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Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine

Department of School Psychology

RELIGIOUS COGNITIVE BELIEF, EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT, AND
BEHAVIORAL COMMITMENT AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SELF-
REGULATION OF ADOLESCENTS

Leslie M. Chaundy

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Psychology

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PHILADELPHIA COLLEGE OF OSTEOPATHIC MEDICINE
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Dissertation Approval

This is to certify that the thesis presented to us by Leslie M. Chaundy
on the 14th day of June, 2013, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Psychology, has been examined and is
acceptable in both scholarship and literary quality.

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Abstract

Research indicates that religion has played a vital role in the founding of the American nation as well as the American education system. However, over the years, religion has been taken from the educational realm and is no longer considered an important variable in impacting educational outcomes. This study examined the National Study of Youth & Religion dataset to further explore what was the most important component of religiosity (religious cognitive beliefs, emotional attachment, or behavioral commitment) in impacting academic and behavioral success. This study found that religious cognitive beliefs (belief in God and belief in moral absolutes) did not have a significant relationship with academic outcomes, but were significantly correlated with behavioral outcomes. Emotional attachment and the frequency of attending religious services, prayer, and scripture reading were all also found to be significantly correlated with academic and behavioral outcomes. Religious attendance was found to be the most powerful predictor of academic grades, and emotional attachment and scripture reading were found to be the most powerful predictors of overall behavioral self-regulation. Also, many group differences were found in terms of religious affiliation. This study is important for education and has many implications for schools because prayer, scripture reading, and moral absolutes have been taken out of education. Children are being kept from knowing, developing a relationship with, and following God, which this study supports has the potential to impact self-regulation and, ultimately, educational outcomes.

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Epigraph

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14, Luke 18:16).

Chapter 1

Introduction

Religion has played a pivotal role in the founding of the nation, as well as the American educational system, and continues to be an important aspect of many lives (Barton, 1995; Jeynes, 2003; Murray, 1995; www.free2pray.info). However, over the years religion has been taken out of the educational realm and is no longer considered an important factor in shaping the lives of youth or impacting educational outcomes (Jeynes, 2003). Research indicates that it is often a variable that is overlooked (Donelson, 1999; Jeynes, 2003; Regnerus, Smith, & Fritsch, 2003). This is unfortunate because much of the research that has been completed suggests that religion exerts many positive effects for a variety of reasons (Donelson, 1999; Jeynes, 2003; Regnerus et al., 2003; Smith & Denton, 2005). Numerous studies have also demonstrated that religion has the potential to affect academic and behavioral outcomes in schools (Jeynes, 2003; Regnerus et al., 2003).

Statement of the Problem

There has been much controversy and debate over the role of religion in education since many lawsuits led to Supreme Court decisions ending devotional bible readings and prayer in classrooms, and especially resulting from the recent “school choice” reform issues (First Amendment Center and the Bible Literacy Project, 1999; Jeynes, 2003; Murray, 1995; www.free2pray.info). Many people continue to believe that teaching religion in school is unconstitutional because of the principle of separation of church and state (Barton, 1995; First Amendment Center and the Bible Literacy Project, 1999; Jeynes, 2003; Murray, 1995; www.free2pray.info). Others believe that religion in

schools is a constitutional right and that not allowing it limits student religious expression (First Amendment Center and the Bible Literacy Project, 1999; Jeynes, 2003; Murray, 1995; www.free2pray.info). Some argue that the removal of moral education from schools (specifically Bible reading and prayer) has been associated with the rise of moral relativism and the moral decay of society (Barton, 1995; Jeynes, 2003; Murray, 1995). Because of these conflicting issues; a movement has grown to reintroduce religion into public schools (First Amendment Center and the Bible Literacy Project, 1999; National Council On Bible Curriculum).

Need for the Study

Jeynes (2010) suggested that establishing a relationship with student outcomes is fundamental if one is to present a strong case in favor of religious courses in school. However, Jeynes (2010) noted that there is really no consensus in the academic community about whether specifically Bible literacy is associated with positive or negative outcomes, primarily because of the very few studies conducted in this area. According to Jeynes (2010), despite efforts, little is known about the possible influence of these Bible courses on the achievement and behavior of students, and considerable debate continues on whether Bible literacy has positive influences (Jeynes, 2010). Jeynes is one of the few researchers who has researched the area of Bible literacy and has concluded that more research is needed, particularly as it relates to academic achievement (Jeynes, 2010). Jeynes (2010) asserted that virtually all Americans want to improve educational outcomes, whether they are religious or not. The First Amendment Center and the Bible Literacy Project (1999), also report that “Americans have been divided about the issue of religion in education since the early days of the common school

movement and ending the confusion and conflict about bibles in the public schools would be good for public education and the nation” (p.1).

Jeynes (2009) suggested the reason for the limited number of studies on Bible literacy include the inability of study because of the removal of Bible reading and prayer in schools. Most studies that do examine this issue include small samples, college students, studies taken from Europe, or dissertations (Jeynes, 2010). Jeynes (2009) reported that over the past several decades researchers have demonstrated an interest in examining the effects of religion on school achievement and behavior; however, religious schools are more frequently examined than the religiosity of students. According to Jeynes (2003), more research is needed on the individual religiosity of students, which may be just as important as the religious beliefs of the institutions that they attend. In addition, most studies on the religiosity of students focus primarily only on church attendance, importance of religion, and youth of the Christian faith (Jeynes, 2003).

Regnerus et al. (2003) also reported that although religion has been found to have profound effects, “the relationship with health and social behavior is often minimized or ignored” (p.7). For example, Regnerus et al. (2003) cited a U.S. Congress 726-page report titled, “Adolescent Health,” which included only two references to religion. Donelson (1999) noted that in the early years, religion was important to psychologists such as William James and Stanley Hall, who wrote about moral and religious training being important for developmental psychology. However, over the years, the study of religion has declined because of the increased need to be more scientific (Donelson, 1999). The cultural differences and subjectivity make defining the variables extremely

challenging to define the variables and are the reasons for many mixed results (Donelson, 1999).

Research also indicates that religious cognitive beliefs, religious emotional attachment, and religious behavioral commitment are all important but different concepts that need to be more fully addressed. More research is needed in these areas, as well as in the specific components that would help youth be more successful in educational outcomes. Many advocates for religion in schools claim that the removal of moral education from public schools, specifically school prayer, Bible reading, and moral absolutes, have contributed to the moral decay of society and has had an impact on the academic and behavioral functioning of students (Barton, 1995; Jeynes, 2003; Murray, 1995).

Purpose of the Study

One purpose of this quantitative study is to examine the different aspects of the religiosity of youth, such as cognitive belief (especially belief in moral absolutes), emotional attachment, and behavioral commitment (especially prayer and scripture reading), to determine whether they are associated with improved academic and behavioral outcomes (self-regulation skills). Another purpose of this study is to explore differences across religious affiliations. It is the hope that this study will distinguish among some of the different aspects of religiosity, shed further light on the potential impact of biblical literacy and prayer in schools, and, in some way, demonstrate the importance of the role of religion in education.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

The History of Religion in American Education

A review of the literature reveals that religion played a vital role in the development of the United States as well as of the American educational system (Barton, 1995; Jeynes, 2003; Murray, 1995). The Christian faith of the early settlers, who originally came to America in the 1600s to escape religious persecution, was instrumental in the founding of the nation and is evident in historical documents throughout American history (Barton, 1995; Jeynes, 2003; Murray, 1995). Barton (1995) and Brooks (2010) noted that the importance of God can be seen in the U.S. Constitution, national anthem, Pledge of Allegiance, and currency. It can also be seen in the daily exercises of the American court systems, as well as in oaths taken in office (Murray, 1995).

Religion also greatly influenced the American education system (Barton, 1995; Jeynes, 2003; Murray, 1995). Jeynes (2003) reported that the religious priorities of the Pilgrims and Puritans placed a tremendous emphasis on education. According to Jeynes (2003), the Puritans highly valued education, literacy, self-discipline, and a strong work ethic. They believed that the home was the central place of education, but also functioned as part of a “triad” in which a close relationship existed among the home, church, and school. Jeynes (2003) reported the church was at the center of almost every colony and often functioned as the administrative center where education was organized. Jeynes (2003) noted that church collections were often taken to support educational facilities and that churches ran the elementary and secondary schools, as well as developed colleges.

Jeynes (2003) reported that the early settlers saw the necessity of training ministers in America and that education was considered a means to serve God. Harvard College in 1636 became the first institution of higher education in the United States and was founded as a college to train ministers; the school color of crimson was chosen because of the blood of Christ (Jeynes, 2003). According to Jeynes (2003) devout religious groups founded almost all of the Ivy League schools, such as Brown, Columbia, Dartmouth, Penn, Princeton, Rutgers, William & Mary, and Yale, with religious purposes in mind.

Jeynes (2003) reported that because the church regarded spiritual wisdom and moral education as the highest priority, and because the church emphasized knowing the Bible, teaching children to read was considered most important. Many laws required that students be taught to read for this purpose (Jeynes, 2003). The Massachusetts Compulsory School Law in 1642 was the first time that legislature ordered this to be done (Jeynes, 2003; www.free2pray.info). Jeynes (2003) suggested that the early settlers even believed that the Bible commanded people to be educated. A piece of interesting legislation, referred to as the “Old Deluder Satan Act,” was passed in 1647, requiring each community of 50 or more households to assign at least one person to teach all the children in the community and asserted that Satan wanted people to be ignorant, especially of the Bible (Jeynes, 2003; www.free2pray.info). In 1683, Pennsylvania also passed a law that required parents to teach their children to read at a sufficient level to read the Bible (Jeynes, 2003). Jeynes (2003) indicated that throughout history many groups, such as the Native Americans and slaves, were taught to read in an attempt to understand the Bible. According to Jeynes (2003), this important concept of teaching

reading is still important today in American culture versus other cultures, such as Asians, who place higher value on teaching mathematics and science.

One of the main textbooks used for more than 200 years to teach children was called the *New England Primer*; first published in 1690 (Jeynes, 2003; Murray, 1995; www.free2pray.info). *The New England Primer* used Bible verses to teach the alphabet and contained children's prayers, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and questions about the Bible (www.free2pray.info). *The Noah Webster Speller* (Blue Book) and McGuffey readers were also well-known school textbooks that incorporated Bible verses and references, as well as moral lessons (Jeynes, 2003; www.free2pray.info). Of course, the Bible was thought to be one of the most important books that one could own, and virtually every one of the early settlers had one in his or her household (Jeynes, 2003). According to Barton (1995), the Bible was regularly used as a textbook to teach traditional religious principles and morals.

In 1787, Congress passed the Northwest Ordinance, which directed people of new territories to establish schools to teach religion, morality, and knowledge, and they were directed to use the Bible as the basis for their moral teachings (www.free2pray.info). In the 1800s, as the churches turned over their schools to various states, many state constitutions continued to mandate the teaching of religion, morals, and knowledge (wwwfree2pray.info). According to Jeynes (2003), moral education was the primary focus of education throughout American history until the 1960s. Prayer, Bible reading, and moral instruction were essential parts of the school day (Jeynes, 2003). Barton (1995) noted that children were well-rounded and well-equipped, educated in not only mind but also character.

Murray (1995) reported that the founding fathers of our nation believed that religion and moral education were important for the maintenance of the republic and the health of the nation and this is evident in writings from the Mayflower Compact to the Constitution. Jeynes (2003) noted the comments of Stephen Yulish:

The concept of moral education has always been a crucial underpinning of the American notion of a virtuous republic. . . . The deep felt need to control behavior and conduct moral training was undertaken by the schools alongside the instruction of the church and home (p.45).

According to Barton (1995) and Murray (1995), many founding fathers, such as John Quincy Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, John Locke, Benjamin Rush, George Washington, and Noah Webster, commented on the importance of religion in education and warned of the consequences of not heeding religious training. A few examples are included as follows: Benjamin Franklin, who was considered the least religious of the founding fathers, asserted (in response to Thomas Paine, who attacked religion and asserted that good behavior could be maintained without religious teachings):

You yourself may find it easy to live a virtuous life without the assistance afforded by religion. . . . But think how great a portion of mankind consists of the weak and ignorant men and women and of inexperienced, inconsiderate youth of both sexes who have need of the motives of religion to restrain from the vice, to support their virtue and retain them in the practice of it until it becomes habitual. . . . And perhaps you are indebted to her originally, that is, to your religion,

education, for the habits of virtue upon which you now value yourself If men are so wicked with religion, what would they be without it? (Barton, 1995, p. 95)

John Locke:

Heaven being our great business and interest, the knowledge which may direct us thither is certainly so too; so that this is without peradventure the study which ought to take up the first and chiefest place in our thoughts. . . . Having laid the foundations of virtue in a true notion of God, such as the creed wisely teaches, as far as his age is capable, [teach] him to pray . . . ; [and] the next thing to be taken care of, is to keep him exactly to speaking the truth, and by all the ways imaginable inclining him to be good natured (Murray, 1995, p. 88).

Benjamin Rush:

The only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid in religion. Without this there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty. The only means of establishing and perpetuating the republican forms of government is the universal education of our youth in principles of Christianity by means of the bible; for this divine book above all others favor. . . . respect for just laws. Without religion, I believe that learning does real mischief to the morals and principles of mankind (Barton, 1995, p. 42).

George Washington warned in his farewell address,

Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality may be retained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds. . . . reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principles (Barton, 1995, p. 23).

Noah Webster:

In my view the Christian religion is the most important and one of the first things in which all children, under a free government, ought to be instructed. . . . No truth is more evident to my mind that the Christian religion must be the basis of any government intended to secure the rights and privileges of a free people. The opinion that human reason, left without the constant control of divine laws and commands, will preserve a just administration, secure freedom, and other rights, restrain men from violations of laws and constitutions, and give duration to a popular government, is chimerical (unlikely) as the most extravagant ideas that enter the head of a maniac. . . . Where will you find any code of laws among civilized men in which the commands and prohibitions are not founded on Christian principles? I need not specify the prohibition of murder, robbery, theft (and) trespass (Barton, 1995, p. 41).

He also warned,

The moral principles and precepts contained in the scriptures ought to form the basis of our civil constitution and laws. . . . All the miseries and evils which men suffer from vice, crime, ambition, injustice, oppression, slavery, and war, proceed from their despising or neglecting the precepts contained in the bible (Barton, 1995, p. 86).

Jeynes (2003) reported that Horace Mann, often regarded as the “father of the common school movement,” also believed that society had a responsibility to train children not only intellectually, but also morally, and believed that moral education, more

than the education of the mind, was the key for changing society. According to Jeynes (2003, p.45), Mann declared in his *Twelfth Annual Report* (1848),

But, it will be said that this great result, in Practical Morals, is a consummation of blessedness that can never be attained without religion; and that no community will ever be religious without a Religious Education. Both of these propositions, I regard as eternal and immutable truths. Devoid of religious principles and religious affections the race can never fall so low that it may sink still lower (p. 45).

Jeynes (2003), noted that Mann asserted that the most important focus that educators should have is “best expressed in these few and simple words: ‘Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it’ (Holy Bible, Proverbs 22:6).” (p. 46) Jeynes (2003) also reported that according to Calvin Stowe in 1837,

To leave the moral faculty uninstructed was to leave the most important part of the human mind underdeveloped, and to strip education of almost everything that can make it valuable; and that the bible, independently of the interest attending it, as containing the most ancient and influential writings ever recorded by human hands, and comprising the religious system of almost the whole of the civilized world, is in itself the best book that can be put into hands of children to interest, to exercise, and to unfold their intellectual and moral powers (pp. 18-19).

Jeynes (2003) remarked that throughout American history, moral education was at the heart of the educational curriculum and Americans believed that the Bible should be the basis of that moral instruction. However, Jeynes (2003), also acknowledged that Mann and many others believed that the Bible should be used in a “nonsectarian” way, in

which only certain aspects of the Bible be emphasized that could be used by all denominations. Jeynes (2003) noted that that this view of the Bible was well received and practiced until the 20th century. Murray (1995) also reported that the overall central task of education was to create moral citizens, and to this end, religious instruction was permitted in schools. However, according to Jeynes (2003), unfortunately after a long string of events in educational history, the public school system became increasingly secular.

The Removal of Religion from American Education

Jeynes (2003) stated that the roles of schools changed dramatically during the 1800s. As a result of the industrialization and urbanization of society, the role of the home in education decreased, and more responsibility was given over to the schools. In addition to these changes in schools, a massive influx of Irish Catholic immigrants changed the population landscape (Jeynes, 2003).

