities.

Conclusion

In summary, the purpose of this literature review is to understand the history of Christian hegemony in American higher education and the experiences of students of minoritized religions in such a context (Blumenfeld, 2006; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Joshi, 2020; Rudolph, 1990; Thelin, 2011). While students of minoritized religions are not a monolith, they experience oppression on college campuses in similar ways (Bryant, 2006). Christian hegemony influences the way students of minoritized religions can navigate their college experience because they are consistently facing micro-aggressions, tokenization, alienation, hatred, and violence (Blumenfeld & Klien, 2009; Chander, 2013; Edwards, 2018; Goren, 2014; Joshi, 2020; Riggers-Pehl & Lehman, 2016; Williams, 2013). These experiences have a negative effect on students of minoritized religions well-being, academic success, and retention (Bowman & Small, 2012; Bryant & Astin, 2008; Li & Murphy, 2018). By using Small's (2020) CRPT and Strayhorn's (2012) Sense of Belonging Model, this research addresses how Christian hegemony acts as a barrier to cultivating sense of belonging for students' of minoritized religions. Students need to feel like their religious identities are seen and matter (Small & Bowman, 2012) so higher education administrators need to create spaces where students can practice their religion

in order to be personally and academically successful (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2018; Johnson & Laurence, 2012; Kocet & Stewart, 2011).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Mathangi Subramanian's (2019) novel *A People's History of Heaven* is the story of five girls' experiences growing up in a Bangalore slum. Each character navigates her individual coming of age based on friendships, relationships with parents and teachers, and the socio-cultural environment where they live. Their stories help the reader understand the characters' worldviews and the description of the slum helps the reader understand the context of how the characters understand their home (Subramanian, 2019). The novel represents a qualitative case study, where time, place, and context matter in understanding the lived experiences and meaning making of the characters (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research asks questions about the social and cultural contexts of people's lives in hopes of understanding and making meaning of their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Specifically, Merriam (2009) states "[q]ualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worldview, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences," (p. 5). As a result, qualitative research questions ask about the human experience to understand how people interpret and make meaning of those experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This dissertation used qualitative research in the form of a critical instrumental case study to understand how students of minoritized religions find community on their college campuses. Like Subramanian's (2019) novel, lived experiences and environmental context were essential to shaping the picture of this research.

Overview of Methodology

This dissertation focused on the research participants experiences with Christian hegemony and sense of belonging on their college campus. Merriam (2009) states "[t]he key concern is understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives," (p. 14). While some methods of qualitative research are not designed to be generalizable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), all qualitative methods intend to create a "rich, thick text" (Creswell, 1998, p. 203) to describe a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The purpose of this research is to understand and interpret how Christian hegemony influences sense of belonging for students of minoritized religions. The data intends to help transform the way higher education professionals create policies and programs that support religious pluralism (Small, 2020), hence the use of a critical paradigm (Merriam, 2009). A paradigm informs how the research is conducted and helps the reader understand the researcher's perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Qualitative Case Study

A qualitative case study is defined as an "in-depth analysis of a bounded system," (Merriam, 2009, p. 38). Case study methodology does not have a well-defined or well-structured protocol because each case is unique, with specific boundaries defined by the researcher (Yazan, 2015). The most important aspect of a well-designed case study is clearly defined boundaries and justification for them (Merriam, 2009). There are multiple epistemological approaches to conducting a case study, and multiple specific methods a researcher can use to collect data (Yazan, 2015). A case study is flexible in what the researcher studies but confined to the boundaries the researcher creates (Merriam, 2009).

The methodological approach used in this dissertation was a case study because it is particular to context and flexible (Merriam, 2009). The boundaries in this study included one university as the research site, interviews with students of minoritized religions, interviews with higher education professionals who support students of minoritized religions, and a document analysis. This flexibility allowed for appropriate data collection (Merriam, 2009) while still gaining information about sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012) in an environment steeped in Christian privilege (Joshi, 2020).

This chapter provides in-depth reasoning of the research procedures, including case selection, data collection, verification procedures, protocol descriptions of data collection, and protection against researcher bias. The research question and problem statement were justified by using a case study methodology. Lastly, the theoretical framework was applied to decisions regarding specific methods utilized during data collection.

Limitations

This section illustrates the boundaries I set for the research, and the limitations that were outcomes of those decisions.

Delimitations

This dissertation does not include the experiences of students who identify as Christian, Catholic, or Protestant because they benefit from Christian privilege or students who were raised not practicing a religious tradition. This study does not include Christian sects of what Bowman and Small (2012) identify as double religious minorities, meaning that students are a minority in society and at their university. For example,

Mormons of the Latter-Day Saints are a minority religion in the context of the United States, but they are not a minority at Brigham Young University (Bowman & Small, 2012). Because Latter Day Saints is a sect of Christianity, they are not included in the research because they benefit from Christian privilege (Blumenfeld, 2006; Joshi, 2020).

One of the limitations of this dissertation is that the research does not provide a full picture for every minoritized religion or how students within individual religious identities foster a sense of belonging. The data collected is limited to the students of minoritized religions who meet the qualifications and agree to participate in the research. This was impacted by the diversity of the religious communities and places of worship in the area where the research was conducted.

Because of the global pandemic at the time the research was conducted, observations and field notes were not collected. The original intent of this research procedure was to include observations of on-campus programming, observations in student support office settings, and observations in the student union building. Due to COVID-19, in-person programs and student gatherings were postponed in order to maintain social distancing and protect people. As a result, this data was not collected.

Another limitation of the research is the selection of one research site. However, this was an intentional choice so that the collected data served as a rich, thick description of the environment and students' experiences (Cresswell, 1998). While this research does not intend to speak for all students of minoritized religions, the methodology can be replicated at other institutions and the data can be transferred to better understand the overall experiences of students of minoritized religions. Some institutions are working to minimize the effects of Christian hegemony on campus (Johnson & Laurence, 2012),

therefore the exact environment at the site selection may not be applicable or relevant to other institutions.

Limitations

There were several limitations that resulted in outcomes based on the parameters I set on the case study. The greatest limitation was trying to recruit students of minoritized religions to interview. I recruited students from three schools in the United States, and I was only able to interview four students who met my qualifications. The majority of the students identify as Jewish. These students are observant Jews, meaning they keep Shabbat and eat kosher. This is a different experience than students who identify as being culturally Jewish, who maybe attend synagogue during the High Holidays. Most of the examples related to cultivating sense of belonging and Christian hegemony's role on campus are from the perspectives of observant Jewish women. As a result, this research is missing the perspectives of many minoritized religions and does not depict all the ways Christian hegemony exists on campus. Additionally, the restrictions that I put into place such as being raised with a minoritized religion and the number of semesters I wanted participants to be on campus limited the population I could recruit from.

The lack of diversity within the identities of my participants is also a limitation. Of the student participants, two participants identified as being White, one identified as being White and Arab, and the last participant identified their race as "other". Most of the student participants were women, and most of the staff participants were men. None of them talked about socio-economic status, disability status, sexual orientation, or other social identities.

I also struggled to recruit staff to interview. When I contacted the Hillel director, they told me they were too busy to meet. Considering how many Jewish students are on SU's campus, this speaks to how much work the Hillel director must do to properly support the students. I emailed several chaplains and support staff who did not respond.

I believe my identities may have also been a contributing factor in struggling to recruit participants. This matters in qualitative research because I am tool used to collect and analyze data (Merriam, 2009). In my recruitment emails, I identified myself as being raised Pagan and Unitarian Universalist. Most people do not know a lot about these religious identities, and if they do, there are negative stereotypes associated with them. For example, people associate the word "pagan" with heathen, godless, and the antithesis of religion. In the future, I suspect I will leave these out of my recruitment emails. I am a White woman, and I think these identities made it difficult for me to recruit students of color to participate in my research. Given the context and historical role of White women in the United States, I understand that I may not be viewed as a safe person to talk to about Christian hegemony. My identities limited the data I was able to collect and therefore limited the intersectionality present in the data.

Research Question

The purpose of this research is to bring attention to the way Christian hegemony acts upon physical and socio-cultural environments that influence sense of belonging for students of minoritized religions (Joshi, 2020). The goal is to elevate the voices, experiences, and reflections of students of minoritized religions in order to understand the connection between Christian hegemony and sense of belonging on campus because there

is very little literature about this phenomenon (Small, 2020; Strayhorn, 2012). The problem is that current researchers are erasing minoritized religious identities by using terms such as “spirituality”, “ecumenical worldview”, and “worldview commitment” to discuss all religious, secular, and spiritual students (Astin et al., 2011; Mayhew & Bryant, 2013). This language is not clear in its meaning or student experiences and cannot provide context for the religious backgrounds of students, how their beliefs may change, and how their cultural upbringing has influenced their religious practice (Edwards, 2018; Small, 2020). By grouping all students into these abstract understandings of religious, secular, and spiritual identities, the published research ignores the nuanced pluralism and experiences of students of minoritized religions (Edwards, 2017a; Edwards, 2018; Small, 2020). Small and Bowman (2012) argue that students of minoritized religions should be studied beyond comparing their experiences to students who practice Christianity. When published research erases students of minoritized religions voices and identities, higher education professionals cannot know how to support students’ religious identities (Kocet & Stewart, 2011; Small, 2020). This research hopes to identify how Christian hegemony is embedded in the campus culture and how students’ of minoritized religions experience belonging on campus. When higher education institutions embrace religious pluralism and affirm the value students of minoritized religions bring to campus, they can break down structures that support Christian hegemony (Small, 2020).

The following question was answered through multiple specific methods: *In what ways does Christian hegemony influence sense of belonging for students of minoritized religions on a college campus?* Some of these research procedures included document analysis and interviews (Yazan, 2015) and are explained further in the following section.

Research Procedures

This section delves into the justifications for choices made about epistemology, theoretical framework, the case study methodology, and the specific methods used for data collection. The intention is to provide enough detail to paint a full picture of the design so that it may be replicated at another institution. This section includes the protocols of how the data was managed, analyzed, and interpreted. Merriam (2009) explains that in qualitative research "the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (p. 15), and because I conducted the research, I use the word "I" when relevant to explain the process.

A Critical Paradigm

The intention of the critical paradigm is to critique systems of power and how that power is distributed, negotiated, and reinforced by the status quo (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) states multiple realities are constructed within a socio-political context that privileges some realities over others, and Guba and Lincoln (1994) affirm that constructed realities can change because they are associated with the human experience. The socio-cultural context for this dissertation is Christian hegemony, which privileges Christian students over students who practice a minoritized religion and areligious students (Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020). It also privileges students who were raised Christian but may no longer practice Christianity because they have the social capital of understanding Christian practices that are cultural norms in the United States (Edwards, 2018; Joshi, 2020). Joshi (2020) states that historically "Christianity has been weaponized for oppressive purposes," (p. 169) using examples of slavery, Manifest Destiny, and Indian Residential Schools. For these reasons, the research was conducted

using a critical paradigm in order to bring attention to the experiences of students of minoritized religions and how their sense of belonging may be impacted by the dominant Christian perspective (Merriam, 2009; Small, 2020).

Guba and Lincoln (1994) state "questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm," (p. 105). This is important to the research design process because the researcher's paradigm should aid in selecting an appropriate methodological approach (Merriam, 2009). I believe that reality is understood through systems of power and privilege. Therefore, a critical paradigm was applied to the research design because of its nature to understand and interpret knowledge in the socio-cultural context of power dynamics (Merriam, 2009). The aim of the inquiry is to understand sense of belonging as a phenomenon (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). From a critical perspective, knowledge is a fluid process where individuals are continuously reconstructing their realities as a result of systemic power structures (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As individuals gain more knowledge, they can create more sophisticated understandings of their realities (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As the researcher, I served as a "passionate participant" (Table 6.2, p. 112) in facilitating the knowledge construction and reconstruction (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) of understanding Christian hegemony's power over students' of minoritized religions ability to cultivate sense of belonging.

Theoretical Framework

Guba and Lincoln (1994) state "theories and facts are ... interdependent … that facts are facts only within some theoretical framework," (p. 107). This means researchers make meaning of their data within the conceptual or theoretical framework they have

constructed. The assumption is that a different framework or theory would produce different data (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This dissertation incorporates Small's (2020) Critical Religious Pluralism Theory and Strayhorn's (2012) Sense of Belonging Model. Christian supremacy is a cornerstone of the United States culture (Joshi, 2020). As a result, every institution is rooted in Christian supremacy (Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020). Because of this power structure, a critical paradigm will be used to examine the data in this case study to understand how the university upholds and deconstructs Christian supremacy through document analysis and how students of minoritized religions perceive, if at all, Christian hegemony through interviews (Merriam, 2009). Joshi's (2020) concepts about Christian hegemony lay the groundwork for understanding the theories used in this research.

Small's (2020) Critical Religious Pluralism Theory (CRPT) analyzes institutions through a critical lens regarding Christian hegemony. CRPT recognizes Christian dominance as a societal norm, and its goal is to highlight ways that Christian hegemony is present in society and recognize secularism as a false neutral (Small, 2020). This theory is relevant to this research because its application evaluates Christian hegemony in research, policies, and professional practice in higher education (Small, 2020). In this case study, CRPT was used to investigate university documents and students' of minoritized religions experiences (Merriam, 2009). Recommendations for change were also analyzed through CRPT (Merriam, 2009). However, CRPT does not address sense of belonging.

Strayhorn's (2012) Sense of Belonging Model uses a critical approach to understand how students with marginalized identities find space to live their authentic truths on campus. This model recognizes individual student's need to belong and matter to others (Strayhorn, 2012). The model understands that social identities intersect and for many students, their time in college is riddled with many changes (Strayhorn, 2012). While Strayhorn's (2012) research identifies how students of color and LGBTQ students experience belonging and alienation, it does not include examples of students of minoritized religions. In conjunction with Small (2020), data regarding students of minoritized religions sense of belonging was collected and analyzed within these frameworks (Merriam, 2009). Sense of belonging data was collected through interviews where student participants were asked about the specific experiences with their religious practices and how they must navigate campus to express their religious identity (Merriam, 2009). The next section takes a deeper dive into the case studies methodology.

Case Study Methods

A case is a single entity around which there are boundaries (Merriam, 2009), and a case can serve as a phenomenon (Yazan, 2015). Additionally, a case study is an intensive and holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, institution, person, process, or social unit (Yazan, 2015). Case studies are particular to place and context, descriptive of their surroundings, and heuristic (Yazan, 2015). Further, a case study can be a single design or multiple designs, depending on the parameters set by the researcher (Yazan, 2015). This research focused on a single university as the case to ensure prolonged engagement and persistent observation (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). A single case was chosen so that the data would describe

the role of Christian hegemony in the university context (Joshi, 2020) and how students of minoritized religions navigate within it (Strayhorn, 2012). Some case study methodologists believe that the study cannot be planned, while others believe that every part of the study should be planned before data collection begins (Yazan, 2015). This dissertation used Stake's (2005) technique because of its constructivist approach to case studies (Boblin et al., 2013; Stake, 2005; Yazan, 2015). The loose theoretical framework was formed prior to conducting and analyzing the data for the framework to be solidified to indicate thematic categories (Boblin et al., 2013; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005; Yazan, 2015).

The research design is a critical instrumental case study. A critical case study is one that seeks to change or transform the status quo with its findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 2009), and one of the goals of this research is to transform the way higher education institutions and professionals support students of minoritized religions in cultivating a sense of belonging on campus. Christian hegemony negatively affects students of minoritized religions on campus (Joshi, 2020), and Small's (2020) Critical Religious Pluralism Theory helps identify ways that non-Christian subordination is built into the existing system and "prioritizes the voices of individuals with minoritized religious identities," (p. 65). An instrumental case study provides insight into the phenomenon to help redefine theory, where the case facilitates the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon in an in-depth analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Merriam, 2009). The phenomenon in this dissertation is sense of belonging for students of minoritized religions in the context of Christian hegemony at the university (the case). Scholars can assume that Christian hegemony is a prevalent system of oppression on

college campuses (Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020), so for this instrumental case study, the primary phenomenon is sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012) and if and how students of minoritized religions develop a sense of belonging on their campus.

Research Design

Within the research design, justification is given for the site selection, timeframe of the study, and participant selection. The timeline of events for the data collection procedure is explained, as well as the potential for a nested case study. Data collection methods are described in detail. The research timeframe was the Fall 2021 semester.

Site Selection. The site, a research institution, was selected based on several factors. First, the site had some resources such as clubs or organizations available for students of minoritized religions in order to evaluate the role of community in sense of belonging (Merriam, 2009; Strayhorn, 2012). A review of the university website was conducted to know which student affairs offices might implicitly support students of minoritized religions and to review student demographics. For this case study, understanding the campus restrictions due to COVID-19 was also important because it impacted the way data was collected and analyzed.

The site was selected because of the visible Jewish population on campus (Hillel International, 2021) and its diverse student body. The institution has relationships with Hillel and Chabad. These organizations are not run by the selected institution, although they still have partnerships with students and administrators at the site. Because of their integral role in supporting Jewish students, these off-campus organizations will be included in the boundaries of the case (Merriam, 2009). The selected research site is not a

religiously affiliated university for a specific reason. A common belief is that these institutions are inherently secular because they are not directly affiliated with a religion, but this false neutrality lends itself to the benefit of Christian hegemony (Small, 2020). Christian hegemony is deeply rooted in the United States' cultural values, and this trickles into all facets of its' society (Blumenfeld, 2006; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Joshi, 2020). Higher education is not immune to this phenomenon (Joshi, 2020), and this research strives to illustrate the ways Christian hegemony is embedded in places deemed "secular". Regardless of how the institution was impacted by the privatization era, it is still affected by mainline Protestant Christianity (Blumenfeld, 2006; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012).

