Consistency in Beliefs and Behaviors of Highly Religious Christian Youth

Quantitative Support for the NSYR

Ronald G. Belsterling | ORCID: 0000-0002-4908-049X
Youth & Young Adult Ministry, Capital Seminary, Lancaster, PA, USA
Corresponding author
ronbelsterling@huntvalleychurch.org

Donald Shepson | ORCID: 0000-0002-3249-4565
Professor of Christian Ministry, Grove City College, Grove City, PA, USA
ShepsonDR@gcc.edu

Abstract

With Christian Smith’s consent, research was conducted at a LIFE Conference (Christian & Missionary Alliance’s national youth conference, July 2013) using a modified version of Christian Smith’s and Lisa Pearce’s interview instrument, used in the National Study of Youth & Religion (2002). Approximately two thousand LIFE Conference attendees (close to 400 youth leaders and 1600 students) participated in the research, though this study reports only on the adolescent responses. Frequency measures and multiple regression analyses provide evidence that adolescents’ religiosity appears to be positively associated with pro-social beliefs and behaviors and negatively associated with pop-culture-religiosity (zombies, vampires, good witches, etc.) beliefs. Single items and scales represented the religiosity variable and the associations of these varying measures of religiosity to dependent variables were compared and contrasted. Implications for issues that may need more or less focus in the classroom with future youth leaders will be discussed.

Keywords

Introduction

Though most research over the last several decades supports the positive impact of religiosity on adolescents’ lives, some speculate ambiguity exists, especially relative to perceived inconsistencies in adolescents who claim to be religious (Abel, 2011; Desmond, Morgan, & Kikuchi, 2010; Smith, Christofferson, & Davidson, 2011). Several have suggested that intervening variables, such as ethnicity, economics, social experiences, and education, either relate more positively to consistency in peoples’ beliefs and behaviors than religiosity, or at least significantly mediate religiosity (Burdette & Hill, 2009; Kvarfordt, C. & Herba, K., 2018; Molock, S., & Barksdale, C., 2013; Pearce & Denton, 2011; Puzek, I., Stulhofer, A., & Bozicevic, I, 2012; Rostosky, Wilcox, Wright, & Randall, 2004). Filsinger and Wilson (1984), however, caution that religiosity must be measured thoroughly, and in their research on religiosity and marriage found that it explained almost twice as much of the variance (p < .01) in marital adjustment as family characteristics or socio-economic issues. Perhaps variance in findings might relate more to vague measures, variable definitions, and variable considerations, than to intervening variables (Abel, 2011).

Others believe that the inconsistencies in findings of the impact of religiosity relate more with various ways and timing of measuring religiosity than to the impact of religiosity (Desmond, S., Kikuchi, G., & Budd, K. 2010; Pearce & Denton, 2011; Salas-wright, Christopher, P., Vaugh, M., Hodge, D., & Perron, B, 2012). Pearce and Denton, 2011, suggest that fluctuating findings exist with adolescents because adolescents in general and religious youth in particular may not be consistent. They argue that when teens feel secure in their position, “no religiosity” guides as well as “high religiosity”. Essentially, the key issue seems to be that researchers have had difficulty in agreeing on the best way to measure religiosity for one reason (Cornwall & Thomas, 1990). Disagreement stems from what Moberg (1970) described as two orientations of understanding religion. For some, one’s religiosity relates more to a person’s values, beliefs, and attitudes; for others, one’s religiosity relates more to a person’s institutional association and participation.