According to The First Amendment Center (1999) and Fessenden (2005), Bible wars broke out in the 19th century between Protestants and Catholics over which version of the Bible to read. Fessenden (2005) reported that Catholics began to organize protests against the Protestant character of public schooling and began arguing that the King James Version of the Bible, which was often at the center of the curriculum and the common textbook, was sectarian. In fact, violent confrontations in 1844, known as the Philadelphia Bible riots, took place during which churches and homes were destroyed by arson and seventeen people were killed (Fessenden, 2005). Fessenden (2005) noted several editorial excerpts during that time period that captured the tension and conflict. Fessenden (2005) reported that the *Episcopal Recorder* urged,

Protestant Christians, awake to the crisis and consider the duty which is before them, are we to yield our personal liberty, our inherited rights, our very bibles, the special blessed gift of God to our country, to the will, the ignorance, or the wickedness of these hordes of foreigners? (p.793)

Meanwhile the *Catholic Herald* warned,

The protestant association will take charge of our youth, and provide them with a bible, hymns, and prayers, according to their judgment, and we must sit contented, and be silent, if not grateful. They may afterwards provide us with a national religion, when we shall have been prepared for the blessing, by means of a national protestant education (Fessenden, 2005, p. 794).

The *Native Eagle and American Advocate* noted that,

A man may be a Turk, a Jew, or a Christian, a Catholic, a Methodist, or Presbyterian, and we say nothing against it, but we must remember that our pilgrim fathers landed on Plymouth Rock to establish the protestant religion, free from persecution, we must contend that this was and always will be a Protestant country (Fessenden, 2005, p. 794).

The *Christian Observer* reported that,

We wish them [the Roman Catholics] to enjoy the same religious liberty, the same protection, that we enjoy....but when they come to our shores, we wish them to....have their minds imbued with American principles. We wish them to be Americanized, if we may use that term, instead of...acting over again, scenes of turmoil in which they have too often been prominent in the old world (Fessenden, 2005, p. 796).

Eventually, Bishop John Purcell argued that “if the public school system remained unwilling to divest itself of its Protestant biases, Catholics would be obliged to seek public funding for their own schools” (Fessenden, 2005, p. 800). However, Purcell’s attempts to collect public funds for Catholic schools failed (Fessenden, 2005). According to Fessenden (2005), the Catholics then sought to remove the Bible from public schools only in order to win state funds for their own. Although ongoing battles continued, in 1870 a majority of the superior court justices upheld that the King James Bible was indeed nonsectarian and noted that religion was necessary to the interests of the state and the “common good,” and therefore, schools could not be secularized. The Protestant efforts were so successful in demonstrating the compatibility of the Bible to secular education that they continued it into the 20th century, and many states even required Bible reading in public schools (Fessenden, 2005).

However, Fessenden (2005) noted that anti Catholic thinking eventually gave rise to a more broad-based attack on Christianity. Two school districts were eventually sued in *McCullum v. Board of Education* (1948) and *Zorach v. Clauson* (1952), arguing that release time for religious training aided religious groups in spreading their faith through the improper use of public school taxes (Murray, 1995). According to Murray (1995), “release time” was provided, during which students could leave school to receive additional religious instruction or religious teachers could come to public schools to provide the instruction.

Jeynes (2003) reported that more lawsuits in the 1960s led to a series of Supreme Court decisions that removed prayer and Bible readings altogether from the public schools. *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), *Abington Township School District v. Schempp* (1963),

and *Murray v. Curlett* (1963) were the three landmark decisions (Jeynes, 2003; Murray, 1995; www.free2pray.info). In all three of these cases, parents of students petitioned the courts to stop the school from exposing their children to prayer or Bible reading (www.free2pray.info). The parents of the students and their lawyers from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) argued that prayer and Bible reading violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the Constitution (www.free2pray.info).

Engel v. Vitale (1962) was the first landmark case in which prayer was removed from school (Barton, 1995; Jeynes, 2003; Murray, 1995; www.free2pray.info). The New York school system had adopted a state prayer, known as the “Regents School Prayer,” to be recited at the beginning of each school day. It was a nonsectarian or nondenominational prayer, otherwise known as the “to whom it may concern prayer” (www.free2pray.info). It included the following words: “Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependency upon thee, and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers and our country” (Barton, 1995; Jeynes, 2003; Murray, 1995; www.free2pray.info). Jeynes (2003) and Murray (1995) also noted that the prayer was voluntary; nevertheless, it was challenged by several parents.

In the second landmark case, *Abington Township School District v. Schempp* (1963), Bible reading was removed from school (Jeynes, 2003; Murray, 1995; www.free2pray.info). According to Jeynes (2003) and www.free2pray.info, the Abington Township School District complied with a state law requiring that 10 verses of scripture be read every day, although the readings were also voluntary and without interpretation or comment. However, the parents of a student took their case to the courts on the grounds that this was coercion (www.free2pray.info).

In the third landmark case, *Murray v. Curlett* (1963), Madalyn Murray O’Hair, an atheist, and her son, William Murray, took the School Board of Baltimore to court for allowing prayer and/or Bible reading in school at the beginning of each school day (Jeynes, 2003; Murray, 1995; www.free2pray.info). According to Murray (1995), although O’Hair won a small victory at first though the court’s ruling that William could be excused from the opening activities and exercises, she pursued the issue arguing that preference was given to religious believers versus nonbelievers and that William was being insulted by his peers for not participating.

The second and third landmark cases came to the Supreme Court at the same time, so they were ruled on together (Murray, 1995; www.free2pray.info). The Supreme Court ruled 8 to 1 in favor of abolishing school prayer and Bible reading in public schools (Murray, 1995; www.free2pray.info). The court’s arguments were based upon the idea that the founding fathers wanted a “wall of separation” between church and state and that the government should be neutral to religion in schools (Barton, 1995; Jeynes, 2003; Murray, 1995; www.free2pray.info). Supreme Court Justice Tom Clark wrote on religious freedom, “it has long been recognized that government must be neutral and, while protecting all, must prefer none and disparage none” (Murray, 1995, p. 31).

However, according to Jeynes (2003), former President Hoover stated that “the Supreme Court decision constituted a disintegration of a sacred American heritage” (p. 87). Murray (1995) noted that, as time passed, people remembered the Bill of Rights but gradually forgot the history responsible for its creation, and its meaning and content were modified and extended by successive generations of Supreme Court justices. Barton (1995) indicated that the reason for these rulings was only one member of the Supreme

Court had prior constitutional experience prior to his appointment, and he was the only one who objected to the rulings. According to Barton (1995), all of the other court justices had political backgrounds. Barton (1995) commented that these justices began to introduce new ideas and laws, contrary to American heritage and values, and reported that only one Supreme Court justice acted as a judge; the others were determined to develop new policies rather than uphold previous precedents.

Barton (1995) suggested that this new interpretation of the law invited hundreds of lawsuits challenging any presence of religion in public life. According to Barton (1995), in the 1950s, almost no legal challenges were made and in the 1990's they have soared to more than 3,000. The *Epperson v. Arkansas* (1968) case reiterated that public schools must be secular both in their curricula and related programs (Murray, 1995). In *Stone v. Graham* (1980), the court ruled that the Ten Commandments could not be posted in classrooms and had to be removed from view. According to Barton (1995), it was noted that "if posted copies of the Ten Commandments are to have any effect at all, it will be to induce the school children to read, meditate upon, perhaps to venerate and obey, the Commandments this is not a permissible state objective under the establishment clause" (p.16). In *Wallace v. Jeffree* (1986), a "moment of silence" was struck down by the court, in what appeared to be a creative attempt to return prayer to schools (Murray, 1995). In *Lee v. Weisman* (1992), the Supreme Court ruled that clergy may not offer prayer at graduation ceremonies (www.free2pray.info). In *Doe v. Santa Fe Independent School District* (2000), student-led prayer at football games was found to be "unconstitutional" (www.free2pray.info).

Barton (1995) reported that lower court rulings have gone even further than the Supreme Court in their rulings and suggested that today there is “anti-religious prejudice” in education. Barton (1995) cited such examples as children not being able to pray aloud at lunch, Christmas parties and carols being barred from school, and the word *Christmas* not allowed to be spoken because it contains the word *Christ*. Jeynes (2003) also acknowledged the religious discrimination in schools, such as countless children getting suspended for bringing their Bibles to school, not being able to mention the name of Jesus in essays, and not being allowed to exchange Christmas cards. Davis (2009), commenting on these later court rulings, stated,

the court’s early school prayer decisions that freed the nations’ public school children from an oppressive, ritualistic Protestant indoctrination at the beginning of every school day was a favor to an entire nation,” but “there is a huge difference between telling religiously oriented people that they cannot require mandatory, Christian-centric prayer before a public school day and telling them they cannot require a moment of silence or have a once a year invocation before a graduation ceremony..... it becomes evidence that the less-discriminating group may be right, that is truly the intent of the court to erase all traces of religious thinking from the public school system (p. 44).

Barton (1995), Davis (2009), Jeynes (2003), and Murray (1995) all reported that many people believe that schools are becoming increasingly “hostile to religion.”

According to Barton (1995), Davis (2009), Jeynes (2003), and Murray (1995), many parents have abandoned public schools and have resorted to homeschooling their children or enrolling them in private schools to avoid the prevailing attitudes and

theories. Jeynes (2003) commented on the explosion in these two movements and noted that they are a response to the hostile antireligious school environment that is at odds with the beliefs of a majority of Americans. However, Jeynes (1999) also reminded readers that “antireligious acts” may be more the result of ignorance of the law and what is legally permissible in public schools than of true hostility.

Davis (2009) indicated that the homeschooling movement began in the 1960s, in response to the removal of prayer and Bible readings from school. According to Davis (2009), the most significant reason given for homeschooling is to provide religious or moral instruction. Davis (2009) reported that the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that in 2007, 1.5 million students were homeschooled in the United States, a 74% increase since 1999, and reported that some surveys indicated that the estimates may have been as high as 2.4 million. In addition to the homeschooling movement, private school enrollment has grown (Barton, 1995). According to Barton (1995), in 1965, 1000 Christian schools were in the United States, and by 1985, the number was projected to be 32,000. According to Hillman (2008), charter schools are also on the rise and provide a means for children in religious families to receive a public general education that is also sensitive to their values and permits them to observe their religion. Hillman (2008) reported that 90,000 children attend online charter schools at home where parents are provided with secular educational materials and the support of consulting teachers, yet retain control over the curriculum and may employ religious materials in instruction.

However, Davis (2009) noted that the negative effect of these movements is that everyday thousands of children lose the opportunity to learn mutual respect and tolerance

for each other and other religions. Murray (1995) also stated that if secularism as the state religion is not removed, the brightest and best students could move to private schools and this will ultimately lead to a two-tiered educational system that will create an atmosphere of tension between class and race. Murray (1995) reported that the superior education and values that are taught in religious and other private schools are beyond the reach of most citizens and noted that no child should be denied a good and moral education because of class or race.

Interestingly, Murray, one of the plaintiffs in the *Murray v. Curlett* (1963) case against school prayer, has since apologized and written a book, *Let Us Pray: A Plea for School Prayer* advocating for the return of school prayer (Murray, 1995). He regrets his role as the plaintiff, and writes, “It is in my opinion, the wheels that my mother and I set in motion have done great harm to this nation” (Murray, 1995, p. 35). However, Murray (1995) noted that the removal of prayer from schools was not entirely his and his mother’s fault, as it was a process of secularization. He suggested that the courts had a deliberate role in deciding the types of cases to hear. Barton (1995) also noted that, although the majority of Americans (97%) claimed a belief in God at the time of the ruling, the ruling still passed. Barton (1995) blamed the Christian community for some of the secularization of schools and asserted that “Christians through bad doctrine, political inactivity, and apathy have handed the nation over to leaders who are eager to uproot the Christian practices that have been at the heart of the nation for centuries” (p. 118). Murray (1995) also claimed that not one Christian organization filed a brief in support of school prayer. Murray (1995) stated his belief that “prayer is a cultural marker and an indicator of a much larger problem and suggests the removal of prayer from

public schools was one facet among many others of the pervading secularism of our culture” (p. 163). William Bennett (1999), former secretary of education, also noted that even though the United States is a prosperous nation, it is evident that something has gone very wrong at the core.

The Rise of Moral Relativism in America

Many researchers believe that the removal of religion from school has been replaced by a “moral relativism” in society (Barton, 1995, Jeynes, 2003, Murray, 1995). Murray (1995) reported that moral relativism comes directly from a secular world view and that both secularism and relativism are based on neutrality in values. According to Beckwith and Koukl (2005), morality is about what is right and wrong and is often based on subjective and objective truths. Subjective truths are personal preference and objective truths are realities in the external world that cannot be changed by feelings (Beckwith & Koukl, 2005). Moral relativism teaches that morals are subjective and people do their own thing and no universal rules apply (Beckwith & Koukl, 2005).

Beckwith and Koukl (2005) gave the example of asking someone if murder is wrong. According to Beckwith and Koukl (2005), a common view and typical response in today’s society would be that “it depends and people should decide for themselves.” Beckwith and Koukl (2005) noted that a steady diet of moral relativism can lead to muddling a person’s thinking and creates a chaotic and confusing world. According to Beckwith and Koukl (2005), recent generations have institutionalized moral relativism, and celebrate it as “tolerance.” Beckwith and Koukl (2005) indicated that, for example, in one generation behaviors that once were considered unacceptable are now considered acceptable. Beckwith and Koukl (2005) reported that although people can have their own

opinions; today they are best kept to themselves. Gunnoe, Beversluis, and College (2009) suggested that many adults feel more comfortable “supporting” youth than “directing and correcting” them. Murray (1995) also made note that once upon a time a counselor offered counsel. Jeynes (1999) remarked that historically religious people have irritated people’s consciousness.

Jeynes (2003) noted that prominent educators in the early 1900s, such as John Dewey, started to promote the idea and philosophy that morals were “relative,” not “absolute,” and advocated for children to develop their own value systems and to decide for themselves what is right and wrong. Murray (1995) also commented on the 70s era, when “values clarification” prevailed and teachers were asked not to transmit values, just help students “clarify them.” Murray (1995) reported that this movement did not help clarify values, but wants and desires that were harmful.

Gunnoe et al. (2009) reported that historically sociologists have viewed sources of authority external to self, such as God and social institutions, as positive forces in society. Gunnoe et al. (2009) also noted that many psychologists, such as Piaget, Adler, Kohlberg, and Fowler, generally viewed external authority as critical for socializing children until they were mature and could eventually internally control themselves, and believed internal control was a primary goal of psycho-social and moral development. However, Gunnoe et al. (2009) suggested that contemporary youth have never embraced an externally based system and therefore are constructing meaning by themselves and this may be the cause of and a contributor to the recent lack of moral base and the mental and behavioral deterioration of American children. According to Gunnoe et al. (2009), the Commission of Children at Risk issued a report stressing in 2003 the need for youth to be

“anchored in authoritative communities that are warm and supportive and establish clear limits and expectations and reflect and transmit a shared understanding of what it means to be a good person” (p. 237).

According to Murray (1995), values clarification is a nonjudgmental neutral academic approach, but he suggests that relativism is a moral position like any other. Barton (1995) and Murray (1995) believed that schools have done great harm by teaching morals in conflict with traditional family values and have undermined moral training by parents; for example, sex education is an area in which parents may encourage abstinence, but schools teach sex education. Many researchers believe that moral relativism gives mixed messages and has caused children to be deeply confused and conflicted, eventually leading to the moral decay of society (Barton, 1995; Beckwith & Koukl, 2005; Jeynes, 2003; Murray, 1995).

Jeynes (2003, 2009), reported that the Supreme Court decisions had a major impact on the teaching of moral education in the public schools because prior to the decisions moral education was founded on the Bible. According to Barton (1995), activities that were once an integral part of education are now censored, and the removal of absolutes and fixed rights and wrongs has altered student morality and behavior. Barton (1995), Jeynes (2003, 2010), Murray (1995), www.free2pray.info and many other researchers have suggested that the removal of moral teaching from the public schools quickly became associated with a religious and moral decline in the nation, and they all have reported that data suggest that today’s youth are “morally adrift.” However, they also noted that the causality is likely in both directions (Barton, 1995; Jeynes, 2003; Murray, 1995). Murray (1995) stated that the close parallel between American education

and the process of secularization is uncomfortable for many people because it implies that moral education and decent social behavior are related.

The Decline of the American Nation

David Barton, the Director of Specialty Research Associates, wondered, is it possible that the prayers being offered by these children and teachers across the nation had any measurable tangible effect, and his questions led him to look for statistical proof (Brooks, 2010). Barton's book, *America: To Pray or Not to Pray* (1995) uses government records and statistics to chart the decline of morality since the removal of prayer in schools.

