

## **Is SDA History Relevant to Millennials? Minnie Day Sype, Licensed Minister 1902-1956**

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### **Objectives**

1. Identify attitudes of millennials relating to the value of studying Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) history.
2. Identify attitudes of millennials towards the roles of women in SDA ministry.
3. Identify ways libraries can make SDA history relevant to millennials.
4. Analyze literature pertaining to a lesser-known SDA woman who pioneered in SDA ministry.

### **Background and Rationale**

Recent debates over women's ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist church have caught the attention of the millennial generation. The Association of Theological Schools reported in 2013 that 34% of the students in its member schools were women. It's important to look at SDA history and remember that women have served the church as ministers and in other capacities since its beginning.

The 1908 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists yearbook lists six women as either ordained or licensed ministers. Among them was Minnie Day Sype who served as a licensed minister from 1902-1956. This project examines Sype's background, professional successes and problems as she struggled to function in a male dominated profession. Her autobiography and papers as well as published and unpublished biographical works by other authors contribute to the discussion.

Information on the attitudes of millennials toward the study of SDA history will help give direction to libraries struggling to meet the needs of the millennial generation. The literature

analysis of Minnie Day Sype will be used to illustrate how a topic of current interest also relates to SDA history.

### Generations Theory & Millennials' Characteristics

Have you ever had the experience of talking about an idea or event in a group of people and the those your age look at you and smile and nod in understanding, while the people who are considerably older or younger shake their heads, furrow their brows, or say, “What?”

Generations theory is based on the idea that individuals living during the same time period have a common ground shaped by shared knowledge of world events, technology, society, economics, etc., and even have similar characteristics according to Strauss & Howe. Additionally, the major characteristics repeat cyclically. This diagram adapted by Pendergast illustrates differences in generations including attributes, and characteristics at various ages.

Life-cycle Type	Idealistic - Boomer	Reactive - Gen X	Heroic - Gen Y	Artistic - Gen Z
Childhood Nurture	Relaxed	Under-protected	Tightening	Overprotected
Young Adulthood Nurture Given	Reflecting Tightening	Competing Overprotective	Building Relaxed	Remodeling Underprotective
Middle Age	Judgmental	Exhausted	Energetic	Experimental
Elderhood Leadership Style	Wise, visionary Austere, safe	Persuasive Pragmatic	Busy, confident Grand, inclusive	Sensitive, flexible Pluralistic
Motto	Truth	Persuasion	Power	Love
Positive Attributes	Principled, resolute	Savvy, practical	Rational, competent	Caring, open mind
Negative Attributes	Selfish, arrogant	Money, amoral	Bold, insensitive	Indecisive, guilt

Our conference is especially focused on the millennial generation, also known as Generation Y. Many characteristics are listed in the literature, but these are some of the most common characteristics. Of course, Millennials are not all alike and personality and other factors do come into play and there are pros and cons to most of these traits.

- Special – treated as special by their “helicopter” or “snow plow” parents. Does this cause feelings of entitlement? Snow plow parents are those who rush in and plow down all obstacles including teachers and librarians who they think are in the way of their child’s success.
- Sheltered – Here again, over-protective parents, dual career families, technological advances, and living under the shadow of terrorism may have resulted in individuals lacking in real life skills. An AU focus group conducted in 2017 with recent alumni showed that skills such as cooking, financial management, time management, and dealing with mental health issues such as depression were needed and should be addressed by the University.
- Confident – But, do they feel too confident to accept help from librarians and professors?
- Team Oriented but Individualistic – There is a difference between working “on” a team and working “in” a team. Millennials enjoy working with others but like to be recognized for their individual contribution to the team (Luttrell, 2015, p. 81).
- Conventional – they want to do the right thing necessary to achieve their goals
- Pressured – Millennials reported the highest stress and depression levels according to the American Psychological Association study (Castello, 2013).
- Achieving – Millennials are highly intelligent with the highest percentage attending college. They are used to having information at their fingertips.
- Connected – Much of their connection is for quick information and social purposes. Digital Natives have the advantage of growing up with technology, but also need to cope with loss of privacy as they are constantly monitored by all sorts of digital devices and seem willing to share personal things over social media. They have “hypertext minds,” a

different way of thinking from the sequential thinking patterns many of us were trained to adopt. They crave interactivity and immediate response (Luttrell, 2015, p. 80).