Participant Selection. In order to select participants, they had to meet certain requirements. To be selected, the undergraduate student must have spent three or more semesters on campus to ensure that they had enough exposure to their environment (Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, they had more experience than first-year students attempting to find a sense of belonging and could reflect on their experiences with Christian hegemony on campus. Selected students were raised with a religious identity that does not benefit from Christian privilege because religious identity can be cultural, and social norms may be taught at home (Edwards, 2018). This means that if a student was raised practicing Judaism, but now identifies as Atheist or Agnostic, they are eligible to participate in the research because their upbringing was likely influenced by the cultural teachings of their religious traditions (Blumenfeld, 2006; Edwards, 2018). The students did not need to be actively practicing their religion, because scholars indicate that it is difficult for students of minoritized religions to continue their religious practices during

college (Amorini, 2016; Blumenfeld & Klein, 2009; Goren, 2014; Mayhew et al., 2018). Participants could be domestic or international students, because identities are intersectional, so every student has other experiences with finding a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012; Small, 2020). Ideally, the interviewed students have a diverse range of religious identities. In order to reach saturation of the data, the goal was to interview at least four students (Merriam, 2009).

To find students who are eligible to be interviewed, an email detailing the purpose of the study was sent to listservs provided by specifically targeted student affairs offices, such as the multicultural center, international student services, or multifaith center and specific clubs that support students of minoritized religions. The email included a survey that collected demographic information about the student. The project was advertised through approved university social media postings to recruit more research participants. "Maximum variation sampling" (Merriam, 2009, p. 78) was used to email each individual student who met the parameters of the research proposal. Once a student replied agreeing to participate in the study, an interview time was set up. Interviews were recorded over Zoom in order to use the transcription feature. Gatekeepers to this research included the offices that provided listservs and students agreeing to participate.

In addition to interviewing students, I also interviewed higher education professionals who support students of minoritized religions to better understand how they advocate for this population of students (Nielsen & Small, 2019). I asked students during their second interview about their experiences with faculty and staff. If they disclosed an encouraging higher education professional, I contacted that person to see if they were

willing to participate in a one-time interview. I did not plan to interview any professionals who are not mentioned by the research participants; however, I did interview staff who were connected to acts of antisemitism that occurred on campus and the department that houses interfaith programming. These interviews helped to provide more context to the student experience (Maxwell, 2013). While many higher education professionals state they are committed to diversity and inclusion, students may not feel like they are being supported, respected, or valued by their institution (Lang & Yandell, 2019; Nielsen & Small, 2019).

Data Collection Procedure. Theory informs data collection and analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Language from Small's (2020) CRPT was used to create research questions for student and employee participant interviews. I used examples provided in Strayhorn's (2012) Sense of Belonging Model in document analysis to determine if there were opportunities available for students of minoritized religions to cultivate sense of belonging. Strayhorn (2012) stresses the importance of students feeling respected and having their needs met by the university as critical pieces in cultivating sense of belonging. Interview questions that refer to a student's detailed experiences and meaning making were developed using examples provided in Nielsen and Small's (2019) article and language from Strayhorn's (2012) Sense of Belonging Model.

Merriam (2009) indicates that data collection and data analysis should occur simultaneously when conducting a case study. Specific methods and techniques about data collection and analysis are described below, while this section describes the process of collecting and analyzing data. Stake (2005) articulates that having a prescribed plan of

action for conducting research is difficult because the researcher may come across unforeseen challenges or changes in their procedures. The schedule changed as a result of acts of antisemitism that occurred on campus in which the university president responded through an email.

Because data was analyzed as it was being collected, each step of data collection informed the next. This process was not linear and document analysis was ongoing as a result of what I learned from the student and staff participants. First, I started with some document analysis. I reviewed policies related to students of minoritized religions, such as holiday accommodations and inclusion statements. I also conducted a website analysis, where I looked for resources that support students of minoritized religions. These included clubs, organizations, staff members, offices and departments, and programs. This provided me with an understanding of the context of the university and presence of Christian normativity.

While the analysis provided an initial frame of reference for understanding and analyzing student interviews, document analysis was an ongoing process. Data collected during interviews often led to further research, such as student newspaper articles, emails, and published analyses of institutional structures. For example, when a student described the University Chapel and critiqued it as being a predominantly Christian space, I looked at their website and found an article that aligned with her critique. Website and policy analysis provided context in understanding the student participants' answers in the first interview and aided in developing questions for the second interview.

The first set of interviews focused on life history and lasted 45 to 90 minutes (Seidman, 2006). Next, the data collected was transcribed and reviewed. I underlined codes, wrote a brief synopsis of the interview, and indicated what I learned from them (Merriam, 2009). Data from the first interview and website and policy analysis were used to inform the second set of interview questions focused on the student's detailed experiences with Christian hegemony on campus and sense of belonging.

At the time I was conducting second interviews, the president sent an email addressing the acts of antisemitism that occurred on campus. This impacted the second interviews because I asked student participants about their thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the email and the events. As a result, the second set of semi-structured interviews lasted for 60 to 120 minutes (Seidman, 2006). Then they were transcribed and analyzed. In this interview, I asked students about their relationships with employees on campus who respect their religious identity. All of them said they do not have someone one campus they would go to with questions about their religious identity. Their responses had an impact on my data collection. I assumed I would interview faculty and staff members based on their responses. Instead, I chose to interview staff members who work in offices that were listed as campus resources to the acts of antisemitism.

I interviewed four staff members who support and are connected to students of minoritized religions. These interviews were approximately 30 to 60 minutes. They intended to address elements of Small's (2020) CRPT and how higher education professionals aided in cultivating a respectful environment for students of minoritized religions. These interviews also focused on the institutions' response to the acts of

antisemitism and how their office was used as a resource. Because of these interviews, I continued a document analysis of the student and institution newspapers. I looked for articles describing other events of hate speech, protests, acts of hate related to racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and others. I also looked at how the institution responded to acts of Islamophobia and other religious discrimination. This document analysis and staff member interviews informed the third interview.

Based on the answers to the second interview and staff interviews, a third interview was conducted with each student to understand how they make meaning of their experiences on campus related to their religious identity. The third set of semi-structured interviews lasted between 45 to 105 minutes (Seidman, 2006). The data was transcribed and analyzed, and then I categorized the data codes into larger themes for data analysis. When I had questions about participants' responses, I emailed them to ask clarifying questions. When I thought of other questions related to document analysis, I looked for sources to answer my questions. Another important note is that I listened to each interview a minimum of four times in order to get a full picture of the participants' experiences, and I kept journal entries of each interview (Merriam, 2009). The data collection process was fluid. As I collected and analyzed data, I often had new questions. Document analysis occurred from the beginning of data collection until I was done editing my research findings.

Specific Methods of Data Collection. A unique aspect of case studies is that they require multiple forms of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). The most discussed data collection methods are document analysis, interviews, and observations

(Merriam, 2009). Document analysis and interviews are the data collection strategies implemented for this dissertation and are explained in further detail below. Additionally, this research was conducted in the era of COVID-19, impacting the way that data was collected.

Document Analysis. Documents such as the student handbook, religious inclusion statement and policy, student newspaper articles, and website were analyzed (Bowen, 2009; Merriam, 2009). They were examined to determine how they uphold or dismantle Christian hegemony (Small, 2020). This was one of the first data points collected, because policies and statements do not indicate practice but do indicate the university values (Joshi, 2020). The initial document analysis took place over one week to conduct a thorough analysis of the context and historical insight of the site (Bowen, 2009). This helped to determine the institution's stance on supporting students of minoritized religions, how this support has changed throughout the history of the university, and awareness of this population on campus (Bowen, 2009). This initial data collection led to finding clubs and organizations that support students of minoritized religions, and whether there is a specific location on campus for students of minoritized religions to engage in religious practice and find community with others. As previously stated, document analysis was an ongoing process throughout the interviews and analysis based on new questions that arose from the participant responses and events occurring on campus. This data was recorded in a notebook dedicated to document analysis. There is also a password protected word document with direct quotations that are related to students of minoritized religions (Merriam, 2009).

Student Interviews. Three semi-structured interviews per research participant were conducted during the semester. The interviews were semi-structured because the student participants have different religious identities, variation in salience, and discrepancies in how they engage in their religious practices. Lasting from 45 minutes to 120 minutes, the interviews followed Seidman's (2006) three interview model: focused life history, detailed experience, and reflection on the meaning-making. The first interview focused on the student's religious upbringing, the details of their religious identity, and how their religious practices changed since they came to college. The second interview included a detailed report of the student's lived experience on campus, if and how they found a community within their religious identity, and how they experience Christian oppression on campus. I employed language and tenets from Small's (2020) CRPT and Strayhorn's (2012) Sense of Belonging Model during the interviews so that students could reflect on their specific experiences on campus that may have connected to their religious beliefs and practices. The third interview focused on how the student understands their self and their place on campus in the context of Christian hegemony and how welcome they feel on campus as a religious minority (Seidman, 2006). The language and examples provided by the theoretical framework influenced the interviews.

Before interviewing participants, I conducted a document analysis to have a better understanding of the institution's context. This informed the interview questions. I asked about their experiences with specific policies, events and programs, and offices on campus based on the information that I found in the document analysis and examples provided in the theoretical framework (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005).

Higher Education Professional Interviews. The purpose of interviewing higher education professionals (faculty, staff, administrators, etc.) is to understand how they support students of minoritized religions, how they aid in belonging, and how they perceive the university's support of students of minoritized religions (Nielsen & Small, 2019). These professionals were identified by serving as a resource for students of minoritized religions. I started with staff members in the offices listed in the president's email condoning acts of antisemitism. The professionals did not need to identify with a minoritized religion, and the interview did not focus on their personal religious identity. The purpose of this data is twofold: to understand how individual faculty, staff, or administrators influence a student's sense of belonging on campus and to understand how they view Christian hegemony impacting students of minoritized religions on campus. Language from Small's (2020) CRPT and Nielsen and Small's (2019) article was used to develop interview questions. Additionally, this data serves as a form of triangulation (Merriam, 2009). One semi-structured interview lasting 30 to 60 minutes was conducted via Zoom using the record and transcription function to collect the data. I listened to these interviews at least three times and wrote synopsis notes after each interview (Merriam, 2009).

Data Management. Merriam (2009) states the importance of data management and recommends keeping data stored in multiple places in the event of losing data. The data for this project was kept in multiple places and organized by type of data collection method (Merriam, 2009). For example, there is a separate digital folder for document analysis, student interviews, and employee interviews. Each participant's data was labeled and categorized within the "Interviews" folder. Documents are stored in my

password protected GWBox, my password protected Microsoft One drive, and as hard copies in physical folders stored in a secure location. Because much of this data was collected over Zoom, the transcripts were printed out and the audio file was saved to both drives (Merriam, 2009). In order to protect the identities of the research participants, the file names were saved under the student's pseudonym. Within 24 hours of completing the interview, the original transcript and audio file downloaded from Zoom was deleted and the saved version was anonymized (Lobe et al., 2020).

I also had two separate notebooks for data collection. One notebook was used for personal reflection. I did not type these reflections but used them to make notes about how I interpreted the data. This also served as a way of identifying researcher bias (Merriam, 2009; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007), and I adjusted my interpretation of the data accordingly. This journal helped me identify my own feelings and reactions to the data, so that I could have a space to reflect on my experiences with Christian hegemony (Merriam, 2009). This process is necessary to separate my experiences with Christian hegemony from the research participants' experiences. This increases the validity and reliability of the research (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). While this notebook did not contain any information about the research participants, it was also kept in a secure location.

The second notebook was used for interview notes and reflections. Any changes made to the data collection process were noted in this journal. Additionally, this journal was used to contextualize participant responses with current events such as COVID-19 or acts of antisemitism that occurred on campus. These notes were typed and saved in

appropriate folders to each drive (Merriam, 2009). This notebook contained confidential information, so it was stored in a secure location. Once the data collection was complete, the pages in the journal were shredded.

When data collection was completed, a new set of folders was created for each identified theme for the research. The documents indicated the method in which it was collected, but I sorted them based on findings to interpret and make meaning of the data to answer the research question (Merriam, 2009).

Validity and Reliability. With any research, there are threats to the internal and external credibility (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). One threat to internal credibility may be "ironic legitimation" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 235). I assumed that students of minoritized religions would find sense of belonging in a unique way, but it is possible that they find sense of belonging in the same way students of color and students who identify in the LGBTQ community find sense of belonging. Another internal threat to credibility is "illusory correlation" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 237). I tend to find connections amongst theories, themes, and information that may not actually exist. I mitigated this threat by consulting with my committee members and asking for feedback from peers in my cohort. An external threat is "interpretive validity" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 238). Because I am a novice researcher, there are likely questions about my ability to interpret the findings (Merriam, 2009), so to mitigate this, I consulted with my committee members and peer group. I also used member checking (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007) with research participants to ensure that I accurately captured their meaning making. Another threat to external credibility is "order

bias" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 238). There is no "correct way" to conduct a case study (Yazan, 2015) so it stands to reason that the research may have been critiqued on the order in which the data is collected. This is mitigated by justifying choices with existing literature and consulting with my committee members (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

Multiple strategies for validity and reliability were implemented in this research. First, there was a written and typed audit trail throughout the data collection process (Merriam, 2009; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The audit trail indicated every step of the data collection process and why the choice was made to collect the data. I built relationships with the research participants so that I could ask clarifying questions throughout the interview process and observation analysis. I asked the student participants to read and provide feedback for the life history synopses I wrote about them and updated as per the students' requests. The data was triangulated (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007) by comparing findings to current literature and examining the data through the conceptual framework discussed above. Case studies have built-in triangulation because of the multiple sources of data collection (Merriam, 2009). Interviews with staff and administrators served as a form of triangulation (Merriam, 2009). In order to adequately engage in the data, codes that are counter to the general trends from the findings were included in order to give space for all the experiences described in the interview process (Merriam, 2009; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Acknowledging data that disputes additional findings provides trustworthiness because it indicates the researcher is presenting all the data collected instead of constructing a false narrative (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2009).

Reflexivity allowed me to be aware of my own positionality throughout the research process (Merriam, 2009; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). I ensured validity by writing a credible narrative that accurately depicts the experiences of students of minoritized religions so that they may see themselves in the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a person who identifies with a minoritized religion, I needed to record my thoughts and feelings as separate from the responses, experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the participants. While my shared experience of identifying with a minoritized religion helped me build rapport with the research participants, I needed to ensure that my experiences were not conflated with the data (Merriam, 2009).

A specific notebook was used for interview notes and reflections, and a GWBox document was used to keep records of reoccurring themes, observations, and experiences within the data. The data is a "rich, thick text" (Creswell, 1998, p. 203) for readers to have a full picture of what was discussed in the interviews. In addition, drawing connections from the data analysis provided trustworthiness (Creswell, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While the intent of this research is not to generalize the experiences of students of minoritized religions sense of belonging, hopefully the data and research can be transferred to a different site (Merriam, 2009).

Data Analysis. Analyzing data needs to be intentional and detailed (Merriam, 2009). The data was consolidated, reduced, and interpreted based on what participants said (Yazan, 2015) throughout the process of data collection (Merriam, 2009). A conventional content analysis was used to make meaning of the data because its purpose is to examine a phenomenon (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Extensive notes were taken during the interviews with the students and reflections were written after each interview.

Those notes were added to the transcript of each interview. Each participant's interviews were grouped together in an individual file. The transcripts were read once before I began to identify codes or categories (Merriam, 2009). On the second reading, I made first level categories by pulling out sentences that indicated an understanding of the phenomena and meaning making. I classified second level categories with similar codes. As codes become more prevalent, I identified them as themes (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Creswell, 1998; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). I started with more than 20 codes that were paired down to six themes to represent the data. Data points cannot fit into multiple themes, so it is important that themes are not redundant (Merriam, 2009).

Data collected from documents, including university policies, website information, and program advertisements was analyzed using Small's (2020) CRPT and Strayhorn's (2012) Sense of Belonging Model. CRPT was used to determine the degree to which Christian hegemony is present on campus, if and how the university prioritizes religious pluralism, and if and how the university advocates for dismantling Christian supremacy on campus (Small, 2020). The Sense of Belonging Model was used to determine how many clubs, organizations, physical spaces, and support systems are in place to convey mattering, respect, and care for intersectionality (Strayhorn, 2012). Document analysis assisted in understanding the changes made in response to religious pluralism and sense of belonging, filled in the gaps from student interviews, and enhanced the validity of the research (Bowen, 2009).

Finally, higher education professionals were interviewed as a means of triangulation. The data was analyzed, and then I compared the topics discussed in these interviews with the themes found in the student interviews. Interview data was analyzed

similarly to the student interviews. Notes were taken during interviews with professionals, and transcripts were reviewed. Notes were added to the transcripts and overall codes assigned based on the data. New information was categorized into its own themes and redundant data was used to ensure the validity of the document analysis and student interview analysis. Additionally, the interviews with staff and administrators helped to provide more context regarding the case site.

In order to interpret the data, I reviewed the themes that were identified and applied them to the theoretical framework chosen for this research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Merriam, 2009). Collected data was analyzed using Small's (2020) seven tenets of CRPT and Strayhorn's (2012) seven core elements of sense of belonging by aligning university policies, students' lived experiences, and students' meaning making with the tenets and elements in the theories (Merriam, 2009). I answered the research question by constructing a narrative that represents belonging of students of minoritized religions on college campuses and how that belonging is influenced by Christian hegemony (Creswell, 1998).

Challenges in the Research Process. Several challenges arose as I was recruiting participants and collecting data. These instances gave me pause as I thought about how they related to my research. First, I struggled to find students of minoritized religions willing to participate in my research. I expanded my IRB to include three different public institutions so that I could cast a wider net and was finally able to recruit four students who participated in the three-interview series. I spent 8 months recruiting students, sending repeated emails to chaplains, multicultural and student affairs office directors, faculty, and student organization presidents. Several of the students who signed up to

participate identified themselves as Christians who still practice Christianity, even though my recruitment materials clearly stated I was not looking for students who identify as Christian, Catholic, or Protestant. Difficulty recruiting students of minoritized religions may speak to a greatly concern about campus climate and a student's willingness to engage with such research.