Barton (1995), Murray (1995), and www.free2pray.info demonstrated the top leading problems in schools since the removal of prayer in school. In 1940, the top seven problems ranked in order were: talking out of turn, chewing gum, making noise, running in the halls, cutting in line, dress code violations, and littering. In 1990, the top seven problems ranked in order included drug abuse, alcohol abuse, pregnancy, suicide, rape, robbery, and assault. According to Barton (1995), they signal a new class of problems. Barton (1995) also demonstrated that there was a decline in youth behavior, education, family, and the nation that correlated with the removal of simple prayer that acknowledged dependence upon God and asked for blessings upon students, parents, teachers, and the country.

In 1995, Barton reported that, even after controlling for population growth premarital sexual activity among 15-year-olds had increased almost 1,000% since 1962, teenage pregnancy increased 400%, and sexually transmitted diseases, such as gonorrhea, increased 400%. Barton (1995) also noted that 65% of students who had gone through a

sex education program were sexually active, twice the percentage of students who had not completed a sex education program. Barton (1995) reported that violent crimes had gone up 572% among 17-year-old girls, and suicide rates had increased 253% since 1963. Jeynes (2003) also commented on the declining morality of the nation and reported that measures by the Department of Health and Human Services (1992) and U.S. Department of Justice (1993) indicated that delinquent behavior and adolescent crime rose 300 - 700% from 1963 - 1980. Jeynes (2003) also noted that illegal drug use peaked between 1979 and 1982, and teenage pregnancy rose 553% during the period of 1963 - 1988. Jeynes (2003) reported that many of the increases took place among the first generation of students for which the Bible was taken out of schools, but are still noteworthy.

Barton (1995) also demonstrated the deterioration of the family since the removal of school prayer. Barton (1995) indicated that divorce rates rose almost 120% and skyrocketed in the 70s. According to Brooks (2010), after 1963, family divorce increased 300% each year for the next 15 years. Barton (1995) noted that although the divorce rates showed improvements in the 1990s; the decrease in divorce was deceptive and most likely the result of more couples opting to live together instead. Unmarried couples living together increased 600% and single-parent households increased 140% (Barton, 1995).

Barton (1995), Jeynes (2003), and others also indicated that America's religious and moral decline may have impacted the academic atmosphere as well. According to Barton (1995), the removal of prayer negatively impacted SAT scores, which showed an unprecedented steady decline for 8 years in a row following the Supreme Court decisions to remove religion from schools. Jeynes (2003) noted that, although the College Board

rejected the notion that traditional Western religion and values had a role in the test decline, the Board did believe that the following factors had a considerable impact on academic outcomes: delinquent behavior, declining role of the family, and a marked diminution in learning motivation. Barton (1995) noted that the decline slowed in the 1970s and began improving in the 1980s, but the improvement correlated with the growth in private-school enrollment. He claimed that as private-school enrollment declined, so did the SAT scores again. Barton (1995) and Jeynes (2003) reported that the College Board compared private-school and public-school SAT scores and found that private-school students performed higher than public-school students.

Many people argue that students who attend private schools are economically advantaged (Barton, 1995; Jeynes, 2003). However, Barton (1995) asserted that these differences in scores are not the results of “affluence” and claimed that the money spent per student is actually lower for private-school students than for public-school students. Jeynes (2003) also reported that other researchers have indicated that the average income of Catholic school parents is actually not much higher than that of public-school parents. Jeynes (2003) reported some evidence shows that the racial distribution of students is similar in public and private schools and that research suggests that religious schools may benefit disadvantaged students the most. Jeynes (2003) also noted that academic achievement is determined more by family background than by school facilities or resources. Barton (1995) and Jeynes (2003) both indicated that the deterioration of the family resulting from the decline in morality could have a secondary impact on academics. Barton (1995) suggested that fundamental differences exist between the curricula in private and public schools, not academically, but morally. These differences

include religious principles and moral standards as inherent parts of the educational philosophy in private schools.

In addition to performing poorly by American standards, American students also perform poorer on international comparison tests (Barton, 1995; Jeynes, 2003).

According to Barton (1995), international comparison tests reveal that on 19 academic tests, American students were never rated first or second and were rated last seven times. Barton (1995) also reported that the United States has the highest illiteracy rate among industrial nations. According to Jeynes (2003), the U.S Census Bureau indicated that the literacy rate had declined from 99% in the 1950s to 87% in 2000. Jeynes (2003) reported that students performance on other types of achievement tests also declined.

Barton also reported in 1995 that research indicated that school violence was increasing and teacher competency was decreasing. According to Barton (1995), 5,200 high school teachers were physically attacked each month in the 1990's and one fifth of them required medical treatment. In addition to these issues, Barton (1995) noted that the decline in basic knowledge would have long-term effects on businesses and the community. According to Barton (1995), many businesses had to spend money to teach remedial skills and to absorb the cost of productivity. The Department of Education even noted, "For the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills of one generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach, those of their parents" (as cited by Barton, 1995, p. 82).

Barton, in 1995, reported that in the past decades numerous attempts were made to reverse the academic deterioration by improving student/teacher ratios, increasing salaries, and improving spending on public education; however, despite these efforts, the

quality of education continued to decline. Barton (1995) noted that any environment where disrespect, immorality, and violence prevail is not conducive to effective learning. Ravitch stated that “modern schools are so overburdened with responsibilities of many kinds, that somehow their basic responsibility for education has been overwhelmed by all these other needs” (as cited in Murray, 1995, p.161).

Lastly, Barton (1995) suggested that the removal of religion from schools overall impacted the nation as well. By 1995, overall crime rates had increased nearly 700%, sexually transmitted diseases had increased nearly 200%, alcohol consumption per capita had increased by one third, and national productivity had dropped by more than 80%. Bennett (1999) also reported that from 1960 to 1999, the population increased by 48% but violent crime rose 467%, the number of prisoners rose 463%, out-of-wedlock births rose 461%, single-parent homes rose 200%, and suicide and divorce doubled. Abortion rates in 1973 totaled 744,060 and in 1996 totaled 1,365,700 (Bennett, 1999). Barton (1995) suggested that overall, the national indicators of behavior showed dramatic declines in personal self-control.

By 1995, America’s international positions in education, industry, morality, and family stability had fallen to the worst levels of any industrialized nation (Barton, 1995). America had become a world leader in violent crime, divorce rates, teenage pregnancy, voluntary abortions, illegal drug use, illiteracy rate, and documented cases of AIDS. Bennett (1999) noted that although the 1990s saw some reductions in welfare, violent crime, abortion, AIDS, divorce, and suicide and an increase in SAT scores, the American family was still worrisome because America had the highest divorce rate among Western nations and the highest incidence of single-parent families. Barton (1995) also reported

that new categories of problems had emerged, such as child abuse, corruption of public officials, illegal drug use, AIDS, and sexual abuse. Barton (1995) noted these problems had already existed, but they became so widespread that they became considered national problems to be measured. Barton (1995) reported that the practice of public prayer and seeking God's concurring aide was integral to this nation's birth, growth, and development and by removing the Bible from schools, so much time and money are being wasted in punishing crimes and taking such little pains to prevent them (Barton, 1995).

Reintegrating Religion into American Education

Many people believe that religion needs to be put back into public schools, and several efforts have been made over the years to accomplish this task by introducing academic courses on the Bible (Jeynes, 2010). However, much confusion continues in regard to the role of religion in education (Haynes, 2012). According to the First Amendment Center (1999), many Americans have mistaken views about the Supreme Court decisions involving Bibles and prayer in school. The First Amendment Center (1999) reported that the Court did not eliminate prayer or the Bible; it barred state-sponsored practices including devotional use. Public schools may teach students about the bible as long as such teaching is presented objectively as part of a secular program of education (The First Amendment Center, 1999). Former President Bill Clinton also commented on this issue and stated in the following speech at a school in Virginia in 1995: "Nothing in the first amendment converts our schools to religion-free zones or requires all religious expression to be left at the school house door" (as cited in Jeynes, 2010, p. 524).

According to Barton (1995), Jeynes (2003), Murray (1995), and www.freetoprayer.info, the majority of Americans (69%), continue to believe that the First Amendment states “separation of church and state,” although they report that these words never appear anywhere in the Constitution. Barton (1995) and www.free2pray.info reported that the First Amendment states: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” The First Amendment gives citizens the freedom to worship without government interference, assures that the government will not establish a state religion, enables people to speak their minds and publish news that may be critical of government without fear of arrest, and lastly, allows citizens the right to peacefully gather together (www.free2pray.info).

According to www.free2pray.info, the First Amendment contains two parts: the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause. The Establishment Clause states that the government will not establish a state religion (as other European countries, especially England, were doing at that time). The people also did not want the federal government to impose any one religion or denomination on all the states. The Free Exercise Clause states that the federal government will not interfere with the people’s freedom to worship God (www.free2pray.info).

Jeynes (2003), Murray (1995), and www.free2pray.info reported that the words “separation of church and state” came from a letter that Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1802 in response to concerns about religious freedom. Murray (1995) noted that the phrase is often borrowed and interpreted incorrectly. According to www.free2pray.info, Jefferson

added that phrase as a metaphor to underscore the First Amendment as a guardian of people's religious freedom from government interference. Jefferson wrote to the Danbury Baptist Association: "I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature 'should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between church and state" (www.free2pray.info).

According to Philip Hamburger in *Separation of Church and State*,

It [separation of church and state] was not original to the constitutional framers, but instead emerged over the next century in response to fears of Roman Catholicism as fatal to the republican governance and was basically a means of safeguarding American democracy from the antidemocratic Catholic immigrants that arrived by the millions in the middle of the nineteenth century (as cited in Fessenden, 2005).

Murray (1995) reported that the original intent of the First Amendment was to assure protection *of* religion, not *from* religion. According to www.free2pray.info, the court decisions in the 1960s over the role of religion in schools changed the way that many Americans understand the First Amendment to this day.

Barton (1995) reported that separation of church and state is no longer a prohibition against establishing a national denomination, but is now a prohibition against any religious activity in public. Murray (1995) and www.free2pray.info suggested that when the courts prohibit prayer or Bible reading, they are violating the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause because they are acting to establish a "secular faith" in the country and are violating the freedom of speech to worship God. Justice Potter

Stewart, the one justice who voted against the ruling in the second and third landmark case, stated that the decision “led not to true neutrality with respect to religion, but to the establishment of a religion of secularism” (www.free2pray.info). According to Murray (1995) and www.free2pray.info, “secularization” is the social or political process of rejecting all forms of religious faiths or the elimination of any religious elements within public education and other civic institutions. According to www.free2pray.info, “atheism has been recognized by the federal government as a religion, and the Supreme Court ruling preferred secular atheism, and therefore failed to be neutral as Justice Tom Clark suggested.”

According to [ww.free2pray.info](http://www.free2pray.info), neutrality would be neither forcing nonbelievers to pray nor prohibiting believers from praying. According to Murray (1995), many people originally believed at the time that secular education was value free, but instead some have argued that neutrality is infused with values. Murray (1995) reported that one person’s neutrality can be another person’s religion, and indicated that the Court’s decision contributed to a process in which one set of values was given preference over all others.

The First Amendment Center (1999) reported that there have been two “failed models” in the past, one being the “sacred public school,” which was an unconstitutional approach, and the second being the school as a “religion-free zone,” where religion has been completely ignored. According to Haynes (2012), after the lawsuits, many administrators made mistakes in interpreting the laws, educators feared teaching the subject, and textbook publishers largely ignored the topic. In an attempt to resolve the conflict, Charles Haynes and attorney Oliver Thomas, in addition to a coalition of others,

convened in 1987 the first ever attempt to find “common ground” (Haynes, 2012).

Haynes (2012) noted that culture war conflicts of the 1980s, including textbook trials and the Equal Access Act of 1984, were a few of the examples that inspired a diverse group of people to meet. According to Haynes (2012), a year and a half of intense negotiations produced the first ever consensus statement on teaching about religion in schools, called “Religion in the Public School Curriculum: Questions and Answers.” According to Haynes (2012), the statement is endorsed by the National Education Association in addition to a coalition of others.

The Bible in Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide was also produced in 1999 and provides guidelines for teaching a legal and academic course about the Bible in public schools (Bible Literacy Project). The document offers advice on the role of religion in public schools under the current law and offers a guide of education and constitutional guidelines (Bible Literacy Project). According to the Bible Literacy Project, the guide was compiled and endorsed by a coalition of 21 prominent educational, religious, and civil liberty organizations. The First Amendment Center (1999) reported that the *First Amendment Guide* offers a third approach, in which public schools neither inoculate nor inhibit religion. The Project advocates for a fair and balanced curriculum and believes that religion should be treated with fairness and respect, protection for religious liberty is the right of all faiths or none, and religion is an important part of a complete education (First Amendment Center, 1999).

The *First Amendment Guide* and U.S. Department of Education report that schools may not provide religious instruction, but may teach about religion, including the Bible or other scripture. Teaching it must be educational in nature, not devotional (The

First Amendment Center, 1999). Constitutionality of the classes depends upon who teaches the class and the materials used (The First Amendment Center, 1999). The teacher cannot promote or disparage religion or teach it from a particular sectarian view, and religious groups cannot teach courses on school premises during the school day (The First Amendment Center, 1999). The First Amendment Center (1999) noted that the Bible may be used as the primary text, but should probably not be the only text.

According to the First Amendment Center (1999), the text to use should remain under the control of the local school board. Supernatural occurrences and divine action may not be taught as historical fact, which can be controversial (The First Amendment Center, 1999). In addition, under the Equal Access Act, students in public schools may form religious clubs (including prayer, Bible, or worship experience) as long as the school allows other clubs (The First Amendment Center, 1999). The school must also allow access to school media to announce these meetings and allow the distribution of literature in the same way other literature unrelated to the curriculum is distributed (The First Amendment Center, 1999).

Rationale for Reintegrating Religion into Education

There are several reasons for reintegrating religion into education. The Bible Literacy Project's rationale for teaching an academic course on the Bible is based upon several reasons: the consensus on the academic value of teaching a course on the Bible, a consensus on the Bible's timeless influence, the consensus that teaching about the Bible has a firm legal foundation, and the availability of materials to support constitutional Bible courses. Other important reasons for wanting to reintegrate religion into education include the need for multicultural sensitivity (Haynes, 2012), as well as the fact that

Christians are the majority in America (Barton, 1995; Jeynes, 2010; Murray, 1995). In addition, research indicates that religion plays a significant role in the lives of youth and is associated with many positive outcomes for a variety of different reasons (Regnerus, 2003; Smith & Denton, 2005).

Academic Value

According to the Bible Literacy Project, four major studies reported that educators at the secondary and postsecondary levels believe that the Bible is “key” to a good education. The Bible Literacy Project reported that 81% of high-school English teachers surveyed reported that teaching some Bible literature was important and 98% of English teachers surveyed believed that Bible literacy was academically advantageous. A report by the Bible Literacy Project indicated that in a qualitative study in 10 states, 40 out of 41 English teachers said the Bible gives students a distinct educational advantage, and 90% of teachers said that it was important for both non-college-bound students as well as college-bound students (Bible Literacy Project). English teachers and professors agree that the Bible is filled with biblical allusions, symbols, and archetypes (Bible Literacy Project). According to the Bible Literacy Project and Jeynes (2010), the works of Shakespeare alone contain more than 1,300 references to the Bible. The Bible Literacy Project also reported that the Bible was the most frequently named work that college English department chairs wished college freshmen had read, and all English professors from top rated schools, such as Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, and Berkeley, agreed that regardless of the person’s faith, an educated person needs to know the Bible. According to the Bible Literacy Project, professors stated that the Bible was “indispensable, provides great advantage, and is absolutely critical.”

In an executive summary, which reported on a qualitative research project that assessed what American teens need to know and what they do know about Bible literacy, revealed that Bible illiteracy is common (Bible Literacy Project). The report indicated that the majority of high school teachers estimated that less than one fourth of their current students were Bible literate (Bible Literacy Project). According to the Bible Literacy Project, a Gallup survey of 1,002 students ages 13-18 years, in 2004 revealed that only a minority of American teens appeared to be “bible literate,” reaching the level of knowledge similar to that defined by high-school teachers as necessary to a good education (Bible Literacy Project). Prothero (2007) also commented on the magnitude of religious illiteracy in the nation. A Gallup survey concluded that “no controversy among adults, however heated, should be considered an excuse for leaving the next generation ignorant about a body of knowledge crucial to understanding American art, literature, history, language, and culture” (Bible Literacy Project). The Bible Literacy Project also noted that only four of 30 schools it studied offered a unit or course about the Bible.