Literature Review

Despite the lack of complete agreement and despite some recent questions, much research with adolescents in particular, continues to suggest that religiosity affects youth in positive ways both intra- and interpersonally (Abel, 2011;
Belsterling, 2009, 2016; Fawcett, Francis, Linkletter, & Robbins, 2012; Miller & Moore, 1990; Regenerous, 2007). Religiosity has been associated with lower levels of adolescent alcohol and drug use (Jang, S.J., Bader, C.d., & Johnson, B. R., 2008; Rostosky et al., 2008). Religiosity, more than other commonly considered variables, has been found to relate to lower levels of adolescent depression and at-risk behaviors and higher levels of positive psychosocial adjustment (Good, M. & Willoughby, T., 2006; Longo, G.S., Bray, B.C., & Kim-Spoon, J., 2017; Topalian, A., King, K., & Vidourek, R., 2019). Religiosity clearly relates to adolescents’ responsible and careful sexual behavior (Burdette & Hill, 2009; Regenerous, 2007). Studies even indicate that religiosity benefits adjustment in teenage mothers and their children (Bert, 2011). Additionally, cross cultural research confirms positive associations of religiosity and indicates that religious youth display more consistency in attitudes and behaviors than non-religious youth (Miller & Olson, 1988).

Though many recognize a clear multi-dimensional nature of religiosity (Glock, 1962), which truly incorporates both of the orientations described by Moberg (1970), and though some have thus studied religiosity more carefully (typically through self-constructed indices), most research on religiosity (Mahoney, 2010) continues to study religiosity through only one or two items (Good & Willoughby, 2006; Hansen, 1987; Mahoney, Pargament, Swank & Tarakeshwar, 2001; Miller & Moore, 1990; Regenerous, 2007). In a meta-analysis considering a decade of research, Mahoney (2010) stated that 77% of all research on religiosity measures religiosity as a single item. Though most believe to the contrary (Cotton, McGrady, & Rosenthal, 2010; Mahoney, 2010), some even argue that measuring religiosity only through one or two queries actually produces more valid results (Burdette & Hill, 2009).

This research compared and contrasted the impact of religious beliefs and behaviors by measuring religiosity in both ways indicated by Moberg. In addition to hoping to quantitatively confirm the validity of the influence of religiosity on youth and demonstrate the validity of the essence of the NSYR’s questions, several assumptions existed in doing this research. We believed that a more complex measure of religiosity would produce more robust and consistent associations between one’s religious beliefs and religious behavior than a simple measure. Though we did also believe that overall, both measures of religiosity would show positive results for association between belief and behavior. Specifically this research intended to see if youth who indicated higher levels of religious belief would demonstrate as having less unorthodox religious fascination and more consistency between belief and behavior than less religious youth.
Methods

Sample
The Christian and Missionary Alliance National Youth Convention, in St. Louis, MO., drew four-thousand, three hundred, and sixty-four youth and one-thousand, two hundred, and eighty youth leaders to their July, 2013 summer conference. The C&MA is a Protestant denomination which split from the Presbyterians in the late 1800s and places high importance on the emphasis of missions’ ministry. Of those who attended the convention, fifteen-hundred, and seventy-seven students and three-hundred and ninety-seven youth leaders voluntarily participated in the research.

Students came from mostly white (82%), intact (original two-parent) homes (80%), where more than one-half of those (54%) families attend religious services at least weekly. The adolescents consisted mostly of suburban or rural (80%) fifteen to eighteen year olds (78%). The distribution between males (47%) and females (53%) was close to equal.

Measures
The interview instrument used in the National Study of Youth and Religion provided the essential content of material or questions being used in this research project. Due to the NSYR’s qualitative nature, there is little corroboration of its quantitative reliability and or validity. Qualitatively, the credibility of the research’s reliability and external validity seems to be affirmed by the multitude of research utilizing or relying on the NSYR’s findings (Abel, 2011; Burdette et al., 2009). The Lilly Foundation provided a grant for the original research conducted by Smith and Pearce for the NSYR.