The second challenge started as an observance that grew into an unsurprising nuisance. During the interview process, I used Zoom to record and transcribe the interviews. As I was editing the transcripts, I realized that all religious words that were not related to Christianity were incorrectly transcribed. Rosh Hashanah was often picked up as "Russia", "China", or "Rosha Shawna". Yom Kippur was seldom transcribed as "young people", although it was more likely transcribed as "Yom Kippur War" even though the Yom Kippur War only came up once in an interview with one student participant. To better articulate this point, see the list below. The first word is what participants said and words after the colon are Zoom transcription discrepancies. There are more examples, but these are the most common.

- Shabbat: about, shout, robot
- Matzah: monster, math, at
- Simchat Torah: democrat Torah, simple Torah
- Mezuzah: misses, uh, mess
- Chabad: hub odd, Abad, hub spot, abroad, Bob, about, combined
- Imam: Mom
- Sukkot: city, code, coat
- Kippah: keep, key uh, keyboard
- Hijab: a job
- Halal: hall, hello
- Eid: eat
- Hillel: allow, local, hill

Human Participants and Ethical Precautions

Maintaining ethical standards is imperative to upholding credibility in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). Because interviews were conducted as a means of data collection, building trust and negotiating ongoing consent with participants was vital to upholding ethical standards (Flewitt, 2006; Merriam, 2009). This section covers the potential ethical dilemmas that could be encountered when conducting research and methods used to anticipate and mitigate harm to participants.

The greatest ethical dilemma the research encounters is for the care of participants. Students of minoritized religions may have experienced trauma from Christian privilege (Joshi, 2020). Reflecting on their experiences may resurface experiences of bullying, their religion being minimized, their humanity being invalidated, and damnation (Joshi, 2020). Most students who practice a minoritized religion have been told they are destined for hell unless they accept Jesus Christ as their savior (Joshi, 2020). These are painful experiences that are likely to bring up negative feelings. Internalized oppression can lead to "low self-esteem, shame, and depression," (Joshi, 2020, p. 181). Additionally, students of minoritized religions often identify with a marginalized racial identity as well. Reflecting on the combined trauma of racism and Christian supremacy may trigger negative feelings and reactions. The research process is designed in such a way that cannot prevent these emotions from arising as a result of the interviews. In order to mitigate this harm, I had information about how to contact the counseling center on campus. I included a list of counselors who identify as a person of color if a student wished to see a counselor who shares their racial identity. I also had a list of local religious leaders from minoritized religions so that a student could contact

someone who shares their religious identity in the event they would rather speak with them.

Care was also taken for higher education professionals. During the interviews, they were asked about their views regarding the institution, the role of Christian hegemony on campus, and how they navigate supporting students of minoritized religions. In order to protect their identity, they selected pseudonyms. Additionally, their title and department were not disclosed. Interviews took place virtually, so none of the professionals were seen speaking to me about the research. These actions were important because professionals needed to be able to speak freely about their place of employment without repercussions. Professionals were offered similar emotional support through counseling and religious leaders.

Another ethical issue that arises is protecting a student's identity. While face-to-face interviews are preferred as a best practice (Merriam, 2009), the interviews occurred virtually because of COVID-19. One of the benefits of virtual interviews is that students did not risk being seen participating in the interviews on campus (Lobe et al., 2020). They did not have to explain to anyone who oversees that they were participating in a research project regarding their religious identity. In addition to using a pseudonym, virtual meetings further protect research participants' identities.

Further, harm may come from misrepresenting the participants in the data. To prevent this, I shared my findings with the research participants to ensure I was not misquoting them. This took place after all the interviews had been conducted and analyzed, as I was writing the results of the data. Member checks are helpful beyond

ensuring validity because they can serve as a means of building trust with respondents (Flewitt, 2006; Merriam, 2009).

In order to disclose the potential for harm, informed consent is implemented to share the purpose of the research to participants (Merriam, 2009). Verbal informed consent was acquired at the beginning of every interview. I did not have participants sign informed consent forms for two reasons. First, the meetings were virtual, so signatures would need to be collected electronically, which is another potential way their identities might be discovered. Second, after the initial interest form, participants selected pseudonyms in an effort to protect their identity (Lobe et al., 2020; Merriam, 2009).

Many organizations and Christian-identified people struggle to talk about Christian privilege in the United States despite its presence (Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020). Joshi (2020) states that Christian privilege is so pervasive that Christianity is seen as the "natural order of life" (p. 172). This case study illuminates the oppressive experiences that students of minoritized religions encounter on their campus through interviews and highlights Christian hegemony within campus policies, procedures, and practices through a document analysis. The results of this dissertation may bring up some negative pushback against the university, but the selected research site is not the only university that has policies rooted in Christian privilege (Joshi, 2020). The site location includes details that are clear enough to understand the environmental context but broad enough to protect the site's identity (Merriam, 2009). The ethical concern was mitigated by explaining the broad details about the site, its regional context, and its student body. Additionally, the institution was given a pseudonym and details pertaining to the institution were excluded so its identity could not be deduced (Merriam, 2009).

Conclusion

In summary, a critical instrumental case study (Merriam, 2009) was used to understand how students of minoritized religions cultivate sense of belonging in a campus environment built upon Christian hegemony. Using Stake's (2005) approach to case study design, document analysis and interviews were used to collect and analyze data (Merriam, 2009). Data was analyzed using Small's (2020) tenets of CRPT and Strayhorn's (2012) core elements of sense of belonging. These choices were made based on using a critical epistemology because the purpose of this research is to transform the way scholars and practitioners think about and work with students of minoritized religions (Merriam, 2009). Several measures were put in place to ensure the data was not lost and participants' identities were kept confidential (Merriam, 2009). Further, solutions to mitigate threats to validity and reliability were identified. Because of the amount of data collected, analysis of university documents and interviews was ongoing to ensure appropriate themes were identified. Lastly, several ways to reduce harm to research participants were utilized throughout the data collection process. Although there was much preparation to execute this research, the future could not be anticipated and was subject to change (Stake, 2005; Yazan, 2015). I documented changes that occurred throughout the data collection process. However, regardless of the order in which a researcher collects data, the overall research process should be transferable to other research sites. Thus, the results may differ but still reflect values of White Christian supremacy.

Chapter 4: Setting a Stage for the Site

"[SU] is not Yeshiva University, so it's not always going to be able to get away with changing things, but they at least try to offer alternatives," shared, Heim, one of the staff members participating in this research. Heim was referring to fact that he understands the school was not built for Jewish students, even though accommodations are made for them. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the setting for this case study. Case studies are specific to their time and place and are outlined by the boundaries set by the researcher (Merriam, 2009; Yazan, 2015). This site was selected because of its large Jewish student population, its religiously diverse student body, and its status as a public institution. Additionally, this site was analyzed within the context of Christian hegemony, how the site supports students of minoritized religions, and students' ability to cultivate sense of belonging on campus. This chapter covers the setting of the institution and describes different features of the site. Policies, practices, and characteristics related to the institution paint a comprehensive picture of the setting to better understand the context of the findings.

An important note to address is that while collecting data, several acts of antisemitism occurred on campus that impacted all the student and staff participants, regardless of their religious identity or position at the institution. I described the events and institutional response later in this chapter. Lastly, I provided student biographies to contextualize the themes that were found in this research. Participant's worldviews color their experiences at the institution and were therefore considered a vital piece of this study (Merriam, 2009). To maintain anonymity, the names of the participants, the institution, and other identified features have been changed. Additionally, some of the

resources cannot be cited as they would identify the institution of this case study. Those recourses will be identified as follows: (anonymous, year).

The Case Site

State University (SU) is a large, public, research institution on the eastern side of the United States. There are more than 40,000 students at SU, 30,000 of which are undergraduates. The institution does not publish any data regarding the religious diversity of the student population, however, Hillel International estimates that 19% of undergraduate students and 8% of graduate students identify themselves as Jewish (Hillel International, 2021). No other numerical data can be found regarding the religious, secular, and spiritual diversity of SU. However, there are many clubs that support Jewish and Muslim students, and there are a few clubs that support Pagan, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and Baha'i students.

The current Strategic Plan for SU mentions religion as a secondary identity to its intersection with race and racism. Diversity initiatives within the current Strategic Plan include LGBTQ+ students, race, women in STEM, goals to increase racially diverse faculty, goals to increase courses offered related to cultural competence, and diversity dialogue groups. However, the Strategic Plan does not include religious, secular, and spiritual identities (RSSIs) as a standalone social identity, and intentional support for RSSIs is only mentioned as it coincides with race. The diversity and inclusion webpage lists resources for students' social identities but there is no centralized office to supports RSSIs.

A department at SU collects data regarding bias incidents on campus, including gender bias, racial bias, and additional bias incidents related to social identities. Their published data, described below, indicates an increase in reports related to religious prejudice over the past four academic years (anonymous, 2021). In the 2018-2019 school year, six of the 89 incidents included religious prejudice, and the following year, six of 42 incidents of prejudice included religion. Likely fewer reports were submitted in the 2019-2020 academic year because the COVID-19 pandemic began in the spring of 2020, sending students home or off campus. Throughout the 2020-2021 school year, 10 of the 79 incidents were related to religious prejudice. At the time I was collecting my data during the Fall 2021 semester, 31 incidents had been reported, five of which were related to religious prejudice. This data only represents what is reported to SU, so there are likely more incidents that are not reported (anonymous, 2021). Additionally, these numbers indicate the need to support students of minoritized religions because they are clearly experiencing prejudice; avoiding discussions about religious identity altogether will not eliminate the bias they experience (Blumenfeld, 2006; Edwards, 2017b; Fairchild & Blumenfeld, 2007; Joshi, 2020; Nielsen & Small; 2019).

SU does not have a specific center for religious, secular, and spiritual student identities, even though they do have centers for LGBTQ+ students, students of color, and a multicultural student center on campus. Support for religious, secular, and spiritual students is done by an office within the diversity and inclusion department on campus. This office focuses most of its attention on supporting students of color and multiethnic students. The institution does not have an office specifically dedicated to support religious, secular, and spiritual students. One of the staff participants explained the Vice

President of Student Affairs has intentions to create more interfaith programming. The interfaith page on the website has a bulleted list of five ways they support this initiative. Interfaith resources include intersecting identities, service learning, field trips, interfaith dialogue, and meditation. This list does not address the power structures that support Christian hegemony or acknowledge that there is a power structure at all (Joshi, 2020; Kocet & Stewart, 2011; Small, 2020). This is problematic for a couple reasons. First, this interfaith programming does not address Christian hegemony's role in oppressing non-Christian religious identities (Small, 2020). Secondly, by creating programming around service learning and field trips, the role of Christian hegemony is ignored while students are exposed to events that minimize their religious differences or exotify their religious beliefs (Joshi, 2020; Kocet & Stewart, 2011).

Religious institutions including Hillel, a Catholic student center, a Methodist Church, a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and other Protestant denominations can be found across a street adjacent to campus. Although there is a population of Muslim students at SU, a mosque is not close to campus. As recent as the Fall 2021 semester, SU renovated a space that is now used a Muslim prayer space. A staff participant explained that students use this space daily. However, the foot washing station is in the building next door, and this may be an inconvenience for students. Buddhist students also do not readily have access to a temple or place for worship on or near SU's campus. There is a chapel on campus, but no other institution or temple for religious minorities. SU has 15 affiliated chaplains, 11 of which are Christian, (Catholic or Protestant). Only two Rabbis, one Imam, and one Hindu reverend are listed as support staff and resources for students of minoritized religions. A chaplain is not listed for

Pagan, Buddhist, Baha'i, Sikh, Jain, Daoist, or other Dharmic, Indigenous, or Earth-based religious traditions. Additionally, no one is listed as resource or support staff for secular, Humanist, Atheist, and Agnostic students. Although SU has the intention of developing interfaith initiatives, that is not reflected in their chaplaincies, offices, and support staff.

The campus does have a University Chapel that claims to be non-denominational. The University Chapel is the tallest building on campus (anonymous, 2017). It is a venue for concerts, weddings, campus-wide events, and lectures. The University Chapel has three main chapels and unmovable pews in two of the three chapel spaces. Another published case study focuses on the use and history of the University Chapel (anonymous, 2017). The author notes the University Chapel was built to honor SU alumni veterans who died in war, and the creation of the building was intentionally non-denominational. The author states that typically interdenominational and non-denominational are used interchangeably but tend to focus on different sects of Christianity. When analyzing the architecture of the main chapel, the author (2017) states, "The chapel maintains a strong architectural connection to Renaissance Catholic worship." Many other architectural aspects of the main chapel coincide with Catholic values, and the space is primarily used for mass on Sundays and predominantly Christian wedding ceremonies. The smaller, secondary chapel is used more frequently by "contemporary chaplaincies [who] seek a space that feels more aligned with Protestant sensibilities." The third chapel space is advertised as a lounge space with movable furniture; however, the space cannot fit more than 30 people. The main chapel is used predominantly by Catholics, the secondary chapel is used most by Protestants, and students of minoritized religions rarely use the chapel (anonymous, 2017). Again, these

structural and functional uses of the University Chapel lend themselves to a specific denomination in a "non-denominational" space.

SU's dining facilities offer halal, vegetarian, and vegan options for students of minoritized religions. These options are identified with menu icons, indicating allergens and halal certification. The on-campus dining halls do not offer kosher food options. If a student wants to keep kosher at SU, they will need to purchase a separate full kosher meal plan from Hillel. Hillel offers a full kosher meal plan. Students who live on campus are required to have a meal plan, and Jewish students opting into the full kosher plan pay SU first. SU refunds Jewish students who purchase full kosher meal plans, and the student pays Hillel directly. There are varying options for the kosher meal plan, including a "kosher for Passover" meal plan. This is a specialized meal plan for Jewish students to opt into during the week of Passover. However, when students opt into the full kosher meal plan, they must eat every meal at Hillel. SU claims they are not allowed to pay a rabbi to kasher any of the on-campus kitchens because of "separation of church and state." Therefore, they do not offer kosher options on campus. This means that Jewish students who keep kosher and adhere to the kosher meal plan must walk off campus to Hillel in order to eat. This also means that Jewish students cannot eat at any of the dining halls on campus unless they pay for an additional on-campus meal plan.

Campus Policies

Campus policies related to religious, secular, and spiritual students are limited, lacking nuance, and typically do not address the role of Christian hegemony on campus (Maples et al., 2021). SU's policies claiming to support students of minoritized religions

are representative of these findings. There are two policies worth mentioning as it relates to this dissertation. The first policy is the non-discrimination policy, and the second policy is the excused absence policy. These policies were found on SU's website.

Religion is listed as a protected class under the non-discrimination policy. On SU's policy webpage, there are several links to resources that students can use if they believe they have been discriminated against. Under the written non-discrimination policy, the resources link students to race-based, sexual orientation-based, gender-based, and ethnic-based resources. There are no specific resources listed for students who believe they have been discriminated against because of their religious, secular, or spiritual beliefs. This aligns with the rest of the findings in this case study.

The institution's excused absence policy is more robust. SU does allow students to miss classes for religious observance. The responsibility lies on students to inform their professors within the first week of the semester and provide documentation related to their absence to prove their religiousness. This aligns with the findings of Maples and colleagues (2021) and is particularly egregious because Christian students are never asked to prove their religiousness. Students cannot be penalized for missing assignments that are due on religious holidays; however, missed work must be made up in a timely manner. This is agreed upon by the student and the professor. Students who believe they have been unfairly denied an excused absence can appeal through the university. SU specifically discourages professors from scheduling large assignments and tests during major holidays, although the university calendar does not make them readily accessible. Additionally, the institution encourages professors to remind students of the notification policy lest the students get a "false perception" that SU is "insensitive to religious

diversity". These policies do not address the role that Christian hegemony plays on campus and the burden of responsibility is on the student to express their needs to their professors (Maples et al., 2021).

Acts of Antisemitism

While I was interviewing research participants, several acts of antisemitism occurred on campus. The details are unclear due to the response from SU, so I presented the events as they were reported to me. I discuss the university president's response and an article published by the student newspaper to better illustrate these events.

Two antisemitic events occurred in a short time frame on campus. Although these were not the only acts of antisemitism to occur in the Fall 2021 semester, these were the events that garnered attention from the university. An on-campus student had a swastika drawn on their whiteboard on the door of their residence hall room. It was reported as a hate crime because it specifically targeted a Jewish student. Secondly, flyers with antisemitic language were distributed at off-campus residences where SU students live, including off-campus fraternity houses. Information from the students, staff, and email from the university president makes it unclear if these flyers were specifically targeting a Jewish fraternity or if the flyers were distributed to spread hate. A student walking through the off-campus location found about 15 to 20 flyers and threw them away. Because this technically took place off campus, SU's campus police were not involved. Three weeks later, the university president issued a campus-wide email condemning acts of hate and racism towards Jewish students. The email briefly described the events that occurred and stated that SU is a diverse community that fosters respect. The email also

offered a list of resources for students impacted by these events, none of which specifically led students to support for religious identity or spirituality. Instead, resources included counseling services, student conduct, and the diversity and inclusion office. All the research participants claimed it lacked nuance and many shared that it was not adequate for the events that occurred. Two students and a staff member commented on the slow response time as well.

Around the same time, a student journalist reported this story in The University Times, a student run newspaper. The article provided more details about the incidents than the email from the university president. The article described some of the language written on the flyers and offered testimonials from students, faculty, and staff. While several of the interviewed Jewish students expressed how often they experience antisemitism in their lives, they were frustrated that these events occurred within their campus community and the president's slow response time. Interviewed students shared that the incidents do not make them feel safe on campus, and that antisemitism is not discussed as an act of hatred by any administrator on campus. The faculty and staff that were interviewed discussed a need for more education on antisemitism "considering very few people understand what it is really all about". One office's response is to have a better way of reporting incidents of prejudice on campus.

The university president's email and the newspaper article provide some understanding of the events, and the student and staff participants had more details on the situation. One student participant shared that the only reason the university president addressed the events with an email is because he was encouraged to do so by the director of Hillel. This student has a close relationship with the director of Hillel and participated

in a focus group centered on how to report acts of antisemitism on campus. Another student questioned why the university took so long to send a response, and a third student commented that the university never comments on or responds to events related to Muslim students or Palestine. One of the staff participants shared they were not aware their office was being listed as a resource until after the email was sent. Another staff participant commented that these acts of antisemitism are common on campus. Data about specific incidents of antisemitism is difficult to collect and find at SU because people do not agree on what counts as an act of antisemitism. First, a group of individuals at SU would need to decide what meets the threshold for being termed as an act of antisemitism. Next, a clear reporting system would need to be put in place. Lastly, the data would need to be reported in some way. Currently, this process is not in place. The data depicting acts of hate, violence, and bias related to religious identity is piecemeal at best. Hillel International advertises SU as having a large Jewish community, so when SU chooses not to publicly advertise acts of antisemitism on campus, it serves as a public relations strategy.