Timeless Influence

According to the Bible Literacy Project, another rationale for teaching an academic course on the Bible is its timeless influence. Jeynes (2010) and Prothero (2007) reported that the Bible is the most published book in history, and is the most published book every year. The Bible Literacy Project also reported that it is the best-selling book of the year, every year. Estimates of 25 million Bibles were purchased in the year 2005 (twice as many as the most recent Harry Potter book). The Bible Literacy Project acknowledged that cultural literacy demands knowledge of the Bible and notes that hundreds of Bible phrases, characters, places, and symbols have become the common

currency of Western culture. Jeynes (2010) and Prothero (2007) reported that religious convictions were responsible for the abolishment of slavery, the civil rights and women's rights movements, and for many of the wars today in the Middle East. One high-school teacher in the study by the Bible Literacy Project reported that it's important for students to understand their own culture, just to be well grounded citizens of the United States, to know where the institutions and ideas came from. The Bible Literacy Project also reported that a *TIME Magazine* article titled, "Why Should We Teach the Bible in Public Schools?" stated that the bible is the "bedrock of Western culture."

Comfort (2001) also suggested that the Bible is a supernatural book that has survived despite numerous attempts to abolish it. He reported that the Bible contains many scientific facts that have been verified by numerous archaeological discoveries and noted that many famous inventors in the past have been inspired by the Bible and many famous historical figures have commented on its significance. Barton (1995), Jeynes (2003), Murray (1995), and www.free2pray.info also acknowledged that many of the Founding Fathers commented on the Bible and noted that the Christian Protestant religion is an important part of American heritage and history of which students should be aware.

Brooks (2010) noted that, although prayer has been taken out of schools, religion and the existence of God often are recognized by the American government. Brooks (2010) demonstrated the following examples: Each day, the Supreme Court starts with the invocation, "God save the United States and this Honorable Court"; the national motto is "In God We Trust"; and the Pledge of Allegiance includes "One nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." In addition, the Declaration of

Independence includes the phrase, “with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence” (Brooks, 2010).

Legally Grounded

According to the Bible Literacy Project, teaching about the Bible in public high-school English and social studies classes is academically valuable, legally grounded, and supported by the Supreme Court. According to the Bible Literacy Project and Jeynes (2010), Supreme Court Justice Tom C. Clark wrote in 1963 in response to the Schempp majority decision that,

it might well be said that education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy for its literary and historical qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be affected consistently with the first amendment (p. 225).

The Bible Literacy Project concludes with a 2005 *Chicago Tribune* quote:

It makes no sense to starve our public school students by eliminating the bible and religion from the curriculum, given overwhelming interest of students in the subject and legal and academic support for it. How can we be multicultural, in the best sense, if we do not understand our own culture? It is impossible for us to evaluate other ways of life without some strong understanding of the roots of our own.

The Bible Literacy Project also noted a second editorial: “When public schools decline to impart knowledge about such an important subject as the bible, they are not doing anything to preserve the separation of church and state, they are merely failing their students.”

Bible Curricula

The Bible Literacy Project noted that another rationale for advocating for a Bible course in schools is the publication of *The Bible and Public Schools*, which has provided a guide for teaching an academic and legal Bible course. According to Jeynes (2010), two major efforts and curriculums have been launched to reintroduce the Bible into schools: the Bible Literacy Project and the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools (NCBCPS). The Bible Literacy Project has developed a complete curriculum and textbook entitled, *The Bible and Its Influence*. It provides an overview of the entire Bible and its impact on literature, culture, and public life. The Bible Literacy Project stated that the curriculum was reviewed by more than 40 scholars, educators, and First Amendment experts, as well as was endorsed by *TIME Magazine* as a model textbook.

The NCBCPS reported that its curriculum has been used for more than 40 years and has been voted into 687 schools districts, including 2,235 high-schools across 38 states (National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools). According to the NCBCPS, more than 550,000 students nationwide have taken its course on high-school campuses, during school hours, for credit. It lists well-known people on their advisory committee such, as Dr. Charles Stanley, Anne Graham Lotz, and Chuck Norris. It claims

that its curriculum has never been legally challenged (National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools).

However, one should note that, despite the mutual attempts to integrate religion back into schools, tension and conflict continue even between the curricula. According to NCBCPS, there are two approaches to teaching the Bible in school. It states that it uses the Bible as its textbook (King James Version) and reports that its “elective” course “emphasizes the bible as the foundation document of society and is the single most influential book in shaping western culture, our laws, our history, and even our speech, and is a lesson in American heritage (National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools). The NCBCPS reports that “conscientious citizens should be wary of another approach to reintroducing the bible in public schools.” According to NCBCPS, the second approach, “comparable religions, seeks to implement bible courses in the context of world religions, subjecting the bible to inter-faith criticism, judging it by group consensus, and molding it to fit politically correct standards.” The NCBCPS reports that such courses tend to promote Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism (National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools). While NCBCPS stated that these courses are also legal, it reported that, “they teach comparable religions rather than a true Bible curriculum” (National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools).

The NCBCPS also warned that “a secular organization has been promoting a ‘World Religions’ course, which teaches how other faiths interpret and critique the Christian bible” (National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools). It stated that these groups want school districts to believe that this is the only legal way to teach the Bible and indicated that “THIS IS NOT TRUE.” It reported that groups and individuals

with “controversial pasts and questionable motives” are the supporters of the second approach and have been tied to the “Pluralism Project,” which it reported is “a group dedicated to the rejection of absolute truths, the advancement of new world order, and the blending of religions into one” (National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools).

Multicultural Sensitivity

Haynes (2012), reported that “it’s important to ‘get religion right’ in public schools because for better or worse, religious convictions play a central role in shaping events in America and throughout the world” (p. 9). Haynes (2012) reminded his readers that religious differences are at the heart of many of the world’s most violent conflicts. He noted that many Americans have little to no knowledge of other religions besides their own and suggested that religious illiteracy may be a contributing factor to the rising intolerance in the United States. Haynes (2012) acknowledged that many Muslims have been unfairly targeted because of prejudice and intolerance caused by ignorance, and he believes that teaching religion could educate and alleviate the ignorance as well as help students understand contemporary issues. Haynes (2012) stated that teaching tolerance may be one of the most compelling reasons for teaching elementary students about religion.

Jeynes (1999) also reported that many people in America have little knowledge of major religions and stereotype religious people in negative ways, largely because of their lack of knowledge of what religious people believe. Many people cannot even differentiate among Christian groups (Jeynes, 1999). Jeynes (1999) suggested that educating people about the freedom that religious people actually want would lessen a

great deal of the animosity. Some people suggest that elementary school may be the place to start (Ayers & Reid, 2005). Dr. E. D. Hirsch, founder of the Core Knowledge Foundation, reminded his readers that “young children are interested not just in themselves and their immediate surroundings, but also in other people, places, and times . . . We can take advantage of children’s natural curiosity and broaden their horizons by introducing them to knowledge of other times and places” (as cited in Ayers & Reid, 2005).

Haynes (2012) acknowledged the rapidly expanding religious diversity and the new challenges that it presents in building one nation out of many faiths and cultures. However, Haynes (2012) reminded his readers that if Americans hope to prevent religious discrimination and division in the United States, Americans need to take religion seriously by increasing religious literacy and promoting religious freedom as a fundamental and inalienable right for every person. Murray (1995) reported that at least 1,200 organized and distinct religious groups are in the United States.

The Christian Majority

Another compelling reason to return religion to school is that Christians are the majority. Barton (1995), Jeynes (2003), and Murray (1995) remind their readers that, although religious diversity exists in the United States, Christians are still the overwhelming majority. Jeynes (2010) reported that, according to a Gallup poll in 2006, 84% of all Americans subscribed to a Judeo-Christian faith and 5% subscribed to another faith tradition. Smith and Denton (2005) also reported that in the National Study of Youth & Religion (NSYR), in which 3370 youth across the country were randomly surveyed, 75% identified themselves as Christian. In regards to religion in schools,

Murray (1995) believed that the majority should not be held hostage to the minority, and he pointed out that when he and his mother sued his school district in 1963, he was the only student who objected to school prayer and Bible reading in school, yet the whole school had to conform to his wishes. According to Barton (1995) and Murray (1995), opinion polls indicate that a majority of Americans believe that children should have the right to pray in school.

The Importance of Religion in the Lives of Youth

Religion plays a significant role in the lives of youth (Smith & Denton, 2005) and this significant role may be another reason for wanting to integrate religion back into schools. According to Smith and Denton (2005), religion is a significant presence in the lives of youth and is an important and defining feature of the lives of significant numbers of adolescents. According to Regnerus (2003), a Gallup poll in the 1990s revealed that 76% of adolescents, ages 13-17 years, believed in a personal God, and 74% stated that they prayed at least occasionally. Data from the Monitoring the Future Project also suggest that the overall level of religiousness among American adolescents is high (Regnerus, 2003). In their executive summary entitled "Portrait of American Teens (2005)," Schwadel and Smith (2005) reported that 85% of all the teenagers surveyed by the NSYR, a major qualitative and quantitative study of the religious and spiritual lives of American teens, indicated a belief in God, 51% reported that faith was important in shaping their lives, and 56% reported that they committed their life to God.

The NSYR also reported that the surveyed youth held many traditional religious beliefs and that a majority believed in God, but also in afterlife, judgment day, angels, demons, and miracles, and viewed God as a personal being involved in the lives of

people today (Schwadel & Smith, 2005). A majority of the teenagers surveyed were also active in religious organizations and activities within and beyond their churches, and expressed positive views of their churches, which they would continue to attend if it were up to them (Schwadel & Smith, 2005). The NSYR did find some lack of coherence in beliefs; for example, although 73% of the youth surveyed believed in judgment day, only 50% believed in the afterlife (Schwadel & Smith, 2005). The NSYR also reported that although 68% of youth agreed that God is a personal being involved in the lives of people today, a majority of them (38%) reported that they did not feel close to God (Schwadel & Smith, 2005). This lack of closeness may be attributable to the fact that, although a majority reported that faith was important to them and they were committed to God, only 41% of the youth surveyed attended religious services regularly (Schwadel & Smith, 2005). Gunnoe et al. (2009) noted that many of the youth interviewed in this study also described God as not requiring anything of them.

According to Smith and Denton (2005), as of 2005, a majority of teenagers in the United States identified themselves as Christian (52% Protestant and 23% Catholic), and a significant minority identified themselves as Jewish, Mormon, or nonreligious (1.5%, 2.5%, 16%, respectively). A very small sample identified themselves as Jehovah's Witness (.6%), Pagan or Wiccan (.3%), Hindu (.1%), Buddhist (.3%), or Muslim (.5%; Smith & Denton, 2005). In addition, very few teens appeared to be switching to alternative faiths. Smith and Denton (2005) reported that "contrary to popular belief, the notion that the United States is a religiously pluralistic society in terms of religious identity is not true" (p. 261) and they stated that the alleged idea is an "overblown and an erroneous claim" (p. 261). Smith and Denton (2005) agreed that there has been a great

deal of immigration in recent decades, but they reported that many of the immigrants are Christians who are seeking refuge from anti Christian persecution in their home countries, such as the Catholic Latinos from Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America.

Smith and Denton (2005) also reported that many youth share conventional beliefs similar to those of their parents. They found little support for the claim by some researchers that youth today are more “spiritual rather than religious” and have been alienated and rebellious towards religion (Smith & Denton, 2005). An analysis by Smith, Faris, and Denton (2004) of the Monitoring the Future study also confirmed these findings. Smith et al. (2004) found in their study that two thirds of students did not appear to be alienated or hostile toward organized religion; however, 15% of the minority did appear to be alienated, and another 15% appeared to be simply disengaged in attitudes toward religion; being neither warm nor cold. Smith et al. (2004) also reported that the percentage of the minority of adolescents who did appear to be hostile or estranged from organized religion, seems to have remained relatively stable and has not grown in recent decades (1976-1996). Smith et al. (2004) noted females and Blacks adolescents were less likely to be alienated from organized religion than were other adolescents.

A research report by the NSYR (2008) examined religious and spiritual change in the lives of 2,530 adolescents across a three span (Denton, Pearce, & Smith, 2008). Although no dramatic shifts were found, the study revealed a small, but consistent, decrease in conventional religious beliefs and practices (Denton et al., 2008). A majority of the adolescents in the study remained stable in their beliefs; however, slight decreases

occurred in religious affiliation, attendance of services and religious education classes, belief in a personal God, belief in a judgment day, belief in angels, belief in afterlife, and praying and reading scriptures (Denton et al., 2008). They found an increase in the number of adolescents who did not claim any religious affiliation, who were unsure in their belief about God, and who believed in demons and evil spirits, reincarnation, and astrology (Denton et al., 2008). Interestingly, the adolescents evaluated themselves to be just as religious as before these increases or even more religious (Denton et al., 2008).

Although Smith and Denton (2005) did find support for a movement toward Eastern religions, they did not find support for what they called Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Smith and Denton (2005) reported that although many youth claim to be Christian, a significant portion of the historical Christian faith has been morphed into something quite different. Smith and Denton (2005) noted that the original concept of Christianity as “sin and redemption” has been replaced by such concepts as “happiness and niceness.” They claimed that these outlooks are distinctly different from traditional Christian faith commitments (Smith & Denton, 2005). Smith and Denton (2005) reported that most teenagers’ views and opinions are quite different from the actual teachings of their own religion, and most seemed to be unclear about who even Jesus was.

Smith and Denton (2005) noted that very few youth professed to believe the basic tenets of their own faith traditions and most would have failed basic tests of the basic beliefs of their religion. Smith and Denton (2005) were unsure if teens did not really comprehend the tenets of their religious traditions, if they did not care to believe them, or if the inconsistency was a result of living in an individualistic and capitalistic society. In addition, Smith and Denton (2005) stated that the youth they studied had a difficult time

articulating and explaining the concept of religion, appeared confused about their beliefs' implications for their lives, and overall had weak religious and spiritual understanding.

Smith and Denton (2005) concluded that religious organizations were not doing a good job at educating and engaging youth in religion and found little evidence to suggest that agents of religious socialization (churches) were being effective and successful in this task. Smith and Denton (2005) indicated that congregations may have been losing out to other influences for attention, time, and energy. Smith and Denton (2005) reported that school, homework, television, media, sports, activities, work, and relationships were competing factors. According to Smith and Denton (2005), religion was valued, but not invested in, and religious activities were not a priority. Of importance is Smith and Denton (2005) reported that how religiously serious and involved teenagers are is not randomly determined, but reflects the influence of particular social locations and key social relationships.

Influence of Religion in the Lives of Youth

In addition to pointing out that religion is important in adolescent lives, literature also reveals that religiosity is associated with many positive life outcomes (Barton, 1995, Jeynes, 2003; Regnerus, 2003; Smith & Denton, 2005; Smith & Faris, 2002). According to Jeynes (2003), there have been many debates over the role of religion in education since the 1960s, and especially as a result of the recent "school choice" reform issue, many studies have attempted to demonstrate the positive effects for youth. Jeynes (2003) reported that numerous studies have documented that religious schools and religiosity (specifically, church attendance and importance of religious faith) have significant positive effects on American youth and education. Smith and Faris (2002)

examined the Monitoring the Future Project of 2,478 students and stated in their executive summary that they found that religion (regular service attendance, high subjective importance of faith, and years of participating in religious youth groups) among American 12th graders was positively correlated to constructive youth activities and negatively correlated with many delinquent and at-risk behaviors, even after controlling for race, age, sex, rural versus urban residence, region, education of parents, number of siblings, whether the mother works, and the presence of a father or male guardian in the household. Smith and Denton (2005) also reported that religion makes a difference for youth, and they indicated that religion exerts a significant influence on the moral views and choices of youth. NSYR found significant differences between more and less religious teenagers after controlling for other demographic factors and key variables, such as age, sex, race, region of residence, parental marital status, parental education, and parental income (Smith & Denton, 2005).

NSYR studied religiously *devoted*, religiously *regular*, religiously *sporadic*, and religiously *disengaged* youth by combining religiosity factors, such as attending religious services, faith importance, closeness to God, involvement in youth group, praying, and reading scriptures, and grouped them into meaningful categories to rate and measure differences (Smith and Denton, 2005). According to Smith & Denton (2005), pulling various dimensions into categories made a more reasonable and focused limit to their study. The NSYR found significant positive outcomes across a variety of youth attitudes and behaviors (Smith & Denton, 2005). All the differences they found were significant at the 0.05 level, and they noted that the differences were primarily between the devoted and regular teens and the disengaged teens, not between sporadic and disengaged

students. Smith and Denton (2005) summarized that teens who were devoted, religiously active, or at least regular were doing noticeably better than their religiously disengaged peers on a variety of risk behaviors and attitudes, at least when comparing the most and least engaged.