With permission from Christian Smith, the NSYR instrument was modified from a qualitative person to person interview format into a seventy-two question quantitative survey. Answer options typically took the form of five Likert-scale answer possibilities. Some questions only had three answer options. As answer options were adopted from NSYR’s coded responses, there really was no rationale offered as to why a few questions only ended up with three responses. Closed questions (e.g. “Do you believe …) usually provided four responses (see Table 2); these questions delt primarily with issues related to spiritual beliefs. Some questions were altered to reflect updated considerations. Not all questions were used and about ten new questions were included; the alterations and new questions stayed consistent with the research interests reflected in the NSYR. In a preliminary study, it took students between 10 and 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire, thus it was suggested to convention attendees that it would probably take them around twenty minutes to complete the survey.
Procedures and Data Collection

The research team was comprised of two youth ministry professors and students from their programs. The college students were trained relative to various responsibilities. Several received study participants, collected release forms, introduced them to the procedures, and gave out tokens of appreciation when surveys were completed. Others aided those taking part in the study by setting them up at computer stations, sharing QR codes—linking participants to the survey on Wufoo (wufoo.com), or providing them with hard-copy surveys. They also made sure that links to the site were deleted before participants’ phones left the room. Approximately half of all student surveys were collected via hard copy with the rest of the student and leader surveys being completed online. The research team uploaded the hard-copy surveys during off hours and post-conference.

Conference participants were encouraged to participate in the study with an appeal to its value to denominational youth leaders as well as with prizes that could be won for participating. Most of the research took place on the second floor of the conference center and down a corridor that was out of the main thoroughfare. Students wishing to join the study had to be fairly intentional in order to find the room. During off hours the research team approached youth leaders individually as they were standing in meal and event lines and assisted them in completing surveys via the QR code on their cell phones.

Once all surveys were collected and uploaded, the data was converted from Wufoo to Microsoft Excel data, and then into IBM SPSS predictive analytic software data. All data was translated from String to Numeric in the Excel and then imported by SPSS. Considering that the questionnaire intentionally did not present most answer options in patterns of ascent or decent, the values of every item were also recoded into an ascending order. All analyses on the data were performed via the SPSS software.

Design

All “treatment” already occurred before the sample population gathered and was studied, thus, the research design was an “ex post facto” experimental-quantitative design. As the intent of the study was to focus on a specific Christian denomination population, randomization of sample selection and original group assignment were not part of this research. Because this study occurred with a convenience sample, the findings are not generalizable to a wider, non-religious, population. Since by intent, however, generalizability extends only to populations of religiously identified youth, the lack of random sampling does not interfere with the external validity of this research. Most data was analyzed using SPSS frequency and regression procedures.
This research advances five hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: As “religiosity” will be used as the primary independent variable in the study, there will be measurement differences relative to dependent variables between individual items as measures of religiosity and a multi-dimensional scale of religiosity.

Hypothesis 2: Among C&MA youth, religiosity will demonstrate a positive association with positive and responsible social beliefs and behaviors.

Hypothesis 3: Religiosity will have a negative relationship with pop-culture-religious beliefs that are typically antithetical to Christian religious beliefs.

Hypothesis 4: This study will quantitatively endorse the NSYR’s construction of “religiosity” with demonstrative reliability and validity.

Hypothesis 5: This study will not demonstrate the strength of religiosity as an indicator of behavior apart from the influence of demographic variables.

Religiosity, as measured by single items and as a scale, will be sensitive to the orientations of institutional affiliation/participation and personal beliefs/values.

**Variable Construction**

Two items were utilized as the independent variables representing aspects of religiosity. These items include item 40, (REL-A), “About how often do you usually attend religious services- church and/or youth group” and item 66, (REL-B), “How distant or close do you feel to God most of the time”. The 12-item multi-dimensional scale (see Table 2) of religiosity was composed of three items dealing with religious institutional attendance (two actual and one desired), three beliefs about God and spiritual beings (existence of God, angels, and demons), four beliefs about God’s activity, present and future (God’s immanent presence, miracles, a final day of judgment, and eternal life), and two regarding a Christian’s identification with God (feeling close to Him, and partnering with Him [via evangelism]).