Participant Biographies

This section introduces the research participants. There is a brief description of the staff participants, but I only spent about an hour talking to them about how they support students of minoritized religions. I do not know their life histories. For the student participants, I reconstructed their life histories based on our three conversations and included some of the salient topics that were prevalent in our interviews. Please keep in mind that all staff and student names have been changed to keep their identities confidential.

Staff Participants

I interviewed four staff members at SU. Each person serves in a different role, and they had varying perspectives on students and the campus climate. Heim is a rabbi who has worked closely with SU for almost 30 years. Kafka supports students who have experienced prejudice related to their social identities. BD works in an office in the diversity and inclusion department supporting students of color. This is where interfaith work is housed. Gina was responsible for the interfaith programming, although she now does diversity and inclusion assessment for SU.

While each participant provided a unique context, there were some reoccurring themes. None of these staff members received formal training on supporting students of minoritized religions. Each could identify how Christian privilege is part of the campus climate. They shared that support for students of minoritized religions is piecemeal, and clarified that outside of chaplains, who are not employed by SU, there is no specific office or administrator to go to related to issues concerning religious, secular, or spiritual issues. In general, staff shared that support for students of minoritized religions is an afterthought, and Christian hegemony is an ever-present component of campus life.

Student Participants

I spent anywhere from three to six hours talking with each student participant. As I got to know them, I got a sense of their expectations and experiences at SU. Each student has a unique understanding of their religious identity, its saliency to them, and how they have cultivated a community at SU. These brief life-histories intend to provide context for the participants in order to better understand the findings in the next chapter.

Sarah

Sarah grew up in a "fairly strict" Conservative Jewish household in Atlanta, GA. In this context, Conservative indicates a traditional egalitarian observance of Judaism. Her mother grew up observing Conservative Judaism, and her father was raised observing Reform Judaism. Her mother wanted to keep a kosher kitchen, so the family kept kosher and ate vegetarian outside of the house. Sarah explained that once her parents got married, her father became more observant, had a strict practice where he prayed three times a day, and made sure he was eating kosher food outside of the house. Sarah attended a Conservative synagogue, where she also attended Hebrew school regularly after public school. In eighth grade, when Sarah aged out of Hebrew school, she became a teacher's helper. During the summer, Sarah attended a Jewish sleep away camp that allowed her to meet other Conservative Jews. When Sarah was about 10 years old, an event occurred in her family's life that made her father "decide [that] God [didn't] exist [and] Judaism is fake." While "he says he quit all of [Judaism] he still reads Torah regularly at [their] synagogue." This event changed how strictly her family observed Shabbat, though they maintained a kosher kitchen in their house. Sarah stated, "my younger sister was very much influenced by my dad's change where I am … very stubborn." While Sarah's dad tried to convince her and her sister that Judaism was fake, Sarah remained unmoved. Sarah's father never wanted her to stop practicing Judaism, but he did want to change her mind about her religious beliefs. Sarah enjoys learning and teaching people about Judaism, and her Judaism is a very important part of her identity.

Growing up in Atlanta had some challenges. She was aware that most people around her were not Jewish, and she was "one of 20 Jewish students" at her high school.

In late elementary school, her mother asked her to be responsible for explaining to her teachers why she would be missing class for the High Holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. While she identifies this as a burden, she also said it became normal. Talking to her professors about taking off for Jewish holidays at SU did not feel like a new or different experience. When teachers would ask questions about the holidays, she was excited to teach them about Judaism.

Sarah chose SU for a couple reasons. She wanted to be a Jewish Studies major, which is available at SU and not at any of the colleges or universities in her home state. Sarah is a sophomore in this program. She also came to SU because of its large Conservative Jewish population. During her college search process, she specifically sought out schools with both factors: a large Jewish student population and a Jewish Studies major. She specifically wanted to be in a community with a lot of other Jews and SU could offer that. Another Jewish student at SU hosted Sarah for a weekend so that she could experience Shabbat at Hillel, and this experience was so positive that it finalized her decision to attend SU over the other schools she was considering. Currently, she lives on the side of campus closer to Hillel which makes it easier for her to get involved in it, and the Conservative Jewish organization on campus. Sarah shared that she has a leadership position within that organization because she wants to be a Jewish leader on campus and within her career.

There are many Conservative Jewish students on campus, but the organization does not offer prayer services every Saturday morning. Also, with COVID precautions, there are fewer in-person celebrations for holidays. She prefers to attend Conservative services, but during COVID, there was only one service for Simchat Torah. Sarah talked

about her discomfort with the separation of men and women during prayer services within the Orthodox Jewish community, and she described her first celebration of Simchat Torah on campus being one where it was "awkward" to have the men and women be separated by a barrier. Overall, Sarah's experience with SU and the Jewish community have been positive.

Sarah's observance has only grown throughout her life. She feels comfortable in the choices she has made related to her observance of Jewish law. While SU offers Shabbat keys, physical keys that allow Jewish students to not use technology during the Sabbath, Sarah does not opt into this option because of her physical health limitations. Sarah uses the kosher for Passover meal plan but opts to eat vegetarian in the on-campus dining halls. This way she can eat with her Conservative Jewish friends and is not confined to "eating with the same 30 to 40 people all the time [at Hillel]." She attends Friday night and Saturday morning prayer services almost every week, and she feels comfortable talking about her religious beliefs and traditions on campus, including with her non-Jewish professors. Sarah admitted that she does not have a lot of friends on campus who are not Jewish. Sarah talked a lot about how meaningful her home synagogue in Atlanta and the Jewish community at SU are to her. Throughout COVID, she pushed herself to get involved in the Jewish community at SU. Sarah shared the following: "Judaism has always been important to me," and "I just don't know what my life would be without Judaism, like it would be almost nonexistent." She attributes a lot of this to her Jewish communities. When I asked her how important religion is in her life, she responded, "[Judaism] is the most important thing in my life." Sarah's connection to

the Jewish community and her passion for her religious observance were through lines connecting her three interviews.

Rebecca

Rebecca is in her third year of her political science and communication degrees, and she was raised observing Conservative Judaism. The pre-school and Hebrew school she attended were through her Conservative synagogue. Her maternal grandparents are Orthodox Jews who grew up in New York City, however both of her parents were raised practicing Reform Judaism. Rebecca and her parents live in Maryland. Her parents decided that having a Jewish education was important, so she attended Hebrew school as well as public school. Her family did not keep a kosher kitchen, but they celebrated Shabbat with grape juice and challah when she was very young. Rebecca shared that at some point their Shabbat observance stopped and she "didn't know why." In middle school, Rebecca started attending a Jewish youth group where her peers were more observant, and she chose to become more observant as well. Around this time, she asked her parents if they could celebrate and observe Shabbat more frequently, so they had family game nights on Fridays and went to services on Saturday mornings. She chose to start keeping Shabbat more closely in alignment with Jewish law and has gradually gotten more observant over the years. Rebecca shared that attending her youth group was very influential, and she was "the only kid who actually liked [her] Hebrew school … because [she] liked to learn about the culture and ... the bible stories." Now that she is a junior in college, she and her roommate keep a kosher kitchen in their apartment.

Rebecca shared that she noticed ways she was different religiously from other kids in her public elementary school. For example, she asked her mom if Santa Claus was

real, and her mother replied, “No, and I don’t mind telling you this because you’re Jewish, but you can’t tell any of your friends because it will destroy them because they actually believe in Santa.” She started noticing antisemitism during her teenage years. The week before her bat mitzvah, some teenagers in her neighborhood destroyed the light up lawn menorah that she built with her dad. While the police investigation indicated that several family’s Christmas decorations were also destroyed, her family held an interfaith conversation to process the events. Rebecca shared that this experience was very negative for her. She also said that swastikas were frequently found on desks in her high school and whenever the Holocaust was discussed in school, she could feel everyone’s eyes on her. She was one of three Jewish students in her year at her high school, so she appreciated being a part of her youth group outside of school. Rebecca got a letter from her Rabbi that allowed her to take her ACTs and SATs at the Jewish Day School on a Sunday instead of Saturday so that she could observe Shabbat. However, she shared that she did not necessarily select SU for its Jewish community.

Rebecca said that the large Jewish community at SU came as a happy surprise because that was not why she selected to come to the institution. She participates in the Conservative Jewish prayer services on Friday nights and attends the Orthodox Saturday morning services on weekends when the Conservative students are not meeting. She occasionally attends Chabad dinners, keeps kosher, and does not go to class on holidays. Her first two years on campus, her living-learning community was housed on the side of campus closer to Hillel, so she did not have to specifically request to live closer to Hillel. Rebecca talked about her experience as if she navigates between her Jewish community and her non-Jewish communities while on campus. She explained that she has always had

to live between these worlds and that it is a part of being in different spaces with different groups of people. When asked how important religion is in her life, Rebecca said that it was “very important”.

Throughout her interviews, Rebecca talked about how meaningful Judaism is in her life, how she sees and responds to antisemitism, and how her religious traditions inform her worldview. She shared, “One thing about Judaism that has always stood out to me is that questioning is incentivized.” Her ability to openly question the teachings of the Torah were important to her understanding of her religious identity and beliefs. An idea that someone in her youth group shared that has stuck with her is, “A lot of people use their politics to inform their understanding of the Torah. You should be using the Torah to inform your politics.” This concept showed up in every interview with her whether it was explicitly stated or implicitly inferred. Rebecca lives her life in accordance with her Jewish teachings, and it makes her a “happier person”.

Deborah

Deborah is a senior studying within a business major, and she was raised observing Modern Orthodox Judaism. She grew up in Houston, Texas in a predominantly Modern Orthodox community, attending a Jewish school and a Modern Orthodox synagogue. Her extended family are all Jewish, but her parents were raised observing different sects of Judaism. Her mom grew up Conservative Jewish, with a focus on the cultural aspects of Judaism. Her father went to an Orthodox Jewish day school, so he practiced traditional Orthodox Judaism. When they got married, they compromised on Modern Orthodoxy, which Deborah described as being a modern interpretation of Orthodox Jewish law. Her family had a kosher household, and they kept Shabbat,

attending Friday night and Saturday morning prayer services every weekend. Her family is very religious and involved in their home synagogue. Deborah explained that she "was fully Modern Orthodox in every way." She knew that she was different from Christians, but she did not have any friends that were not Jewish. In middle school, she attended a non-religious summer camp, which was her first experience meeting and being around non-Jewish people. This was the first time she felt like her beliefs were being put to the test because people around her were doing activities on the Sabbath, not eating kosher, and wearing shorts. The first few summers she went to this camp, she experienced a lot of self-reflection because she realized that the people around her were "nice and normal and didn't care that [she] was Jewish." She learned to appreciate other peoples' worldviews without it changing how observant she was.

If anything, Deborah talked about the tension between Orthodoxy and Modern Orthodoxy as it relates to her day-to-day observance of Judaism, such as wearing pants or women's role in the synagogue. Deborah said that she is a feminist, but her Jewish traditions mean more to her than being able to lead prayer services. Her identity as a woman is important to her but "it's not a hill [she] is willing to die on." Deborah believes in respectful discourse. She wants to have conversations with people who have different viewpoints than her because it helps her learn about different cultures and backgrounds.

When she graduated from high school, Deborah took a gap year in Israel where she attended a Jewish seminary school. She studied the Torah with other Israeli Orthodox Jewish women who were born and raised in Israel. She went from an environment where she was the most interested student in Judaic studies at her Jewish high school to being the "least spiritually inclined person" present. She had a positive experience where she

learned more about the depth of Judaism, and it allowed her to get more involved in her faith. She said, “It helped me a lot in defining what I believe is obligated in Judaism versus culture and custom in Judaism.” She said that the experience helped give context to some of the aspects of Judaism that did not make sense growing up in the United States, such as the significance of Shabbat and what she wanted out of her Jewish community in college.

Deborah selected SU because of the large Modern Orthodox community, but also because the school is “very diverse.” She wanted to meet other people who were not specifically Modern Orthodox Jews, similar to her summer camp experience. She had the stability of a full kosher meal plan, access to Modern Orthodox prayer services, a community of people she could keep Shabbat with, and the ability to live with a Jewish roommate. At the same time, she met other culturally Jewish students, got involved in the dance club of which she is now a leader, and got involved in organizations related to her major. She enjoys being a part of her Jewish community while also having other communities that allow her to expand her worldview and learn new things about herself.

Deborah had several negative experiences on campus related to antisemitism and people being disrespectful of Judaism, but she would tell you that overall, she has had a positive experience at SU. When I asked her how important religion is in her life, she said “it’s a core part of my life.” She described the ways she tangibly practices Judaism and how it influences the way she lives her life. She said, “It’s just a part of who I am. It’s not a choice. It's not a hobby. It’s a part of me, like I wouldn’t be me if I didn’t have Judaism, like I would be a fully different person.” This quote stood out to me because I think this speaks to the importance of religious identity for many students of minoritized religions.

Identifying the lack of support for students of minoritized religions and nuances within the Jewish community were reoccurring themes throughout Deborah's interviews. She often identified ways in which what SU said and how SU responded were not in congruence with each other. She was not shy about pointing out discrepancies within the university and explaining how institutional structures maintained Christian hegemony. Our conversations added to the nuance of how Christian hegemony shows up in seemingly secular spaces.

Sid

Sid is a senior at SU, who was raised practicing Islam. Sid is a first-generation American; his mother is from France and his father is from Algeria. His mother was raised Catholic, although his family did not attend a Catholic church or practice Catholicism. He described celebrating Christmas by having oranges under a tree. His father is Muslim, so Sid grew up attending a mosque and Sunday school where he read the Quran. Sid said that he "was not very religious," but that his family adhered more to what it means to be culturally Muslim and lived their lives in accordance with Muslim values. When Sid was very young, his father took him to a farm on Eid where he participated in the slaughter of a goat. This practice is in accordance to eating halal meat during Eid. Sid shared that he did not enjoy this experience and described it as a negative one. He never enjoyed going to Sunday school or celebrating Muslim holidays. His father believed that Jews and Christians were trying to keep Muslim people oppressed in the United States, and Sid grew up with the belief that to be Muslim is to be "weak, inferior, or less than" other religious identities. These beliefs influenced his decisions when he came to SU.

When Sid came to SU, he rejected his religious and cultural Muslim traditions and "decided to participate in a club that did consulting for Israeli startups." He participated in this club for a couple years and realized there was a lot of anti-Muslim hate within the group. Sid described his time in the club to me as follows: "I very explicitly said that I did not want to identify with being Muslim. I went to great lengths to try to rationalize the idea that I wasn't." While at a party with other members of this club, someone made a derogatory joke about a Muslim woman and Sid laughed along. He did not understand at the time why he was laughing, but then he said, "It didn't really click for me until about a minute and a half later that that was something that I laughed at." I understood this to mean that it was something he felt ashamed about. He later quit the club.

During his junior year, which was the second year of COVID, Sid experienced some mental health concerns where he used substances to self-medicate. I asked him if he felt like he had spiritual experiences while he was using the substances, and he said, "Yes … because I felt like I had an understanding of my purpose, and understand what to do, where to go, who I want to be, who I am." He tried to get into Satanism, but he did not get involved beyond researching the organization. Once he got help for his mental health needs, Sid found the Pagan club on campus.

Sid was drawn to the Pagan club because to him it felt like a religion for the sake of anti-religion. He viewed religion as a tool used to divide and hurt people, and Paganism felt like a healing space that was inclusive to everyone. He enjoys casting spells, meditating, and having spiritual experiences. He said that being involved in the Pagan club allowed him "the first true spiritual experience … because it wasn't really tied to something." When I probed further to understand what he meant, he articulated that it

was free of judgement. He also shared that no matter what, he will "identify with being Muslim." He told me he got to a point where he realized, "Alright, I'm not religiously Muslim, but clearly, I was raised with the cultural values of the Muslim identity. I am Muslim."

Because of his experiences on campus, Sid could identify a lot of the nuances of social interactions and cultural values of SU. When I asked him how important religion and spirituality are in his life, he said, "Very, very, very important, probably one of the most important things that I've ever really thought about." Cultural differences and belonging were the major reoccurring themes we talked about during each conversation. Sid has had some positive experiences at SU, but when it comes to discussing religious issues, he would get frustrated because he felt as though the institutional structures that are in place prevent SU from making any nuanced change. On multiple occasions, he told me he believes SU lacks the self-awareness needed to understand cultural differences or make changes where Muslim students can feel welcomed in a variety of settings beyond a classroom.

Each student brought a unique and nuanced approach to answering the research questions. These life histories are meant to provide a snapshot of who they are in order to contextualize their responses that will be presented in the next chapter. Their worldviews color their responses, understanding, and meaning making related to their religious traditions and spirituality on campus.

Conclusion

On the surface, SU appears to be a welcoming campus that supports religious diversity. In reality, students of minoritized religions need to leave campus in order to have access to the support they need. The students generally have positive experiences within their religious communities, but they still comment on how the institution can be more inclusive. The institution does not have specific resources related to religious, secular, or spiritual identities outside of chaplains who are predominantly Christian. The non-denominational chapel is very obviously Catholic in its architectural style and its function. Some accommodations are made for dining plans and housing needs, but SU's Strategic Plan does not identify a need to support religious, secular, and spiritual students. Students are still experiencing prejudice based on their religious identities, and when acts of antisemitism occur on campus, response from the administration lacks nuance and resources to support students impacted by the harm. While SU is a state school that hides behind the guise of secularism, the institution upholds and maintains cultural values of Christian hegemony. In the next chapter, I will review the major themes that emerged from this research.