Substance use. Many studies have demonstrated that religion protects against substance abuse (Barton, 1995; Donelson, 1999; Fagen, 2006; Francis, 2002; Francis & Robbins, 2009; Jeynes, 2003; Jeynes, 2009, Sinha, Cnaan, & Gelles, 2007; Regnerus, 2003; Smith & Denton, 2005; Smith & Faris, 2002; and Yonker, Schnabelrauch, & DeHaan, 2012). NSYR found that religiously active teenagers (devoted and regular) were less likely to smoke cigarettes regularly, drink alcohol often, get drunk often, and use marijuana (Smith & Denton, 2005). Smith and Faris (2002) also found that religious 12th graders were less likely to smoke cigarettes; start smoking early; to drink; go to bars; and use, sell, or be offered drugs. They were also more likely to postpone the first use of drugs and first time getting drunk. Sinha et al. (2007) also found from a national sample of 2,004 adolescents that youth who said religion was important in their lives and/or attended religious services were less likely to smoke and use alcohol and drugs, even after controlling for other variables. A meta-analytic review by Yonker et al. (2012) also indicated that religiosity and spirituality have positive outcomes on measures of risk behaviors, such as substance abuse, including smoking, alcohol consumption, and marijuana use. Donelson (1999) also found evidence in her review of literature that religious involvement is associated with a markedly lower risk of alcohol and drug use. A literature review by Regnerus (2003) also documented that religiosity has protective effects on using tobacco, alcohol, and drugs. Regnerus (2003) reported that religious

youth are also less likely to associate with peers who drink or use drugs. Religion also affects treatment outcomes (Regnerus, 2003). According to Regnerus (2003), religious-based drug programs have appeared to lower substance abuse rates among adolescents more so than have health- and social-studies-based programs. However, a review of literature also indicated that religious tradition is less important than internalized or practiced religion (Regnerus, 2003).

Sexual activity. Research also documents that religion significantly impacts sexual activity in adolescents (Barton, 1995; Fagen, 2006; Jeynes, 2003; Jeynes, 2009; Regnerus, 2003; Sinha et al., 2007; Smith & Denton, 2005). According to Regnerus (2003), although religion and other outcomes have modest effects, the effect of religion on sexual behavior is considered quite strong; however, he also noted that few studies have been conducted in this area because of the sensitive nature of the topic. Regnerus (2003) reported that religion affects adolescent sexual behavior because it influences attitudes and beliefs about contraception, permissible premarital sexual activity, pornography, and friendship choices. Regnerus (2003) reported that religious attendance, importance of faith, and denominational affiliation all correspond with lower levels of sexual activity, age of lost virginity, number of sexual partners, and frequency of sexual activity. Overall, religiously devout youth begin having sex later and have fewer sexual partners. However, Regnerus (2003) also reported that more research is needed in the area of oral sex because youth may be substituting or using oral sex as a delay mechanism and some research suggests that religious youth are no less likely than nonreligious youth to engage in oral sex.

The NSYR also found that religiously devoted teens are less likely to watch television and X-rated movies, use the Internet to view pornographic material, and play video games (Smith & Denton, 2005). Differences in sexual beliefs and practices were also noted, and according to Smith and Denton (2005), religiously devoted teens were more likely to believe in waiting for marriage to have sex and less likely to be willing to be touched by another person in the private areas under clothes, have oral sex and sexual intercourse, and have more partners. Sinha et al. (2007) also found evidence from a national sample of 2,004 adolescents that youth who said religion was important in their lives and/or attended religious services were less likely to be sexually active, even after controlling for other variables.

Regnerus (2003) also suggested that research indicates that religious affiliation has been found to impact sex. According to Regnerus (2003), a review of literature indicates that conservative Protestants are least likely to report having sexual activity and Catholics are most likely. Some research also suggests that church attendance and institutional involvement are more influential than intrinsic faith (Regnerus, 2003). According to Regnerus (2003), research indicates that youth who never attend religious services have more than three times as many sexual partners than those who attend weekly. In addition, Regnerus (2003) reported that research indicates that regular service attendance is far more influential than sex education in deterring sexual activity and that permissive attitudes about premarital sex are negatively connected with attendance at religious services.

Regnerus (2003) also reported that virginity pledges can, under certain conditions, substantially delay sexual intercourse, in one study by 34%. Regnerus (2003) also noted

that some research has proposed that having sex lowers religiosity and that those who make virginity pledges are those at the least risk of having sex. In addition, research suggests that pledges work less well with black teens, older teens, and in schools where many students took the pledge (Regnerus, 2003.)

Regnerus (2003) also noted that a review of literature indicates that religious influence on sex is not the case for all youth, reporting that it is most influential for White youth and less so for Black Youth. According to Regnerus (2003), an interesting question that still remains unanswered is as follows: If Black youth are found to be more religious than White youth, why do they continue to display consistently early sexual activity? Some researchers have suggested that earlier sexual maturity and development among Black youth is the answer. Others believe that at-risk or urban youth are underserved (Regnerus, 2003). Another area of sexuality is the topic of homosexuality, about which little research has been done in terms of adolescents (Regnerus, 2003). However, Regnerus (2003) reported that a negative relationship has been documented between some religious affiliations and sentiments about homosexuality.

Delinquency. A review of literature demonstrates that religious involvement is also associated with a marked lower risk of delinquency (Barton, 1995; Donelson, 1999; Jeynes, 2003; Regnerus, 2003; Smith & Denton, 2005, Smith & Faris, 2002; Yonker et al., 2012). Regnerus (2003) reported that research on delinquency began in 1969 and has been more contentious than any other area in terms of religion and outcomes. According to Regnerus (2003), Hirschi and Stark published a study in 1969 entitled *Hellfire and Delinquency*, which suggested that religious practices and the fear of godly judgment had no impact on adolescent delinquency. In summary, they found no hellfire effect

(Regnerus, 2003). Other studies since then have suggested that delinquency had to do more with community “norms and values” and have found that there is an impact from religion on victimless crimes, such as underage drinking and drug use (Regnerus, 2003). According to Regnerus (2003), Stark has since suggested that religiosity is related to conformity in communities where the mean level of religiosity is high and is more of a sociological process as opposed to social-psychological process. However, other researchers have suggested a “contingency theory” of religious effects on deviance and found that when religious youth are embattled against a secular culture around them, they will stand out from their peers (Regnerus, 2003).

However, Yonker et al. (2012) found in their meta-analytic review that religiosity and spirituality were associated with diminished deviant behavior, such as vandalism, stealing, and assault. Smith and Faris (2002) found that religious 12th graders were associated with fewer violent incidents, such as hitting teachers and getting into fights, than were their nonreligious peers. They were also less likely than nonreligious 12th graders to commit crimes such as shop-lifting, theft of more than \$50, vandalism, trespassing, auto theft, arson, and armed robbery, and to report getting in trouble with the police (Smith & Faris, 2002). Desmond et al. (2001) also found that adolescent religiosity (church attendance, importance assigned to religion, and frequency of prayer) correlated with higher levels of self-control (as cited in Jeynes, 2003).

According to Regnerus (2003), research indicates that parental religiosity has a profound effect in shaping delinquent behavior and that parental religiosity has both direct and indirect effects on youth delinquent behavior. Regnerus (2003) reported that as parental religiosity rises, child delinquency generally falls. Parental prayer is also

associated with lower delinquency (Regnerus, 2003). In addition, when parent and children differ in religious affiliation and importance, delinquency is substantially higher (Regnerus, 2003). However, Regnerus (2003) mentioned that while some research indicates that religion might reduce delinquency, some evidence also suggests that delinquency might influence youth to devalue religion.

Moral reasoning. Some research also demonstrates that religion may increase moral reasoning (Barton, 1995; Regnerus, 2003; Smith & Denton, 2005). The NSYR studied moral reasoning and honesty behaviors and reported that religious disengaged youth were more likely to be moral relativists, lie to their parents, and cheat (Smith & Denton, 2005). However, Regnerus (2003) reported that results in the literature continue to be mixed. Regnerus (2003) found one study by Bruggeman and Hart (1996) that evaluated the likelihood of lying and cheating when provided with an incentive to lie or cheat. According to Regnerus (2003), the study found no statistical differences between religious and secular high-school students in terms of moral reasoning. Smith and Denton (2005) also noted that the NSYR found a large minority of teenagers who regularly attend religious services but appear to be moral relativists, do not have good relationships, act dishonestly, are sexually active, do not care about racial equality, do not give money to organizations or causes, and are not involved in the civic life of their communities. Smith and Denton (2005) concluded that many religious communities have teachings, commitments, and expectations that teenagers are not living up to.

Volunteer activities. Some research also indicates that religious adolescents have more compassion for others and volunteer more frequently (Fagen, 2006; Regnerus, 2003; Smith & Denton, 2005; Smith & Faris, 2002). For example, the NSYR found that

religiously devoted teenagers have more compassion for less fortunate people (poor and elderly) and concern for justice (care about racial equality; Smith & Denton, 2005). According to Smith and Denton (2005), religious youth are also more likely to be involved in organized activities, more likely to do community or volunteer work, more likely to do such work more often, more likely to help the homeless and needy, and more likely to give their own money to organizations or causes. Smith and Denton (2005) also noted that religious youth are more likely to be involved in their communities and come in contact with others with differences, which bridges social capital, fosters social cohesion and trust, and cultivates leadership skills. Regnerus (2003) confirmed these findings and reported that a study by the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) revealed that adolescents' religious behavior and positive perceptions of religion were related to more frequent volunteer work and more time spent on extracurricular activities and may indicate some sort of underlying "attachment to society." Smith and Faris (2002) reported that religious 12th graders were more likely to volunteer in their communities, participate in student government, and play sports than were their nonreligious peers.

Emotional health. In addition to religion decreasing at-risk behaviors and increasing pro-social behaviors, research suggests that religion positively impacts an adolescent's emotional health (Donelson, 1999; Fagen, 2006; Jeynes, 2003; Regnerus, 2003; Smith & Denton, 2005; Yonker et al., 2012). The NSYR found that religious involvement is associated with greater well-being and more positive perceptions and attitudes about life and the future (Smith & Denton, 2005). Religious youth are more likely to feel happy about their bodies and physical appearance (Smith & Denton, 2005). They are also less

likely to feel sad and depressed, alone and misunderstood, invisible, uncared for, and that life is meaningless (Smith & Denton, 2005). Yonker et al. (2012) also found in a meta-analytic review that religiosity and spirituality were associated with fewer depressive symptoms and greater well-being and self-esteem, and were associated with positive personality traits, such as agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness.

Regnerus (2003) also reported that several studies in his review of literature also reported a positive relationship between religiosity and self-esteem and that personal religiosity corresponded with significantly lower distress and higher social adjustment. Although surprising, Regnerus (2003) noted that very few studies in the literature have focused on depression or suicide in youth. According to Regnerus (2003), the little research that has been done indicates a negative correlation between depression and suicide and religiosity. Sinha et al. (2007), in a national study of 2,004 adolescents, found evidence that youth who said that religion was important in their lives and/or attended religious services were less likely to report feelings of depression. However, Donelson (1999) found in her review of literature that intrinsic orientation to religion predicted lower depression for Christians, but not for those of other religious affiliations.

Donelson (1999) did find evidence that religion may help people deal with stress. According to Donelson (1999), there is some evidence of a positive association between church attendance and self-defined religiousness and lower levels of distress and worry, better adjustment, and life satisfaction, as well as positive associations between religion and mental health. However, Donelson (1999) made note that research is still unclear if positive health leads to religion or if religion leads to good health.

Physical health. In addition to emotional health, some research demonstrates that religion impacts physical health as well (Donelson, 1999; Fagen, 2006; Jeynes, 2003; Regnerus, 2003). Regnerus (2003) reported that in adults the influence of religion is remarkable, and weekly church attendance has protective effects against death that are comparable to the harmful effect of smoking a pack of cigarettes as day, which is 7 years. However, Regnerus (2003) pointed out that very few studies on adolescent physical and emotional health appear in the literature when compared to the number of studies on delinquency, sex, or education. Regnerus's (2003) review of literature found one study that revealed a positive relationship between religiosity and health behaviors, such as diet, exercise, sleep habits, and seatbelt use, and the study concluded that religiosity promotes long-term physical well-being. Smith and Faris (2002) also found that religious 12th graders were more likely to receive fewer traffic tickets, more likely to wear seatbelts, less likely to enjoy danger and taking risks, and more likely to exercise at least weekly. Donelson (1999) suggested that religion may help people by prescribing and encouraging a healthy lifestyle.

Family relationships. In addition to emotional and physical health, research suggests that religion positively impacts family relationships (Barton, 1995; Fagen, 2006; Jeynes, 2003; Regnerus, 2003; Smith & Denton, 2005; Smith & Kim, 2003). According to the NSYR, religiously devoted teenagers are more likely than nonreligious teenagers to have better family and meaningful relationships and report that they feel close to, get along better with, and spend time with their mother and father, and feel that their parents understand them, love them, accept them, and pay attention to them (Smith & Denton, 2005). They are also much less likely to be rated as rebellious by their parents or to have

a bad temper (Smith & Denton, 2005). In addition, they get along better with siblings than do nonreligious counterparts (Smith and Denton, 2005). According to Smith & Denton (2005), religiously devoted teenagers also have a larger number of non-parental adults in their lives to whom they can turn for support, advice, and help, and are likely to have adult supervision. Smith and Denton (2005) also noted religious parents feel they know more supportive people in their children's lives to whom they can talk. Religion also facilitates network closure (Smith & Denton, 2005).

Smith and Kim (2003) also reported that, using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of Youth in 1997, they found that adolescents living in religiously involved families (including involvement, parental attendance, and parental prayer) are more likely to report stronger and more positive relationships between themselves and their parents than do adolescents in families that are not religiously involved, even after controlling for other possible influences of demographic and socioeconomic factors. In addition, overall research suggests that the more important religion is to a mother, the more likely her child is to report a higher quality of relationship with her (Regnerus, 2003). Research has also found that when children enjoy emotionally supportive relationships with their mothers and perceive their parents to be more accepting of them, the more likely the youth is to internalize the parent's religious beliefs and practices and increase private religiosity (Regnerus, 2003). Regnerus (2003) also reported that research suggests that religious mothers are especially influential upon sons.

Academic achievement. Lastly, research indicates that religion positively impacts education and academic performance (Barton, 1995; Fagen, 2006; Jeynes, 2003; Regnerus, 2003; Smith & Denton, 2005; Smith & Faris, 2002). According to Regnerus

(2003), research consistently indicates that religious schools far surpass public schools in terms of achievement, especially in low-income neighborhoods, and concludes that the gap continues to widen. Jeynes (2003), using a federal data set of 124 studies in the research literature, conducted the first ever meta-analysis examining the effects of religious schools and religiosity on academic outcomes. The studies that the meta-analysis drew from generally took into consideration factors of socioeconomic status and gender (Jeynes, 2003). According to Jeynes (2003), a limitation to the study is that almost all subjects of the studies were of Christian faith.

Jeynes (2003) concluded that the results of the meta-analysis support the notion that attending religious schools and having personal religious commitment are associative with higher levels of academic achievement. The overall effect size for the impact of students attending religious schools in America was .17 ($p < .05$; Jeynes, 2003). For achievement tests, the effect size was .18 (Reading .17, Math .17, Science .12, Social Studies .14, Writing .27, and Vocabulary .23; Jeynes, 2003). GPA effect size was .11 and other measures effect size was .24 (Jeynes, 2003). Middle-school students were found to have the highest effects (Jeynes, 2003).

Data results of the analysis from the NELS by Jeynes (2003) also indicated that religious schools outperform nonreligious schools in the five trait areas of better school atmosphere, higher level of racial harmony, more school discipline, less school violence, and more homework. Of these five traits, more homework, racial harmony, and less school violence were also shown to be positively correlated to academic achievement (Jeynes, 2003). Of the educational behavioral outcomes examined, the largest effect size emerged for school safety (.45; Jeynes, 2003). According to Jeynes (2003), results

indicated that students regard religious schools more than public schools as loving, safe, and enjoyable places to learn. Jeynes (2003) also found that discipline problems were far less likely in religious schools than in public schools in terms of cutting class and disobeying teachers.

According to Regnerus (2003), religiosity (attendance or involvement) has also been found to predict academic success and desirable educational outcomes. Regnerus (2003) reported that research indicates that teens who are more religiously involved report higher educational expectations, spend more time on homework, avoid truancy, receive higher math scores, take advanced mathematics courses, and are more likely to receive a high school diploma. Regnerus (2003) found in his own study that attending religious services was related to heightened educational expectations and that intensely religious youth scored higher on standardized math and reading tests, even after accounting for other important factors. Youth religious involvement was also especially positively related to youth from low-income neighborhoods (Regnerus, 2003). A study by Fagen (2006) of a sample of 4,027 students from a survey of 90,000 American adolescents by the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health also found that teens from intact families with frequent religious attendance earned the highest GPA (2.94) when compared to that of their peers with intact families with low to no religious attendance (2.75). The NSYR also found that religious youth are less likely to cut class, be suspended or expelled from school, or earn bad grades (Smith & Denton, 2005). Smith and Faris (2002), using the Monitoring the Future dataset, found that religious 12th graders, when compared to nonreligious 12th graders, tended to behave better in school and were less likely to be sent to detention, skip school, or be suspended and expelled. In

addition, a national study of 2,004 youth found that adolescents who said religion was important in their lives and/or attended religious services were less likely than nonreligious peers to be truant (Sinha et al., 2007). Donelson's (1999) review of literature also provided evidence that religious involvement is associated with increased academic and social competence.