Social beliefs were identified intra-personally by item 46 (LifeMeaning), “How often, if ever, does life feel meaningless to you”, and inter-personally by item 50 (SexWait), “Do you think that people should wait to have sex until they are married, or not necessarily”. Christian behaviors were represented by how students respond to items 36 (Porn/Anti-Social), “Estimate how many, if any, X-rated, pornographic movies, videos, or cable programs have you watched in the last year”, and 54 (Service/Pro-Social), “In the last year, how much, if at
all, have you participated in organized volunteer work or community service”. The pop-culture-religiosity scale consisted of beliefs typically antithetical to Christian religious beliefs (PopReligion) representing religious pop-culture fascinations (astrology, vampires, zombies, reincarnation, and good witches).

Religiosity variables were regressed on pop-religious beliefs, social beliefs and behaviors of Christian youth. Partial correlations removed the influence of ethnicity, home structure, and education, which were speculated in the literature as confounding variables (Molock et al., 2013). In some cases independent religiosity variables were transformed and treated as different groups in 1-Way ANOVAs. Type I error rate of risk was specified at .05 and internal consistency of any scales is established with Cronbach’s alpha. Essentially, estimates of the effects of the independent variables were obtained through multiple, hierarchical regression analyses.

Analyses and Results

Though 1577 adolescents participated in the survey, most findings relate to consideration only from 1522 (96.5%) of the surveys, as the remaining others contained missing information and were eliminated from consideration in the analyses. Most of the participating youth (91%) attend church or youth group weekly or more, and 87% of the adolescent participants stated that they would attend religious services at least weekly if it were only their decision. Their attendance reflected consistency with their families’ weekly (or more) attendance (89.5%). Ninety-nine percent of the youth believe that God exists, with the majority very confident (95%) that God exists. Most also believe that God interacts with humanity (90.5%) and typically, personally, feel close to God (60%). Unfortunately, a large minority of participants typically (25%) or never (5.7%) feel close to God.

By the naked eye, one can see the consistency of church and youth-group attendance and belief in God with other theological beliefs. Participants strongly believe in miracles (89.7%), the concept of eternal life (87.5%), a final judgment day (82%), angels (90%), hell (82%), Satan and demons (93%). The majority also believe that Christians should share their faith hoping for the conversion of others (77%). Interestingly, however, while many believe that science proves Godly creation (46%), many (21%) believe that science either proves evolutionary theory as opposed to Godly creation, or both Godly creation and evolutionary theory (13%). Seventeen percent believe that science proves neither perspective. Of the 15 items of religious belief mentioned, the
average mode score among the 1522 youth was the highest option available, a
1.0 in thirteen cases and a 2.0 in the others.

Actively, very few youth use the internet to grow spiritually (6%) or are
engaged in political activity (17% over a two-year period). A small majority
have served their communities through volunteer work at least five times in
the previous year (58%), with 28% stating that they participate in community
service almost once per month. A large minority feel as though they have been
bullied because of their faith (43%). Though 62% say they have never seen
pornography, some (5%) have viewed it via various media resources at least
30 times or more during the previous year. Those studied clearly believe (83%)
people should wait to have sex until marriage. Most typically feel confident
about what is right and wrong (79%) and do not wrestle with depressive think-
ing (61%). This confirms Topalian et. al’s (2019) findings. A little more than 10%
do admit, however, to normally feeling as though there is no meaning to life,
and almost one-third (28.1%) sometimes feel that way.

Reliability analyses provided two scales that achieved acceptable lev-
els of internal consistency: Religiosity (n = 1,522, \( \alpha = .70 \)) (see Table 2); and,
PopReligion (n = 1,522, \( \alpha = .74 \)). There was no opportunity for test-retest efforts.
It was considered that if a Factor analysis supported the Religiosity variable the
construct validity of the variable would thus be supported.