Chapter 5: The Findings

Relevant data from document analysis, staff participants, and student participants will be provided in this chapter. While there were several topics that came up in conversation, I have condensed them down into six themes that help to answer the research question. As a reminder, the research question asks: *In what ways does Christian hegemony influence sense of belonging for students of minoritized religions on a college campus?* Themes determined from this research include "the audacity of White Christianity", "direct acts of hate", "the choice mirage", "hiding behind the guise of secularism", "internalized oppression", and "cultivating community". In this chapter, I will define each theme, provide examples from the data relating to each theme, and explain how these themes impacted students' experiences on campus.

The Audacity of White Christianity

According to Oxford Languages, audacity can be defined in two ways; 1) a willingness to take bold risks; and 2) rude or disrespectful behavior. For the examples I will provide in this section, the oppressive institutionalized structure of Christianity is doing both. The intersection of race and religion is important to highlight in this example because the combined power structures of White supremacy and Christian supremacy are at play in these examples. The experiences described in this section provide examples of how White Christian hegemony is the structure that permits Christians to get away with treating non-Christians as inferior, weird, or exotic. These examples provide insight into how people with dominant identities believe that comfort is their right because their identity is the norm. While I understand not all Christians behave this way, all Christians

benefit from the oppressive structures of Christian hegemony. These examples had me saying “the audacity” out loud.

Examples

Some of these examples are more extreme than others, but they all fit into audacious behavior in some way. These examples are separated into categories to create a clearer picture of the everyday experiences of the students. Kafka talked about how the campus climate is one where people are expected to have a basic understanding of Christianity, and that Christian privilege “is pervasive, so much so that it’s been rendered invisible.” They explained that on campus, people are assumed to be Christian until they disclose otherwise. This assumption in and of itself is problematic, but it feels particularly audacious at a university with such a large Jewish student population. This overarching institutional value gives context to these examples.

Interpersonal Experiences

Deborah described a couple interpersonal experiences that left her feeling very uncomfortable. She explained that Friday night prayer services are open to all people, and a person named Adam started coming regularly to the Conservative services and staying for Shabbat dinner afterwards. Deborah said it was clear that he did not understand a lot about Judaism, and “he seemed friendly, like he was new to Hillel and to Jewish stuff.” He wore a fedora instead of a kippah, but she did not comment about it being unusual. Deborah shared that Adam came to prayer services about “10 to 12 times” and at some point:

> [He] started asking us about Judaism and about Conservative services like, "What do you believe in then?", "How do you do certain things?", "What do you do and not do on Shabbat?", and "What do you believe God told you?" And then he pulled out his Bible and started doing Christian stuff. He was reading from the New Testament to compare to what I said about Judaism. … We would say something, and he would try to bring up a verse of the New Testament and compare it to the Old Testament. He would bring his Bible to Friday night free Shabbat dinner and put it on the table and start asking us questions.

When I asked follow-up questions about this experience in our second interview, she shared that his behavior "wasn't harmless." She said he would ask questions and, "he would pull out his Bible and start reading from the New Testament." When they answered his questions he would say, "Oh interesting, because this book right here [says], and he would start telling us what it said."

Later she and her friends came across an event sponsored by his Christian organization. They were looking for a table hosted by Student Activities, unrelated to his Christian organization, and were confused by the social event happening in the same place. They did not intend to "crash" or attend the social event hosted by the Christian organization, but Adam was there and came over to talk to Deborah and her friends. He was excited to see them and said, "This is my friend group. This is my Friday night prayer service. This is my Hillel." He compared the organization's social event in a public space to a Shabbat prayer service. Deborah said that it was "really uncomfortable." When she sees him on campus, she tries to avoid him because he will wave and try to talk to her. She told me, "He makes me uncomfortable. We are not friends." Ultimately,

Adam thought his behavior was acceptable. He thought he would be welcomed into a Jewish prayer service where he challenged Jewish students' beliefs by "disproving" them and reading directly from the New Testament. This behavior is not the same as Rebecca appreciating the ability to question Jewish beliefs. Jewish people debating interpretations of Jewish scripture is not the same experience as a Christian person coming into a Jewish prayer service and correcting Jewish peoples' beliefs from a religious text that Jewish people do not adhere to. This example highlights the presence of Christian hegemony, and how Christian privilege allows for Adam to think his behavior is acceptable, when in fact, it is audacious.

During her sophomore year, Deborah lived in a language immersion living-learning community. This community consisted of about 12 languages, and Deborah was part of Hebrew House. She lived with other Jewish students of varying levels of religious observance. The director of the living-learning community was not Jewish, and Deborah shared that she had regular meetings with him where he would adjust his body language to appear domineering over her. In addition, he scheduled mandatory events on Jewish holidays and got mad when the Hebrew cluster would ask for extensions or to be excused from the programs. When the students of Hebrew House asked for an extension for a project that was due on Yom Kippur, "he begrudgingly pushed off the deadline for us, just for the Hebrew cluster, and he complained that he was giving special treatment to the Hebrew cluster." His behavior was problematic because he believed that he was going out of his way to make an exception for students to accommodate their religious beliefs. Students of minoritized religions either must prove how religious they are or be punished

for being too religious (Joshi, 2020; Mapels et al., 2021). Neither of these experiences are asked of Christian students (Joshi, 2020).

A Christian Calendar

A Gregorian calendar is used in the United States, which impacts our businesses, holiday schedules, and academic calendars. However, many non-Christian religions follow a different calendar system, which impacts their holiday schedules. Administrators at institutions claim this makes planning around non-Christian holidays difficult, even though they have search engines and internet access that make it very easy to figure out when Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Ramadan, and other major religious holidays will take place in any given year. Each participant had a negative experience related to the university calendar and how it impacted their access to campus resources and events. Sarah shared that she was not able to attend the university sponsored club fair. It was rescheduled due to rain, and it ended up taking place on Simchat Torah, a major Jewish holiday. Not only were Jewish students in synagogue on that day, but they also could not use electronics, work, or be present to advertise their clubs. Sarah shared that next year she will "be a junior who has never been to the club fair."

Deborah explained how she has experienced trouble with the add/drop period at the beginning of the semester. Adding, dropping, and getting on and off waitlists is a process that requires technology. Depending on when the semester starts and when the High Holidays occur, this may serve as a challenge for observant Jewish students who also need to finalize their course schedule. At the beginning of the Fall 2021 semester, Deborah explained:

> The Hillel director had a whole system because of two-day holidays. The way that our waitlist works, if you're on the waitlist for a class in the first two weeks you have to log in every 24 hours to stay on the waitlist. So [the Hillel director] had a whole system where you have to sign up in a Google doc ahead of time and then the university individually goes in to make sure you stayed on the waitlist for all your classes.

SU does not offer any days off for religious holidays that occur during the semester, which means that every year students are missing class for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Simchat Torah, Eid, Holi, and other major religious holidays. SU schedules final exams on Friday nights and Saturdays, which means that Jewish students who keep Shabbat need to reschedule their Saturday final exams. Of course, SU does not hold final exams on Sundays, so Christian students never have to reschedule their final exams for religious observance. Given the large population of non-Christian students on campus, making little effort to plan around these events is disrespectful and unacceptable.

Time off around religious holidays affects students, staff, and faculty. Heim illustrated how the audacity of White Christianity shows up on campus. He said that the university policy allows time off for religious holidays, but it does not include travel time. This means that if a student needs to travel home to celebrate Yom Kippur, the professor technically does not have to allow an excused absence. On the same note, for several years, the university president has given all faculty and staff December 24 (Christman Eve) the day off in order to travel. Faculty and staff do not have to use their personal vacation time to take this day off work. This is a clear example of Christian privilege on campus. This double standard is audacious because it communicates that

Christianity is a more valid and normal religion than others. The president assumes that everyone will take off time for Christmas, but they are not given time to travel for non-Christian holidays.

Sarah brought another point to my attention related to the calendar. She talked about Hannukah being a minor holiday, one which Jewish people can work and use technology. She said that a lot of people will comment on Hannukah being early or late in a year. Sarah said, "In the Jewish calendar, Hanukkah starts on the same day every year. People only talk about Hanukkah in relationship to Christmas." These examples related to the Gregorian calendar indicate how institutionally and societally, most people do not consider any need to make accommodations for non-Christian holidays. Not only is this audacious, but it also connects to Kafka's point about assuming that Christian hegemony is embedded in the institution. The last example regarding the audacity of White Christianity is quite a common occurrence for non-Christian people.

Proselytizing

Proselytizing is not an uncommon experience for people to live through, but the experience can be an unsettling one. Rebecca shared an experience she had with proselytizers on campus. A man, who she described as being in his 30s, approached her as she was walking on campus. He asked if she had a couple minutes to talk. This is how she explained the scenario.

> He starts out, he's like, "Jesus loves you" this and the other thing and you know I let him go on for a minute or two to be nice, I guess, and then ... he just kept going. At some point I was like "I'm sorry. I'm just not the audience for you." He

goes, “Why not?” and I go, “Because I’m Jewish.” And he goes, “Oh, so then you’re going to hell.”

This is a great example of a bold risk displaying rude and disrespectful behavior. Rebecca shared that 30 minutes later she and her friends walked by him again and he said the same thing. Proselytizers are allowed on campus because its public property but allowing people to practice their freedom of speech in such a way can have a detrimental effect on the students the institution claims to support. When I asked Rebecca if she would feel comfortable reporting the incident, she told me it would be more hassle to report it when SU would likely do nothing in response. This is not quite the vote of confidence an institution likely wants to hear. Whether Christian hegemony shows up as a microaggression or a blatantly disrespectful act at Shabbat prayer services, it hurts the students being targeted. The audacity of White Christianity leaves students feeling frustrated at best or unsafe to be themselves on campus. This leads to more severe behavior on campus.

Direct Acts of Hate

Examples for “direct acts of hate” refer to times where student experienced words, actions, symbols, threats, or other bias incidents related to their religious identity. I am deliberately choosing to refer to these acts as hateful occurrences because they belittle and attack someone’s religious identity. These are different from examples of the audacity of White Christianity because they are manifestations of greater societal issues.

Examples

There are several examples of antisemitism the Jewish participants experienced throughout their lives. Each of them talked about seeing swastikas drawn on walls and whiteboards, carved into school desks, and printed on flyers as something that was not noteworthy. I understood this to mean that the students were desensitized to seeing swastikas. Sarah explained that compared to other acts of antisemitism on campus and in society, seeing swastikas was "not that big of deal." Imagine being so bombarded with a symbol of hate that it longer feels like a big deal.

The antisemitic events described in the last chapter generated a response from each of the participants. Most students did not feel that the university's response was adequate because it lacked nuance, was delayed, and failed to address the root of the problem. Rebecca asked, "Why did it take them so long to send an email condemning antisemitism?" Sid questioned the authenticity of the email, claiming that the university president did not address the root of the problem. Deborah learned from the Hillel director the only reason an email was sent was because he encouraged the university president to respond. The email had links to campus resources but none of them provided support services for students who had experienced direct acts of hate or prejudice related to their religious identity. SU saw an increase in reported acts of antisemitism on campus the semester I conducted this research. For example, Deborah shared that around this time several students had their mezuzahs taken from their apartment doors. These acts of hate make students feel fearful on campus and create a hostile environment for Jewish students. Antisemitism certainly is not the only act of hate being committed on campus.

BD shared a prejudiced action committed by one of the Christian chaplains. A Christian chaplain complained to the staff setting up the club fair that they did not think it

was appropriate for the Wiccan student group to set up a table in the same section with the other religious groups because being Wiccan "isn't a real religion". I asked BD how they responded to the chaplain. The chaplain was told they had to accept the Wiccan student group. This response is one that uplifts the Wiccan students, however, the prejudiced behavior from the chaplain is not uncommon. These acts make students of minoritized religions feel unsafe on their campus community.

Lastly, a 2016 article in The University Times addressed the Islamophobic hate crimes that Muslim students were experiencing on campus. The author attributed this in part to the negative stories about Muslims in the media. The Imam on campus expressed the importance of getting to know Muslim students and learning about Islam. Sid also heard his peers making derogatory statements about Muslim women. BD explained that Muslim students expressed feelings of frustration on campus. Because Jewish students are the largest group of students of minoritized religions, Muslim students feel even more oppressed on campus. They shared with him that they feel like their religious identity is an afterthought of SU. These actions only perpetuate hate on campus and in society. The next theme is about difficult choices students must make regarding their religious identity.

The Choice Mirage

This theme highlights examples where there is a false dichotomy of choice. SU provides outlets for students of minoritized religions to practice their religious traditions, but they typically must make a trade off to do so. In other words, students can "choose" how observant they want to be, but it often comes at a price as they typically must give

something up in order to adhere to their religious traditions. Christians would never have to make a choice between celebrating Christmas or taking a final exam because an institution in the United States would never schedule a final exam on Christmas day. The choices students of minoritized religions must make related to their religious identity at SU are not choices that Christian students face about their Christianity.

Examples

Most of the examples used to support this finding are basic human needs. I will be discussing participants' experiences with meal plans, residence halls, and clothing. Student participants do not make decisions around these topics lightly, and I would guess they are not the only students of minoritized religions making these challenging decisions.

Clothing

Students of minoritized religions must make choices about their dress every day. Sid said that wearing a hijab on campus is not unusual, but if a Muslim woman were to come to a football game wearing her hijab, people would treat her differently. He explained this was partially due to cultural norms, and while Sid did not explicitly state this, I understood him to mean, "This is a football game. This is no place for religion." Sarah said she does feels comfortable walking around campus wearing her Star of David necklace, but she suspects that Orthodox Jewish men experience some confused or negative reactions to their religious regalia. This is because Jewish men wear more obvious regalia including tallit, tzitzit, and kippahs, and Jewish women are not required to wear these items. In some Orthodox communities, women would not be allowed to

wear these at all. When people wear their religious regalia, they are not "making a choice." They are living their lives in accordance with the teachings of their religious practice. Religious traditions around food can also be challenging to navigate.

Dining

SU offers a kosher dining plan for Jewish students, which most of the Jewish participants were excited about even if they did not purchase the plan. Jewish students who opt into the kosher meal plan must eat every meal at Hillel, which is technically off campus. They are not able to eat at the regular dining halls on campus unless they have a separate on-campus meal plan. Sarah shared the reason she did not opt into the full kosher meal plan is because she "[doesn't] want to be stuck eating with the same 30 or 40 people all the time." She explained that typically, the most observant Jewish students are the ones who take advantage of the kosher meal plan. If she were to opt into the plan, she would not be able to eat with her Conservative Jewish friends or any of her other friends. Deborah did opt into the kosher meal plan, and she has never eaten in an on-campus dining hall except for a boxed lunch during new student orientation. Deborah expressed her wish for the on-campus dining halls to offer kosher boxed lunches so that she could eat in the dining hall with her other friends. Sarah navigates this by eating at the vegan and vegetarian station in the dining hall, but she said she understands why that might not meet the needs of all the observant Jewish students on campus. Additionally, getting to Hillel to eat might include a long walk or an inconvenient location between classes. Sarah, Deborah, and Rebecca all commented on this challenge. Deborah shared, "I just don't think it makes sense that Jewish students that are observant kosher Jewish students are pushed away like that and can't eat in any of the other dining halls." Essentially,

observant Jewish students must choose between keeping a strict kosher diet or engaging with other people and elements of their college experience. They also must choose how they will navigate their class schedule as is relates to having time to get to and from the Hillel dining facility. Jewish students seem to think it is less of a choice and more of a trade-off. The same can be said about where Jewish students live on campus.

Residence Halls

The residence halls are in two major areas of campus, and one grouping is much closer to Hillel than the other. Sarah shared that when she was applying for on-campus housing, a Hillel staff member encouraged Jewish students to request to live on the side of campus closer to Hillel. Not only are these residence halls closer to Hillel but they have better infrastructure for observant Jewish students to use Shabbat keys. These are physical keys that allow Jewish students to access their residence hall without using technology during Shabbat. The residence halls on the side of campus further from Hillel have poorer access to Shabbat keys and doors. Deborah explained that the residence hall she lived in her first semester on campus did not have Shabbat keys, so she and the other Jewish students had to make a request to the Residence Director. They had special keys made, and the only door they could access was a poorly lit entrance on the other side of the building. Deborah expressed her frustration with this system, "Because the Jews who live on [the far side of] campus generally are not the Orthodox Jews … it kind of causes social divisions. But all this is because of the structure of the institution that creates those divisions." Deborah shared that between her experiences with the kosher meal plan and living on campus that it was "a huge deal and fully impacted [her] social life." Again, these "choices" that students make have a big impact on their ability to engage in all the

experiences SU has to offer. The infrastructure of the institution segregates Jewish students from the larger SU community and isolates the observant Jewish students from their less-observant peers. By putting the responsibility of the "choice" on the student, SU can argue that they have provided the accommodations to the students and therefore, have done their part.

Holiday Observance

Lastly, students of minoritized religions must decide whether to celebrate their holidays or attend class. By missing class, they may miss important information, class discussion, and events in the classroom that may not be able to be replicated. While SU's excused absence policy does allow for students to miss class for religious observance, this does not mean that professors will not hold this against students who miss 75% of class the first month of the fall semester. Because the holidays occur on different days in the Gregorian calendar, the number of missed classes can fluctuate from year to year. In 2016 and 2020, the student run newspaper, The University Times, published articles about Jewish students choosing between going to class or observing religious holidays, including the holiest days of the year. In both articles, the author advocated for the days off or at a minimum, for SU to include major religious holidays on the university calendar. The students feel the impact of this choice every year.

Heim talked about power dynamics between faculty and students requesting an absence due to religious accommodations. He said:

> It gets challenging because professors hold some power. Even if the dean says [professors] have to give [students time] off, I've had professors look [students] in

> the eye and say, “You can take off today, but I want you to know, no student has ever passed my makeup test.” ...Then the professor says “I never really said that. I just said that my makeup test is going to be a little harder.”

These conversations make it difficult for students of minoritized religions to report their professors because there is no formal record. Similar to Heim’s example, professors can claim they did not make that exact statement, or the student misunderstood them. Maples and colleagues (2021) discuss this power dynamic as well. When a student must face potential backlash from a professor, the choice between observing a holiday and missing class becomes a higher stakes choice.