Jeynes (2003), in his meta-analysis of the overall body of literature on religious commitment (showing religious actions and perceiving oneself as religious) and educational outcomes found generally significant levels of impact. Effect size for overall academic achievement was .14 and for achievement tests was .17 (Reading .19, Math .21, Science .15, Social Studies .16), GPA .08, and other measures .22 (Jeynes, 2003). Jeynes (2003) also found that religious students have the advantage of five learning habits that are strongly related with academic performance; taking harder courses, diligence, work habits, work handed in on time, and paying attention.

Jeynes (2003) also studied the effects of religious commitment on problem behavior and found in his meta-analysis that religious commitment had a positive impact on school behavior (.32). Religiously committed students were less likely to consume illegal drugs and alcohol (.28), and extrinsic religiosity (attending religious activities) had a greater impact than intrinsic religiosity (Jeynes, 2003). According to Jeynes (2003), overall, the meta-analysis actually showed a larger effect size for school behavior than it did for academic outcomes.

Regnerus (2003) suggested that the ritual action of attending worship services constitutes a form of social integration and reinforces values conducive to educational achievement. Regnerus (2003) argued that religious involvement also likely signifies a

level of social control and motivation toward education. According to Regnerus (2003), religious organizations provide functional communities among dysfunction (high-poverty neighborhoods) and reinforce parental support networks and control and provide social capital. Regnerus (2003) reported that he and Elder in 2001 concluded that religious organizations are not less functional in more advantaged neighborhoods, but they are just one of the many functional communities already established there-where social organization and is established and law abiding norms are expected and upheld. Regnerus (2003) suggested that religious communities may provide self-discipline, access to resources, and positive role models that shape the values of youth in pro-social directions. In addition, spending time in more religious activities may crowd out other potential negative influences (Regnerus, 2003). Regnerus (2003) also indicated that “religious involvement appears to impact the best and worst students; stimulating the brightest students, and shielding the worst from academic failure; suggesting that rigorous self-discipline and valuing persistence may play a key role.”

Barrett (2010) concluded that religious involvement can be especially beneficial for urban Black adolescents because it provides access to forms of social and cultural capital selectively valued and rewarded by the mainstream education system. Church-going urban youth have been associated with higher rates of school attendance, and religious attendance is inversely correlated with dropping out of school and has been considered a protective factor in fostering pro-social behavior and development (Barrett, 2010). Barrett (2010) found religious involvement to relate significantly and positively with educational outcomes using a representative sample of urban high-school seniors. Barrett (2010) hypothesized that social capital (economic and social resources) would

explain and mediate much of the influence of religious involvement. They found that while social capital explained much of the influence, there was still a moderate but significant link between desirable outcomes and religious involvement (Barrett, 2010). In Barrett's (2010) study, religious involvement remained the most effective predictor of positive educational outcomes. Barrett also revealed that the relationship between religious involvement and successful educational outcomes was much stronger for Black students in the city than for their White counterparts (Barrett, 2010).

Jeynes (2003) also found in his meta-analysis of 15 studies that Black and Hispanic children who attended a religious school outperformed their less religious counterparts on standardized measures of math and reading. The overall effect size was .25, and was true even after controlling for socioeconomic status and gender (Jeynes, 2003). Minority students who were religiously committed also outperformed their nonreligious counterparts on overall academic achievement (Jeynes, 2003). The overall effect size was .16 (Jeynes, 2003). Jeynes (2003) also found an effect size of .32 on school-related behavior.

Cognitive ability. In addition to achievement scores, some research has found evidence that religion impacts cognitive ability. Regnerus (2003) cited a study that found religious service attendance corresponded with higher verbal ability in girls. Zern in 1989, also examined the effects of students' religious commitment on college academic achievement and found that it was related to students living up to their ability level (as measured by the SAT and GRE; as cited in Jeynes, 2003). Jeynes (2003), however, reported that the students did not show any tendency to perform better academically.

Reasons Religion May Exert a Positive Influence

Research indicates many reasons why and how religion influences teenagers (Donelson, 1999; Hill & Pargament, 2008, Jeynes, 2003; Regnerus, 2003; Smith & Denton, 2005). Pargament et al. (2008) reported there are sociological, psychological, and physiological reasons or explanations for why religion exerts positive effects.

Sociological Processes

Smith and Denton (2005) proposed that specific sociological processes are at work and theorized that religion could exert a positive effect on human consciousness and action because of the sociology of religion; it socializes, motivates, constrains, and directs human assumptions, values, preferences, moral commitments, choices, and behaviors. Smith (2003) developed a systematic account of how and why religion exerts significant positive, constructive effects on youth and suggested that nine distinct yet interrelated, mutually reinforcing factors, including three key dimensions of influence (moral order, learned competencies, and social and organizational ties). According to Smith and Denton (2005), religious involvement provides moral directives, spiritual experiences, role models, community and leadership skills, coping skills, cultural capital, social capital, network closure, and extra-community links. These factors cluster as groups of three large factors, and underneath, three specific factors (Smith & Denton, 2005).

According to Smith and Denton (2005), moral order is the cultural traditions that promote normative ideas of right and wrong that are established not by people's own desires, but apart from them, and provide standards by which people judge themselves. Smith and Denton (2005) reported moral order orients consciousness and motivates

action. Moral order is comprised of *moral directives* (the authority of long historical traditions that many religious organizations bring), *spiritual experiences* (personal experiences, such as conversion, answer to prayer, and miracles that religious organizations help to facilitate to reinforce and solidify religious moral order, and *role-models* (provision of adult and peer group role models and relationships that provide incentives that reinforce behavior and raise the cost of violating the moral order; Smith & Denton, 2005). Smith and Denton (2005) noted that many youth are up against American capitalism and advertising trends that promote a moral order of virtues, including self-gratification, assertion, competition, conformity, perpetual experimentation, and material acquisition.

Learned competencies increase youth competencies, skills, and knowledge and improve life chances (Smith & Denton, 2005). Learned competencies are comprised of *community and leadership skills* (provide contexts and opportunities during which youth can observe, learn, and practice valuable community life skills and provide a chance to acquire and practice skills that can increase their confidence and functional abilities), *coping skills* (promote a variety of beliefs and practices that can effectively strengthen the ability to cope with the stress of difficult situations, process emotions, and resolve interpersonal conflicts), and *cultural capital* (provides alternative opportunities beyond home that can enhance well-being, and academic benefits, and assist in providing constructive outcomes in lives; Smith & Denton, 2005). Smith and Denton (2005) discussed the benefits of believing that something loving and omnipotent is in control of one's life; that God guides, gives strength, understands and shares in suffering, ultimately rewarding and providing punishments; that suffering builds character; and that everything

works for the greater good. Smith and Denton (2005) noted that the sacred, divine, and generations of belief can enhance and provide one with greater significance and meaning.

Social and organizational ties are the relationships that affect the opportunities of young people and include *social capital* (access to adults of all ages, which facilitates a cross-generational network linking youth to sources of helpful information, resources, and opportunities, as well as accountability), *network closure* (an extra familial network of people who can provide youth with attention, monitoring, and supervision, as well as provide information and support to parents) and *extra-community links* (connections of youth to positive new experiences, events, and challenges beyond their community that enhance competency, confidence, and knowledge through such opportunities as summer camps, retreats, mission trips; Smith & Denton, 2005). Smith and Denton (2005) noted that youth are usually socialized by their peers because of their limited exposure to others. According to Smith and Denton (2005), religious institutions provide a place for interaction and foster good life choices.

Regnerus (2003) also suggested that religion influences youth directly and indirectly, such as by shaping parenting behaviors that ultimately influence youth's lives. Regnerus (2003) noted that the marital pair and family unit are sacred structures and important parts of the American Christian faith, and religious affiliation has been found to impact parenting skills. According to Regnerus (2003), Protestant parents value obedience in their children more so than do parents of other denominations and appear to be more likely to use physical punishment and spank their children more frequently (one should note that spanking is considered a mild form of punishment, not considered child abuse). However, conservative Protestants are also more likely to hug and praise their children

than are those from less conservative traditions (Regnerus, 2003). Regnerus (2003) indicated that parental religiosity and priorities through authoritative parenting have been found to promote adolescent social responsibility; outcomes consisting of honesty, self-control, obedience, and trustworthiness. In addition, religion may also impact parental monitoring or youth choice of friends (Regnerus, 2003). Smith and Faris (2002) also found that religious 12th graders were more likely than nonreligious 12th graders to have strict parents and were less likely to argue with them.

Psychological Processes

Smith (2008) advocated for critical realism and believed that causes for the influences of religion are multiple and complex and that interaction among beliefs, practices, and subjective experiences transpire in complex interactive processes over time. For example, Smith (2007) suggested that Christianity works not only because of social processes, but also because of social-psychological processes, and indicates that these social-psychological processes may explain why religion, specifically Christianity, has managed to endure for more than 2,000 years. According to Smith (2007), believing that the cosmos is not empty is a factor that makes Christianity work; it meets many basic mental and emotional human needs and desires for a significant and meaningful life, unconditional love, confession of sin, grace and forgiveness, transcendent worship, moral living, and sense of community belonging. Smith (2003) noted that most American religions also comprise and foster many beliefs and practices that can strengthen young people's ability to cope effectively with life's problems and offer youth a variety of cognitive and behavioral resources to address and process life's mental, emotional, and interpersonal stresses and troubles. These resources include prayer, meditation,

confession, forgiveness, reconciliations, Sabbath keeping, small group sharing, funeral rites, and cleaning rituals (Smith, 2003).

Newberg and Waldman (2009) also reported that religious tradition provides a sense of purpose and meaning. Hill and Pargament (2008) reported that religion can orient and motivate people, and provide direction for living, attachment, and support. Donelson (1999) also found that religion may help people cope with stress by giving a sense of meaning, stimulating hope, giving a sense of control, prescribing a healthy lifestyle, setting positive social norms, providing social support, and giving a sense of the supernatural. In addition, a religious causal attribution may influence the way people cope with stress (Donelson, 1999).

Physiological Processes

In addition to sociological and psychological processes, some researchers believe that religion changes the brain through physiological processes as well, and these processes are discussed in more detail in later sections (McNamara, 2001, Newberg & Waldman, 2009).

Religion and Negative Outcomes

The overall body of research supports that religion has positive effects; however, some research concludes that religion does not always influence positive outcomes and may, in fact, negatively impact youth (Hill & Pargament, 2008; Newberg & Waldman, 2009; Regnerus, 2003; Smith, 2003; Smith & Denton, 2005). Hill and Pargament (2008) reported that some research suggests that religion induces several types of struggles; interpersonal (conflicts with others), intrapersonal (internal), and struggles with God (questioning or doubt), which may lead to negative health outcomes. According to Hill

and Pargament (2008), religious and spiritual struggles have been associated with psychological distress, anxiety, depression, poorer quality of life, panic disorder, and suicidality.

Smith (2003) noted that some research has investigated destructive tendencies among mainstream clergy, and others have noted potentially destructive aspects and outcomes of youth in some new religious movements. Research has also found that membership in a strict religious order can induce feelings of anger, anxiety, and fear (Newberg and Waldman, 2009). Newberg and Waldman (2009) concluded that “religion isn’t the problem, the problem is authoritarianism coupled with the desire to angrily impose one’ idealistic beliefs on others” (p. 11).

Some evidence also suggests that certain aspects of religiosity have negative effects in terms of educational achievement. Regnerus (2003) reported that certain religious affiliations, such as conservative Protestant or fundamentalist, may lower educational aspirations. Regnerus (2003) indicated that these religious affiliations may shun secular education, may be less likely to take college prep courses, and may understand college as involving material gain. Research also indicates that conservative Protestants hold distinctly lower perceptions of the merit of a college education (Regnerus, 2003). According to Regnerus (2003), religious identification plays a role in life choices, such as marriage and childbearing, which impacts the pursuit of a college degree.

Smith and Denton (2005) discussed the fact that not all religious organizations provide youth with the same quantity or quality of resources and this inconsistency may be the reason for some of the mixed results. Smith and Denton (2005) pointed out that

some organizations may even be detrimental, noting such problems as abusive leaders, hypocrites, and dysfunctional organization that may influence negative youth outcomes. Smith and Denton (2005) also expressed that some organizations provide only a few weak resources (inadequate supply); remain detached, marginal, and uninvolved; and fail to engage youth during disruptive life events, such as divorce or tragedy. There are also competing influences, such as peer pressure and competing moral order and practices (Smith & Denton, 2005).

Some researchers concluded that the mixed results in the literature may be the result of poor measurement of the concept of religion (Regnerus, 2003). Donelson (1999) also commented upon the fact that research in the area of religion and mental health has a long history of ambiguous and confusing results, possibly because researchers have used a diversity of measures of religion. Donelson (1999) stated that cultural differences and subjectivity make defining the variables extremely challenging.

Need for More Studies on Religion

Some researchers have suggested that the mixed results in the literature call for more research in the area of religion and youth, as well as better measurement of the concepts (Donelson, 1999; Regnerus, 2003). Some researchers such as Smith et al. (2004), indicated that much of the data and research that are available are also outdated. Donelson (1999) noted that religion was once respected and very important to psychologists in the early years, such as William James and Stanley Hall, who wrote about the importance of moral and religious training to developmental psychology. However, over the years, the study of religion has declined because of the increased need to be more scientific (Donelson, 1999). Donelson (1999) reported that although more

research is needed, there is generally more attention to adolescents than adults in the literature.

Jeynes (2003) suggested that religion is a variable that is no longer considered valuable in impacting youth or shaping youth behavior. Regnerus et al. (2003) also reported that, although religion has been found to have profound effects, “the relationship with health and social behavior is often minimized or ignored” (p. 7). For example, they cited a 726- page congressional report titled, “Adolescent Health,” which included only two references to religion (Regnerus et al., 2003). Regnerus (2003) also reported that a 1990 Thomas and Craver analysis of 60 textbooks about children and adolescents published between 1960 -1988 found no reference at all to religion in 75% of them. Donelson (1999) suggested that the neglect of religion in texts and the lack of knowledge generate and perpetuate bias.

Hill and Pargament (2003) reported that a review of literature indicates that religion and spirituality are understudied in the field of psychology for several reasons, such as the fact that religion and spirituality are less important to psychologists than the public as a whole, the fact that religion falls outside the scientific scope of study, and the misperceived belief that religion is decreasing in an increasing scientific era. Hill and Pargament (2003) also noted that when religion is studied, it is usually studied only as an add-on variable within a study, or global indices are used, such as the denominational affiliation, frequency of church attendance, or self-rated religiousness and spirituality. Hill and Pargament (2008) encouraged researchers to study the specifics about religion and spirituality that lead to greater mental health.

Jeynes (2003, 2009) reported that, although social scientists have demonstrated an interest in studying the effects of religion on school achievement and behavior, research that does target adolescents generally examines religious institutions rather than the religious commitment of students. In addition, the research that is conducted on the religiosity of students usually focuses specifically on church attendance or importance of beliefs (Jeynes, 2003). Subjects are also primarily of the Christian faith (Hill & Pargament, 2008; Jeynes, 2003). According to Jeynes (2003), more research is needed on the individual religious beliefs of students, which may be just as important as the religious beliefs of the institutions that they attend.

McCullough and Willoughby (2009) defined religion as “cognition, affect, and behavior that arise from awareness of, or perceived interaction with, supernatural entities that are presumed to play an important role in human affairs” (p. 71). They stated that psychological components of religion can be measured by beliefs about the existence of God and involvement in human life; level of engagement in activities, such as prayer or religious service attendance; and strength of commitment to a particular religious belief system. Hill and Pargament (2003) reported that researchers have found that religiosity involves a complexity of variables, including cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and physiological dimensions. Donelson (1999) also reported that people differ in their religious orientation and these differences are important to study, such as intrinsic or extrinsic beliefs, strength of beliefs, and reasons for religious affiliation. Smith and Denton (2005) also noted that levels of religiosity in American religious culture are determined not by one, but by a variety of dimensions of religion including beliefs, practices, experiences, affiliations, and group participation. However, Regnerus (2003)

noted that many studies consider only one or two dimensions of religiosity, such as affiliation or attendance, and because religion is “multidimensional,” he suggested that more studies are needed in this area. Rew, Wong, and Sternglanz (2004) also indicated that religiosity is treated as a unidimensional construct and few specific religious beliefs and practices are studied.

