"There is Enough Food on the Table": Religious Minority Students' Experiences with the Campus Spiritual Climate

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“THERE IS ENOUGH FOOD on the TABLE”: RELIGIOUS MINORITY STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES with the CAMPUS SPIRITUAL CLIMATE

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in

The School of Education

by

Regina Charlotte Schneider
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ABSTRACT

Within the last 30 years, diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives have been at much of the forefront of student affairs and higher education policy and practices. Issues regarding gender, race, and socioeconomic status have received much attention not only in education, but also in the greater landscape of the nation. Religious and spiritual minority students are a population that has only recently been considered in fostering a more inclusive and pluralistic college environment. Thus, there is a research gap involving religious/spiritual minority college students and their perceptions of the campus climate. Additionally, only a small pool of research addresses the spiritual dimension of a campus climate.

This qualitative case study focuses on eight religious and spiritual minority students at a large, public university in the southeast. Data collected involved their experiences with the campus spiritual climate, utilizing a Four Dimension Campus Climate Framework (Hurtado et al., 1998). The results of this study showed that while most of the participants had positive views of the campus climate in terms of their social experiences, the majority of participants viewed the spiritual dimension of the campus climate as indifferent and inadequate in serving religious minorities. The implication of this study is the need for higher education professionals to create an engaging and inclusive spiritual campus climate for all students to learn and develop in cross-cultural awareness.
CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

Background

Since the 1980s, institutions of higher education have sought to increase diversity in student and faculty populations, incorporate awareness of different social identities, and meet the needs of a changing and diversifying American population. Policies and dialogue have been created to address issues about race relations, the LGBTQA+ community, and gender equity. However, due to the secularization of higher education institutions have been slow and hesitant to address issues on religious diversity and spirituality, especially in dealing with minority groups (Felix & Bowman, 2015). Despite racial and ethnic diversity going hand-in-hand with religious and spiritual diversity, higher education practitioners are sometimes more equipped to handle discussions on the former and not so much the latter. In order to discern why practitioners should be competent in facilitating religious/spiritual dialogue, we must first look at Christianity within higher education, historical discriminatory practices, and religious current events that affect college students today.

Christianity and Christian Privilege in Higher Education

Rockenbach et al. (2015) note that American universities and colleges will face new challenges in a growing religious minority and non-religious population due to higher education's historical and current connections to religion, specifically Christianity. Fairchild (2009) argued that normalizing the United States as a Christian nation results in the idea of Christians being due the benefits afforded to them. Additionally, student affairs professionals should take initiative in educating themselves about higher education’s long history with Christianity.
Discriminatory Practices

Higher education in America has a long history of restricting access to certain populations. Higher education’s roots start in religion, with White males with the financial means to attend studying to be clergy and learned gentlemen (Thelin, 2011). White women and African Americans would later establish their own colleges, eventually leading to the desegregation of higher education in the 1960s. Not only did institutions discriminate based on race and gender, but also on religion. For Jewish students in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, policies such as requiring chapel service attendance, preference given to children of alumni, requesting information on the father’s birthplace and name, and religious affiliation were tactics used to exclude such students (Felix & Bowman, 2015). Pre-WWII segregation between Jews and non-Jews in extracurricular activities and housing were present at colleges such as Cambridge, Harvard, Dartmouth, Syracuse University, and Ohio State (Dinnerstein, 1995; Karabel, 2006). These acts led to Jewish students forming their own fraternities and clubs (Higham, 1957).

Hate Crimes

In 2017, religious bias-based hate crimes accounted for 22\% of the 7,106 bias related incidents reported in the United States (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2018). Of the 1,679 religious based offenses reported by the FBI (2018), nearly 80\% were against religious minorities, with 58\% being anti-Semitic, 19\% anti-Muslim, 1\% anti-Sikh, 1\% anti-Hindu, and 1\% anti-Buddhist. Such crimes have been on the rise, with Islamophobic crimes rising 20\% from 2015 to 2016, and anti-Semitic crimes up 16\% (Barrouquere, 2017). In 2015, a hostile and anti-religious neighbor murdered Yusor Abu-Salha, a recent graduate from North Carolina State University (NCSU), her husband Deah Barakat, a second year University of North Carolina dental student, and Yusor’s sister Razan Abu-Salha, who also attended NCSU (Chappell, 2019). In 2017, two Muslim women were harassed on a train in Portland; two men, Ricky John Best and
Taliesin Myrddin Namkai-Meche, died of stab wounds while defending them from the attacker (Haag & Fortin, 2017). In October 2018, 11 Jews were killed at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh (Robertson et al., 2018). In April 2019, a gunman shouting anti-Semitic slurs killed 60-year-old Lori Kaye and wounded a Rabbi and other attendees at Chabad of Poway synagogue in San Diego (Medina, Mele, & Murphy, 2019). In December 2019, five Jews were injured celebrating Hanukah at a Rabi’s home in New York (Liebson et al., 2019). In light of the United States’ foundations in religious freedom, religious minorities are still targets of violence.

**Statement of the Problem**

The quote in the title of this study—“there is enough food on the table”—is a metaphor for resources; groups in power will inevitably hoard resources from marginalized groups. The greater religious climate in the United States can seem antagonistic to religious minorities, and that view trickles down to college campuses. Few studies have focused on the experiences of religious minority students. In the general population, 71% of Americans identify as Christian, while religious minorities represent 6%, and religious “nones” comprise 23% (7% atheist/agnostic, 16% nothing in particular) (Pew Research Center, 2014a). Among college graduates, Christians comprise 66% of the population, 25% are unaffiliated (11% Atheist/Agnostics, 15% nothing/don’t know), and 9% are religious minorities (Pew Research Center, 2014a). Religious minorities’ experiences and perceptions of campus climate varies. In some studies, researchers found religious minorities lacked a sense of belonging (Riggers-Piehl & Lehman, 2016). In others, religious minorities had higher levels of satisfaction regarding the campus climate versus religious majority students or nones (Mayhew et al., 2014; Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2014). More research is needed to assess the campus religious and spiritual climate in
higher education, religious minorities’ perception of campus climates, and the experience of smaller religious population such as Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jews, among others.

For decades, more and more Americans have identified as spiritual but not religious. Students decline in religious participation when entering college; however, they retain an interest in spiritual development (Astin, Astin & Lindholm, 2011). By the end of their junior year, 50% of students “rate integrating spirituality in my life as ‘very important’ or ‘essential’ life goal” (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011). As higher education has become more diversified, institutions have focused on improving their admission and retention initiatives to support minority students. While diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives regarding race, gender, and ethnicity have rose in prominence in the past decades, dialogue regarding religious minorities is not as prevalent yet. Religious minority students can feel invisible, marginalized, and silenced, which in turn affects their sense of belonging, institutional loyalty, and development (Museus et al., 2008; Bowman & Smedley, 2013; Johnson et al., 2014).

**Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to explore religious minority students’ experiences and perceptions regarding the campus religious and spiritual climate at a secular institution in the southeast. This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How do religious minority students describe their social and spiritual/religious experience in college?
2. How do religious minority students access and utilize services and resources provided by their university?
3. How do experiences on campus influence spiritual development among religious minority students?
Method

I deemed a qualitative method as the most appropriate method for this study, as qualitative research is beneficial in understanding a phenomenon, learning specific details, and finding out the why and how of a question, especially when researching a small, distinct population. I adopted a case study design and utilized individual interviews for data collection. The participants of this study were undergraduate students who identified as religious minorities. Eight students participated in this study. I employed purposeful and snowball sampling and also conducted face-to-face, individual interviews for data collection. After transcribing and coding the data, I summarized the emerged themes to answer the research questions.

Theoretical Framework

Hurtado et al.’s Four-part Campus Climate Model

The primary theoretical framework for this study is Hurtado, Clayton-Pedersen, Allen, and Milem’s (1998) four-part model for evaluating campus climate: (a) institutional context and legacy, (b) structural diversity, (c) psychological climate, and (d) behavioral climate. Using the framework, data analysis can aid with improving campus climate by looking at various structural, physical, and behavioral characteristics that influence student experiences. Hurtado et al.’s (1998) framework has been used in several campus climate studies, especially in terms of evaluating spiritual climate (Bryant et al., 2009; Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2014; Rockenbach et al., 2017).

Hurtado et al.’s (1998) theoretical framework operates on the basis that campus climate diversity exists in distinct educational contexts, based on historical and sociocultural events, such as financial aid and admissions policies, outside social events, governmental policies, etc. Furthermore, as an agent of upward mobility, centers of research and progress, and academic
freedom, the authors argue that higher education institutions have not decided whether they should mirror society or be mediators of change (Hurtado et al., 1998). In previous studies, researchers have used the four-part model to analyze racial minority students. For example, Rankin and Reason’s (2005) study looked at the psychological and behavioral dimensions of the campus racial climate to analyze how intentional, educational programs that address changing racial demographics can affect students. Johnson, Wasserman, Yildrim, and Yonai (2014) applied aspects of the psychological dimension of campus climate to retention, commitment, and persistence levels of students of color and White students.

Recently, more researchers have utilized the model in analyzing a spiritual dimension of campus climate. For example, Bryant et al. (2009) looked at inclusion/exclusion of religious groups and movements away from a religious heritage due to changing demographics. Rockenbach and Mayhew (2014) used the four dimensions in relation to student satisfaction and spiritual climate. Rockenbach (2017) analyzed the behavioral dimension and how students appreciated others of different backgrounds. Finally, Rockenbach et al. (2017) addressed structural diversity (Muslim student organizations), behavioral climate (engagement among religious diver peers), and the psychological climate (support, division, or insensitivity to religious diversity) to analyze non-Muslim students attitudes of Muslims.

The lives and experiences of college students do not exist in a vacuum. Not only does the institutional environment affect students, but society as well. Therefore, this study adopted Hurtado et al.’s (1998) theoretical framework to include the politics, society and culture, emic and etic perspectives, and inner and outer group relations. This approach provides greater insight to the milieu of religious minority college students and the ways in which they can be served. Guided by the framework, I developed and utilized an interview protocol that asked the
participants questions relating to governmental policies and current events affecting their group, their experiences with students of the same and different religious/spiritual groups, and use of campus resources. The questions also gauged their sense of support in engaging in their beliefs, through either events, organizations, or other students/faculty/staff.