### **Millennials in the Library Literature Review**

Walker (2006) and Becker (2012) emphasize that since millennials are used to personalization in e-commerce market, they also expect attentive and personalized public services in the library. Although millennials are confident in their abilities and used to having information at their fingertips, they are often unaware of academic sources and how to evaluate and use them (Jones, 2008; Costello et al, 2004.). To meet millennials' needs working in teams, Rush and Brigham (2014) advise instruction librarians to use active, collaborative, game-based learning rather than lecturing. Girven (2016) points out the need for collaborative as well as quiet study areas based on students' input and needs.

Librarians need a variety of skills, technological as well as interpersonal to meet the needs of millennials. Students are all too often well connected when it comes to entertainment, e-commerce, chat apps and social media websites, but still need the help of a librarian when trying to gain skills in our more linear based world (Rush, 2014; Costello et al., 2004) and the opportunity of developing relationships with information professionals (Becker, 2012). Means of connecting and communication have changed in the last few years. Beaver (2017) showed how important text messaging (35%) has become in comparison with social networks (22%) and email (24) for communication among millennials.

### **Patron Survey**

This past spring we conducted a brief survey among library patrons at Andrews University to ascertain their opinions with regard to their perceptions of the value and relevance of SDA history, women in ministry, and what the library could do to promote SDA history. The

survey was advertised through posters, fliers, email, and on the library website. Forty patrons volunteered to participate in the anonymous online survey. Demographics of gender, age range, SDA membership, and patron classification (undergraduate student, graduate student, faculty/staff, and community) were collected. The sample contained about even numbers of men and women, but the age 26-40 (47%) and graduate student (39%) groups were the largest.

The survey consisted of six questions. The first two questions inquired about the value of SDA history and relevance of the contribution of women to it and were ranked on a 5 point scale where one equaled “Not important or relevant” and five equaled “Very important or relevant.” The average score given for “How important is SDA history?” was 4.18. The average score to the question concerning the relevance of women who pioneered in SDA ministry to their experience was 4.25. When responses were separated by gender we found that the men scored higher on both of these questions. Responses were also separated by age groups: 18-25 (young millennials), 26-40 (older millennials), and over 40 (GenX/Baby Boomers). The analysis by age showed that young millennials scored the lowest and over 40s scored the highest in their ranking of the value/relevance of SDA history.

Participants were also asked to mark all the ways that women should be involved in ministry. These included: chaplain, licensed minister, ordained minister, women’s ministry, music ministry and office support. Seventy-two percent indicated that women should be ordained ministers and 77% said they should be licensed ministers. We also analyzed the data for the categories of licensed and ordained ministers by gender and age. When those two questions are broken down by gender, we see some interesting patterns. Ninety percent of women said that women should be ordained ministers, compared with 53% of men; and 86% of women indicated that women should be licensed ministers, compared with 68% of men. Another graph shows the

percentage of each of the three age groups concerning the question of women as ordained and licensed ministers. The young millennials group had the highest percentage scoring the affirmative (93% on each of the two categories). Older millennials scored the fewest “yes” votes, 53% for ordained and 68% for licensed ministers. I think we can say that from our rather small sample, the two groups most favorable to the ordination and licensing of women ministers are the women and young millennials.

The next question asked which of the following four women they were familiar with: Ellen G. White, Minnie Day Sype, Lulu Russell Wightman, and Helen Stanton Williams. All were listed as ministers in the SDA yearbook 1904. Besides Ellen White, very few had heard of the other three.

Patrons were given the opportunity to comment on how the library could contribute to the understanding of the history of women in the SDA church. A little over half offered suggestions or other helpful comments. One patron commented: *“Often times, the information that we learn about most women in the church (apart from EGW) is heavily related to her husband. We do not often learn about these women independently.”*

The greatest number of comments pertained to having visual displays, exhibits or posters or sponsoring events such as lectures or symposiums. No differences were noticed by age or gender. Here are a few more examples.