In conducting a review of literature, very few studies measured different concepts of religiosity. The NSYR, a huge study of adolescent youth in which data were collected on various religious beliefs, experiences, and practices, failed to measure the effects of the different concepts separately and instead combined all the concepts into one dimension of overall “religiosity” to make a more reasonable and focused study (Smith & Denton, 2005). However, research indicates that religious beliefs, religious experiences or attachment, and religious practices or commitment are all important, but very different concepts that need to be more fully addressed individually (Hill & Pargament, 2008; Jaynes, 2003; Regnerus, 2003; Rew et al., 2004) and are further discussed in the following sections.

Religious Cognitive Beliefs

Specific religious beliefs that adolescents hold are an important component of religiosity because they can serve to control behavior (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). According to McCullough and Willoughby (2009), “the hypothesis that religion exists to control people’s behavior is one of the oldest hypotheses in the scientific study of religion” (p. 88). McCullough and Willoughby (2009) indicated that most religious belief systems presume that gods or spirits observe humans’ behavior, pass judgment, and then administer rewards or punishments. The Theory of Mind is a mechanism that

enables one to attribute mental states to other persons or agents, and when humans postulate a God or pray to a God, they are attributing certain cognitive properties to that God; among them to the property of possessing a mind (McNamara, 2001). Literature indicates that a perceived presence of an evaluative audience increases self-awareness and self regulation (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009).

According to McNamara (2001), the frontal lobe plays a crucial role in both belief fixation and executive functioning. McNamara (2001) noted that the frontal lobes make up the large expanse of the cortex in the anterior portions of the brain, and the prefrontal areas are divided into two large functional regions that include the paralimbic cortex of the anterior cingulate region and the orbitofrontal, as well as the dorsolateral, prefrontal region. Much of the functioning of the frontal lobes can be inferred from the patterns of connectivity, which are virtually interconnected to all other cortical sites (McNamara, 2001). According to McNamara (2001), connectivity implies that the frontal lobes are in a position to inhibit and regulate the output of other cortical regions and impact executive-functioning skills.

McNamara (2001) indicated that adults with prefrontal lesions are often associated with executive-functioning deficits and disinhibition of drives and dorsolateral and orbitofrontal lesions are associated with a variety of “higher order” functional deficits. There is also evidence that executive functions of the frontal lobes depend partly on dopaminergic activity (McNamara, 2001). According to McNamara (2001), dopamine neurons have been associated with the reward and pleasure systems of the brain and have been implicated in addictions. People with Parkinson’s disease are

dramatically impaired on tests of executive functioning and exhibit decreases in religiosity (McNamara, 2001).

According to McNamara (2001), pro-social behavior and empathy also depend on frontal-lobe functioning. McNamara (2001) noted that Theory of Mind allows one to understand the thoughts, perceptions, and feelings of others, and the ability to engage in moral choice, empathy, and pro-social behavior is generally the ability to delay gratification of one's own impulses. Impairments in Theory of Mind have been documented in antisocial psychopaths and certain types of autism and have been linked to orbitofrontal dysfunction. Two blood flow studies have also implicated orbitofrontal sites in the Theory of Mind processes (McNamara, 2001).

McNamara (2001) concluded that frontal lobes appear to mediate those capacities and functions that uniquely define us as mature and frontal lobe activation and development is a desirable outcome. However, McNamara (2001) reminded the reader that the frontal lobes are often not fully developed until adolescence or adult years. The child's ability to delay gratification of impulses develops with maturation of the frontal lobes, which increase in size and connectivity with development (McNamara, 2001). McNamara (2001) suggested that religion functions to activate the development of the frontal networks and religious practices are associated with the activation of the lobes, particularly the prefrontal cortex, which mediates executive functions. According to McNamara (2001), human cultures throughout the world have developed practices and educational systems that promote development of the frontal lobes, and all religions claim to increase pro-social behavior, empathy, and moral insight.

Other researchers have confirmed these findings (Newberg & Waldman, 2009). An exciting new discovery in the field of neuroscience is that religion literally changes one's brain (Newberg & Waldman, 2009). Neurotheologist Dr. Andy Newberg and Dr. Mark Waldman and their research team at the University of Pennsylvania have studied, through the use of neuroimaging, how contemplating God alters neural functioning (Newberg & Waldman, 2009). They found through brain scans that intense long-term contemplation of God and other spiritual values appears to change permanently the structure of those parts of the brain that control moods, give rise to conscious notions of self, and shape sensory perceptions of the world. Newberg and Waldman (2009) noted that contemplating God causes different circuits in the brain to become activated, while others become deactivated. According to Newberg and Waldman (2009), contemplation of God strengthens specific neurological circuits, enhances social awareness and empathy, and subdues destructive feelings and emotions, such as anger and fear.

Johnstone and Glass (2008) also reported that the frontal-parietal lobe circuits play a role in spirituality and reported that recent research indicates that spiritual experiences are related to increased physiological activity of the frontal and temporal lobes and decreased activity of the right parietal lobe. However, Johnstone and Glass (2008) found that their study supported only the decreased parietal lobe activity; however, they also reported that their participants were not engaged in a religious activity when the study was done. According to Seybold (2005), the role of the brain in religious experience is a new way of investigating religious experience that has emerged in the last decade. *Neurotheology* is the new term that is often defined as how the mind/brain functions in terms of one's relationship to God.

However, McCullough and Willoughby (2009) have indicated that one should consider the possibility that self-control precedes religiousness and that very little causal research suggests religiosity precedes self-control. Hathaway and Barkley (2003) pointed out that children with Attention Deficit Disorder with Hyperactivity (ADHD), which is a deficit in executive-functioning abilities, such as self-control, behavioral inhibition, and moral regulation, often have additional challenges that could adversely impact their religious development and spiritual journey, such as religious socialization, religious focus, internalizing faith, spiritual growth, and religious alienation. For example, church attendance can be a problem because of behavioral problems, conforming to religious roles and expectations regarding conduct can be a problem, and difficulty sustaining attention and concentration can negatively affect acquisition and retention of the material (Hathaway & Barkley, 2003). According to Hathaway and Barkley (2003), difficulty in consistently maintaining a spiritually disciplined life can affect the frequency of prayer, and difficulty in motivation can affect the ability to delay immediate gratification in favor of the distant hope of heaven. Hathaway and Barkley (2003) reported that as these children enter adulthood, it is not surprising that many of them feel separated from God and their community of faith.

Despite the controversy, McCullough and Willoughby (2009) provided a comprehensive review of the literature on religion, self-regulation, and self-control and found evidence that certain types of religious belief, behavior, and cognition can foster self-regulation and self-control. McCullough and Willoughby (2009) identified five key propositions or reasons for why religion can promote self-control: religion can influence self-regulation by influencing people's goals (selection and importance), religion can

promote self-monitoring (by supernatural forces, religious communities, and rituals), religion can build self-regulatory strength (through exercising self-regulation and practicing rituals), religion can prescribe and promote mastery with religious outputs (prayer, meditation, positive imagery, consulting religious texts), and religion can affect health, well-being, and social behavior. However, again McCullough and Willoughby (2009) noted that self-regulation may also explain some of these associations.

McCullough and Willoughby's (2009) literature review brought about some of the following findings on religiousness and individual differences: (a) Religious parents and families tend to have children with higher levels of self-control. (b) Intrinsic religious motivation versus extrinsic religious motivation is positively associated with self-control. (c) Personality traits, such as agreeableness, conscientiousness, and low psychoticism, are also associated with religiousness and self-control. (d) Religious people tend to have higher conscientiousness, agreeableness, and self-control than spiritual people.

McCullough and Willoughby (2009) suggested the idea that something about religious beliefs, behaviors, institutions, and rituals themselves may be responsible for the link between religion and self-control, such as the fact that religion prescribes a set of rules, a conviction that one is being monitored by an omniscient deity that can administer rewards and punishments, and a self-discipline that is needed to maintain involvement in private and public rituals. Some evidence also suggests that although religiousness and spirituality have some overlap, the personality core of religiousness is distinct from that of spirituality (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009).

McCullough and Willoughby (2009) also mentioned that, interestingly, some religious phenomena generate the loss of self-control, such as speaking in tongues,

mystical experiences, or altered states of consciousness. In addition, some aspects of religiosity have negative outcomes, such as fundamentalist beliefs that encourage anger and terrorism (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). McCullough and Willoughby (2009) pointed out that “religion is well suited to motivate any behavior that is predicated on self control and self-regulation, whether that behavior is studying hard for an exam or putting explosives on a belt and then detonating it on a crowded bus” (p. 88).

Religious Emotional Attachment

Religious beliefs are important, however; in addition to believing in God, God also needs to be an important part of one’s life in order to guide and direct behavior. In order to be an important part of one’s life, there need to be some sort of perceived personal connection or relationship; not just a cognitive belief, but an emotional attachment” Fayard, Pereau, and Ciofica (2009) reminded their readers that in addition to the neurobiological factors, another crucial element is the psychological processes involved in spiritual experience.

A review of literature demonstrates numerous psychological benefits and consequences of secure and insecure type of attachment, such as the encouragement of pro-social behavior and the prevention of antisocial development (Granqvist, Mikulincer, and Shaver, 2010). In 1982, Bowlby denoted attachment as an affectional bond to a person who accomplishes two important functions: providing a safe haven in times of threat or stress and serving as a secure base from which to explore the environment and develop new mental and physical skills (as cited in Granqvist et al., 2010). Granqvist et al. (2010) demonstrated that God meets the definitional criteria for an attachment figure and functions psychologically much like other attachments. According to Granqvist et

al. (2010), the idea that core aspects of religious experience and behavior can be understood within an attachment framework was originally pioneered by Lee Kirkpatrick. Kirkpatrick suggested that God can provide a safe haven in times of distress and serve as a secure base for risky or challenging endeavors.

Grandqvist et al. (2010) reported that a survey by Gallup and Jones found that “a relationship with God” was the most popular American view of faith. According to Grandqvist et al. (2010), people can have a “personal relationship” with God, which is mostly pronounced in theistic faith traditions. Grandqvist et al. (2010) suggested that this “relationship” with God is similar to other attachments for a variety of reasons. God is often considered to be benevolent (loving, comforting, and protecting), omnipresent (always near), and omnipotent (stronger and wiser; Grandqvist et al., 2010). According to Grandqvist et al., 2010, Freud also suggested many resemblances between a relationship with God and parental attachments. Donelson (1999) reported that Freud felt that religious belief was a projection of feelings toward one’s parents.

Grandqvist et al. (2010) indicated that many images portray God as loving, comforting, and protecting. According to Grandqvist et al. (2010), God is always near, and prayer is often a direct means of attaining closeness and is the most practiced form of religiosity. God is also often considered stronger and wiser and is used as a safe haven during times of trouble (Grandqvist, 2010). Research supports that many religious conversions are most likely to occur during times of severe emotional distress and crisis, and many people are most likely to turn to God in times of illness, injury, or fatigue, or during a frightening event, often situations that Bowlby believed “activated” the

attachment system (Granqvist et al., 2010). In addition, perceived separation from God can lead to feelings of abandonment and elicit feelings of grief (Granqvist et al., 2010).

One should note that just as there is research on secure and insecure attachment to parents, there is also research on the developmental pathway to religion for individuals, as well as individual differences in attachment (Grandqvist et al., 2010). Research indicates that individuals who are secure in respect to attachment to their parents and who experienced sensitive and religious caregivers develop a secure, enhancing image of a loving God (correspondence pathway; Grandqvist et al., 2010). Individuals who experienced past insensitive care-giving may experience insecure attachment to God as a distress regulation (compensation pathway; Grandqvist et al., 2010). Grandqvist et al. (2010) also reported empirical research indicates that religious conversions are often associated with parental insensitivity, and those who have parents who are rated as less loving are often reported as more likely to have more sudden increases in religiousness (hyper-activation). However, Granqvist et al. (2010) revealed that most of the research focused on religious individuals and that more research is needed on less religious and secular individuals.

Donelson (1999) also reported that attachment theory may help explain differences in religious change and conversions. According to Donelson (1999), securely attached individuals experience less marked changes in religiosity. Insecure, avoidant individuals have a higher rate of sudden conversion and insecure, anxious individuals report an even more emotional experience (Donelson, 1999). Donelson (1999) noted that insecure anxious individuals are fearful of abandonment, desire more closeness and intimacy, and are overly dependent, clingy, and needy. According to Donelson (1999),

attachment to God may be an effective compensation for an apparent lack in interpersonal relationships. Donelson (1999) also identified that, although religious conversion can happen any time during the life span, in the literature, the average age is estimated to be between ages 12 and 17 years, when emotions are running rampant. An emotional upset usually accompanies the conversion.

Fayard et al. (2009) proposed that three components form a neurobiological and psychological foundation for Christian spirituality. The Seeking System is the basic neurobiological system that propels humans to experience a sense of spiritual longing or to seek a relationship with God (Fayard et al., 2009). According to Fayard et al. (2009), this seeking can be seen in persistent feelings of interest, curiosity, sensation seeking, and search for higher meaning. Fayard et al. (2009) pointed out that excessive dopamine levels have been associated with psychiatric conditions that correlate with increased religious ideation.

According to Fayard et al. (2009), the Seeking System activates the Attachment System, the neurobiological and psychological development of felt interpersonal connectedness to God, and the Attachment System provides the template for the feeling of being close to someone. According to Fayard et al. (2009), the amygdala, the inferior occipital gyri, and the insula are all implicated in the attachment process. The Theory of Mind is the last component, the neurobiology and cognitive psychology of beliefs emerging from attributions made about God or spiritual beings (Fayard et al., 2009). Fayard et al. (2009) pointed out that the Christian faith is grounded on the belief in God, and various spiritual practices, such as Bible study, preaching, worship, and the celebration of sacraments, are designed to bring one closer to God. Fayard et al. (2009)

suspected that disorders in the Seeking System and failures in the Attachment System may result in defective Theory of Mind, which they speculate may challenge the manner in which human beings experience God.

Religious Behavioral Commitment

In addition to religious belief and attachment, people who are religious or spiritual usually practice some type of religious behavior. According to Smith and Denton (2005), for many adolescents, religion is not just an affiliation, identification, or cognitive belief; faith is activated, practiced, and formed through practicing religion and engaging in regularly enacted religious habits and works that have theological, spiritual, or moral meaning, such as worshipping with other believers; praying; reading scripture; practicing confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation; and engaging in service to others. Smith and Denton (2005) reported that religious practices are specific actions which believers engage in over time for the purpose of being shaped.

According to Newberg and Waldman (2009), spiritual practices can enhance cognition, communication, and creativity, as well as improve physical and emotional health. In addition, spiritual practices have an effect on neurotransmitters (the chemicals in the brain) by increasing dopamine and gamma-amino butyric acid (GABA) and by altering serotonin levels (Newberg & Waldman, 2009). In 2008, Azari et al. also found brain changes when reading scripture (as cited in Johnstone & Glass, 2008). According to Johnstone and Glass (2008), Azari et al. compared reading a nursery rhyme, reading a telephone book, and reading a psalm and found by evaluating Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scans that reading psalms was associated with activation of the

frontal-parietal circuit, including the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, dorsomedial frontal cortex, and medial parietal cortex.

According to Smith and Denton (2005), prayer, scripture reading, meditation, and tithing are well-known religious practices, but include many other possibilities. Smith and Denton (2005), in their study of youth in America, reported that, although a majority of the youth claimed to be religious, substantial numbers did not *regularly* practice their religious faith. According to Smith and Denton (2005), only four of 10 teenagers said they attended religious services weekly and only one quarter of the teenagers regularly attended a religious youth group. About half had attended Sunday schools, but substantial minorities had never been involved in religious camps, conferences, retreats, or projects (Smith & Denton, 2005). In addition, less than one third of youth (32%), read the Bible each week (Smith & Denton, 2005). However, Smith and Denton (2005) did report that 53% of adolescents admitted they prayed alone at least a few times a week.

Religious Attendance

The NSYR found that youth who attended religious services *regularly* were more likely to have certainty in a belief in God, reported a greater importance of faith in their lives, and were more likely to pray and read the Bible than were teens who attended sporadically or not at all (Smith & Denton, 2005). The study also found large denominational differences in commitment to God, and some denominations were more likely to pray and read scriptures (Smith & Denton, 2005). Protestant teens were often more likely than teens of other denominations to believe, place a greater importance in faith, and participate more in religious activities (Smith & Denton, 2005). In addition, according to Smith and Denton (2005), conservative Protestantism and Mormonism

appeared particularly likely to produce religiously devoted youth, and Catholicism especially appeared not to do so.

Research suggests that many studies focus on the aspect of religious commitment in terms of religious attendance (Jeynes, 2003). In contrast, much less research is focused on prayer and scripture reading and more research is needed in these two areas (Bamford & Lagattuta, 2010; Jeynes, 2010; McKinney & McKinney, 1999; Rew et al., 2004).