**Religious and Spiritual Identity Development Theories**

Two additional theories were adopted to interpret the religious/spiritual identity development of religious/spiritual minority students: Sharon Daloz Parks’ theory of faith development (1986; 2000) and Peek’s (2005) Model of Muslim Identity Development. Parks’ theory of faith development focuses on how higher education influences faith development in students, centering on cognition, dependence and community (Patton et al., 2016). These three areas of development contain four increasing complex stages that begin from early adolescence, young adult, experienced adult, to midlife (Patton et al., 2016). Within each stage, Park’s described forms of knowing, forms of dependence, and forms of community.

Peek’s (2005) Model of Muslim Identity Development is a three-stage model based on qualitative works done after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks (Patton et al., 2016). In Peek’s model, Muslim’s religious identity are either ascribed, chosen, or declared. As Muslims progress in their religious identity, they move from identities ascribed by their family and culture, to becoming introspective about their beliefs and values, to a deeper understanding of their faith (Patton et al., 2016).

These two theories in tandem with Hurtado et al.’s (1998) four-part model led the data collection and analysis of this study. Park’s (1986; 2002) theory is beneficial in identifying development and progression in religious and spiritual individuals and offers a framework to analyze their development through epistemology, relationships, and emotions. This theory is
useful in conjunction with Hurtado et al.’s (1998) climate model as they both analyze important components of campus climate, such as relationships among students and student development. Peek’s (2005) model was utilized as two of the participants are Muslim, both at different stages of their identity development; this model is helpful in studying Muslim identity development in a post 9/11 America.

**Significance**

Religion plays an integral part in American society through lifestyle, social norms, and politics. Religious (and non-religious) backgrounds heavily influence lifestyle decision, ethics, code of conduct, and dietary habits. The role of the student affairs profession is to foster the holistic development of students, and that includes their spiritual development. Previous literature suggested decline in religious participation among college students; however, students retain an interest in spiritual development (Astin et al., 2011). It is important for student affairs professionals, higher education administrators and researchers to be culturally adept at interacting with and supporting religious minority students. Mutakabbir and Nuriddin (2016a) accurately stated that the United States is only moving towards greater diversity, not less. The United States has a long history of religious strife beginning with the early colonies to the 20th and 21st century’s influx of religious minorities. If higher education administrators want to create an inclusive and intellectually stimulating environment for the benefit of all students, they must also consider the promotion of religious pluralism, starting with assessing religious minority student’s needs.
Definition of Key Terms

Asatru – A revitalized Neo-Pagan religion, whose members’ beliefs and practices revolve around the ancient Norse-Germanic spirits and Gods. It is the fastest growing religion in Iceland (“11 things,” 2019).

Buddhism – An Indian religion/philosophical tradition tracing back to the religious teacher, Siddhartha Gautama, who taught about ending rebirth and suffering. Buddhism is the fourth largest religion in the world; less than one percent of Americans identify as Buddhist (Pew Research Center, 2014a).

Campus Climate - The current attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of students, faculty, and staff about the campus environment, including but not limited to religion and spirituality.

Hinduism – A polytheistic Indian religious system that teaches the immortality of the soul, the true nature of ultimate reality, and an ending to rebirth. Hinduism is the third largest religion in the world; less than one percent of Americans identify as Hindu (Pew Research Center, 2014a).

Interfaith – The interactions between people of different religions and traditions, in recognition of their differences and similarities in promoting peace and justice (United Religions Initiative, n.d.)

Islam – A Middle-Eastern religion established by the Prophet Muhammed in the 7th century that believes in one God, worshipped by the Biblical figure Abraham. It is the second largest religion in the world and the third largest religion in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2014a).

Religious minority – A practitioner and/or member of a religion that holds minority status within the United States, due to a history of marginalization, discrimination, and/or stigma.

Sephardic Judaism – A religio-ethnic branch of Judaism originating from 15th century Spain/Portugal. The United States has one of the largest populations of Jews outside Israel.
Spiritual, Not Religious – A growing population in the United States that identifies more with individual spirituality and self-growth, rather than organized religions and religious institutions.

Spirituality – The quality by which humans find and make meaning in their lives, through emphasis of the soul/spirit, higher power(s), purpose, and/or self-authorship (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011).

Taoism – A Chinese religious/philosophical tradition tracing back to the legendary teacher Laozi that emphasizes living in harmony with the Tao, or “the way” of the universe. Less than 0.01% of Americans identify as Taoist (The Pluralism Project, n.d.).

Delimitations & Limitations

This study focuses on the experiences of religious minority students, and not of the religious majority (Christians) in the United States. One important note to my study is that the definition of a religious minority can vary depending on the researcher. In this study, I chose not to focus on minority Christian denominations, such as Seventh Day Adventists or Mormons, who are included in some studies as religious minorities (Bowman & Small, 2012; Rockenbach et al., 2017). I also choose not to focus on religious nones such as atheists and agnostics (Bryant & Astin, 2008; Bowman & Smedley, 2013; Rockenbach et al., 2015). Furthermore, my study focuses on the religious and spiritual aspect of the campus climate. While the majority of my participants are nontraditional and racial minority students, this study does not delve into their experiences pertaining to the campus climate regarding their race, gender, etc. As my study only collected data from a small number of religious minority students (eight students) enrolled at one
southeast institution (LSU), findings may not be generalizable to religious minorities who are enrolled at institutions of different sizes, locations, and campus cultures.

**Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 begins with the introduction and background to this study, including why research on religious minority college students is important, the purpose of this study, relevant key terms, and a brief overview of the methods utilized. Chapter 2 provides an analysis of current literature regarding religious minority college students, university campus climates, and the spiritual dimension of a campus climate. Chapter 3 explains the methodology utilized for this study, including the research site, participants, and validity. Chapter 4 presents the results of the data collection and the emerged themes. Chapter 5 concludes this study with a discussion, implications for policy and practice, and conclusion. This study's References and an Appendix follows Chapter 5.
CHAPTER TWO. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of the current literature relevant to religious minority college students and the campus climates of institutions of higher education. Who constitutes a religious minority, differences between the terms “religious” and “spiritual,” and literature regarding religious minority groups, especially Muslims, will be explored. Additionally, studies conducted on campus climate, analysis of different dimensions of campus climate, a spiritual dimension, and interfaith initiatives are explored.

Religious Minorities

Definitions

Various studies categorize religious minorities in different ways. How scholars define religious minorities must be analyzed through the lens of defining minority status, religion and spirituality, and their relation to one another. Love (2001) defined religion as a “shared system of beliefs, principles, or doctrines related to a belief in and worship of a supernatural power or powers regarded as creator(s) and governor(s) of the universe” (p. 8). Educational anthropologist John Ogbu defined minority status through the relation of power between both groups, with a minority population occupying a subordinate position in society in relation to another (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). In contrast, a majority group can be understood as having “economic, social, and political resources at their disposal and has attained both power and prestige as a result of these privileges” (Mutakabbir & Nuriddin, 2016a). Some studies considered smaller and less represented denominations of Christianity (Mormon, Seventh Day Adventists) in their studies, while others also incorporated religious nones (atheists, agnostics, etc.). Mayhew, Bowman, and Rockenbach (2014) defined religious minority status as “belonging to groups that do not experience the representation and recognition in general society typically granted to affiliates of
Christian traditions” (p. 223). In another article, Rockenbach et al. (2015) included Latter-Day Saints and Unitarian Universalists as belonging to minority faiths. Bryant (2006) took a more general approach by using “individuals whose perspectives are not situated within the Christian worldview that prevails culturally and religiously in the United States” (p. 3). For the purpose of this study, I adapted Bryant (2006) and Mayhew et al.’s (2014) definitions to define religious minority as a practitioner and/or member of a religious and/or spiritual worldview situated outside of Christianity, that holds minority status within the United States, due to a history of marginalization, discrimination, and/or stigma. Additionally, I did not define members of the Latter-Day Saints community as a religious minority, though their status is sometimes contested.

The terms “spiritual” and “religious” are often used interchangeably. A growing portion of the American population identifies as “spiritual but not religious.” Spirituality can encompass a meaning-making expression of who we are (Astin et al., 2011). In a person’s spiritual quest, finding answers to life’s mysteries, developing personal philosophies, and cultivating equanimity and internal harmony are lifelong pursuits. Some researchers chose to use the term “worldview” instead of religion or spirituality in order to encompass inclusivity and more accurately gather data from student populations (“nones” and students of other belief systems) (Mayhew et al., 2014; Rockenbach, 2017).

**Experiences of Religious Minority Students**

Several studies were conducted regarding Muslim students experiences in higher education, particularly with Muslim women’s experiences in veiling. For example, Cole and Ahmadi (2003) asked Muslim women why they chose to veil as well as how their peers perceived them. Interviewing seven Muslim women of various nationalities at a Midwest college, the women stated that they found that non-Muslim female students would not interact with them much, and that male students would speak to them more when they stopped veiling.
Some students stopped veiling due to the social isolation they felt from their peers, as well as after they began to question notions of modesty. In a similar study, Seggie and Sanford (2010) interviewed six Muslim women who veiled at a primarily Christian, Midwestern research university. While the students found the campus to be welcoming, they also tended to shy away from relationships with non-Muslim students as they felt their religious beliefs were misunderstood. A lack of awareness from administration and faculty of Islam posed challenges to communication. The women also faced challenges adhering to their religious beliefs due to living on campus requirements, and suggested having interfaith/prayer rooms in the residence halls and on campus. The authors found that a lack of understanding and hesitancy to participate in interfaith dialogue hindered the religious campus climate. Furthermore, in Stubbs and Sallee’s (2013) study on how Muslim students navigate their American and Muslim identities, students suggested having a campus prayer space, and that administration should show support for religious student organizations. In navigating their identities, students leaned more towards one or more identity depending on which culture they felt was more appropriate to adhere to in a given situation. Lastly, in Mutakabbir & Nuriddin’s (2016b) study exploring the experiences of four African American Muslim Males at four HBCUs, having a space on campus to pray was important to all of the participants, although only one student was successful in persuading their institution to have one. There were challenges when eating at the dining hall and experiences of microaggressions strengthened their faith. Overall, the participants benefitted from being at an HBCU.