The choice mirage is a clever way for SU to claim they are accommodating the needs of students of minoritized religions without having to respond to the impact it has on their lived experiences on campus. For many students of minoritized religions, their religious identity is a salient part of their identity. They do not think of observing their religious traditions as a choice, much like Christians are assumed to celebrate Christmas. It is a part of who they are. Students of minoritized religions are making decisions to adhere to those traditions while sacrificing other aspects of their college experience. When student’s claim SU is not doing enough to support them, the institution hides behind the guise of secularism.

Hiding Behind the Guise of Secularism

In the context of the United States, secularism is a false neutral that claims a distancing from religion while ignoring the ways that Christian values and traditions are infused into American values, calendars, traditions, and language creating a supremacist

structure that oppresses students of minoritized religions (Joshi, 2020; Jun et al., 2018; Small, 2020). Examples in this theme are a performance of inclusion and equality, but they do not deliver on that promise in practice. The institution is doing the minimum required to claim they provide support and resources for religious, secular, and spiritual student identities. Realistically, the systems, policies, and laws created in the spirit of secularism are created for and by Christians in order to maintain power within Christian hegemony. In this way, secularism is not providing an areligious environment, because Christian norms, values, and beliefs can still be found throughout SU's policies, practices, and culture. By claiming secularism, they claim a scapegoat that continues to marginalize non-Christian students.

Examples

These examples will focus more on the published policies and infrastructure of the campus. The concept of SU being a secular state school also came up in several of the conversations I had with the staff on campus. Students and staff can identify ways SU supports students of minoritized religions, but they can also identify instances where they are told "no" because of "secularism".

"Separation of Church and State"

A 2019 article in The University Times addressed the concern about on-campus dining halls not being accessible to students on the kosher meal plan. Students expressed frustration with not being able to eat lunch with their friends, claiming that other institutions in their region have kosher kiosks or packed lunches available to observant Jewish students. A dining employee explained how this would not be possible at SU

because the state cannot pay someone to do a religious function such as kasher a kitchen. They claimed a separation of church and state and that providing this service would violate First Amendment laws. By using secularism as their excuse, staff at the institution shut down the students' frustrations and essentially said, "Our hands are tied. There is nothing we can do about it." This argument is fundamentally wrong regarding the legality of the First Amendment because SU would not be promoting Judaism over other religious groups, especially considering they already pay for and provide halal options. In fact, an argument can be made that by not providing kosher options in the on-campus dining halls, SU is prohibiting the free exercise of an observant Jewish student's ability to eat on campus. Instead of thinking about creative solutions to address the problem, the institution does nothing. They believe the problem is solved because they offer a kosher meal plan through Hillel, and vegan, vegetarian, and halal options in the dining hall. Offering dining options that accommodate some religions but not all is hypocritical, and the argument of secularism falls apart. This is not the only occasion administrators at SU rely on the First Amendment to excuse themselves from acknowledging harm done to students of minoritized religions.

General rhetoric supports the notion that public schools benefit from the "separation of church and state". Conceptually, this idea promises a learning environment that is free from Christian privilege and normativity. During interviews with staff, I asked how they saw Christian privilege occurring on campus, if at all. BD said that religiously affiliated clubs cannot receive funding from the Student Government Association because of the "separation of church and state" so his office pays for it instead. This does not make sense to me because SU is still paying for this in some way. Kafka shared that

Christianity is embedded in all aspects of the institution including graduation ceremonies, the academic calendar, the University Chapel, and its values. Graduation ceremonies have religious invocations, and the University Chapel cannot really accommodate all religious identities and their traditions. The privilege is so embedded that it is "rendered invisible." When I asked what the institution is doing to work against Christian privilege, Kafka told me the equity and inclusion work is "performative at best." The institution is addressing the symptoms instead of the real issues, and their reason for this is because they are a public university. Additionally, campus resources either lean on interfaith programming or do not address religious identity as a social identity. Their reasoning for this is "because it is a public school." There seems to be a disconnect between what SU is willing to do and what SU "cannot" do because they claim to be a secular institution. While the institution may be public, it cannot keep its promise on a learning environment free from Christianity when Christian values are infused into the institution's values. This example highlights the claim that secularism is a false neutral. SU is not neutral on religious equity as the institution is clearly maintaining Christian values and holidays. Instead secularism is used to maintain the system as it already exists. Secularism rarely, if ever, delivers on its promise because it exists in a culture built upon Christian hegemony.

Heim shared a story about graduation invocation. Over a decade ago, SU's Board of Trustees decided that having a religious invocation led by a Christian chaplain was no longer acceptable, and they suggested it no longer be a part of graduation. The president overruled the Board of Trustees and decided to keep the invocation because it was "tradition". The university president wanted to keep the religious invocation, but in order to appease the board, the chaplains are on a rotating schedule. Every few years each one

leads the invocation. Heim said that while not explicitly stated by the president, the message was clear: "Tone down your religion." Chaplains were encouraged to share humanist messages during this invocation instead. Humanism is an ecumenical worldview (Astin et al., 2011). These actions are not secular, and the president acknowledges that religious diversity exists on campus. If anything, they provide insight as to how "secularism" is used to maintain Christian hegemony as the status quo. As Kafka points out, Christian privilege is "rendered invisible" and "secularism" is the codified language used to disguise it. This example highlights the hypocrisy of claiming SU as a secular institution. If SU was an areligious university, there would not be an invocation lead by a university chaplain at any school event.

Free Speech

When acts of antisemitism, Islamophobia, and Christian supremacy occur on campus, the behavior is often protected under free speech. SU has guidelines for public demonstrations and leafletting. These guidelines state that demonstrators must be invited by a campus member and that they cannot engage in harassing, physically abusive, threatening, or intimidating conduct. A 2017 article in The University Times addresses this because the author experienced a threatening comment from an outside demonstrator. The author asked SU's administration what behavior rises to the level of harassing, threatening, or intimidating, and SU would not answer the question. Proselytizers are allowed to come to campus and tell non-Christian students they are going to hell because it is "protected by free speech". Rebecca said that she felt harassed in that situation. Legally, free speech can be dictated by time, place, and manner, and SU mentions this in their demonstration guidelines. SU can regulate when and where proselytizers come to

campus. Heim explained that when students want to protest Israel Fest, SU requires protestors be a certain distance from the event. This is already taking place in other situations on campus, so it could certainly be enforced for other groups.

Additionally, the guidelines state that any member of the campus community can distribute flyers without registration or advanced planning, if they do not litter. For example, with the events that occurred on campus while I was collecting data, the distributed flyers with antisemitic language were not considered a hate crime because they were not targeting a specific person. These guidelines may sound like they protect the students in the campus community; however, these guidelines in practice do not prevent students from experiencing harassing, threatening, or intimidating conduct. Free speech is secularism's ally because it protects Christian hegemony as a power structure. When students of minoritized religions are discriminated against because of their religious beliefs, the language is protected under free speech regardless of the damage it does to the individual. In this way, the claim of secularism is maintaining the status quo. If administrators at SU are not directly referencing First Amendment rights, they are likely referring to being a public school.

This theme highlights that Christian hegemony is alive and present on campus. There are clear examples of it showing up from the dining hall to ceremonies to acts of hate. SU uses secularism as an excuse to not support students of minoritized religions. If secularism refers to being free of religion, then SU is not a secular institution. Christian hegemony clearly exists and is maintained on campus. SU also uses secularism an excuse from protecting students from harassment. Pretending that secularism is a tangible

outcome SU can provide can lead to internalized oppression for students of minoritized religions.

Internalized Oppression

Many people with minoritized identities experience internalized oppression. This occurs when people with minoritized identities believe that the oppression they face is normal. Students of minoritized religions also experience this oppression, and this theme arose often in the interviews with students. All the participants were raised in the United States and therefore grew up in a society that adheres to values, customs, and norms of Christian hegemony. I noticed that internalized Christian hegemony showed up in the ways the student participants talked about the institution supporting or not supporting their religious identity. Because of this, some participants talked about feeling grateful to the institution for "allowing" them to be visible and take up space on their own campus. These examples illustrate how the students want more from SU but do not feel comfortable enough to ask.

Examples

This is one of the more nuanced themes I discovered within the data. At first, when I asked questions about how SU supported students' religious identity, how inclusive the institution felt to them, and how welcomed they felt to express their religious identity, their answers were confusing. Sarah and Rebecca were quick to talk about how positive their experience had been "considering [SU] is a public school." Then a couple minutes later they would talk about their low expectations of faculty and staff at the institution to have any awareness of their religious identity. Meanwhile, Deborah and

Sid were quick to call out examples of Christian privilege or times when SU did not provide the same support for all religious identities. Here are some examples to better explore this theme.

Sid's Experiences

Sid internalized his hatred for being Muslim. He believed that "being Muslim meant to be inferior or at least weak," because his father believed Muslims were valued less than Christians and Jewish people. Sid internalized these messages, believed them to be true, and was mad about them. As a result, Sid told me, "I rejected everything and decided to participate in a club that did consulting for Israeli startups, kind of as a rejection against my dad." He experienced a lot of Islamophobia in these spaces, and he even found himself laughing at Islamophobic jokes. He realized that participating in these clubs did not align with his values, but he believed his religious identity was a shameful secret.

Once Sid left the Israeli startup club, he tried to start a club that would attempt to bridge the gap between Muslim and Jewish students on campus. He thought that by getting people together, he could create equality between the two religions on campus. He found it easy to find Jewish students to participate, but other Muslim students were less interested. He attributed this to his personal beliefs about the Israel/Palestine conflict. This club failed, and Sid told me that he views "religion is used to divide and hurt people." He was attracted to Paganism because he viewed it as a "religion for the sake of anti-religion." He like the "idea of something that was inclusive to everybody and embraces the idea that religion sucks." I understood this mean that Paganism was so

drastically different from Sid's understanding of Abrahamic religions that it felt like the opposite of his previous experiences.

Sid was constantly searching for a religious community that made him feel welcomed and not judged, and Paganism provided him that community. His internalized self-hate regarding his Muslim religious identity had a negative impact on his college experiences. Sid's internalized oppression was the result of familial values and societal values. Sarah and Rebecca's experiences are different because their internalized oppression only came from societal values.

Sarah's Experiences

Sarah and I were discussing the dining options on campus and how much she appreciated having access to a full kosher meal plan even though she does not use it. She shared that the dining hall served matzah during Passover, which shocked her. She said,

> You should have seen my face when I saw the matzah in the dining hall, because that is not something I would have ever imagined they would do. The fact that the dining halls knew it was Passover was surprising.

SU's student body is 20% Jewish (Hillel International, 2021), and Sarah did not expect her institution to know about Passover food restrictions. Although she lives on campus in the residence halls closer to Hillel, where more students are Jewish than not, she did not expect her Resident Assistant to be aware of her religious identity or understand her religious traditions. When I asked her about SU having class on the Jewish High Holidays she said, "I would never have expected [to get the days off] because I come from Georgia where that would never even be considered." She goes on to say how

shocked she was to learn that some public schools in the United States do not have school on the High Holidays. I asked Sarah, "What does your institution do that indicates Judaism is respected on campus?" She told me,

> There is a full kosher meal plan. They allow us to use the University Chapel for High Holidays services. They allow us on Simchat Torah … to gather hundreds of students and dance throughout all of campus. … And they allow us a Megillah reading in the Student Union.

Sarah was very excited that SU "allowed" the visible and public observance of her religious traditions on campus. By using the words "allow" and "shocked", I interpret this to mean she did not expect SU to provide a space outside of Hillel for her Judaism to be acknowledged and celebrated. Dominant groups believe that comfort is their right, and this is no exception for Christians. Sarah never expected the comfort to visibly celebrate her religious traditions to be her right. Through Sarah's perspective, permission had to be granted for Jewish students to be allowed to celebrate their religious holidays publicly on campus. Later she told me that she has had a positive experience at SU because "normally people don't care about Jews." I understood this to mean that Sarah never expected her institution to acknowledge or care about her religious identity.

Rebecca's Experiences

Rebecca shared similar sentiments with me. She does not expect her professors to know anything about the Jewish holidays, but she also shared, "I think [SU] makes reasonable accommodations for students." Also, she is frustrated that there "is not a clear uniform policy for professors" related to excused absences. She believes SU cares about

her religious needs because they "have and endorse Hillel and Chabad." These organizations have partnerships with campus, but they are not on campus or funded by SU. She believes "it's the university's responsibility to acknowledge students' religious identities" and "it's their responsibility to not encourage any particular establishment or religion." However, she was frustrated that it took the university so long to respond to acts of antisemitism on campus. When her classmates make antisemitic comments in class, she feels "put on the spot" and "forced into a defensive position." I interpret this to be an example of cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is defined as inconsistent thoughts related to behavior and attitude. She does not expect her faculty to be knowledgeable about Judaism or antisemitism but then is frustrated when faculty or administrators at SU do not acknowledge and condemn antisemitism. As we were talking about supporting the diversity of students on campus she said, "I haven't seen any kind of active support of any particular community, and I haven't seen any active non-support." Twenty minutes later, she said, "Periodically, I get emails [from SU that say], 'We support diversity on campus, and we love all our students,' particularly when it comes to race, but I don't get a lot of 'We love the diversity of religion.'" She can identify ways SU is lacking in its support of religious, secular, and spiritual students, and it appears that she wants more of that. However, she seems to accept Christian hegemony as the status quo. She accepts the institution making accommodations and does not ask for more than what is being offered. At the same time, she is frustrated by how little support there is for Jewish students. She does not seem to appreciate the way things are, but she does not expect SU to change.

Deborah and Sid are more aware of the institutionalized Christian hegemony on campus, but they still articulated internalized oppression. Deborah said it was okay the club fair was on Simchat Torah, preventing the Jewish students from being able to attend, because Google calendar does not list it as a holiday. These examples elucidate how embedded Christian hegemony is on campus and in society. Regardless of their internalized oppression, each participant is doing everything they can to cultivate a community for themselves on campus.

Cultivating Community

Community was a constant theme throughout every interview I had with the students. They talked about the communities they are involved with and how their religious identities impact the communities they choose to be involved in. They discussed ways the institution supports or prevents them from building community. These examples show that students find a way to make the best of their situation and find a home away from home. This theme highlights why they stay at SU.

Examples

The examples in this theme are related to the intersection of religion and culture, their religious and spiritual communities, and how students experienced COVID-19. These examples vary from being positive outlets for community and ways in which the community is lacking for students of minoritized religions. Throughout the examples, there is an undercurrent of persistence to maintain their communities.

Cultural Communication

Sid's interviews were mostly focused on finding a community to fit into. He shared that he experienced welcoming and inclusive environments in his classes, but he struggled to find a place that embraced his cultural identity. He expressed that a significant element of his Muslim culture is to communicate directly, which is counter-cultural to how most people in the United States communicate. He said that if he talked to a professor and disclosed his Muslim identity that there would be more to it than just the religious aspect. He said,

> If I went up to my professor and began speaking to them in the way that a traditional Muslim person would speak or an Arabic person would speak in the cultural way that its spoken, that is something that wouldn't be accepted.

When I asked him why, he explained that people think it is rude to communicate in a direct manner. He said that for someone's religious identity to be accepted, people need to be willing to accept everything else that comes with it. Sid articulated his belief that SU lacked nuance in their ability to communicate and understand the cultural diversity within the student body.

Sid struggled in finding a religious community on campus, but he ultimately found a group he felt safe in. At first, he struggled with feeling like his religious identity was inferior, and he joined a club to help Israeli startup groups. He struggled in that community when the other members made sexist and Islamophobic comments about Muslim women. Then, he struggled to find a peaceful balance between the Jewish and Muslim communities on campus, and when those attempts did not work, he left them all. Finally, he has recently started to find a community within the Pagan club. He shared that he has had positive experiences with the other members of the club, and he does not feel

judged within the space. He has put a lot of effort into making a place for himself on campus, and because of his cultural and spiritual values, the process has been difficult for him.

The Jewish women talked about how comfortable they feel when they are with their Jewish peers because they can fully be themselves. Rebecca talked about how collaborative communication is popular in Jewish communities. Collaborative communication is the process of building upon a story and finishing peoples' sentences. In this communication style, one person may "interrupt" another to add to the story that is being told, in order to create a story together. She said, "I've noticed sometimes that when I or other Jewish friends are talking with non-Jewish people, it kind of irks them because they're not used to that kind of communication habit." This cultural difference impacts the way Rebecca connects and communicates with non-Jewish friends. Collaborative communication allows her to build connection with her Jewish friends, and she can engage in the practice without being judged.

Programming and Celebrations

Heim told me he focuses on developing programming that meets students where they are at, including the residence halls, fraternity houses, holidays, and Shabbat services. Deborah, Rebecca, and Sarah talked about how much they enjoy the community aspect of Judaism. Sarah explained that after Friday night services, she and her friends might stay at Shabbat dinner for hours talking and hanging out. She said the act of building community after prayer is often people's favorite part of Shabbat. Deborah shared that when she was in Israel, she developed a greater appreciation for Shabbat because she realized that Shabbat was a holiday that occurred every week. People spent

Friday preparing to be in community with other Jewish people for a full day. Rebecca explained that Shabbat services and celebrating holidays is fun and meaningful. They cultivate community by celebrating together and spending time together after the prayer services. Certainly, other students of minoritized religions are celebrating and engaging in programming occurring on campus.

Gina was responsible for leading interfaith dialogue groups, and she told me that it was very difficult to get students to attend and engage in the discussion. She believed this was challenging because most of the conversations boiled down to the similarities across religious identities instead of being a safe place where students could talk about the nuance of religious differences. Regardless of the programming offered at SU, finding a community to engage with during COVID-19 was difficult.