*“Encourage professors to speak about these women and their influence and to encourage their students to reference them in at least a couple of their assignments that would build awareness of women in ministry that I believe the new generation of millennial ministers so desperately needs.”*

*“Have an info wall with pictures, infographics, books, and other resources. They can also create a video, have a link on their website, or small posters in cubicles.”*

*“Scholarships or incentives for research dealing with Adventist women who were pioneers in all aspects of SDA development.”*

We are going to study the input, especially from our millennial groups and see which of the suggestions we can implement during the coming school year. We did an analysis of literature pertaining to one of the lesser-known SDA woman who pioneered in SDA ministry, Minnie Day Sype. The next section of the presentation consists of stories and information about Minnie Day Sype.

### **Minnie Day Sype, A Licensed Adventist Minister, 1902-1956**

From the time Minnie Day Sype accepted the Adventist message after her marriage to Logan Sype, a Seventh-day Adventist, she had a burden for souls and home missionary work. As she wrote, “I could not see people careless and unconcerned about their soul’s salvation without making an effort to help them.”

Minnie arranged her housework to give more time to ministry. She placed a reading rack near the outside door of her home. “Every tramp, agent, or caller of any kind, was supplied with a paper or tract on present truth.” Minnie dedicated Thursdays to missionary work. She visited the sick, made quilts and comforters for missions, and on rainy days wrote missionary letters and enclosed a tract or a poem to draw people minds to God.

Some weeks Minnie took Thursday as a day for canvassing (selling Adventist literature) and used the profits to buy postage stamps for her missionary letters. When funds were low, she would also make sunbonnets to sell or take in sewing for others. Whenever she met opposition from family and friends or others, Minnie would spend time in prayer. While praying, Bible texts that she had memorized would come to mind to give her courage to sell books and other items. She sold hundreds of “Christ’s Object Lessons” in Iowa and Oklahoma.

Looking for better economic opportunities, Minnie and Logan went to a Wyoming mining camp, back to Iowa and on to Oklahoma. Always Minnie was sharing her faith. In Oklahoma, they deliberately settled a great distance from other Adventists so they would have more opportunities to live their faith “before those who knew nothing of it.”

After purchasing a farm and livestock, Logan planted his crops. In July, when everything was green and prospects were looking good, a hot wind began to blow. After 3 days, the crops were cooked. Minnie wrote, “As our worldly prospects vanished, we were brought nearer to God.” She began to receive invitations to talk to the people about the Bible. By winter, Minnie and Logan had a church ready for organization. They called for the conference president to organize what was known as the Gip (now Butler), Oklahoma church. Having worked long and hard to raise up this church without of pay, they were gratified to receive a check for \$25 from the Oklahoma Conference. Toward spring, the conference president asked Logan and Minnie to work for the conference.

They looked at their situation, their team of horses and their cows were gone and the possibility of raising a crop was limited. Minnie’s sister, Myrtle, had come to Oklahoma and offered to care for her three children. Logan Sype said, “Mama, if you go into this work, I will stand by you and do what I can. I can sing and open the meetings, and you can tell the people the truth.” It seemed to be a “call from God.”

The Ruth Church located 13 miles from their home invited Minnie to help them. When she arrived at the home of a member, he said, “Sister Sype, I wish you would give us a study on the law of God this evening.” Although she did not feel qualified to do so, Minnie was prevailed upon to do so. While the church member was notifying his neighbors, Minnie went into a big canyon near his home to pray and study. She writes, “This burden for souls rested upon me. I felt



my inability, and cried to God.” That evening, Minnie spoke with freedom and was asked to come back in two weeks and speak again.

After the meeting, a young woman came to her and spoke about the sermon. This was the first time it occurred to Minnie that she was really preaching. People began to call her, “the woman preacher.” Minnie found the idea to be a great trial because she had never admired a “woman preacher.” One day while praying over the situation and seeing the “mountain of opposition, public criticism, and adverse public opinion, that would have to be met, she cried in great despair, “O Lord, I never can do this. While crying and praying to God, a strong impression came over her – “I knew it was from God – ‘My grace is sufficient.’” She got up from her knees, determined to do whatever came her way and “leave the result to God.”