When measuring levels of appreciation towards Muslim students by non-Muslims, Rockenbach, Mayhew, Bowman, Morin, and Riggers-Piehl (2017) found that different groups had varying levels. The researchers surveyed 13,489 students at 52 colleges between the fall of
2011 and the spring of 2014, 37% were Protestant institutions, 21% Catholic, 19% private nonsectarian, and 24% public. Fifty-seven percent of the survey were Christian, 26% were nontheistic, four percent were religious minorities (2% Jewish, 1% Buddhist, 1% Unitarian Universalist), and 12% other. Forty-one percent had a high level of appreciation, while 56% were moderate, and 3% were low. Agnostic, Buddhist, Secular Humanist, Spiritual, and Unitarian Universalist students were most appreciative towards Muslims. Mormons, Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, and Evangelical Christians were less appreciative. Having a multi-faith room and student organizations had a positive correlation with appreciative attitudes, while less favorable results were linked to discord and insensitivity (Rockenbach et al., 2017). Muslim students were less comfortable speaking about their religion as they found it hard to negotiate their religious identities at a secular institution.

While the above studies revealed important findings about Muslim students and other groups’ perspectives about Muslim students, other researchers focused on other religious minority students’ experiences. For example, Kadushin and Tighe (2008) found that the more a Jewish student felt connected to the student body and had more Jewish friends, the less challenges they faced in their religious identity. The researchers surveyed 1,087 college students at eight elite colleges (two public, six private) about difficulties in being Jewish. Results were overall positive with 58% strongly agreeing, 26% slightly agreeing, 9% saying neither, 6% slightly disagreeing, and 1% strongly disagreeing. Four of the universities had between 20%-30% of students identifying as Jewish, while four had lower numbers (6-17%). Cole and Ahmadi (2010) researched whether Muslim, Jewish, and Christian students had different college experiences, and if those differences existed in academic, diversity-related, and religious activities, and/or faculty support. The authors surveyed 70 Christians, 67 Jews, and 66 Muslims.
While Muslim students were more engaged in activities related to diversity, they were also less satisfied with their college experiences than Jewish students. Beyond the Muslim and Jewish populations, more studies are needed for other underserved religious populations such as Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains.

**Campus Climate**

**Definitions**

Campus climate studies generally focused on attitudes and perceptions of the campus stakeholders: students, faculty, and staff. Peterson and Spencer (1990) defined campus climate through organizational culture: “The current common patterns of important dimensions of organizational life or its members’ perceptions of and attitudes towards those dimensions” (p. 48). Hurtado et al. (1998) described climate as “two domains: impact of governmental programs, policy, initiatives, and sociohistorical factors” (p. 282). Rankin and Reasons’ (2008) understanding of campus climate incorporates “current attitudes, behaviors, and standards and practices of employees and students of an institution” that “includes needs, abilities, and potential of all groups” (p. 264). Museus, Nichols, and Lambert (2008) defined campus climate as “current perceptions and attitudes about the campus environment (with regard to race)” (p. 114). In this study, I defined campus climate, according to both Rankin and Reason’s (2008) and Museus et al.’s (2008) definitions, as the current attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of students, faculty, and staff about the campus environment, including but not limited to religion and spirituality.

**Campus Climate Studies**

Topics such as policy, academic persistence, and demographics have been considered in higher education literature as influential factors of campus climate (Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Museus et al., 2008). Students of color and White students tend to perceive campus climates
differently. Rankin and Reason (2005) researched student’s personal campus experience, their perception of their campus’ climate, and perceptions of the institutional policy regarding diversity at 10 campuses around the United States. Among the 7,347 undergraduates surveyed (5,308 White & 2,039 students of color), students of color perceived the campus climate as more racist, less friendly, more hostile, and less respectful compared to White students. Johnson et al. (2014) examined how campus racial climate and stress affected the persistence of White students and students of color after two years of enrollment. For students of color, stress concerning academics had an indirect negative influence on persistence, a negative direct effect on institutional commitment, and indirectly affected intention to return. Instances of racism also diminished their feelings about the campus climate. The results were consistent with reports of students of color experiencing campus climate more negatively.

In addition to Hurtado et al.’s (1998) framework, a few scholars have offered frameworks to study campus climate holistically and in-depth. Building off Rankin’s (2003) Transformational Tapestry Model, Rankin and Reason (2008) offers their approach to transforming campus climate through analyzing six dimensions: (1) access and retention, (2) research/scholarship, (3) inter- and intragroup relations, (4) curriculum and pedagogy, (5) university policies/service, and (6) external relations. Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, Cuellar (2008) evaluated climate studies and presented several frameworks regarding current assessment practices by institutions and scholars. The authors summarized that campus climate is interrelated through social connections and relationships.

**Spiritual Dimension**

A few campus climate studies focused on religion and spirituality in students to analyze a “spiritual dimension” in college environments (Bryant and Astin, 2008; Bryant et al., 2009; Seggie and Sanford, 2010; Bowman & Smedley, 2013; Mayhew et al., 2014; Rockenbach &
Satisfaction levels of campus climates and college experiences for religious minorities vary from study to study. While some studies show religious minorities dissatisfied, others have showed them somewhere in the middle or more satisfied than their religious majority counterparts.

**Dissatisfied**

Bryant and Astin (2008) explored spiritual struggle and the potential consequences related to psychological wellbeing and growth in religiosity and spirituality. The authors surveyed 3,493 students, the majority of whom were Christian. Religious minorities and others consisted of 17% of the sample. The authors suggested that spirituality and religion might not always be beneficial to well-being; 21% frequently struggled with evil and suffering, and 40% occasionally felt anger towards God. Muslims, Buddhists, Unitarian Universalists, Hindus, and Eastern Orthodox students and women were more likely to experience spiritual struggle. The authors also suggest that student affairs professionals need to be aware of student’s spiritual struggles and establish a space that normalizes spiritual struggle, foster contemplation, and allow for tension without necessarily seeking a resolution.

Bryant et al. (2009) interviewed 14 faculty and staff and 13 students using Hurtado et al.’s (1999) theoretical framework. The campus had an open and non-interfering attitude; however, there were concerns about religious minorities being able to express their beliefs openly. Students tended to flock to what was familiar to them, and atheist and agnostic students were private about their beliefs. Student organizations and residential life were the most cited medium for religious/spiritual engagement. At a small, Lutheran college in the Midwest, Bryant and Craft (2010) conducted interviews, focus groups, and observations on whether the college had an intention to welcome students of other faiths. In this setting, it was critical that the
institution valued pluralism by channeling diverse and conflicting spiritual viewpoints. Such opportunities for programming would provoke student development. Seggie and Sanford’s (2010) study highlighted that a lack of understanding and hesitancy for inter-religious dialogue and interaction can hinder the religious campus climate. The researchers suggested hiring faculty and administration of more diverse religious backgrounds.

**Somewhere In-Between**

Devout Christians may feel threatened by the expectation to challenge and critically question truths, even outside of religious contexts (Mayhew et al., 2014). In the authors’ study, students of a worldview majority (34% Christians) found the campus climate to be more negative than their non-religious (40%) and religious minority (27%) counterparts. Bowman and Smedley (2013) explored the connection between religious affiliation and university satisfaction utilizing a longitudinal survey. Among 3,098 students at 28 selective universities, religious minority students fell in between non-religious students, who were less satisfied with their college experiences, and Protestants, who showed satisfaction.

**High Satisfaction**

Lower satisfaction levels in religious majority students may be a result of institutions seeking to support and give attention to non-majority students (Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2014). Rockenbach and Mayhew (2014) surveyed 1,071 students; 40% were religious majority students, 37% non-religious, and 23% religious minorities. Among the participants, 44% were satisfied with the spiritual climate, 49% moderately/slightly satisfied, and 7% were not satisfied at all. African American and Asian students had a tendency to be less satisfied relative to White students. In addition, Rockenbach et al. (2015) found that of the approximately 633 juniors at
two private universities in the Northeast and Midwest, religious minority (22%) and majority students (34%) both perceived the climate as welcoming with minute difference.

However, while some religious minority groups may feel satisfied with campus climate, other minority groups may have different views. Riggers-Piehl and Lehman (2016) analyzed sense of belonging among Christian, Jewish, and Muslim students in relation to the campus spiritual climate. Of the 6,062 students at nine University of California campuses, Muslim students perceived negative attitude towards religion as disrespectful towards Islam. Jewish students’ perception of tolerance helped their sense of belonging. While students rarely saw faculty and staff disrespectful towards religion, they occasionally felt disrespected by peer students. All three groups (Christians, Jews, and Muslims) had different reactions and perceptions of negative feelings towards religion on campus. This study by Riggers-Piehl and Lehman (2016) reiterated the need for more research on perceptions of religious minority groups. They also suggested taking account variation among groups as well as being cautious in lumping together minority group experiences.

**Interfaith Engagement**

As institutions looks to foster religious pluralism and ecumenical worldviews on campus, researchers have looked at opportunities for studying interfaith engagement (Bryant, 2006). Interfaith is defined as the interactions between people of different religions and traditions, in recognition of their differences and similarities in promoting peace and justice (United Religions Initiative, n.d.). In Bryant’s (2006) study, Unitarian Universalist and Buddhist students had the highest levels of ease with engaging in pluralism. Bryant & Craft (2010) argued that a college environment that effectively utilizes pluralism has the opportunity to invoke student development through spiritual programming and interfaith dialogue. Patel and Meyer (2011)
discussed the ways in which interfaith cooperation strengthens communities during times of social and religious tension. The authors also discussed how universities could promote civic engagement with diverse, religious communities and developing students to lead interfaith cooperation (Patel & Meyer, 2011).

Findings from the Interfaith Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Longitudinal survey (IDEALS) showed that over two-thirds of students surveyed appreciated people of different races and nationalities, but religious/sexual/gender/ideological diversity appreciation levels were inconsistent (Rockenbach, 2017). Students would be more inclined toward appreciation of a group if they had at least one close friend belonging to that group. Fifty percent were exceedingly appreciative of Atheists, Hindus, and Mormons. Only about 47% of religious minorities had a place to go for support regarding spiritual questions and struggles. Campuses with multi-faith centers and Muslim student organizations had students with more positive attitudes toward that group.

**Conclusion**

This chapter contained an overview of current literature on religious minority students. In addition to analysis of race relations, sexuality and gender, and ethnicity, scholars have begun to incorporate religious and spiritual dimensions in campus climate studies. While variation in campus climate studies calls for more research, trends show that religious minority students have decreased satisfaction. Research also shows that higher education institutions cannot afford to be indifferent to the needs of these students. Focus on Muslim student experiences is indicative of a post-9/11 America. However, with anti-Semitism on the rise alongside White supremacy, it is vital that researchers also focus on Jewish student experiences and students of other religious minorities.
CHAPTER THREE. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a case study approach that explores and analyzes a person, group, entity, or phenomenon in its contemporary setting, which is bounded by time and place (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013), anthropologists and sociologists first began using this research design method, and today it is utilized across many disciplines. Case study research is useful when studying a phenomenon or issue through selecting a specific case. The researcher can then generate themes, specific situations, and patterns that can be learned from studying the case (Creswell, 2013).