With only one sign of clumping, initial correlations demonstrated multi-
ple correlations above .3 and none over .7, with an acceptable determinant
(106- suggesting a lack of multicollinearity) (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). All
correlations were significant (\( p < .01 \)) and most were very significant (\( p < .001 \)).
The KMO and Anti-image matrix indicated the scale to be a strong measure
of sampling adequacy (.834) and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity showed signifi-
cance (\( p < .001 \)). Based on the one clump, the eigenvalues, and the scree plot,
however, only three items demonstrated strong contribution to the strength
of the religiosity variable. This variable was defined as the “Belief in religious/
spiritual beings (\( \alpha = .76 \))” variable [BRelBeings].

Though many suggest that only items with eigenvalues > 1, and on the verti-
cal of the scree plot, are worthy to keep, others suggest that this approach may
make one lose valuable items helping to explain as high variance as is possible
(Field, Miles, & Field, 2012). Though three components were extracted, and
though the first item contributes to 29% of overall variance, each successive
item appears to contribute (seven items contribute between 5% and 8.5%),
with even the last (twelfth) item still contributing 3%. Reducing the scale
down based solely on the extracted components defeats the intent to have a
scale constructed of multiple dimensions. Based on some of the positive indi-
cations and on the broader considerations (Field et. al, 2012), it was decided to
retain the Religiosity scale as a variable for analyses.
In the multiple hierarchical regression of all religiosity variables on behaviors identified as service and porn (beyond education, ethnicity, and family structure/home-situation), REL-A (attendance) and Religiosity (REL-A and REL-B) added slightly meaningful and extremely significant (REL-A, $R^2 = .04$, $p < .001$; Religiosity, $R^2 = .05$, $p < .001$) power to predicting participation in service and BRelBeings (belief in spiritual beings) and REL-B (beliefs) to avoidance of pornography (REL-B, $R^2 = .03$, $p < .001$; BRelBeings, $R^2 = .024$, $p < .001$). Correlations between the predictor variables and the dependent variables were low, as they were in every regression in this study, which affirmed all inquiries.

In the multiple hierarchical regression of all religiosity variables on the pop-culture-religiosity (again, beyond education, ethnicity, and family structure/home-situation), REL-A and Religiosity added meaningful and extremely significant (REL-A, $R^2 = .12$, $p < .001$; Religiosity, $R^2 = .15$, $p < .001$) power to predicting lack of belief in things like vampires, good witches, etc. REL-B added slightly meaningful and extremely significant ($R^2 = .05$, $p < .001$) predictive power. One must note, however, that about 20% of the participants did allow for the legitimacy of astrology, good witches, and reincarnation, while 10% allowed for the reality of vampires and zombies. As identified earlier, this is a highly Christian religious population sample.

In the multiple hierarchical regression of all religiosity variables on social beliefs identified as LifeMeaning and SexWait (beyond education, ethnicity, and family structure/home-situation), REL-A and Religiosity added meaningful and extremely significant (REL-A, $R^2 = .04$, $p < .001$; Religiosity, $R^2 = .09$, $p < .001$) power to predicting a student’s belief that one should wait until marriage to have sex. About 20% of the youth, however, stopped short of agreeing with that position. REL-B and Religiosity added meaningful and extremely significant (REL-B, $R^2 = .13$, $p < .001$; Religiosity, $R^2 = .08$, $p < .001$) power to predicting a student’s ability to avoid believing that life is meaningless. REL-A added slightly meaningful and extremely significant (REL-A, $R^2 = .04$, $p < .001$) predictive power. One should not miss, however, that among the youth, only 26% never felt that life is meaningless and 10% feel that life usually or always feels meaningless.

**Discussion**

First, some general realities of the research must be noted. Due to the high numbers of participants and key similarities in the participants (see population frequencies), the tendency towards regression to the mean of many
variables seemed evident even before, and were confirmed by, data analyses. Because of this reality, the strength of meaning on the predictable change in a variable, while appearing small in some cases, actually suggests that the strength of the predictor variable might be stronger than appearances as many of those considered to be less religious in this study may actually comprise the more religious in other populations. Further study by varying levels of response within the independent variables in question could, and logically seem like they would, strengthen and better explain many findings of this study. More complete ANOVA study would possibly do the same. This study considered three key potentially confounding variables, identified under the subtitle Variable Construction, and thus controlled for them in every regression analysis. The findings of this research seem to indicate possible causality and not simply correlation in variable relationships.