Early in her time in Oklahoma, Minnie was challenged two ministers, who opposed the idea of a woman preacher. One them told her audience that “he would never talk in public with a woman and that women had no right to speak in public.” Unable to make peace with two ministers, she made a public response to their challenge. The Methodist minister was not present so she spoke to the Christian minister that evening.

Minnie stated, “I got my commission from Jesus himself. He commissioned Mary after His resurrection to go and tell the brethren that He had risen.” Continuing, she said, “I am following in Mary’s footsteps, telling the people that He is coming again. Paul, in the sixteenth chapter of Romans, recommends a number of women workers, especially Phebe, whom he asks the church to assist.” Minnie also told her audience, “Pricilla and Aquila were Paul’s co-laborers in the gospel.” She goes on to state, “At one time Paul sent a brother to them, that they might more fully teach him the way to eternal life. The mentions the following women leaders: Miriam, who assisted Moses; Deborah, who led the forces of Israel; Anna, who was a prophetess in the

house of God. Phillip had four daughters who prophesied. Others might be mentioned. It is true that women are told in a certain chapter to keep silence in case of confusion, but in the same chapter, men are told to keep silence on certain occasions.” Minnie also quoted Acts 2:17, 18 and told her brother in the ministry “that he was behind the time; that all civilization was coming to realize that woman is to be man’s help-meet in every good work.” She stated that, “in heathen countries you find women spoken evilly of and down-trodden, treated as inferiors; but the more enlightened the country, the more respectfully you will find women treated. Minnie stated that to her surprise when she came to Oklahoma, that “instead of being treated as a lady should be treated, as a co-worker, as a helper in the advancement of the work of God, I have been treated as heathen are treated.”

At the Oklahoma camp meeting of 1902, Minnie was granted a ministerial license. She continued to be granted a license each year as she moved to other states as well.

Marinda Day was born on April 18, 1869 in the village of Thayer, Union County, Iowa to Elias Day and Mary Ann Jackson as their first born child. The “timid” girl was almost always called Minnie. Examples of Minnie’s strong beliefs are found early. When she overheard a farmer telling her father that he didn’t believe in God, Minnie threw a large ear of corn and hit him in the back.

Minnie was married on March 6, 1889 to Logan Sype, just short of her 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. She was attracted to him because he did not drink or smoke. Logan was a second generation Adventist. At the time of their marriage they agreed to disagree on religion. Each would attend the other’s church, although Minnie was sure that she could convince Logan that he kept Sabbath on the wrong day.

Soon Minnie was engaged in Bible study with father-in-law and in July 1889 she became a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. All of her children were born in Union County, Iowa. Ross Jackson Sype was born on December 31, 1889; James Earl Sype, July 12, 1892, and H. H. Anna Sype, January 7, 1898.

In the book, *Called by God* by Josephine Benton, Minnie Sype's contribution to women's ministry is discussed in Chapter 2, Farmer's Wife becomes Evangelist. For the book a number of letters were collected reminiscing about Minnie's ministry. Elder W. A. Howe remembered that "old time workers . . . saying that she had been voted ordination by the Iowa Conference but had refused it." Minnie's daughter, Anna Gregg Hamlin wrote in 1984, "Mother raised up many churches . . . [In Oklahoma] there were at least 5 . . . [In] Iowa . . . I remember her raising up new churches in Carroll, Lake City, Calmar, Hawarden, and Denison."

Her granddaughter, Minita Belle Sype-Brown stated, "Grandma was a very powerful and dynamic speaker."

I became acquainted with Aunt Minnie by marrying her grand niece. Cal Russell, who married Aunt Minnie's niece, always said "shades of Aunt Minnie" whenever he managed to upset his wife.

### **Conclusions**

The conclusions of our study were that Millennials are interested in SDA history. Males rated the value of SDA history higher than women across age groups. Millennials value women's participation in SDA ministry higher than other age groups, but females, across all age groups, supported ordination and licensing of women ministers more than males. Most participants didn't know about the women other than Ellen G. White who had contributed to early ministry of the SDA church.

Minnie Day Sype faced problems and challenges similar to women today. All ages gave constructive and creative suggestions for Library promotion of SDA history topics. No significant differences among age or gender groups. James White Library will seek to implement some of the patron suggestions during the coming school year to help create more awareness of this important area of SDA history.

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