The case study method was chosen for this study as it was determined that a collective case study, studying an issue in several cases, would best fit the topic (Creswell, 2013). For this case study, the issue constitutes religious and spiritual minority students’ experiences with the campus spiritual climate, while the eight participants comprise the multiple cases. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted in order to explore the experiences of religious minorities within a bounded system, which encompasses a specific site (i.e., a university) to analyze its phenomenon (i.e., campus religious & spiritual climate).

Research Site

The location of this study was at a large, research-intensive public university in the southeast: Louisiana State University (LSU). For the Fall 2019 enrollment, LSU had over 31,761 students, 25,920 undergraduates and 5,841 graduate/professional students (Louisiana State University, 2020). Female students numbered 17,076, and male students numbered 14,685. Louisiana is located in the region known as the “Bible Belt,” where evangelical Protestantism plays a strong role in everyday life (Barton, 2010; Barna Group, 2017). Adult Christians
comprise 84% of the state’s population, higher than the national average (71%) (Pew Research, 2014a, 2014b). LSU is also home to more than 10 churches on or near campus grounds, and an Islamic center adjacent to campus. There are 45 registered religious/spiritual student organizations on campus, with only six that are not Christianity affiliated.

**Participants**

I conducted purposeful sampling to recruit participants who were non-Christian and self-identified as a religious minority. Once the IRB approval for the study was obtained in September 2019, I started recruiting participants that I knew fit the criteria: Mary, Baker, Jasmine, and Chuu. I also created flyers that had various religious symbols, imagery, and architecture to recruit participants to my study (temples/mosques, Dharma wheel/Yin-Yang). These flyers were placed strategically around campus, in buildings that had a lot of foot traffic, such as the student union and around the university quad. Nine additional students reached out to me, three being Devika, Jake, and Odie. The other six students were deemed not qualified for the study or did not follow up about interviewing. Besides convenient sampling and recruiting participants through flyers, I also conducted snowball sampling, where I recruited Sutri. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the participants.
Table 1. Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Religion/Spiritual Identity</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Sex/Gender Identity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Field of Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Arab/Middle Eastern</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Biology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devika</td>
<td>Sephardic Judaism</td>
<td>Cuban/African-American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake</td>
<td>Asatru</td>
<td>White/Caucasian, White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>Taoism</td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Anthropology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Graduate Student</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutri</td>
<td>Buddhism/Hinduism</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Graduate Student</td>
<td>Biology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuu</td>
<td>Spiritual Not Religious</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odie</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Physics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The names of the participants are pseudonyms, which they picked themselves. In total, eight students participated in the study, with males and females split evenly. The students ranged from a first semester freshman to a graduate student finishing his dissertation. Six students were STEM majors, one was education, and another was in the social sciences. Three students had an international and/or immigrant background. Sutri was an international student who had been attending LSU for over 5 years, Jasmine was a naturalized citizen who was also an undergraduate at LSU, and Mary lived abroad in the Middle East for a few years before entering college. In terms of their particular religious identities, Chuu was the only student that did not adhere to a particular faith system, Sutri identified as Buddhist “mixed with Hindu” and as a “cultural agnostic,” and Odie identified as both Jewish and Atheist. Odie identified as Jewish in a cultural and “heartfelt” way, but identified as Atheist as he does not believe in Yahweh. Devika and Baker were both nontraditional students, with Baker returning to finish the degree that she began in 2012.

Data Collection

The individual interviews were held in my office on campus, located in a large building that holds several departments, including Admissions and Retention. These one-on-one interviews took place privately during the weekdays. The participants were asked some general demographic questions as well as their life story up until their interview. The interview protocol (see Appendix B) was created around the research questions and was guided by the theoretical framework. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 61 minutes and were recorded and transcribed through the phone application, Otter. Participation was voluntary and I provided no incentives.


Data Analysis

Once interview transcriptions were edited for accuracy and coherence via Otter, I began to examine the data and highlight topics of discussion, especially topics that were repeated during the interview. The main tool of data analysis in qualitative data is coding—a process of categorizing information that is the basis of identifying themes, building descriptions, and interpretation (Creswell, 2013). I coded provisional themes for each interview individually and then aggregated the themes of all eight interviews until six themes emerged. Several coding methods were utilized in this process: open coding and axial coding. Open coding began at the individual interview level by focusing on attitudes, actions, thoughts, and experiences of the participants. Through axial coding, reoccurring patterns of thoughts and behaviors revealed similarities and differences between the participants’ experiences. A holistic analysis of the cases led to common themes being generated.

Researcher’s Positionality

Having attended the research site as an undergraduate student, I was very familiar with the campus. I was an undergraduate from 2012-2016, and was thus familiar with campus politics, student issues, and the constant presence of Christianity on campus. However, for the most part most college students now belong to Generation Z, while I am a millennial; my experiences might be different from the participants, and the university climate might have changed, too. Additionally, as a religious minority (Buddhist) I was able to empathize with the participants in their frustrations and experiences.

At the same time, when I began attending LSU, I had only begun to move away from the Christian beliefs I was raised with. For a time, I concentrated on the agnostic aspect of my religious identity and did not readily identify with Buddhism, even though I was one in
everything but name. Sachi Edwards (2018) argues that because religion cannot be disentangled from culture, that cultural socialization remains with the individual even if they reject belief and practice. Thus, the oppression and/or privileges they endued still remain. I have been socialized in Christian beliefs, practices, and rituals all my life, and thus I have an advantage over other religious minorities who are unfamiliar with that worldview. I have the perspective of being a Christian apostate, religious none, and religious minority, with differing perspectives taking place at the undergraduate and graduate level. I believe this perspective greatly facilitated my deep understanding of the participants’ feeling, stories and experiences.

**Trustworthiness**

When analyzing information gathered from participants, researchers undergo triangulation, a process of corroborating evidence through multiple sources, methods, and theories to scrutinize the trustworthiness of the subject’s statements (Creswell, 2013). In this study, due to the nature of the participants beliefs—some of them following religious/spiritual beliefs systems that are obscure to the average American—I investigated their statements made about current events and practices. For example, when Jake discussed Asatru’s association with Neo-Nazis, it being the fastest growing religion in Iceland, a temple to the Norse god Odin being built in Iceland, and its historical origins, I conducted further research to validate these statements for accuracy and for context. Through further investigation via news sites and scholarly articles, I determined that these statements were indeed true, providing more meaning and greater context for the climate and environment, on campus and in the United States, in which Jake experiences (Strmiska, 2000; McNallen, 2015; Samuel, 2017; ásatrú, 2018; “11 things,” 2018). Additionally, Odie’s discussion of President Trump’s Executive Order 13,899
and the debates surrounding the implications it had on American Jews were verified as accurate (Chakrabarti & Martin, 2019).

Part of validating and legitimizing qualitative data is done through member checking, or allowing participants to lend to the credibility of the data (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, member checking allows participants to correct data and to ask to include or exclude information. Once the results were compiled and written, I emailed the participants a copy. Devika corrected the name of a person she discussed while the rest of the participants agreed that the writing was accurate. Participants who did not respond to the email were assumed to have nothing to add.
CHAPTER FOUR. RESULTS

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do religious minority students describe their spiritual/religious experience in college?
2. How do religious minority students access and utilize services and resources provided by their university?
3. How do experiences on campus influence spiritual identity development among religious minority students?

Because students’ experiences do not exist in a vacuum, the current political and social climate of the country affects their experiences, as the college environment is a microcosm of the United States. Current conditions in the religious and spiritual climate of the country impacts students, religious or not. The following chapter discusses the participants’ spiritual/religious experiences, their levels of involvement and resource utilization, and how they developed in their spiritual identity in college.

Religious Experiences

To answer the first research question, I asked the students to share their experiences as religious minorities in college and in general. Themes revolving around the current religious climate in the United States, the campus spiritual climate at LSU, microaggressions, interactions with Christians on campus, and religious expression emerged from the data.

National and Statewide Climate

Talking about the experiences of minority groups inevitably positions itself in the context of the majority group predominance: the students were keenly aware of their identity as religious minorities in a majority Christian nation. Viewpoints that the participants shared included that
the concept of God is a dominating view in the United States, Christianity is viewed as the “center of the universe/world,” and there is a “prevalent culture of conversion.” Odie viewed the religious climate in the United States as dependent on the region. In his view, he believed the north is more accepting of other religions, while the coasts are more apathetic. Odie, who identified with both Judaism and Atheism, discussed the fact that for the non-religious, political representation is low, and that an atheist would never be elected as president. When discussing current events, the participants brought up rising Anti-Semitic and Islamophobic attacks and events.

In discussing Baton Rouge and Louisiana’s religious climate, views were mixed. For Chuu and Sutri, students who had lived in smaller cities in the south, people in Baton Rouge were less religious. As a freshman, Chuu had not spent enough time in Baton Rouge to understand the city’s religious climate, and Sutri was unsure how people perceived hijabs. Baker believed it to be worse than the national average, as Louisiana is part of the Bible Belt. Odie described the climate in the south as cutthroat and homogenous.

While governmental policies did not restrict or inhibit the students’ religious practices or expression, certain governmental actions and policies were an affront to their beliefs and difficult to tolerate, such as gentrification and the withdrawal from the Parish Climate Accords. Odie talked about President Trump’s Executive Order on Combating Anti-Semitism, and that Jews in his circle were wary of the implications of defining Jews as a separate nationality (Executive Order 13,899, 2019). For Jasmine, President Trump’s Executive Order 13,769, Protecting the Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into the United States—which involved a travel ban targeting majority Muslim nations—negatively affected her as a Muslim (2017).
Campus Spiritual Climate

When discussing LSU’s campus climate, the students discussed both positive and negative aspects of LSU’s campus climate, including the spiritual dimension. Most of the students regarded LSU’s overall campus climate positively. The university was described as “tight knit” and had a sense of community. For students who had lived in smaller cities, LSU was diverse and had a friendlier environment. Five of the students described the campus as “friendly,” and that people were welcoming, nice, and helpful. Two of the students said they “love LSU” and had overall positive experiences. However, there were parts of the campus climate that were highlighted as negative experiences. For example, Devika described LSU as “inhibited” and that she had second thoughts about taking a class because she was unsure of the type of discussions or dialogue that would be brought up.