COVID-19

Each student described a different experience related to building community during COVID-19. Sid talked about finding a community of people with similar experiences on Twitter. He was also struggling with his mental health, and that impacted his ability to find a safe spiritual community. Rebecca talked about being an only child at home with parents who are less observant than her. Rebecca's strict observance of Shabbat means that she does not use technology or work on that day. She was very lonely during her time away from campus because she could not access zoom services during Shabbat, and she spent a lot of time reading or playing solitaire. Deborah found a group of Orthodox and Modern Orthodox Jewish students to go off-campus and pray together. This technically violated SU's COVID-19 precautions, however finding a small prayer community was a very meaningful experience for her. She said that it made the act of

prayer feel more authentic. Sarah started at SU in the Fall of 2020 and is very COVID-conscious. She decided to participate in prayer services and Hillel as a means of finding community outside of her residence hall. She shared that she was only involved in Jewish activities. Sarah said that if she had not become involved in Hillel last year, she never would have left her room. Cultivating community during COVID-19 was very important to the students because it allowed them to stay connected to their religious traditions. Otherwise, their isolation heightened the need to find ways of connecting with people.

Conclusion

The findings of this research were reoccurring themes that were presented in multiple ways throughout the data. "The audacity of White Christianity" provides examples of times when students of minoritized religions were disrespected because of the boldness of Christian hegemony. "Direct acts of hate" captures the ways students experience prejudice and threats to their religious identity. "The choice mirage" highlights ways that students of minoritized religions are asked to make sacrifices to their college experience to observe their religious identity. "Hiding behind the guise of secularism" illustrates examples where SU chooses not to support students of minoritized religions because administrators claim the institution is secular. "Internalized oppression" provides examples of how students of minoritized religions internalize Christian hegemony and accept their identity as being outside of the norm. Lastly, "cultivating community" explores the ways that students of minoritized religions attempt to find a community where they can safely express their religious traditions and spiritual beliefs. In the next chapter, I will connect these themes to the theoretical framework and literature.

Chapter 6: Discussion

In her 2021 non-fiction book, *People Love Dead Jews: Reports from a Haunted Present,* Dara Horn explains that Jewish people have never been made to feel like they belong. Horn's thesis is the history of Jewish existence is being forcibly removed, relocated, evicted, and murdered. While this dissertation focuses on more than Jewish students' experiences, the thesis feels apt to the results of this research: "We may tolerate you in this space, but this space is not for you." The purpose of this chapter is to answer the research question: *In what ways does Christian hegemony influence sense of belonging for students of minoritized religions on a college campus?* The short answer is that Christian hegemony makes cultivating a sense of belonging very difficult for students of minoritized religions. Students of minoritized religions must find smaller communities within campus to be their authentic selves, knowing that their campus was not built to include them. Another intention of this chapter is to illuminate how this research fulfills a piece in the gap in literature. By increasing access for students of minoritized religions to cultivate sense of belonging, institutions of higher education can better retain and support these students.

In the last chapter, I identified six themes that arose from the data. In this chapter, I will connect elements of the Sense of Belonging Model (Strayhorn, 2012) to the findings. The research question will be answered using each element of the model. I used Critical Religious Pluralism Theory (Small, 2020) as my framework to address recommendations for change. Answering the research question is not enough, and CRPT served as the social justice schema used to reimagine how institutions can develop a groundwork for dismantling Christian hegemony. I will also present areas for further

research based on my methodological choices and other conversations that came up during the data collection process.

Connecting the Findings

Recall the following quote from the literature review, "Protestantism values the belief that faith is voluntary and individualized," (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). As a result, individuals are called out as "bad actors" instead of naming the systemic power structures that allows the behavior to occur (Lang & Yandell, 2019). Based on the examples provided in the findings, one might be quick to claim the individuals in the stories are "bad apples" who cannot represent an entire group. However, the themes represent patterns that align with previous research, so as a result, the individuals causing the harm benefit from Christian hegemony and get to exist within its confines with little consequence. Christian hegemony does influence students of minoritized religions on SU's campus in several ways. To quickly summarize the theories, the Sense of Belonging Model indicates that sense of belonging is a basic human need, a psychological need to matter, and a moving target that fluctuates based on time, place, and context given a student's environment (Strayhorn, 2012), and CRPT is a social justice response to dismantling Christian hegemony by creating equity for religious, secular, and spiritual student identities (Small, 2020). Remember that sense of belonging may take more work for students with identities on the margins because institutions of higher education were not built for them (Strayhorn, 2012). Each element of the Sense of Belonging Model (Strayhorn, 2012) is used to answer the research question.

Element One

The first element of the Sense of Belonging Model indicates that belonging is a basic human need that comes after physiological and safety needs (Strayhorn, 2012). There are several ways that SU makes it challenging for students of minoritized religions to feel like they belong. Examples include general disregard for their needs (Nielsen & Small, 2019), the academic calendar (Joshi, 2020), acts of hate (Blumenfeld, 2006), and diversity language (Lang & Yandell, 2019). Examples from the literature align with examples provided by the participants.

Throughout the interviews, participants made it clear that SU considers students of minoritized religions an afterthought. The institution was not designed to support students of minoritized religions, so they make exceptions when necessary. SU's religious observance policies regarding class absence allow professors to make a student have to prove their religious sincerity, which is often humiliating (Maples et al., 2021). This behavior would never be asked of Christian students, but more importantly, Christian students would never need to do this because the institution's schedule is built around Christian holidays. Concurrently, the academic calendar does not acknowledge or accommodate the holidays of students of minoritized religions (Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020). As Deborah explained, some residence halls have unsafe entrances for Shabbat keys. BD explained how his office is responsible for coordinating meals for Muslim students during Ramadan, and he talked about it as if it was something that had never been done before. Nielsen and Small (2019) explain the "disregard for the needs of religious minority students has caused trauma," (p. 182), and these examples illustrate that.

As one might expect, direct acts of hate have a negative impact on students of minoritized religions (Blumenfeld, 2006). If a student is experiencing antisemitism, Islamophobia, or other prejudice that invalidates their religious beliefs, it will have a repercussion on their sense of belonging. These acts of hate violate their basic human need to belong (Blumenfeld, 2006; Strayhorn, 2012). Students explained they were not surprised by the antisemitic events that occurred on and off campus, although they were disappointed that they happened. The institution's response had consequences to sense of belonging for students of minoritized religions. Rebecca was frustrated it took SU three weeks to respond to the events and felt the campus resources provided in the email did not meet her needs. Deborah was upset that the Hillel director had to encourage the university president to send the email in the first place and was also disappointed by the lack of resources provided to students. Sid shared the email response was not adequate and felt as though SU never acknowledged the Muslim community when they experienced Islamophobia on campus. Sarah was the only student who did not feel disappointed by SU's response, however she followed up by commenting about being from the south where no one cares about Jewish people. Blumenfeld (2006) explains that hate crimes are a tactic used to oppress non-Christians, and the antisemitic events that occurred on campus did not make Jewish students feel welcome. Ultimately, when direct acts of hate occur on campus, students of minoritized religions do not feel safe and therefore, do not feel like they belong (Blumenfeld, 2006; Strayhorn, 2012).

The examples provided in "the choice mirage" are directly related to students' access to food, their residence halls, and their safety. Sid and Sarah both talked about how wearing clothing in adherence to one's religious beliefs may lead them to have

negative experiences on campus. Even with a large population of Jewish students on campus, they might not feel safe to wear religious garb. Sid conveyed that depending on the context, wearing a hijab or a turban would not be welcomed in many environments because seeing a hijab conveys a level of non-Christian religiousness that is unwelcome in predominantly Christian spaces, aligning with the work of multiple scholars (Blumenfeld, 2006; Edwards, 2020; Joshi, 2020; Maher et al., 2008; Small, 2020). This reality communicates to students of minoritized religions that depending on the circumstance, they are not expected to be seen, let alone welcomed into a space. This societal and institutional attitude does not help to cultivate sense of belonging. While SU claims to be a diverse institution welcome to all, the campus climate excludes students of minoritized religions (Lang & Yandell, 2019).

Christian hegemony is a barrier to belonging for students of minoritized religions because it considers their basic human needs as being outside of the norm. Therefore, providing services that meet their needs are considered "extra", exceptions to the rule, or outside of the role of the institution (Blumenfeld, 2006; Edwards, 2020; Joshi, 2020; Lang & Yandell, 2019; Maples et al., 2021; Small, 2020; Strayhorn, 2012). This lack of belonging can lead students of minoritized religions to make brash decisions in order to fit in.

Element Two

The second element of the Sense of Belonging Model states that belonging is a fundamental motive that drives behavior (Strayhorn, 2012). Students make decisions based on that drive, which may not align with their values. Consequently, students may find themselves in difficult situations or in communities that could influence their well-

being. Regardless of the situation, Christian hegemony played a role in the students' experiences. Examples for this element come from "the choice mirage" and "cultivating community".

In this research, the Jewish participants were able to cultivate belonging through Hillel; however, they must leave campus to get there. Muslim students have access to a prayer space; however, the ablution stations are in another building. Pagan students can gather and meet for rituals; however, university chaplains express negative feelings toward their existence on campus. Each example is touched by Christian hegemony in some way, indicating its dominance over minoritized religions (Blumenfeld, 2006; Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020).

"The choice mirage" can put students in challenging positions for making decisions. This concept extends to the kosher dining hall and Shabbat key access in residence halls. SU extends the opportunity for Jewish students to keep kosher, but they must eat every meal off campus. Because most observant Jewish students do not live in residence halls on the side of campus opposite from Hillel, the residence hall entrances with Shabbat key access may be in a unsafe or inconvenient place. Christian students rarely must give up their convenience to eat in the dining halls on campus or have access to their residence halls, which are examples of everyday Christian privilege (Joshi, 2020).

Furthermore, students of minoritized religions "choose" to miss class to observe their religious holidays. When administrators at institutions of higher education put students of minoritized religions in these difficult situations, they take away a student's agency to make choices that are safe to their well-being. SU is claiming that students have a choice, but it is the bare minimum of choice. When oppressors create a false

narrative around choice, they communicate to the oppressed that they do not deserve to make a safe choice within their community. For example, SU claims observant Jewish students can choose the full kosher meal plan, when in fact, adhering to kosher food rules is not seen as a choice. When SU employs this choice mirage, they are asking the student to conform to their oppressor's concept of choice instead of their own. By taking away a student's agency, SU puts students in a difficult position to make decisions in an effort to find belonging. Hence, finding belonging drives student behavior (Strayhorn, 2012).

Strayhorn (2012) states that sense of belonging is powerful enough to have people make choices that might be detrimental to their well-being to feel as though they belong. Sid articulated doing this exact thing when he decided to join the Israeli startup club. He joined partially to reject his Muslim identity, partially to upset his father, and partially to find a different community in which he could belong. He felt this tension. When he realized he could not be his authentic self in the club, he left because his identities were not celebrated or appreciated. His own self-hatred of his Muslim identity pushed him to explore different communities to find a sense of belonging. When he finally acknowledged he could be spiritual without dismissing his Muslim identity, he finally felt safe and seen in the Pagan club. Strayhorn (2012) explains that as young people go through significant life events, they seek different communities to help them find belonging. This is represented in Sid's experience.

A similar concept is present in Rebecca's story as she shared that she does not believe her faculty need to be aware of her religious traditions or the institution does not need to encourage any religious support. As a result, campus administrators and faculty are uneducated on the needs and experiences of students of minoritized religions.

Blumenfeld (2006) states that cultural imperialism occurs when Christians get to control the beliefs and conversation about non-Christian religious identities. Because of cultural imperialism, Rebecca felt the need to claim her religious identity in order to defend and explain her religious beliefs and values. This behavior is reflected in her attempt to cultivate sense of belonging because she wants to feel like her Jewishness belongs on campus even if it ostracizes her in class (Strayhorn, 2012). Christian hegemony is a major force at play in preventing students of minoritized religions from cultivating belonging because its presence makes them feel as though they must fight for the space to be seen, heard, and acknowledged (Blumenfeld, 2006; Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020; Strayhorn, 2012). These examples set the stage for the next element of the Sense of Belonging Model.

Element Three

The third element of the model states that sense of belonging takes on a heightened importance in certain contexts, at certain times, and among certain populations (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 20). I will build off the examples provided in Element Two to provide more context and nuance to how Christian hegemony influences sense of belonging. Sid came to SU looking for one type of community, and eventually found a group where he could be vulnerable and share his spiritual experiences. He talked about the Pagan club being a place where he felt free of judgement. This is the ultimate goal of the Sense of Belonging Model (Strayhorn, 2012). Sid tried several experiences and when he realized they were not the places he could be his authentic self, he sought out a new community. While not all his experiences in his communities were positive, he concluded that he is comfortable with his cultural Muslim identity and exploring Paganism. Finding a community helped him find belonging.

To build on Rebecca's story, she shared that she does not feel comfortable talking about her religious identity in class, but she believes she must defend herself and her religious identity when her peers make antisemitic comments in class. I interpreted this to mean that Rebecca feels like she belongs in her Jewish community, but she does not feel like her Jewishness belongs everywhere else on campus. The need to matter and be seen as a Jewish student in the classroom conflicts with her comfort of speaking up, but in this example, the need to insert her belonging is stronger than her inclination to stay silent. She hopes that by speaking up, it will create space and belonging for other Jewish students on campus, not just at Hillel. These examples convey that context, place, and time matter significantly in cultivating belonging.

SU is rooted in Christian hegemony; therefore, Sid and Rebecca are working against the norm (Joshi, 2020). Some environments are more conducive to belonging than others for students of minoritized religions. Rebecca may feel a greater sense of belonging at Hillel than in the classroom, and the infrastructure is important in cultivating that belonging (Nielsen & Small, 2019; Strayhorn, 2012). Sid felt a sense of belonging in some of his classes, but he struggled to find belonging within his chosen organization. He was feeling vulnerable in his Muslim identity due to familial and cultural imperialism messages that being Muslim is inferior to other religious identities (Blumenfeld, 2006; Strayhorn, 2012). Some spaces are more conducive to belonging for students of minoritized religions than others, whereas White Christians typically feel like they belong (Joshi, 2020; Jun et al., 2018). This is illustrated with Adam believing that interrupting Shabbat prayer services with his New Testament readings is acceptable (Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020; Strayhorn, 2012). Cultivating belonging is difficult for students of

minoritized religions because the ever-present values of Christian hegemony infiltrate context, time, and place (Joshi, 2020; Strayhorn, 2012).

Element Four

The fourth element of the model states that belonging is a consequence of mattering (Strayhorn, 2012). When people matter to others, they feel seen, and that allows them to feel safe, vulnerable, and important to others. Consequently, treating people with ignorance and disrespectful behavior would have a negative impact on their sense of belonging and make them feel excluded. Examples from the findings "audacity of Christianity" and "hiding behind the guise of secularism" are used for this element of the model.

Examples related to the "audacity of Christianity" are the epitome of how Christian hegemony impacts a student's sense of mattering. The university calendar is a great example that indicates to SU students that if they identify with a non-Christian religion, the university does not do much to accommodate their needs. SU expects students of minoritized religions to make their own accommodations and reschedule course assignments and final exams when they conflict with their holidays. Also, SU makes Jewish students navigate several obstacles during add/drop week when it coincides with the High Holidays. Additionally, travel time is not included in religious observance time for students, but the university president gives faculty and staff December 24 off in order to travel for Christmas. This example upholds everyday Christian hegemony (Joshi, 2020), and conveys that Christians celebrating their holiday matters more than students of minoritized religions being able to celebrate their holidays (Strayhorn, 2012). Secularism is an excuse made by SU so that students of minoritized religions do not have to matter.

Christian hegemony operates publicly and with no critique (Edwards, 2020), supporting Kafka's statement about Christian privilege being so present it is invisible. "Hiding behind the guise of secularism" shapes students of minoritized religions sense of mattering in several ways. SU would agree with Sarah and Rebecca when they talk about everyone belonging at a public school. Certainly, because of their non-discrimination policy and the First Amendment, denying students of minoritized religions access to the institution would be illegal. However, using secularism and "separation of church and state" as an excuse to not make accommodations for students of minoritized religions has a negative influence on sense of belonging. Also keep in mind that secularism does a lot of heavy lifting to maintain Christian hegemony (Joshi, 2020). For example, secularism is a myth used to make people believe that religious discrimination does not exist. The "separation of church and state" is used to ensure that one Protestant sect is not privileged over another (Joshi, 2020). Institutions claim that if they make an accommodation for one religiously affiliated group, they must do the same for all religiously affiliated groups. Their reason for not making the accommodations is because they are too difficult, or they are bound by "the separation of church and state". When this occurs, institutions of higher education are maintaining the structural powers of Christian supremacy (Blumenfeld, 2006; Joshi, 2020; Maples et al., 2021). This reasoning does not make students of minoritized religions feel seen or that they matter (Strayhorn, 2012).

Along those lines, the university chapel is inherently not secular, and its setup makes it challenging for students of minoritized religions to be accommodated in the space. Most students of minoritized religions do not even use the space to celebrate or practice their religious traditions (anonymous, 2017). The institution communicates they

do not care about minority religious traditions when students must leave campus or go to an inconvenient location to participate. Students of minoritized religions must withhold their authentic selves for the designated places on campus where their religious identity can be acknowledged (Strayhorn, 2012). Nielsen and Small (2019) explain the importance of having infrastructure that allows for students of minoritized religions to have a space to be their whole selves. Christian hegemony is responsible when students of minoritized religions must leave campus to have that need met (Blumenfeld, 2006; Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020). When secularism upholds systems of oppression, sense of belonging cannot be developed (Small, 2020; Strayhorn, 2012). Christian hegemony hinders cultivating belonging for students of minoritized religions by making them feel like they do not matter.

Element Five

The fifth element relates to students' intersecting identities and dictates that true belonging occurs when people can consistently be their authentic selves. When students do not feel like they can be their authentic selves, they tend to feel alienated (Strayhorn, 2012). When I asked staff about how SU supports students intersecting identities, the responses I got varied. I got the impression from BD and Kafka that SU is focused more on supporting students of color, but not necessarily how their religious, secular, or spiritual identity intersects with their race. Religious identity is more of an afterthought.

I did not ask specific questions about intersecting identities in student interviews, so this concept did not often arise. Deborah expressed that her Jewishness was more important than her identity as a woman. She articulated that she felt comfortable to be herself in Jewish settings, but she is aware of the ways in which she is not supported by

SU. The students felt supported by SU in many ways, but not in their religious identities. Sarah was the only exception to this, but she used language such as being "allowed" to be publicly Jewish and to take up space at SU.

