

Mitsuca Castelly

## **Portfolio**

### **Cover letter**

For this research, I had to find a discourse community that I can observe. I struggled to find one since I am not meeting groups of people in person this semester. I never thought that I would conduct a research on my church. But as soon as the thought came to my mind I could not back up. Observing a Wednesday church service felt different, and I quickly realized how fascinated I was about different activities and members of different ages. Before I came up with research questions, I started searching about Haitian churches and found a variety of results. I could not focus my mind on one topic. I realized then that I needed to choose on my own what my interest was lining most on, which was how the youth and parents, who are older, coexist in an atmosphere that is welcoming, interesting, and refreshing in the Haitian church. I planned to focus on youth 12-20. The views of the youth and parents are likely to be mismatched. I wanted to focus on the atmosphere of the church. What makes the church welcoming, interesting and refreshing, thus compelling to both youth and parents. My hope at the end of this study is to find what motivates the youth to stay in church and take part in the church activities and see if they cooperate with the older members specially parents. Are parents and youth having different thoughts regarding what their church needs in order to be refreshing, and interesting. The coexistence of youth and parents in the church is worth looking into to see what is well and what is lacking. This rich community of Christian Haitian parents and youth living in America opens the door for investigating how they feel embraced in their church. One limitation of this study is the lack of youth

in my small Haitian church which is the reason for the age range of 12-20. With more participants, the research could be more credible. In designing this study, I took the time to read about my discourse community. I enjoyed learning how to revise and polish my research questions and my tools for this study. I was able to choose two tools that fitted well with what I am trying to find. If I was doing this again, I would survey and interview more people from other Haitian churches, and I would have liked to conduct a focus group discussion where the youth and the parents could share their thoughts together in the same room and learn about what each other need or what they already accomplished already in the church to make everyone feel included. This would allow everyone to see each other's reactions. The focus group would be at the end like a resolution.

### **Revised Observation**

It was a regular Wednesday meeting at church in a large room that contains rows of chairs well arranged, and to the front is a small stage with a stand for the speaker. We were social distancing and wearing masks. There were roughly 15 people present and some were on zoom watching. The atmosphere was calm, and I felt kind of drawn out of the group as I made observations. That is because usually in this meeting we are all participating and singing and responding back and forth. People were flipping through pages in their song book to look for new songs every time one song finishes. You can hear different voices singing in harmony. Some children about 5-8 years old were coloring/writing in their notebook next to their families. I was singing as loud as I could and calling out the next song number so the members could sing my favorite songs. They used Haitian Creole to speak, give directions or read from the Bible. They sang in French in the song book. They spoke formally but in a way that everyone understands.

Those books are essential to the meeting for in the book we can follow along and sing. As the pastor preaches, we followed along in the Bible. Adults wrote some verses down and so did I and I added some takeaways of the preach. The children, however, wrote random things or drew but regularly the preacher gets their attention, and they spit out an honest answer. Referencing Melzer in *Understanding Discourse Communities*, the discourse communities have 6 characteristics which my group demonstrated. First, the group has the shared goal of coming together and praising God. Second, the zoom channel was a mechanism of intercommunication among members. Third, sometimes we do not meet when there are announcements or changes occurring, the pastor

shares with members through the zoom channel regularly. Fourth, the genre of the songs and the texts read from the Bible comfort the members and encourage them to keep preaching the message of hope. Fifth, they use the same language and book to do so while maintaining names and stories that some people outside of the group may not know of, thus a specific lexis. Lastly, the threshold level of expert members consists of the pastor and other church leaders that knows more than other young and new members.

After these observations, I knew that my discourse community has plenty research topics to choose from. I ended up focusing more on the emotions that different people experience in the church. Observing how they speak, and how they engage in the service is a good start. The observation may not be useful in the case of emotions. It is more logic to ask them how they feel about certain things in order to get accurate results. Yet, it was important to observe the interaction of the members and how engagement was crucial.

## **Annotated Bibliography**

### *Haitian Adult Immigrants as Learners and Parents*

<https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3965&context=dissertations>

This article brings the struggles of Haitian parents' beliefs and learning experiences and how to support their adolescents learning. It investigated what educational professionals in the local community expect Haitians to know and do as parents may differ from what Haitians know and can do with the resources they have in their given circumstances. Although the focus was on school learning, the same concept applies to supporting their adolescents in church. This will allow me to build on my responses from adults and youth's beliefs and viewpoints about an atmosphere that has no language barriers.