People like me who clearly have a lot to say, and don't mind saying it, we just feel like, “don't say anything because people get offended at every little thing.” I mean, you could say the sky is blue and someone will probably going to argue with you. And it's just, it makes for a very intellectually restrictive campus….Everybody has their own little tribe. And it's like, no one can really come together, except over football and I hate football. I just feel that it inhibits a lot of discussion that really could happen. Inhibits a lot of just interaction that can happen. And I really wish that LSU you would facilitate more of that. Okay, more of, you know, hey let's get the gay Muslims talking to the heterosexual Jews, I mean, I don't know.

Sutri talked about a lack of communication between people, specifically students from other cultures. Key aspects that also affected the participant’s views of the campus spiritual climate were resource gaps, social interactions, and group relations and perceptions.

Spiritual Dimension

The participants’ view of the spiritual dimension of the campus climate ranged from comfortable to dissatisfied. Odie felt that LSU is more open to non-religious students, as he never felt comfortable stating that he was an atheist in high school. Both he and Chuu felt that most students do not care about religious identity because they are preoccupied with other things,
such as attaining their degrees. Jasmine was not uncomfortable at LSU as a Muslim student, and Sutri believed that professors and students do not have a problem with Muslim women who veil. Mary did not have any negative experiences when wearing the hijab as a freshman on campus, as opposed to within Baton Rouge. On the other hand, Devika commented that LSU is “fertile missionary grounds.” Baker echoed the same sentiment, stating that someone is assumed Christian unless stated otherwise. Baker and Devika both viewed these as negative qualities, while Jake thought the assumption was reasonable given the campus’ demographic. Odie discussed how there is more of a “secular Christian” angle that LSU pushes, and while there are no religious overtones to the university, there is still a perception of LSU being a Christian school. Furthermore, he stated that LSU does not pay attention to religious minorities, and when they do, such as in the case of the interfaith prayer room, it is more for the sake of PR. Jasmine described the religious climate as “intense” and “passionate.”

And that was more intense than our Muslim group. It was…it was a lot of “Christ” and “Jesus” talk; it was a lot. A lot. We [Muslim group] didn't do all that….Then it just kind of elaborated, and they just went on and on and on and on about it. Then they had like groups and there were just too many "Jesus." They were so passionate about it. I don't know, they were just passionate.

**Microaggressions**

Because of their position as a minority group on campus, I asked the participants about their experiences with microaggressions, or “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2009). The participants either experienced, did not experience, or witnessed microaggressions against other religious minorities. Devika experienced microaggressions frequently, Baker and Odie witnessed microaggressions against other religious minorities, Chuu did not experience microaggressions based on his beliefs but on his race, and Sutri, Jasmine, and Mary did not experience
microaggressions. In Devika’s Arabic class, a Muslim classmate frequently dismissed her and doubted her intelligence about Islam—specifically because Devika converted from Islam to Judaism. Baker discussed overhearing a student complain about another student’s request to leave class.

Something about this guy got to leave class. Like this professor had a strict “if you come in late I'm closing the door, I'm going to lock you in this room” thing--and I don't know, this guy I think was leaving to go pray at noon, or something for his religion. She was so much like, "Why don't I get to go leave my class to go pray? If I was the professor, I wouldn't let them do that.” …But it was just very shocking how she made it all about her, when it would have had nothing to do with her. It was about respecting another student’s right to practice their religion and she made it about her somehow.

The students were in agreement that microaggressions were unavoidable, and they were skeptical that LSU could do anything to improve, or would even try. Baker stated that “not having representation is an aggression.” Odie had heard Islamophobic comments from other students as well as ignorant comments towards non-religious students. Chuu felt hurt when a university worker asked him if his parents were storeowners, the assumption being that all Asians are working class. Jake chose to ignore microaggressions and thought that the assumption that he was Christian was reasonable; however, he did mention being referred to as a “Nazi occultist.”

**Interactions with Christians on Campus**

The students’ experiences with Christian students were diverse. Jake would engage with Christian student organizations during their table sits. He described the students as “fairly polite,” and they usually were “cool about his beliefs;” he would also have discussions with a minister who usually sits in front of the union and has open seats available. Other times, Christian students would convince him to convert or there would be some hostile attitudes toward his beliefs. Jasmine was not cognizant about her interactions with non-Muslims and was usually too busy to visit the university’s designated free speech space. Odie usually avoided the
Christian groups but indicated that he would be interested in talking to one Christian group in particular that encouraged students to approach them first. Baker also avoided the free speech area mostly due to being frustrated with “having to deal with angry, screaming Christians regularly.” She had never seen people from other religions acting in the same manner on campus.

**Religious Expression**

The student’s beliefs changed or manifested in different ways throughout their college experience. The students’ religious/spiritual identity were important to them, but some were more observant than others. Religious/spiritual beliefs either progressed (Baker, Chuu, Jake, Devika), stayed the same (Jasmine, Sutri, Odie), or regressed (Mary). To give context to their experiences as religious minorities, I asked the participants how they expressed their beliefs. Some students expressed their religion outwardly, such as through clothing and discussion, while others kept their beliefs at a more personal level by practicing by themselves or off campus.

Jasmine is a practicing Muslim and tries to observe the five pillars of Islam and pray five times a day. Chuu prays to a higher power that he refers to as God, but he believes he is just talking to himself. Devika dresses more conservatively and covers her hair as an Orthodox Jewish woman. Some students did not see expression as a priority but would express their religious beliefs through food and discussion. Jake, Sutri, Baker, Mary, and Jasmine were willing to discuss their beliefs to those who asked but they did not engage in discussion often. Both Muslim women did not talk about their experiences as Muslims with their friends. Sutri did not wear clothes that distinguished himself as Buddhist, and most of his observances were of holidays and preparing food. For Baker, the most affirming act of expression in her time at LSU was the fact that the university offered “Taoism” as a religious belief on its college application.

I think just the fact that LSU added the option gives me more of an openness to speak about it because it really…when you're not given that right to identify it's very…it makes you feel like you don't exist. So it's like, “you 're just an other religion.” So to be able to
say like no, I'm Taoist, if I were to have specific needs—or if there were holidays I needed to practice—I feel like I would have that right to say like, "hey, this is my religion." But otherwise, I mean like I said I had no issues with it. But I am really glad they added it as an option. And I'm glad there are classes like Dr. Arai's Asian religion class that speak about it. It's very affirming.

Services and Resources

To answer the second research question, “how do religious minority students access and utilize services and resources provided by their university,” I asked the participants about their levels of engagement on campus. Themes revolving around social involvement, religious/spiritual student organizations, support systems, and resource gaps emerged during data analysis.

Social Involvement

The participants were asked about their social experiences and support system regarding students of the same and different beliefs, experiences with microaggressions, and involvement in religious/spiritual student organizations and events. The student’s personalities, workload, involvement, and viewpoints influenced their social activities and interactions. Baker, Sutri, Mary, and Chuu had very positive experiences. Sutri attended cultural events, and Baker, Sutri, and Chuu had many social interactions with other students. Some students were not interested in the social experiences LSU had to offer or did not have the time to be active. Devika and Jake were not very socially engaged. Devika and Odie were not interested in football or tailgating, though Odie did recognize that the university tried to produce a sense of community. Odie and Jasmine were both too busy with schoolwork to be heavily involved, although they did put in the effort to be social. Mary was mostly involved in the Honors College, and organizations and programs involving international students and pre-medicine. While Mary had mainly positive experiences with organizations and programs, Odie’s were less so.
I tried to go, and yeah it's just so many people, everyone already knew each other. So I just felt super left out even though I love playing these games [E-sports]. So yeah, just never kept going. And it's sort of like that with all the clubs where if you don't know the people, and don't have your group, then no one in the club actually like sucks you in and actually welcomes you. They'll acknowledge you're there and they'll try to be nice but then once the formalities go away, they're right back to the group. And then you're just standing there wondering if you actually want to stay with the club or not.

**Religious/Spiritual Student Organizations**

The lack of student organizations geared towards religious minorities added to the participant’s views on LSU’s inadequacy in serving religious minorities. Devika was not involved in the Jewish student organizations, while Odie was a member of one. Baker and Jake did not have religious organizations that they could join, and there was no “religious nones” club that Odie could join to appeal to his Atheism. During her first year, Baker was involved in the Atheists, Agnostics, and Humanists club, now defunct. Baker stated that Humanism and Taoism share similarities and she joined the organization because it was her best option; she also discussed that there would not be enough people to form a Taoist student organization, and that the group would have to comprise of multiple religions, such as Buddhism. Jake and Baker did not expect an organization present on campus that centered on their religious beliefs, but both would be interested in being involved. Baker felt that it was strange that organizations that were not inherently religious had undertones of Christianity. Sutri stated that he did not have much in common with Buddhist students of other ethnicities, due to differences in practice and beliefs; most of the students from his country identified as Hindu. Chuu, Jasmine, and Mary were apathetic towards having or joining organizations related to their beliefs.

**Support Systems**

The support systems available to religious minorities were in stark contrast to the variety of resources available to Christian students, such as student groups, religious services, and religious leaders on campus. Chuu, Baker, Devika, and Jake had never met anyone on campus
with the same belief system. Jake stated that being a small minority “gets lonely.” In terms of support systems in discussing and practicing their beliefs, students either did not have one, chose not to seek them out, had support systems off campus, or were supported by students outside their religious group. While there is a Jewish population on campus, Devika stated that they mostly consisted of Ashkenazi Jews. She did not know of any Jewish students on campus, and most of her Jewish connections were through the Beth Shalom Synagogue. Odie knew of other Jewish students on campus and from the Baton Rouge area; however there was no non-religious organization. Baker mainly connected through other Buddhists that she knows and through the Buddhist temple. Sutri is not aware of any social support systems for Buddhists on campus and has never tried to look for a community. He was unaware that Baton Rouge had a Buddhist temple and mainly received support through his family. Mary had support systems not related to religion, and Chuu’s support came from his Christian friends.

**Resource Gap**

The participants spoke at length about the gaps in resources provided to religious minorities and in facilitating a religiously/spiritually engaging campus. The students discussed how there was only a focus on Christianity and they suggested programming initiatives they wanted to see. At the same time, they had no expectations that LSU would provide recognition to religious minorities. Overall, the students agreed that the university could be more welcoming, or at the very least not unwelcoming. For example, Baker and Odie spoke about having to seek out resources themselves, with Baker talking about the “emotional labor” of doing so. For Odie, even basic acknowledgement would be impactful. Having a Hanukah program or an LSU Menorah to accompany LSU’s Christmas tree would have “a huge impact on other religious communities,” encouraging them to feel comfortable in reaching out for recognition by the
university. Odie said that the university could undertake initiatives that would not require a lot of effort but would be meaningful.