In general, when students of minoritized religions have internalized Christian hegemony, cultivating sense of belonging is difficult. When belonging requires feeling comfortable enough to be one's authentic self, internalized oppression makes celebrating and finding pride in one's identity that much more challenging (Strayhorn, 2012). Being connected to their religious communities appeared to be the main factor that contributed to their ability to be their authentic selves and belong. For this element, Christian hegemony impacts sense of belonging because SU is willing to support some student identities but avoids supporting students' religious identity. Although I do not have much data related to this element of the model, I do address this in my limitations and areas for future research.

Element Six

Element six states that belonging can lead to other positive outcomes (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 22). Examples for this element connect to the theme "cultivating community". Cultivating community within their religious identity is how students of minoritized religions found belonging. While their community cannot provide for all their needs, the participants articulated their religious community as a place where they could find friends, be celebrated and validated, served as a place where they could be vulnerable, and be their authentic selves. Each student participant articulated how they found their community, and how that positive experience of belonging allowed them to have other positive experiences on campus (Strayhorn, 2012). Again, having the infrastructure to

support such community building is essential to students of minoritized religions well-being (Nielsen & Small, 2019). Additionally, several authors have found that when students are engaged in their religious communities, they are more likely to be involved in other activities on campus (Kuh & Gonyea, 2005), more committed to their religious beliefs (Mayhew & Bryant, 2013), and more likely to have an increased well-being (Bowman & Small, 2012). This literature is supported by several of the student's examples.

Sarah intentionally chose SU because of its lively Conservative Jewish prayer services. She connected to SU before she started attending the university. During her first year when most activities were being held online due to COVID-19, she pushed herself out of her comfort zone in order to find belonging within the Jewish community on campus. This has led to other positive outcomes for her because she has gotten involved in a Jewish club, made friends, and is fulfilling her goals of being a leader in the Jewish community (Bowman & Small, 2012; Mayhew & Bryant, 2013; Strayhorn, 2012).

Deborah also chose SU for its Jewish community. She wanted to know she had a safe place to come back to as she got involved in activities outside of the Jewish community. She wanted to know she had a place within the Modern Orthodox community where she could be her authentic self. Because this community has provided such a positive experience, she was able to get involved with her major, find comfort in an on-campus job, and be a leader in her dance club (Bowman & Small, 2012; Kuh & Gonyea, 2005; Strayhorn, 2012).

Rebecca did not choose SU for its Jewish community; however, she appreciates being in a community that has allowed her to grow in her religious observance. This

community has made it possible for her to fully engage in Shabbat and eat kosher. She also has a community where she does not need to combat antisemitism. As a matter of fact, she has a community she can commiserate with and share her frustrations with when acts of antisemitism occur on campus. The qualities of this community matters to her, and she has a place where she can be seen (Mayhew & Bryant, 2013; Strayhorn, 2012).

In all these examples, Christian hegemony is still present (Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020). Sarah, Deborah, and Rebecca must navigate Christian hegemony's influence on campus and find a community where they know they can be relatively safe from antisemitism and Christian privilege. Because they have found this community and belonging in Hillel (Strayhorn, 2012), they are able to get involved in other communities (Bowman & Small, 2012; Kuh & Gonyea, 2005; Mayhew & Bryant, 2013), knowing they can always return to Hillel. These students may not experience religious belonging in every environment on campus, but they have found a place where their religious identity is accepted and valued.

Element Seven

The last element of the Sense of Belonging Model states that as we change, our needs related to belonging change (Strayhorn, 2012). Belonging is related to time and place and needs to be satisfied on a continuing basis, which means that students feel the tension from within their religious community and their campus community (Strayhorn, 2012). Deborah articulated feeling segregated from the rest of the Jewish community because of her living-learning community and participating in the full Kosher meal plan. She also felt segregated from the rest of the campus community as a result of the "choices" she needed to make to accommodate her religious observance. This feeling

does not engender belonging. Because sense of belonging must be satisfied as "circumstances, conditions, and contexts change," (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 23) this means that on an ideal campus, students of minoritized religions would feel like they belong in the dining halls, their residence halls, their academic buildings, at sporting events, at campus-adjacent locations, and see their identities represented in the institution's policies and practices.

Sid also experienced a lot of change in understanding his religious identity while at SU. His journey led him to completely reject his religious identity until he found a spirituality that worked for him. He tried to defy his family, joined a religious group for shock value, and finally found a community that made him feel safe. As he changed, his needs related to belonging changed (Strayhorn, 2012).

Christian hegemony is a constant presence on campus (Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020). Its values are part of the construction of the institution's values (Joshi, 2020). Students of minoritized religions must constantly navigate these values while cultivating belonging. If belonging must be satisfied on a continual basis (Strayhorn, 2012), then Christian hegemony also must be navigated on a continual basis (Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020). The next section explores solutions and opportunities for change to eliminate obstacles for students of minoritized religions to cultivate sense of belonging.

Recommendations

Critical Religious Pluralism Theory (Small, 2020) is an answer to the challenges that students of minoritized religions face. Alongside concepts from the literature review, I reviewed each tenet and explained different ways institutions of higher education can

dismantle Christian hegemony. Recommendations intend to share ways institutions should create a community where students of minoritized religions can cultivate sense of belonging. I developed these strategies using current literature and participants' lived experiences. The examples provided come directly from the data collected at SU, but the recommendations can be implemented at any higher education institution. These recommendations intend to decrease barriers for students of minoritized religions to cultivate sense of belonging. While CRPT is used to create a more socially just response to cultivating belonging for students of minoritized religions, I do not intend to use pluralism as a universalizing factor. Every religious identity should be celebrated for its difference, nuance, and individuality.

Tenet One

The first tenet of CRPT asserts that oppressive systems that maintain Christian hegemony have been woven in the societal values of the United States, including institutions of higher education (Small, 2020). This tenet shows up in every theme from this study except for "cultivating community." Each example described in the "audacity of White Christianity" theme complies with this tenet. Higher education administrators, including those at SU, who develop the academic calendar, proselytizers, and Adam all believe their behavior is acceptable and normal. While they do not recognize their behavior is contributing to the oppression of students of minoritized religions, that does not mean their actions do not have consequences that negatively impact others. Obviously, "direct acts of hate" occur because the goals of antisemitism, Islamophobia, and its counterparts are to remind its victims that they are subordinate or inferior to Christians. The other themes arose because of the way Christian hegemony is woven into

the values, norms, and systems upheld in the United States (Joshi, 2020). In order to address this, SU must first acknowledge that Christian hegemony exists openly on campus and that they are complicit in contributing to Christian hegemony (Edwards, 2020; Small, 2020). This goes beyond SU. Direct acts of hate towards students of minoritized religions occur at almost all institutions of higher education. When institutions can address how they are contributing to Christian hegemony, they can make changes based on the recommendations provided in the other tenets.

Tenet Two

The second tenet of CRPT focuses on the relationship between religion and culture and how those intersect with all social identities (Small, 2020). Sid and Rebecca talked about this a lot, and these examples presented themselves in the "cultivating community" theme. The examples acknowledge that cultural differences are one of the barriers students faced in building community with people of different religious identities (Edwards, 2018). By acknowledging that religious identity brings cultural values with it, higher education institutions can incorporate this concept into social justice efforts related to race, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, ability status, and other social identities. Talking about different cultural values is a way to discuss religious identity as a social justice issue (Edwards, 2018; Joshi, 2020; Small, 2020).

Tenet Three

The third tenet states that by exposing Christian hegemony, the false neutral of secularism is also exposed (Small, 2020). "Hiding behind the guise of secularism" and "internalized oppression" are themes that relate to this tenet. Christian hegemony is so

good at its role in modern American society that it has rendered itself invisible while presenting as secularism (Blumenfeld, 2006; Joshi, 2020). First, I would recommend higher education administrators and staff revisit how they interpret the First Amendment and how it applies to their ability to support students of minoritized religions, as opposed to maintaining Christian supremacy (Joshi, 2020). SU must acknowledge the false neutral of secularism and make changes to policies and procedures that uphold Christian hegemony. Along these lines, SU can have a greater conversation around how free speech can still be hurtful and impact sense of belonging, especially as it relates to students of minoritized religions. Renovating the University Chapel so that it has moveable furniture and looks less like a Catholic church is one tangible way SU can acknowledge they are not a secular institution and make the space more accessible for students of minoritized religions (Johnson & Laurence, 2012; Nielsen & Small, 2020).

Most higher education institutions buy into the false neutral of secularism because it is easy and helps to maintain the status quo (Small, 2020). Colleges and universities can identify and evaluate when they rely on secularism to support Christian hegemony. By identifying when and why it is occurring, administrators, faculty, and staff can eliminate indoctrinated values and policies and replace them with more inclusive values and policies.

Tenet Four

The fourth tenet of CRPT asks for the inclusion of religious, secular, and spiritual students at the individual level. This includes responding to microaggressions, acts of violence, and interpersonal religious tension (Small, 2020). Recommendations for this tenet will speak to “the audacity of White Christianity”, “direct acts of hate”, “the choice

mirage", "hiding behind the guise of secularism", and "cultivating community". While SU cannot account for every individual's behavior on campus, they can make a concerted effort in educating the campus community about Christian hegemony, like they do for racism, sexism, and homophobia (Nielsen & Small, 2019). Again, this is true on almost every campus. Additionally, faculty and staff should be trained to understand the needs of religious, secular, and spiritual students and how they can regulate speech related to place, time, and manner within the confines of the First Amendment (Nielsen & Small, 2019). By incorporating justice for religious, secular, and spiritual student identities into social justice dialogues, institutions could help illuminate the ways Christian hegemony shows up on campus and in society (Edwards, 2017). Additionally, interfaith programming on every campus should acknowledge the power and privilege of Christianity. The programing and dialogue should not simply be a means of being a tourist to another religious tradition (Edwards, 2017; Edwards, 2018).

Institutions should develop a centralized office, akin to a women's center or LGBTQ+ center, where religious, secular, and spiritual students can go to for support (Nielsen & Small, 2019). Specifically at SU, the current support for students of minoritized religions is piece meal, and students do not know where to go when they need additional resources. This is likely true on most campuses. When acts of violence occur on campus, there are several different responses depending on the office. Having a place that can coordinate the efforts of support staff would help minimize the issues. When direct acts of violence occur on campus, institutions should acknowledge the systemic oppression at work and identify a clear path for what students should do next. If

students do not know where to go, they are left feeling frustrated and as though SU does not care about them (Nielsen & Small, 2019).

In response to challenges presented in "the choice mirage", I would recommend that SU's affiliated Hillel make boxed lunches and have them available at the dining halls. The lunches do not have to be made in the dining halls, and they can be transported from Hillel to an on-campus dining hall. Jewish students on the kosher meal plan can eat lunch on campus with their friends who do not keep kosher. Additionally, SU should make Shabbat keys accessible to use on the front door of every residence hall, so that students do not have to use less trafficked, poorly lit entrances to their home.

Tenet Five

Tenet five asks for a religiously pluralistic approach to "all areas of research, policy, and practice accounting for power, privilege, marginalization, and oppression," (Small, 2020, p. 64). At the institutional level, there are several tangible changes institutions can make to cultivate a more inclusive and equitable campus for students of minoritized religions. Colleges and universities can make a concerted effort to review and revise their policies related to religion and spirituality (Maples et al., 2021). SU can also make a concerted effort to hire a Conservative Rabbi so that Conservative Jewish students can have a point of contact on campus to go to about their religious concerns. Lastly, institutions can adjust their academic calendar in several ways (Joshi, 2020). The academic calendar can include all the major religious holidays so that students, faculty, and staff can avoid planning campus-wide events on those days. Institutions should develop a policy requiring faculty to record lectures given on religious holidays that students can watch later. With the technology used throughout the COVID-19 pandemic,

this would not be a significant adjustment for faculty. These accommodations alone would help students of minoritized religions cultivate sense of belonging (Nielsen & Small, 2019; Strayhorn, 2012).

Tenet Six

The sixth tenet of CRPT refers to addressing Christian hegemony at the societal level (Small, 2020). While this concept did not present as a theme in the research, Sid and Deborah did talk about how SU's response and treatment of students of minoritized religions does reflect what occurs outside the walls of the institution. SU cannot dismantle Christian hegemony alone, however if they become a leader in dismantling Christian hegemony on their campus, there might be a greater impact on society.

Tenet Seven

The final tenet of CRPT asks researchers, practitioners, and policy makers to prioritize the voices of people with minoritized religious identities in order to work towards social transformation (Small, 2020, p. 65). This is one of the goals of this dissertation. I want readers to understand the role of religious, secular, and spiritual identities in social justice work and the role of secularism as a myth in our everyday rhetoric on college campuses. Following the guidelines provided by Small (2020), I hope I have done justice to my research participants and this theory.

Areas for Future Research

Collecting this data has left me with many more questions than answers. First, there is a clear need for more qualitative research beyond case studies around the topic of

religious equity. This research answers one question at one institution. It is barely scratching the surface of qualitative research that needs to occur to move the needle on religious equity. There is also a need for researchers with different identities than mine so that research might be able to capture the experiences of students of color, students with disabilities, and students with different religions. Fortunately, there are several ideas to consider when thinking about areas for future qualitative research. Pagan students likely find their religious identity later in life, and using CRPT (Small, 2020) and the Sense of Belonging Model (Strayhorn, 2012) to determine their experiences on campus would be interesting. Sid is a good example of this. I also had another Pagan student volunteer to participate, but because they were raised practicing Christianity, they did not meet my qualifications for my project. I had to sadly turn them away.

Understanding how students practicing Dharmic, Indigenous, and Earth based religious traditions would be a vital area for future research. There is so little data about this population of students and how they navigate their campus communities. Part of this may be that they do not want to self-identify for fear of any further discrimination. Gina mentioned how difficult it was to get students to participate in interfaith programming at SU as well. SU has a Buddhist Chaplain and a Hindu Chaplain, so these students are on campus.

Future research should focus on the intersection of identities with religious, secular, and spiritual identities at the forefront. Intersectionality should be at the forefront of scholars' and practitioners' work, rather than an afterthought. This will require a diverse group of researchers as well as a diverse group of research participants. There is also the possibility of thinking about how Christian hegemony and American cultural

values intersect with cultural appropriation. For example, several Jewish participants talked about how they do not celebrate Halloween. When they tell people this, they are often met with the following response: “But Halloween is an American holiday.” These statements are problematic and can be discussed in much greater nuance. The intersection of race and religion is another opportunity for further research. The literature review focuses a lot on the intersections of White supremacy and Christian supremacy. Most of my student participants identified as White, so I was not able to connect my findings to this research. An area of future research might include element five of the Sense of Belonging Model. Weaving together this narrative was important to me to provide context to the nuanced problems that arise as a result of Whiteness and Christian hegemony. To only discuss Christian hegemony is to ignore the significant role Whiteness plays in constructing United States’ values. Looking further into this intersection would add a lot of depth to this narrative.

The role of secularism in upholding White Christian Supremacy is an untapped area of research. Scholars discuss secularism as a symptom of White Christian Supremacy, however the research questions do not focus on how secularism is used to maintain the status quo. More research needs to be done in understanding the connections between secularism and the First Amendment, specifically how it ties into “freedom of speech” and “separation of church and state.” By centering the idea that secularism as a false neutral, researchers may be able to clearly draw the through line to White Christian Supremacy.

Additional thoughts could be given to some of the methodological choices that I made during this research process. Considering a school with a smaller Jewish population

might uncover new understandings of this topic. Next, understanding how graduate students with a minoritized religious identity cultivate sense of belonging would be interesting. Also, having a focus on international students would shed light on the intersection of cultural values and values of Christian hegemony. This framework could also be used to determine how faculty and staff who identify with a minoritized religion cultivate a sense of belonging in their workplace. Using a historical analysis methodology is another area for future research. Historical accounts regarding higher education do not acknowledge the role of Christian hegemony in creating the culture of higher education today. Certainly the historical accounts that exist are not critical, and there is an opportunity for historians to write about this complicated and intertwined history.

Throughout the data collection process, each student and staff participant discussed the Israel/Palestine conflict. I chose to not make this a central theme of my findings because it ultimately did not answer the research question. Each participant had a different viewpoint on the conflict, and they also had different experiences with how it showed up in their daily lives. None of my interview questions were directly related to the Israel/Palestine conflict, so it would be interesting to understand why it came up in conversation. My intention in mentioning this is not to remain silent or to take a stance on the conflict, rather to highlight that it occurred. A researcher with more understanding than me of the nuances of the Israel/Palestine conflict might be interested in studying this further.

Conclusion

Christian hegemony influences sense of belonging in all aspects of campus life for students of minoritized religions. Campus policies allow professors to ask a student to prove their religiousness and do not include travel time for religious observance. The academic calendar is designed around Christian holidays and large-scale campus events are scheduled on major non-Christian holidays. There are inconsistent accommodations for religious needs in the dining hall. SU provides halal options with no restrictions but does not offer kosher food. Observant Jewish students are segregated from the rest of campus due to some residence halls' location in relationship to Hillel. Secularism and "separation of church and state" are used as excuses to not support or provide additional resources for students of minoritized religions. If there are additional support services, they are often seen as an afterthought. There is a lack of education about religious minorities and the oppression students of minoritized religions encounter. Lastly, Christians believe that comfort is their right, and that they can take up space in any location. This is seen with proselytizers on campus telling Jewish students they are going to hell, to blatant acts of antisemitism and Islamophobia, to interrupting Shabbat services to debate about religious teachings. These are only a few examples.

CRPT can be used to understand the ways in which Christian hegemony shows up on campus in policies, practices, and resources for students of minoritized religions and to recognize ways institutions can make change. These changes would help to dismantle Christian supremacy and break down barriers that prevent students of minoritized religions from cultivating sense of belonging. No matter their scenario, students of minoritized religions may feel that they do not belong because the campus was designed

to support Christian students. Christian hegemony makes it very difficult for students of minoritized religions to cultivate sense of belonging at SU.

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