The Haitian Times. "French Haitian-Based Churches Fail to Attract Haitian Youth." *The Haitian Times*, 1 Apr. 2021, [haitiantimes.com/2012/05/05/french-haitian-based-churches-fail-to-attract-haitian-youth/](http://haitiantimes.com/2012/05/05/french-haitian-based-churches-fail-to-attract-haitian-youth/).

This article is an overview of the issue of understanding what the Haitian churches could emphasize to create a more welcoming atmosphere for both Haitian parents and

youth. It addresses the language barrier. My research could dive deeper in how language barriers could push the youth away from Haitian churches.

"Faith Makes Us Live." *Google Books*. Google. Web. 28 Apr. 2021.

<https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=-blwDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=haitian+immigrant+churches&ots=h3Ez9ztTgz&sig=PSbfM0nWCY92OUxMYaywtQwwyCY#v=onepage&q=haitian%20immigrant%20churches&f=false>

This article is about Haitian immigrants' adaptation in America and how they create communities that affirm their faith. I could use this to get information about who contributes to constructing the faith driven communities. This article does not focus on protestants, but it clearly is about Haitian Christians that are looking for a welcoming place to live. It being not protestant may lead to information or lexis which is irrelevant or inappropriate to my discourse community.

Resilient adaptation of church-affiliated young Haitian immigrants: A search for protective resources

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/304431577/abstract/4AF0BAAB88C74AAFPQ/1?accountid=14665>

This article spoke about the resilience of Haitian youth immigrants. It investigated locus of control, biculturalism, religious affiliation, parental influence, special education attendance, and bilingual education attendance. I would use this to get some background information on how the youth get influenced by their parents and their interaction with religion. This study is full of emotions of the young and how they adapt in America.

### **Research Questions/ Justification**

To develop my research question, I first thought about what was interesting to me about my discourse community. I wrote down some questions about those interests. I contemplated on how practical they are like the reading said, my research question needs to be answerable. I read through the "creating research questions" sample and tried to develop my own with the blank one. That went okay. I came up with a question and did some research about it and found some articles that spoke about how Haitian churches need ideal churches. A church that has all the components that it needs to not neglect anyone or anything. My broad question was: How do Haitian parents in Protestant churches use spoken languages and informal speech to create a compelling atmosphere for both themselves and the teenage/young adult members? Then I came up with these sub questions to narrow it:

1. How do Haitian parents (mothers and fathers) and leaders' viewpoints regarding a compelling atmosphere differ from young emerging members?

2. How do different church service activities (sermon, singing, praying, taking notes, fellowship) cause change in the atmosphere for youth and parents in Haitian churches?
3. How does Haitian youth and parents view language (the spoken languages and informal speech) as part of the construct of the compelling atmosphere in their churches?
4. What key components do pastors or church leaders play in constructing a compelling atmosphere for both parents (mother and fathers) and teenage/young adults in Haitian churches?

I chose these questions because they seem to fit well in what my interest is. I am curious about what makes both Haitian parents and the youth prosper and feel welcome in the church. In many discourse communities, including Haitian churches, problems arise, and misunderstandings create barriers that limit how well the members feel supported and motivated. I wonder how we can bring to light the reasons for these issues by digging deeper and analyzing the different viewpoints between parents and youth in Haitian churches. These questions connect by understanding the two groups' thoughts about the atmosphere, then how activities shape the atmosphere, how language takes part in the atmosphere, then lastly understanding what the values are regarding a compelling atmosphere. These questions create a sort of focus around the idea of forming the compelling atmosphere which values parents and youth's feelings, has engaging activities, and no language barriers.

### **Study tools/ Justification**

*The first tool is survey:*

This tool is practical for me rather than an observation because this will give me short answers to some basic questions that could lead to follow up interview questions. I would change the wording of some questions for 12-15 years old compared to 16–20-year-old because it would facilitate understanding and group them because they have different needs as they get older and no longer take part in some younger youth activities. I could create a survey to be sent out over to the parents and young people. I could have questions with a numerical scale (1-10) about how important parents think including the young is and how important it is for the atmosphere of the church to be set. Like are how excited they are about church services. I could follow up with some short answer questions asking how they include the young in worship and why. I could also include more people because my church is small.