…They have plenty of opportunity. It wouldn't take like a ton of effort, but it would make a huge impact on the Jewish community and any other community of any other faith if they did anything else. But they--they don't do anything except for Christmas. And then besides that, there's really no other religious tones to the university, at least publicly. But I feel like everyone still perceives LSU is like a Christian school because that's just—everyone here is basically.

At the same time, Odie was careful about not pushing religion onto students, a sentiment that Jake reiterated. Jasmine felt quite welcome “with the way things are” but suggested administration could take an approach “like Justin Trudeau” in welcoming Muslim students or addressing large-scale incidents, such as Muslim terrorist attacks. She also brought up creating awareness to address religious stereotypes. Some participants reiterated that LSU is not doing enough.

Baker and Devika both thanked me for giving them a forum to speak about their beliefs; Devika pointed out that she does not know “who to complain to” about her dissatisfactions. The students were amenable and even hungry for dialogue; they wanted LSU to increase learning opportunities and facilitate interactions with different religious groups and cultures. This included learning about other religious groups, besides just Islam. As an international student, Sutri wanted more opportunities for exposure to different cultures and religions. The available programs are mostly advertised to international students, so only international students attend. He suggested broadcasting events to the greater student population for more students to join in and suggested having festivals and banquets. For Devika, the lack of food options was unacceptable.

What should LSU bring for religious minorities like this? You're the first one that's actually even asked. So, I think LSU itself should ask, you know, “what can we do to help you?” Because I'll be the first one to tell them. Hello, your food offerings are [disagreeing sounds]. Because I know for a fact that the Chabad Rabbi is kosher certified,
so he can kosher a kitchen. So, the resources are right there for them to have something that’s acceptable to Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, everybody—just one place. Anywhere, it doesn’t matter. Just one place that just has vegetarian food, no meat enters whatsoever. I think that would be a really, really great thing for LSU to have, because it wouldn’t be even just religious people, it’d be vegans going there and vegetarians in general.

Furthermore, the students were puzzled at the fact that there are several churches on campus, but little to no space for other religious students, given how little space on campus there is. Devika emphasized a disconnect in having a Jewish student population on campus, and a collection of the Torah in the library, but no Jewish space on campus. Odie also spoke about the lack of space for Jewish students, and the lack of recognition by LSU about other religious holidays and events, even when the university has its own Christmas tree and programs. Some participants were unaware of the two religious prayer rooms on campus—when discussing the prayer room Baker commented on the resource being a good start, but not enough:

...LSU isn’t doing good enough. It’s just not doing well enough. So, LSU needs to keep doing more and more to get to the place where anyone of any religion can come on campus and feel valid. I’m not saying that it [sic] needs to be a building for every single religion, but they’re just—an interfaith room is a good start but it’s just not the end goal here. And I think LSU needs to do more to make everyone feel not just accepted in class, but on campus as well, and outside of campus, you know?

When asked about what kind of initiatives they would like to see at LSU for religious minorities, the participants readily gave suggestions. Chuu focused on meaning making and student development activities; that LSU should “give people hope” and have “students believe in themselves.” Sutri emphasized on improved communication with the international community, as he felt that the community is segregated by ethnicity and nationality. While not necessarily a practicing Muslim, Jasmine commented on one professor not excusing religious holidays for missed work. She would be upset about missing Friday prayer if she was that student, which Devika reiterated. At the time she was being interviewed, Devika was still making up work two weeks after Yom Kippur.
At the same time, while the students had plenty of suggestions to improve the campus climate for religious minorities, they were also hesitant and skeptical about asking for things. Baker commented that if a group made up less than 15-20% of the student population, in her eyes that group did not matter to the university. Other students reiterated that a lack of demand hinders visibility. Jake did not expect the university to incorporate a welcoming environment if there was no demand. Odie believed that the lack of religious expression for minorities was not necessarily the fault of the university, commenting that the lack of programming and events is due to its small Jewish population. Jasmine thought that highlighting support for Muslim students would offend some students, and Chuu held that LSU’s priority is research, education, and money. Sutri was unsure about how the university could make other students feel welcome.

**Influences on Identity Development**

To answer the third research question, “how do experiences on campus influence spiritual identity development among religious minority students,” I asked the participants about their interactions with non-religious minorities and how they progressed spiritually. Themes regarding identity progression and misunderstanding their beliefs emerged.

**Identity Progression**

Devika, Jake, Baker, and Chuu’s belief progressed or changed during their time at LSU. Devika became more conscious of being Jewish and thus became more observant. Jake abandoned Catholicism and came into Asatru through questioning and introspection, and Baker progressed in her own spirituality. With some personal issues arising during his first semester at LSU, Chuu turned to spirituality for self-motivation, values, and guidance. Sutri, Jasmine, and Odie stayed the same in their identities. Odie was raised Jewish but related to Judaism more in a cultural and “heartfelt way.” Similarly, Jasmine did not think often about her identity as a religious minority and said that she had not progressed spiritually. She described her religious
beliefs as strong and important to her but overall, they stayed the same. While Mary identifies as Muslim and still adheres to Muslim practices such as observing holidays, she did not consider herself very religious and regressed in her spirituality since she started college.

Well, okay, honestly, I wore one [hijab] when I was younger. And you know, when you're younger, you make decisions based on how everyone... You follow your surroundings, and I was around Arabs. So I was influenced by them. But then when I came here I didn't live in an Arab community. So I didn't see a lot of people like me. Plus, I really wasn't ready when I wore it—I wore it when I was 10. And I wasn't wearing it right. I was wearing the hijab with short sleeve shirts. That's what I mean by I wasn't wearing it right. So I'm like, that doesn't make sense. I'm half-half, you know? So I took it off.

Lack of Understandings towards Religious Minorities’ Beliefs

The reactions to some of the students’ beliefs ranged from supportive, apathetic, intrigued, or hostile. For most of the participants, there was a lack of understanding from other students regarding their beliefs. Due to the nature of Jake and Baker’s beliefs, most people were largely unaware of them and therefore did not have any preconceived notions of them. At times, however, Jake’s beliefs were oversimplified, and Baker had to defend the legitimacy of her own beliefs:

I mean if people don't identify that view [Taoism] as religious that's fine, but it was really interesting to me that this person had heard of it, and just largely dismissed it as like really—that's just a thing I read about. It's not—people don't practice it, people don't believe in it. It's ancient like Confucianism. It's died out. And I had to tell them people still believe in Confucianism and practice it, and they were incredulous that I was just making it up.

Other students viewed Baker’s beliefs with interest but otherwise were disinterested.

When thinking about Judaism, Odie stated that most people would usually think about Jews in relation to the Holocaust or anti-Semitism. Both he and Devika did not experience anti-Semitism at LSU, however Odie discussed there being a perceived slight against atheists, and that there can be pushback even if people say they are not against Atheism. Similarly, Sutri stated that most people have a stereotypical view of Buddhism; most people do not have negative
attitudes towards Buddhism and do not ask what his religious views are. Some people do not know how to act around Jasmine because she is Muslim; they are hesitant and cautious around her because they do not want to offend her, or they do not know how to talk about religion. Most of the misunderstandings regarding her identity came from children, but Jasmine stated that people have assumed she acted subservient to men or faced abuse because of her gender due to her religion. Before she felt uncomfortable about such assumptions, now she just wants to talk it out. Chuu received positive feedback about his beliefs through his Christian friends. His friends viewed his beliefs in a positive way because of his emphasis on self-improvement, and motivated him in his spiritual growth. Other students were offended by his views when he compared Christianity to Buddhism. Because of Chuu’s experience attending churches and temples, he saw similarities between the two religions and believe their teachings produce the same outcome.

Overall, the students did not particularly care about how other groups perceived them, more so they wanted their beliefs to be respected and validated. While students thought that most people did not care about their beliefs and were fine with this, there was also a sense of alienation and loneliness from some, particularly with Jake and Odie, the latter who sometimes felt that there were no other Jewish students around.

Conclusion

The participants’ feelings about LSU and its campus climate were complex. They aimed to be fair in their assessment, acknowledging where the university might only be able to do so much, while at the same time being analytical on how the university could improve. In general, the students viewed the campus climate positively. However, they were largely dissatisfied regarding the religious/spiritual dimension of the university’s climate, due to feelings of being ignored, overlooked, and without resources.
The university’s location in the southeast, specifically in the Bible Belt where the majority of students are Christian, certainly influenced the experiences of the participants as religious/spiritual minorities. A university having a majority Christian population, with around 8-10 churches on or near campus, nearly 40 Christian student organizations, and Christian holidays and breaks (Christmas and Good Friday) shapes the perceptions of its students. None of the participants had any objections about the resources available to Christian students. A few of the students spoke directly about the right to practice religion and for the beliefs of others to be respected. However, to varying degrees they wanted some sort of recognition. The following chapter will address the participant’s experiences, thoughts, and concerns, and their implications for policy and practice.
CHAPTER FIVE. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses the results of this study, including implications on policy and practice in higher education. Additionally, this chapter discusses the ways in which universities can better serve its religious minority population through programming and initiatives.

Discussion

Using Hurtado et al.’s Framework to Understand Religious Minorities’ Campus Experiences

Utilizing Hurtado et al.’s (1998) framework in assessing campus spiritual climate and the experiences of religious minorities is made a bit complicated due to the model’s focus on race. The four-dimension model focuses on (a) an institution’s context and legacy, (b) structural diversity, (c) psychological climate and (d) behavioral climate. The first dimension of the model, an institution’s context and legacy inclusion or exclusion, does not easily transfer from examining racial minorities to religious minorities. In the early history of higher education, Jews were the main religious group that faced exclusionary practices (Thelin, 2011). Unless an institution has a distinct history of excluding religious minorities, this dimension does not easily translate in analyzing the spiritual climate. At LSU, the participants did not speak about the institution’s context and legacy; rather, they focused on the broader climate of discrimination within the United States. Before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, LSU excluded African Americans and other racial minorities from admission; there is no record of there being discrimination against religious minorities specifically (Louisiana State University, n.d.b). In this case study, the institution’s context and legacy was not a contributing factor to the participant’s views of the campus spiritual climate.