Central tendency explorations established the highly religious profile of those participating in the research (see Table 1). Considering perceptions to the contrary, the number of intact original-two-parent families noted (80%) presents a remarkable reality. This result actually parallels findings in a study consisting of about 500 college freshmen at Christian colleges (Belsterling, 2006). Most frequency findings support earlier research findings indicating that religiosity helps adolescents to adjust socially-appropriately. Others, some not identified in this paper, seem to indicate that Christian youth workers may

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Attendance at Religious Gatherings</th>
<th>Believe that God Exists</th>
<th>Feel Close to God</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N Valid</td>
<td>1577</td>
<td>1577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>799</td>
<td>779</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The higher the score (1–5) in the first and third column the more religious. The lower the score in the second column, the more one felt sure about God's existence. As one can see, there is greater divergence relative to how youth feel than to what they believe. There is also a lower average score by almost a whole point when comparing how youth feel (bell curve) relative to religious attendance (bell curve) and what they believe (positively skewed). We believe these curves lend credibility to the integrity of student responses.
Table 2  Religiosity Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha if Item is Deleted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Rel. Attendance</td>
<td>1.6209</td>
<td>.80688</td>
<td>1522</td>
<td>.672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Family’s Rel. Attendance</td>
<td>1.7622</td>
<td>.82207</td>
<td>1522</td>
<td>.695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Choice in Religious Attendance</td>
<td>1.6741</td>
<td>.90450</td>
<td>1522</td>
<td>.662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings About God</td>
<td>2.6629</td>
<td>1.12356</td>
<td>1522</td>
<td>.700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in God’s Existence</td>
<td>1.0604</td>
<td>.29508</td>
<td>1522</td>
<td>.683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in Existence of Satan</td>
<td>1.1018</td>
<td>.40152</td>
<td>1522</td>
<td>.675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in Existence of Angels</td>
<td>1.1222</td>
<td>.41127</td>
<td>1522</td>
<td>.671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in Miracles</td>
<td>1.1551</td>
<td>.51500</td>
<td>1522</td>
<td>.681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in Eternity</td>
<td>1.1689</td>
<td>.50351</td>
<td>1522</td>
<td>.678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in Evangelism</td>
<td>1.4198</td>
<td>.80462</td>
<td>1522</td>
<td>.704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in a Day of Judgement</td>
<td>1.3482</td>
<td>.83380</td>
<td>1522</td>
<td>.672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in a Personal God</td>
<td>1.1702</td>
<td>.57159</td>
<td>1522</td>
<td>.689</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Based on the overall Alpha score (.701) being lower than the .704 of Belief in Evangelism, some would argue that this item should be removed from the scale. While overall score may not fluctuate much relative to its inclusion or exclusion, that particular item does represent a critical dimension of Christian religiosity (Belsterling, 2006).

need to be more sensitive to issues not fully considered (communication with parents) and possibly be less anxious over other issues typically emphasized in ministry (pornography).

The first hypothesis is cautiously accepted. Individual items measuring the association of religiosity to the dependent variables often provided findings just as strong as or even stronger than the multi-dimensional measure of
religiosity. On the intrapersonal social belief considering the meaning of life, feeling close to God made much more of a difference than either Religiosity or Rel-Attendance. Rel-A seemed to make more meaningful and significant differences, however, more frequently than Rel-Beliefs and almost as frequently as Religiosity. Moberg’s (1970) theory stands supported. Relative to the consistency of the variable and most completely true measure of the concept, however, Religiosity (combination of attendance and belief items) seems like the strongest variable of the three. “Yet a central challenge for future research is to move beyond such global descriptors of religion and clarify particular aspects of religion that matter, for better and worse” (Mahoney, 2010, p.806).