However, there are limitations. I would hand the survey to them and collected it after a few (2-3) weeks. But I might not get responses unless I keep sending reminders and set a time to go and pick it up from people. Face-to-face conversations would allow me to see the non-verbal communication because it is important when you are trying to see what someone feels about something. I would be able to get more information with an

interview because the young might be quick in responding and parents may forget about it because they are so busy. I will focus on how parents and young interact and participate in activities in the church. I plan on asking questions about the transfer of language from Haitian creole to French or English because language is possibly shaping the atmosphere of the church. Making the church more refreshing and welcoming by including the different languages that members speak. I could get a sense of how different languages are divided within church services.

### Survey questions to ages 12-15

- On a scale from 1 to 10, how excited are you about coming to church services?
- Do you come to church often? very often, not often, rarely
- Do you take charge of any activity in the church such as leading songs, preaching, teaching younger kids, leading bible studies? Check all that apply
- When preachers are giving sermons, do you feel that they are related to you?
- What topic interests you most in sermons? How often is this topic preached?
- Are you able to sing along in the song books?
- Can you read, write, and speak Haitian creole? Circle all that apply
- Can you read, write, and speak French? Circle all that apply
- Can you read, write, and speak English? Circle all that apply
- What do you do to stay focused in the church?
- How often do you get distracted during the service: Very frequently, frequently, sometimes, rarely, very rarely, never?
  - What would you say caused you to lose focus?
- Do you think it is important for the church to be welcoming, interesting, and refreshing?
- Describe how members speak to each other?

### Survey question to ages 16-20

- On a scale from 1 to 10, how excited are you about coming to church services?
- Do you come to church often? very often, not often, rarely
- How included do you feel in the church on a scale of 1-10?
- List all the activities in the church that you lead.
- Do you feel that the sermons are addressed to you?
- What topic interests you most in sermons? How often is this topic preached?
- Are you able to sing along in the song books?
- Do you speak, read, and write creole fluently? Circle all that apply
- Do you speak, read, and write French fluently? Circle all that apply
- Do you speak, read, and write English fluently? Circle all that apply
- Do you feel that you are present during the whole church service?
- How often do you get distracted during the service: Very frequently, frequently, sometimes, rarely, very rarely, never?
  - What would you say caused you to lose focus?

- How would you describe the way church members speak to each other?
- Do you think it is important for the church to be welcoming, interesting, and refreshing?

Survey questions to parents:

- How long have you been in this church?
- How is church service different in Haiti versus America?
- On a scale from 1 to 10, how excited are you about coming to church services?
- Do you lead any church activities? List them
- Do you speak, read, and write creole fluently? Circle all that apply
- Do you speak, read, and write French fluently? Circle all that apply
- Do you speak, read, and write English fluently? Circle all that apply
- How often do you get distracted during the service: Very frequently, frequently, sometimes, rarely, very rarely, never?
  - What would you say caused you to lose focus?
- List all the activities that your youth is involve with in the church.
- Describe how members speak to each other?

*The second tool is interview*

I would interview about 3 parents and 3 young members in my church. I could ask follow-up questions of the survey. I hope to get both points of views and analyze those answers and make the atmosphere pleasant and comfortable for them. I would first be focusing on how people feel about the service then dig deeper on how the church has a compelling atmosphere. These questions will be addressed to both parents and the young. The last set of questions are for leaders, especially pastors, because all the leaders in my church are parents anyway.

The limitations are as follows. Interviews don't show actions, and I would like to see the interactions between the young and the parents. They can tell me what they feel, think, or intend but not what they do. Interviews are also time consuming. Those limitations can cause the study to take longer because they would have to fit me into their schedule.

Interview questions:

- What makes an atmosphere welcoming to you?
- What makes an atmosphere interesting/refreshing?
- What do you like about how members speak to each other?
- What makes the church engaging to you?
- How do you adjust with the language shift?

- How important do you feel a compelling atmosphere is for both the young and the adults?
- What do you think makes the church welcoming, interesting, and refreshing?
- How does the way members speak to each other affect the atmosphere?
- What would you change in the youth activities? (follow-up to survey question: List all the activities youth is involve with in the church)

Questions to pastor/ leaders:

- What do you feel your role is in the church? Does that include making the atmosphere compelling?
- How do you see the involvement of the young and parents in the church?
- Could you give some information on how the young and the parents receive a certain role in the church?
- How does sermons include everyone?
- How do you make your sermons interesting for all ages?
- How important it is to include both young and adults in the church?