The structural diversity of a university is important in contributing to spiritual climate, in terms of representation, resource availability, cross-religious interactions, etc. An institution
lacking in diverse populations and representation can lead to alienation (Bryant and Craft, 2010; Seggie and Sanford, 2010). For that reason, the structural diversity of LSU was an important factor in contributing to the participants’ view of the campus spiritual climate. Odie, Devika, Baker, and Jake’s feelings of alienation and loneliness at times were due to a lack of students with the same beliefs, which was a problem in Cole and Ahmadi’s study (2003) as well. A lack of resources was also another frustrating aspect of the participant’s experiences as religious minorities.

The behavioral dimension of the framework, focusing on interactions between and among religious groups, proved to be very beneficial in interpreting data about the participants’ experiences. LSU’s lack of response to religious diversity played a pivotal role in their dissatisfaction with the spiritual climate. Group relations was another important factor in shaping the participants’ experiences. The students with no peer groups felt isolated (Jake, Odie, Devika). Negative experiences with Christians on campus, such as the Evangelical group that picket and shout at students via megaphones in front of the union, and hostile attitudes towards different beliefs (Jake), only further frustrated their experience with the campus’ religious environment. This dimension is also useful in discussing microaggressions due to its focus on intergroup behaviors and interactions; incorporating this dimension in creating the interview protocol allowed the conversation to steer easily towards discussion on microaggressions.

Similarly, the psychological dimension is useful when comparing perceptions of campus climate between majority and minority groups. In this case, how the students expressed their beliefs is an important factor in informing practice. For example, outside of private practices like prayer and meditation, the students primarily expressed their beliefs on campus through discussion (Devika, Jake, Baker) and meals (Odie, Sutri, Devika). Additionally, while the
students did not particularly care how students of other religious backgrounds viewed them, they did care about having their views respected. The psychological dimension is also significant in that it focuses on how minority groups perceive the campus climate versus majority groups. This is an important dimension to consider in the campus spiritual climate, as in some cases, religious minorities might feel that the environment is more welcoming than Christian students do (Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2014; Rockenbach, Mayhew, and Bowman, 2015). Alternatively, certain religious minority groups will have a different perspective of the campus climate than others (Riggers-Piehl and Lehman, 2016).

Social Experiences

The participants’ level of engagement mirrored that of any other college student—some were more involved than others, and the students who had more positive social experiences viewed their college experience more positively than those who were less engaged. Mary, Baker, Jasmine, Sutri, and Chuu, who were more socially involved through organizations and friend groups, had more positive comments about their experiences at LSU as a whole, versus Devika and Jake, who were not very socially engaged. The participants reported little to no religious/spiritual experiences, partly because the majority of participants did not know of anyone else that shared the same beliefs. Only three participants progressed in their spirituality (Jake, Baker, Chuu), while the others either stayed the same (Sutri, Devika, Odie, Jasmine) or regressed (Mary). In general, the lack of programs targeting religious minority students, the lack of outreach to religious minorities, and the lack of intentional efforts in engaging religious discussions on campus led to an unsatisfactory spiritual/religious experience. Most of the experiences that the participants reported were taken of their own volition through individual prayer and observance.
Access and Utilization of Campus Resources

In terms of social and engagement programs offered, some participants utilized resources more often than others, mainly in the realm of student organizations and other academic programs. Only Odie was involved in a religious student organization, with the rest uninterested or not having the opportunity to do so. Religious privilege manifests in a campus environment as the allocation of space, dining options, and academic calendar holidays, to name a few (Schlosser, 2003). The participants readily offered suggestions on services and resources they would gladly use and appreciate if given. As reiterated by Devika, Odie, and Jake, departments such as Campus and Residential Life should incorporate religious/spiritual programming, such as film screenings, speakers and dialogues, and workshops (Bryant et al., 2009; Bryant and Craft, 2010; Seggie and Sanford, 2010). Further, having adequate dining options is important not just for religious minorities (Devika & Odie), but for all students with dietary restrictions (Mutakabbi & Nuriddin, 2016b). While research indicates that having spaces for practice, prayer, and medication are good mediums for a positive campus climate experience, as Baker stated, that should not be the end goal (Seggie and Sanford, 2010; Stubbs & Sallee, 2013; Mutakabbi & Nuriddin, 2016b; Bowman et al., 2017).

Like other students, religious minority students access and utilize services based on availability, desire, and/or need. According to previous studies, students join organizations for socialization, resume building, and sense of belonging (Trolian, 2019). Demographics or personality do not necessarily account in determining high levels of participation (Burton, 1981; Martindale et al., 2017). In this study, why and how certain religious minorities chose/declined to participate in services was determined through various factors, such as lack of interest in certain social events (Chuu, Devika, Jake), lack of time due to school and work (Chuu, Jasmine, Mary, Odie, Sutri), or already being involved in other academic activities (Mary & Odie). Student
organizations or services that meet the students’ expectations and maintain desirable social relationships are more likely to attract and maintain participation (Trolian, 2019). This was not the case for Odie in his experiences with student organizations; his involvement with an unwelcoming and non-inclusive environment in two organizations was a factor in leading him to lose interest in participating in other student organizations. Thus, student affairs practitioners should clarify the expectations, goals, and objectives of programs targeting religious minorities, and help guide student leaders in thoughtfully mapping out the purpose of the organizations. Utilizing assessment practices is also beneficial in measuring what programs and initiatives are effective (Henning & Roberts, 2016). Surveying religious minorities about what their expectations of the social experiences can be beneficial in maintaining engagement.

**Spiritual Development**

It is difficult to determine whether the lack of religious/spiritual programming influenced the participants’ spiritual development. An environment with little focus on religion/spirituality can hinder feelings of belonging and increase a sense of being “lonely,” as Jake expressed. Conversely, such an environment may encourage non-religious/theistic students to feel comfortable revealing their views, as with Odie. Some participants (Devika, Baker) reported that they became more cognizant of their religious and spiritual identity due to the lack of representation and resources available to them at LSU. Chuu became more spiritual during his first semester; however, this was because personal issues pushed him towards meaning making. Four of the religious minority students (Sutri, Odie, Jasmine) had little to no developmental gains related to spirituality. This was primarily due to having a community outside of campus, such as family and congregation members. Mary in particular stated that she regressed in her spiritual identity.
Small and Bowman (2012) identified five factors leading to student development; experiences in college and the campus climate were two of those five factors that played a significant role in this study. Hill (2009) hypothesized that students outside of an institution’s prominent religious demographic might not flourish in their religious identity. Students might adopt their religious participation to match the norms of their surroundings, which was the case for Mary who was no longer around Arabs/Muslims (Hill, 2009). In new social contexts over time, people will begin to question what they learned growing up (Smith, 2011). On college campuses, students may start to question prior beliefs through academic experiences, such as courses in religion, biology, and history (Fisler et al., 2009). Experiences with students of differing religious and spiritual backgrounds, religious groups and organizations on campus, and studying abroad are also factors that can cause spiritual struggle and a reexamination of beliefs (Fisler et al., 2009).

Theories

Several theories revolve around the development of a spiritual/religious identity. Sharon Daloz Parks’ theory of faith development (1986; 2000) comprises of forms of knowing, forms of dependence, and forms of community. Forms of knowing focuses on how people advance in their commitments and epistemology. Forms of dependence analyzes emotions and dependency in spiritual development. Forms of community centers on the tension and balance people juggle in finding a community that shares their values, while also being independent. For each category, the participants were at a certain level within the forms, with some being in between stages.

Forms of knowing comprises of several stages in early adolescence to midlife: Authority-bound, to unqualified relativism, probing commitment, tested commitment, and convictional commitment. Probing commitment focuses on short term commitments to belief systems (Jake
and Chuu) (Patton et al., 2016). In tested commitments, individuals are more secure in their commitments regarding their faith (Baker, Jasmine, Sutri) (Patton et al., 2016). In the final stage, convictional commitment, a deep commitment arises in midlife to ones beliefs and an appreciation for the truths espoused by others has developed; as an older student Devika had reached this stage (Patton et al., 2016). Mary and Odie did not neatly fit into any of the forms of knowing stages, as they were primarily non-practicing.

In forms of dependence, individuals progress from the stages of dependent/counterdependent, to fragile inner-dependence, confident inner-dependence, and finally interdependence. As individuals balance their views with other views, they move from fragile inner-dependence to confident inner-dependence, in which they move to more stable and confident images of themselves and their faith (Patton et al., 2016). At the final stage, interdependence, individuals have a strong sense of self and are unthreatened by other’s views. The participants were already past the first stages. In creating his own spiritual identity, Chuu was moving from fragile inner-dependence to confidence inter-dependence, in that he was still discovering his own beliefs while also becoming more confident in the path he was taking to get there (Patton et al., 2016). Baker and Jasmine had confident inner-dependence, and Devika had reached the final stage of interdependence. More data is needed to determine where Mary, Jake, Odie, and Sutri fit in the different levels in forms of knowing, if at all.

In forms of community, people seek out communities to further develop their faith. Baker participated in a self-selected group, or a community with similar beliefs and meaning making, such as with Baton Rouge’s Buddhist community. A mentoring community allows individuals to distance themselves from past beliefs; Chuu had a mentoring community through classmates that supported him as he created his own spiritual identity. Devika, Mary, Sutri, Jasmine, and Odie
participated in conventional communities, or communities containing values that the significant people in their lives held. They adhered to the cultural and religious norms of their family and community members. Jake was unable to join a community due to a lack of people adhering to the same belief system.

Another theory, focusing on Muslim identity development, can be used to understand Mary and Jasmine’s development (Patton et al., 2016). Peek’s (2005) Model of Muslim Identity Development is a three-stage model where Muslim identity is ascribed, chosen, or declared (Patton et al., 2016). Mary was ascribed her Muslim identity and mostly identified with it because of her family and time abroad. Jasmine chose her Muslim identity in that her religion defined her ethics. However, whether Jasmine had reached the declared stage of Peeks’ model requires more data. Peek’s (2005) model was created based on post 9/11 data about Muslim Americans; Jasmine stated that she feels uncomfortable around the anniversary of 9/11 and becomes worried when she hears about terrorist attacks on the news. This theory is useful when analyzing Muslim’s students experiences with Islamophobia and hate crimes (Cole and Ahmadi, 2003; Haag & Fortin, 2017; Chappell, 2019).