Realistically, the type (institutional affiliation/attendance, internal beliefs, or a multidimensional measure) of the religiosity independent variable used or ignored in a study will vary in findings of strength depending on the nature of dependent variables considered. Perhaps variance in findings reflects researcher bias, unawareness, or carelessness, more than true differences of religiosity’s impact as an independent variable. This study suggests that some of the recent questions relate more to these possibilities than that religiosity does not make consistently positive differences.

Based on the results, the second hypothesis is clearly accepted. While the 12-item, multi-dimensional scale of religiosity fared the most consistent in its ability to specifically account for positive changes in dependent variables, and while the individual item considering the church and/or youth group attendance of youth fared almost as well, the individual item in which students described how close they felt to God did not typically measure as meaningfully or statistically meaningful on most dependent items. It did on occasion, however, measure as influential with intra-personal beliefs. Religiosity indicated positive influence on social beliefs and indicated that most Christian C&MA youth were consistent between social beliefs and Christian behaviors. This finding seems to suggest that a reasoned faith impacts Christian teen behavior more than does an emotional faith.

The third hypothesis was accepted as the study details showed that most Christian youth do not believe in good witches, zombies, vampires, and astrology. The results were not as consistent with the “channeling- talking with the dead” variable. It seems that the inconsistency could be related to the reality of evil spiritual realities (which the study youth confirmed they believe to be real) in which they are aware that people do hold séances and Satanic experiences of worship. Frequency findings do propose some alarm, however, as a full 10% do not rule out the reality of zombies, and 20% allow for the possibilities of good witches and astrological beliefs. This finding causes alarm at the degree to which cultural influence (entertainment medias) are impacting even deeply religious teens.
The fourth hypothesis is also accepted, thus, the NSYR has credible quantitative support for the reliability and validity of the construct of religiosity present within its survey. While the Factor analysis showed only slight percentages of change relative to each item included, most items did contribute individually to more than 5% change in the Religiosity measure. Some of the analyses associated with the factor analysis demonstrated robust findings, confirming the strength of the variable (such as the KMO of .84%). This is a major endorsement for the NSYR findings.

Relative to the fifth hypothesis, religiosity demonstrated as predictable regardless of one’s education, ethnicity, or family structure. Religiosity overwhelmingly demonstrated as positively associated with and predictive of pro-social behavior (service) and desires (remaining chaste until marriage) and negatively correlated to troubled/pop-religious beliefs (life is meaningless; zombies are real) and behavior (involvement with porn). Considering that Religiosity was so carefully measured in this study, it seems fair to conclude that its influence on teen behavior must be familially, socially, and politically considered, thus affirming a need for community support for faith-based institutions.

**Implications and Future Study**

Based on self-reports utilized in this article, the more highly religious a Christian youth was, the more pro-social they reported their beliefs and behaviors to be and the less negative behaviors were engaged in. Comparing and contrasting the youth worker perspectives on the findings of these same youth will prove interesting in either corroborating or contradicting their (the youth) testimonies. It would also be interesting to compare the performances of the youth on these measures relative to youth worker demographic data, such as whether or not one’s youth worker was full time or volunteer (male or female, etc.), to see if there are any correlations that show up which may imply the ministry effect of youth workers.

Future study may wish to expand the number of social beliefs, alternative religious beliefs, and Christian behaviors considered relative to the influence of religiosity. Furthermore, research could zone in on associations of variables with more precision, unearthing more specific relationships between one key variable, say abstinence, and a host of others. While the majority of findings felt positive, the fact that somewhere between ten and twenty percent of this group associated with concerning results, it would be interesting to compare the results of this population verses the results (with the same questions, etc.) of those in other denominations or with a non-religious population or a totally random population of teenagers.
This research may have also benefitted from more consideration of additional potentially intervening variables. Considering the teen fascination with, media focus on, and pop-culture’s embrace of, varying possible supernatural entities, others may wish to study youth who take these entities religiously seriously. The multi-dimensional religiosity scale in this study could also be developed to include subscales measuring its varying religious dimensions.

References