There are limitations to the preceding theories in terms of understanding students’ religious identity development in this study. For example, participants in this study did not necessarily develop in linear paths. The theories did not account for identity development regression (Mary). The theories also did not discuss those who converted from one belief system to another, and what that could mean when both systems are vastly different (i.e., Catholicism and Asatru in Jake’s case).
Implications for Policy and Practice

Part of the expectation for applying theory to practice for student affairs professionals is keeping up to date with current trends and events affecting college students. From issues such as affirmative action, diversifying education, and civil rights, those working in higher education should be informed on issues regarding certain student populations, including religious minorities and the non-religious. Fairchild (2009) argues that student affairs professionals must “educate themselves on the long history of religious privilege in the United States,” especially when over one in four Americans either do not practice a religion, or have converted to another one (p.9). Much of what the participants asked for are not difficult to achieve. Allowances and incorporating religious holidays, outreach to off campus religious entities, interfaith dialogue and programming, and statements of acknowledgement are some ways in which a university could be more welcoming to religious minorities.

One important note is the varying perspectives of the students. The participants vacillated between questions of what LSU should do versus where there were no expectations of action. What are the responsibilities of the university? What is LSU unable to prevent? How does LSU not offend other students by paying attention to x marginalized group? Additionally, the perspective of students from rural versus urban backgrounds differed. There was hesitation on Odie’s part and skepticism on Jake and Jasmine’s for having programs, initiatives, or even any kind of acknowledgement towards religious minorities by the university. On the other hand, Devika and Baker emphasized that the university should do more, starting with the availability of resources. In incorporating or improving diversity, professionals should look at the ways in which they are serving these students.
Institutions can begin to recognize their religious minority student population through several ways. Interfaith prayer and meditation rooms are a good start as suggested by the participants in this study, as well as previous studies (Seggie & Stanford, 2010; Stubbs & Sallee, 2013; Mutakabbir & Nuridin, 2016b). Expanded options for vegetarian, kosher, halal, and other restricted diets is beneficial to not only religious minorities but for other students who want more inclusive meal options. Exposure and increasing diverse populations is not enough to decrease prejudice; interfaith and multicultural curriculum and programming is important in bringing awareness to current events and starting dialogue on campus (Bryant & Craft, 2010; Bowman et al., 2017). The results of the Interfaith Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Longitudinal survey (IDEALS) showed that students of minority worldviews were the most likely to engage in interfaith dialogue and speak about religion and spirituality with faculty; faculty and staff are able to play a role in fostering meaningful interfaith conversation, particularly to students of worldview majorities (Rockenbach et al., 2018).

Additionally, flagging students and referring them to appropriate resources are ways for these students to feel recognized (Bryant et al., 2009; Bryant and Craft, 2010). Another small but meaningful act of recognition to religious minority students is administrators encouraging students to celebrate their holidays on campus through intentional programming. As noted in Rockenbach’s (2017) study, 53% of students did not have someone on campus to go to for spiritual discussion or questions. This proved true for some of the participants in this study.

Student affairs administrators and counselors should consider the levels of religious diversity on campus when serving their students; personnel should be cognizant of the campus’ spiritual climate and available resources, such as available space, organizations, traditions, etc. If on-campus resources are inadequate for religious minority students, personnel can help these
students find resources off campus or be aware of their spiritual struggles (Bryant and Astin, 2008; Seifert & Holman-Harmon, 2009). Seifert & Holman-Harmon (2009) emphasized that when discussing student development, student affairs practitioners should specify when discussing religion, spirituality, purpose, and meaning, even though these dimensions may not be mutually exclusive. The authors also discussed being introspective and intentional when practitioners ask questions about their own assumptions about spirituality, their role in fostering inner development in students, and their own comfort in asking questions about life’s meaning. Stewart and Kocet (2011) proposed a competency based model for student affairs practitioners to utilize in promoting religious and secular pluralism, including being knowledgeable on world religions and spiritual perspectives, fostering conductive and meaningful dialogues on campus, and assessing the needs of campus constituents in developing purpose.

In 2006, an article in LSU’s student newspaper, The Reveille, discussed a Jewish student’s view of LSU (Clinton). The student discussed the campus’ diversity, stating, “Everyone wants diversity, and then puts it off and sequesters it into corners and leaves it nice and segregated” and “the atmosphere on campus is about different groups working toward their own betterment and not the betterment of everyone” (Duckworth, 2006). LSU’s Muslim Student Association has in the past worked to connect the Muslim student population with the rest of the student body and correct misconceptions about their religion (Chandler, 2010; Morris, 2013). When looking at the mission and vision statements for the Office of Diversity at LSU, the listed goals are nondescript (Louisiana State University, n.d.a). There is no mention of celebrating religious diversity or religious/spiritual initiatives and programming. Practices in other institutions may provide a starting point for LSU. For example, Duke University has living learning communities and monthly round table discussions regarding religious pluralism (Duke
University, n.d.). Syracuse University’s Hendricks Chapel offers different services for their students, like Shabbat, meditation, and Juma’h Prayer; the university also offers a calendar of different holidays and how to arrange class makeup with professors (Syracuse University, n.d.). While incorporating religious holidays might not be feasible for most universities, encouraging faculty to make some allowances for students can be helpful for those students who cannot attend class due to religious obligations. Much of what student affairs and higher education professional can do to encourage a welcoming and engaging spiritual climate at their institutions starts with small acts of recognition.

**Implications for Future Research**

Due to the nature of case studies being bounded by time and place, this study produced results that provided generalizable implications for religious minority students in some instances, but not in others. For example, institutions that focus on religion and spirituality within their diversity programs or have larger and more visible religious minority populations, such as in Kadushin & Tighe’s study (2008), may have different climates. Therefore, further research on religious minority students and campus spiritual climate within different campus contexts will be beneficial in informing theory, practice, and policy. Furthermore, Muslim and Jewish student populations have received much of the focus in previous literature; given the current political and social climate, additional research is justified. More research on native, animistic religions (Jake), spiritual, not religious identities (Chuu), and eastern religions (Baker/Sutri) will also further inform scholars and practitioners. Spiritual development and regression in religious minority students should be further studied. Additionally, future research should focus on the intersection of race, gender, class, and other identities with religion and spirituality as such intersections are important in student’s holistic development.
Conclusion

Context is an important aspect of case study research. What is particular to a case and what can be generalized and applied to other contexts can vary. In this case study, the lack of religious and spiritual engagement on behalf of the university is a representation of this particular site. Other research sites might produce different results due to their particular spiritual campus climate. Thus, the spiritual development and utilization of resources is a reflection of this site in particular. What can be generalized and considered for other studies and assessment practices is the fact that religious minority students have their own challenges and needs that can be overlooked due to Christian norms that permeate our society.

I conducted this study due to the need for conversations surrounding religious minorities and religion/spirituality in higher education. Mutakabbir and Nuriddin (2016a) accurately stated that the United States is only moving towards greater diversity, not less. With violence against religious minorities on the rise, especially towards Muslims and Jews, religious pluralism also needs to be a focus in diversity initiatives at the university level. From the data gathered from the participants in this study, it is evident that there is a need for more engagement, dialogue, and recognition regarding religion and spirituality.
APPENDIX A. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPLICATION

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Regina Schneider
    Education
FROM: Dennis Landin
    Chair, Institutional Review Board
DATE: September 26, 2019
RE: IRB# E11833
TITLE: Religious Minority Students' Perceptions of the Campus Spiritual Climate
Review Date: 9/25/2019
Approved X Disapproved
Approval Date: 9/25/2019 Approval Expiration Date: 9/24/2022
Exemption Category/Paragraph: 2a,b
Signed Consent Waived?: No
Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)
LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):
By: Dennis Landin, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –
Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:
1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report and LSU’s Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
8. SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.

* All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU’s Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb
APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Before starting the interview:

a. Introduce yourself.
b. Briefly describe the purpose of the study.
c. Ask participant if you can record the interview (If needed).
d. Provide the consent form and gain consent via signature.
e. Inform the interviewee to feel free to ask any questions, now, before, or after the interview.

Demographic Questions:

What is your name?
What is your race/ethnicity?
What is your gender identity?
How old are you?
What is your year and major?
What is your religious/spiritual identity?
What pseudonym would you like to go by?

Part I: Ice Breaker and Demographic Info

1. Brief life story.
2. How would you describe your religious beliefs?
3. (How is it different from the “main stream” description/categorization?)
4. (How does it link to your other identity? e.g., international, immigrant, etc.)
5. How have you progressed religiously/spiritually (since coming to LSU)?

Part II: Four Dimensions Framework

Governmental: Ask questions about their opinions/experiences related to governmental policy, programs, and initiatives (i.e., Trump’s administration)

6. Have there been any current events that have impacted your religious group?
7. Describe your perceptions/opinions regarding recent federal, state or local policies that may have impacted your religious minority group.

8. (How would you describe the religious climate in the U.S.?)

Institutional: social experiences, support syst., student org., daily interaction with students and faculty member and student affairs professionals

9. How would you describe your social experiences at LSU?

10. Describe your involvement with religious/spiritual student organizations and events at LSU.

11. What type of support system do you have on campus in practicing or discussing your religious/spiritual beliefs?

12. (Are there ways that LSU could be more welcoming to your religious group or religious minorities in general?)

Psychological: Religious Related Perceptions and Attitudes Within and Across Groups

13. In what ways have you been able to express your religious/spiritual beliefs on campus?

14. How do you feel about other groups’ attitudes towards your religious/spiritual beliefs?

Behavioral: Intergroup Relations

15. What kinds of interactions do you have with students of the same religious/spiritual backgrounds?

16. What kinds of interactions do you have with students of other religious/spiritual backgrounds?

17. Have you experienced or observed any micro-aggression behaviors (including XXXX) on campus? If so, how do you feel about it? And what can we do to improve?

Part III: Closing-Up and Snow Ball

18. Last question, is there anything else related to your experiences as a minority that you would like to share with me?

19. Do you know anyone else that have similar background (minority religious) that might be interested in participating in this study?
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Regina Charlotte Schneider, born in Honolulu, Hawaii, graduated from Louisiana State University (LSU) in the spring of 2016 with a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology, and minors in Religious Studies and Chinese. While an undergraduate at LSU, she was involved in Residential Life, Campus Life, and many other volunteer and involvement opportunities. In the fall of 2018, she enrolled in the Master of Arts program in Higher Education Administration at LSU. Currently, her research interests include religious/worldview minority students, religion/spirituality in higher education, religious studies/anthropology of religion, career preparation, curriculum development, and AAPI and student access/success. In her first year as a Master’s student, she was the Graduate Assistant for Student Conduct, and in her second year, the Graduate Assistant for the Pre-Scholars Academy. She anticipates obtaining her degree in May 2020. She will then continue working in the field of higher education before pursuing her Doctorate.