Prayer

Prayer is one way in which religious and spiritual beliefs are put into practice (Banthia, Moskowitz, Acree, & Folkman (2007). According to Cohen and Hill (2007), prayer is a type of communication that is taught, usually requires practice, and is a tool to connect. Prayer helps to form a relationship with God (Yancey, 2007). Prayer is a consistent type of communication seen throughout different religions and across cultures (Gillum & Griffith, 2010). According to Murray (1995), prayer is a natural human instinct and is the medium through which all people, past and present, have expressed their relationship to the divine. It gives meaning to religious experience. Murray (1995) reported that prayer is a universal act, is at the heart of every religion, and is central to all religious faiths. According to Barton (1995), the American courts stated that prayer is a quintessential religious practice. [Quintessential means of the pure and essential essence of something (Dictionaryreference.com).]

Banthia et al. (2007) noted four types of prayer. Meditative prayers expand awareness beyond immediate difficulties and foster intimacy with a higher power, ritualistic prayers are verbal citations or active behavioral practices, petitionary prayers

are requests for special needs, and colloquial prayer is characterized by a conversational style, which has been found to be correlated with life satisfaction and happiness (Banthia et al., 2007). Mantra (chanting a string of words or a vibration that can deliver the mind from illusion or provide transformation) and meditation are also different forms of religious behavior, communication, or prayer (Bhawuk, 2003). McKinney and McKinney (1999) also reported upon Allport's definition of prayer as a communication and expression of religious intention that may include the following types: supplication (wishing for the fulfillment of some personal desire, such as improved health), intercessory (the health or welfare of other people), thanksgiving (sense of gratitude), and contrition and penance (yearning to be relieved of shame and guilt).

Murray (1995) noted that many scientific studies have attempted to study the effect of prayer to see if any evidence exists that prayer affects the material universe. According to Newberg and Waldman (2009), forgiveness, prayer, and different forms of meditation have been found to affect positively specific parts of the brain. Brain-imaging studies of prayer and meditation show that the prefrontal cortex is activated and the anterior cingulate is stimulated; this area of the brain is situated between the frontal lobe and limbic system, acting as a mediator between thoughts and feelings (Newberg & Waldman, 2009). According to Newberg and Waldman (2009), meditation and prayer improve the neural circuits spanning the prefrontal cortex, which integrates attention, working memory, motivation, and many other executive-functioning skills. They also change parietal lobe activity, which gives one a sense of relation to time, space, and other objects in the world (Newberg & Waldman, 2009).

Much of the previous research also suggests that prayer is a specific coping strategy (Bamford & Lagattuta, 2010). Rew et al. (2004) found in their study of 271 youth that children who prayed frequently reported significantly higher levels of positive health behaviors than did children who never prayed, although the children did not significantly differ in their levels of perceived stress. Prayer was also found to be associated with social connectedness (Rew et al., 2004). Rew et al. (2004) concluded that further studies need to be done to understand the protective nature of prayer and other religious behaviors. Francis and Robbins (2009) also conducted a study with students in England and Wales and found that frequency of prayer was associated with a negative view of substance use.

McKinney and McKinney (1999) studied types of prayers in college students (or late adolescents) and classified prayers into the following categories: prayers of petition (asking for something for themselves or others), prayers of reparation (asking for God's forgiveness), prayers of thanksgiving (thanking God), and prayers of adoration (acknowledging God's greatness). According to McKinney and McKinney (1999), these concepts are all cited in the Lord's Prayer. McKinney and McKinney (1999) found in a qualitative analysis that a majority of the prayers were prayers of petition and most of them were for personal favors for themselves for success and relationships. Only occasionally did prayers include people whom the person did not know personally (McKinney & McKinney, 1999). McKinney and McKinney (1999) suggested that this type of prayer is typical of past research that concluded that children's prayers are often egocentric and only as children become older do they become sociocentric. McKinney and McKinney (1999) also noted differences in intensity and intimacy of the prayers and

noted that some students prayed to a distant God and others to God as a close friend or relative, as well as to deceased relatives. McKinney and McKinney (199) also found some of the prayers to be simple communication and used for relaxation.

Gillum and Griffith (2010) reported that nine of 10 Americans report that they engage in prayer. However, surprisingly, there is very little research in the literature on the impact of prayer specifically in youth (Bamford & Lagattuta, 2010, Rew et al., 2004). Interestingly, McKinney and McKinney (1999) also noted that although prayer is a behavior that is performed by most people at least at some time, researchers have neglected this topic. McKinney and McKinney (1999) suggested two possible reasons for this neglect: privacy and vulnerability issues.

Especially in regards to educational outcomes, prayer may be a topic to study further in more detail. According to Barton (1995), school prayer is a philosophy that simply recognizes not only a God of heaven, but also God's laws and standards of conduct. Barton's (1995) research certainly documented the deterioration of the nation after the removal of school prayer, but more research is needed in this area as it relates to youth individually, especially if the return of prayer to school is to be continually advocated.

Scripture Reading

In addition to prayer, other types of religious behavior in the literature that involve the communication of values include praise, worship, singing, mass, communion, and confession (Nightingale, 2003). Also, the Bible provides scripture full of hope and comfort and is a resource for times of trouble and hardship (Diddle & Denham, 2010). According to Smith (2007), Christian sacred scriptures teach moral commandments,

practices, and wisdom through the Ten Commandments, the moral teachings of Jesus, and the ethical and practical teachings of the apostles. Smith (2007) reported that scriptures provide Christians with moral foundations, instructions, and sensibilities by which to navigate their actions and choices in life. However, little research has been completed on the benefits of scripture reading and this is another area of much needed research (Jeynes, 2010).

Jeynes (2009, 2010) noted that another area of need for academic research is Bible literacy. Jeynes (2009) reported that almost no recent research has examined this area, and suggested the reason for this dearth of studies includes the inability of such study to be undertaken in schools because of the removal of prayer and Bible reading. Jeynes (2010) indicated that the few studies that do examine this issue include small samples, include college students, were taken from Europe, or include dissertations. Jeynes (2009, 2010) reported that Bible courses have been established in hundreds of public school districts and advocates of these initiatives assert that individuals who study the Bible will be more likely to excel both academically and behaviorally; however, no consensus exists in the academic community about whether Bible literacy is associated with positive or negative outcomes.

Jeynes (2009a) is one of the first researchers to study this area. He examined 140 students in secondary Christian schools and found that students who had the highest Bible literacy also had the highest GPA, the highest ranking test and grade results, and the best school behavior. These findings were consistent across race and gender. Those with the lowest Bible literacy scores also scored lowest in all the areas (Jeynes, 2009a). Jeynes (2009a) noted that the results not only were significant, but also quite large.

Jeynes (2009a) concluded that Bible literacy is associated with higher levels of achievement and school behavior, although the effects were found to be greater for educational outcomes than for behavioral outcomes. In another study by Jeynes (2009b) of 160 Christian- and public-school students, results indicated a strong relationship between overall and specific measures of Bible literacy and the educational and behavioral outcomes of students, although behavior was not found to be statistically significant. Jeynes (2009) suggested that these results may reflect the student's difficulty in applying the Bible to their lives. Comparisons of Christian- school students and public-school students found that Christian-school students had higher Bible literacy and had a greater advantage over the middle- and lower-level students (Jeynes, 2009b). Jeynes (2009b) did acknowledge that a limitation in his study is that students who excel at school could conceivably be more likely to read the Bible and the results do not provide evidence of a causal relationship. In addition, Jeynes (2009b) noted that his studies used very small samples and thus called for a need for more studies with larger sample sizes.

Jeynes (2010) also completed a meta-analysis of 11 studies to determine whether a relationship existed between Bible knowledge and academic and behavioral outcomes among those living in urban areas. Jeynes (2010) concluded that the results indicated that there was a positive relationship between the variables, although academic outcomes were found to be much stronger. Effect sizes included .33 for both academic and behavioral outcomes, .73 for academic outcomes, and .32 for behavioral outcomes (Jeynes, 2010). However, a limitation was that only three studies included academic outcomes (Jeynes, 2003). A study by Francis (2002) also confirmed these findings of the

advantages of scripture reading. Although Francis (2002) studied students in England and Wales, she found that Bible reading and frequency of prayer were associated with a negative view of substance use.

Jeynes (2009, 2010) stated that more research is needed specifically on Bible literacy, particularly as it relates to academic achievement, and especially because of the new movements to incorporate these courses into schools and to see if bible literacy is something that schools should encourage. Jeynes' (2009, 2010) findings suggest that the endeavor might be worthwhile. Jeynes (2010) indicated that if one can show that Bible knowledge is related to student outcomes; the need to put Bible courses in schools will be justified. Jeynes (2010) stated that proving a relationship exists is fundamental if one is to present a strong case in favor of these courses. He also reminded his readers that that "whether one is religious or not, virtually all Americans want to see improved educational outcomes" (p. 524). The First Amendment Center (1999) also indicated that solving this dilemma would be good for the nation.

Jeynes (2009, 2010) suggested several reasons for Bible literacy's possible impact on academic and behavioral success. According to Jeynes (2009, 2010), much of the research discusses four main reasons: studying the Bible may encourage a strong religious work ethic (often known as the Protestant work ethic), the Bible may teach students to abstain from behaviors that are considered harmful to academic outcomes (such as substance use and sexual activity), findings suggest religious people are more likely to have an internal locus of control (that has a consistent relationship with academic success), and the Bible is a sophisticated piece of literature that could help students understand other literary works and be intellectually stimulating.

Challenges in Studying Religion

One huge implication is worth discussing in regards to the study of religion. It is the knowledge that significant multicultural factors and differences among adolescents in religious identification, experiences, and behavior make studying the topic difficult and may lead to mixed results. Literature indicates that religion and spirituality are difficult concepts to define and measure, because of the many cultural, affiliation, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, gender, age, developmental, and historical differences. Religion is also a learned concept that makes measurement difficult in terms of geographical and family characteristics.

Cultural and Affiliation Differences

Cohen and Hill (2007) reminded their readers that religious identity and motivation must be understood within a cultural framework. They reported that different religious motivations are valued in different cultures and need to be recognized when conceptualizing and measuring religion. According to Cohen and Hill (2007), understanding the similarities and differences is an important process in understanding identification patterns and how people define their religion and spirituality. The authors proposed that religious cultural differences in individualistic and collective cultures have an impact on religious and spiritual identity and motivation. In addition to cultural differences, religious subcultures also exist in each, culture such as Jews in America or Protestants (Cohen & Hill, 2007). Differences exist even among Christian groups (Jeynes, 1999)

According to Cohen and Hill (2007), American culture is highly individualistic relative to other countries, and Americans do not usually associate with religion that is

based on community affiliation, social relationships, tradition, and ritual. Instead, the American Protestant religion focuses strongly on a personal relationship with God (Cohen & Hill, 2007). Cohen and Hill (2007) proposed that many American Protestant religious groups are individualistic, and religious and spiritual experiences are seen as a process that occurs uniquely between an individual and God, and religious identity and motivation revolve around personal faith, expression of individual feelings, and salience of religion to the individual.

Cohen and Hill (2007) proposed that, in contrast, collectivist cultures, such as Hindu India and East Asia value social connections as an integral element of religious life and group affiliations as an important part of religious identity. Religious and spiritual motivation is conceptualized as emphasizing social integration, ritual, and tradition (Cohen & Hill, 2007). Cohen and Hill (2007) found in their study that religion for Jews is about community and biological descent; heredity and extrinsic religiosity items were primarily endorsed. In contrast, religion for Protestants is about personal beliefs, and they rated significantly higher in intrinsic religiousness than did Jews (Cohen & Hill, 2007). Catholics contained a combination of both outlooks, although somewhat more collective and extrinsic (Cohen & Hill, 2007).

Cohen and Hill (2007) suggested that their results indicate that intrinsic religiosity is tapping individualistic religious outlooks and extrinsic religiosity is more related to the collective. Their study demonstrates evidence that American Jews and Catholics resonate more with collectivistic aspects of religion than do Protestants, and several studies have shown that religious identities, motivations, and experiences of Catholics and Jews are more socially and community oriented than those of Protestants, who are more

religiously individualistic (Cohen & Hill, 2007). Cohen and Hill (2007) also found that intrinsic religiosity is related to personal religion and extrinsic religiosity stresses community and ritual. Intrinsic (mature) and extrinsic (immature) religion are concepts that were proposed by Allport and Ross (1967).

Desrosiers, Kelley, and Miller, (2010) also recognized differences across religious affiliations. They found that Protestants reported higher relational spirituality (an explicit personal relationship to God) than did Jews, Agnostics, and Buddhists. According to Albertsen, O'Connor, and Berry, (2006), overall research suggests that religious affiliation is largely a phenomenon connected to culture and thus is part of the difficulty in defining and measuring the concept of religion and spirituality across cultures and religious denominations.

Racial and Ethnic Differences

In addition to many religious and spiritual differences across cultures and religious denominations, differences across race and ethnicities are marked. A review of the literature consistently demonstrates that race plays a factor in religion (Bliss, 2009; King, Weich, Nazroo, and Blizard, 2006; Regnerus, 2003; Sahgal & Smith, 2010.; Smith & Denton, 2005). According to Sahgal and Smith (2010), Black people are markedly more religious than white people on a variety of measures, including level of religious affiliation, religious attendance, frequency of prayer, and religious importance in life. Regnerus (2003) also reported that reviews of literature consistently find that Black people are more likely than Whites people to attend religious services regularly (40% vs. 29%) as well as to indicate that religion has high importance in their lives (55% vs. 24%). Regnerus (2003) also reported that some data suggest that Latino and Asian American

adolescents have greater religious involvement and commitment; although more research is needed in this area.

Many researchers have theorized about why religion and spirituality are higher in ethnic minorities than in non-minorities (Regnerus, 2003). According to Regnerus (2003), some evidence suggests through twin studies that religiosity is “inherited rather than socialized” and that there is a genetic component to the transmission of religiosity, similar to the genetic tendency toward earlier physical development. In 2005, Cervantes and Parham asserted that “spirituality may be a cultural tradition and an assumption is made that experiences of racism and discrimination have molded a spirituality of survival that has affected belief systems, sense of justice, religious expectations, and so forth” (as cited in Bliss, 2009). King et al. (2006) reported that religious involvement is also a vital factor in some ethnic minority groups that enables people to retain cultural roots in a dominant society that holds different values.

Socioeconomic Differences

Religious practices, such as prayer, are also found to be associated with socioeconomic resources (Banthia et al., 2007; Gillum & Griffith, 2010). Banthia et al. (2007) found in their study that race/ethnicity, income, and education predicted different levels and effects of religiosity and prayer. Higher income was associated with less colloquial, meditative, and ritualistic prayer (Banthia et al., 2007). Higher education was also associated with less of all four types of prayer and with lower religiosity (Banthia et al., 2007). Gillum and Griffith (2010) also found that praying was significantly associated with wage, and poverty, and negatively associated with education and health status. Those in good health were less likely to pray (Gillum & Griffith, 2010).

However, Banthia et al. (2007) noted that alternative studies have found a positive relationship between prayer and socioeconomic resources, such as income, education, employment, and health insurance.

Schwadel (2008) also reported that research on social class and religion has historically found the following relationships between poverty and religion: poor people are generally less active in organized religion and secular volunteer activities, although poor people are more likely to perform devotional activities and emphasize the afterlife (to finally get a reward), to have meaningful and emotional religious experiences, and to acknowledge the importance of religion in daily life. However, Schwadel (2008) noted that many of the findings in this area have been associated with adults, and when he studied the results using youth, he and found similar results. Schwadel (2008) found that poor and non-poor teenagers differed considerably on religious activities and outlooks. According to Schwadel (2008), poor teenagers are less likely to be involved in organized religions, to have a religious preference, or to attend services or youth groups. They are also more likely to view their friends as having different religious beliefs than their own (Schwadel, 2008). However, Schwadel (2008) found evidence that poor teenagers are religious, but their practice tends to be more personal, rather than institutionally based. Consistent with the literature regarding adults, Schwadel (2008) reported that poor teenagers are more likely than non-poor teenagers to pray, read scripture, believe in judgment day, and say faith is important in their daily lives, even though they do not regularly attend church services or report meaningful religious experiences.

Schwadel (2008) hypothesized that religious services and activities cost money and may not be affordable to poor teenagers and their parents, especially many of whom

are single parents. Schwadel (2008) also pointed out that the poor may not have transportation to get to religious services and puts a constraint on social networks. In terms of personal religiosity and prayer, Banthia et al. (2007) considered the possibility that people who are more educated have access to more information and financial resources and may use prayer as a last resort. Gillum and Griffith (2010) also believed that greater economic resources might increase people's ability to pay for services and increase exposure and access to services. Banthia et al. (2007) also considered the idea that when people were discouraged, reduced well-being led to more prayer.

Gender Differences

Research also suggests that girls are found to be consistently more religious than boys (Donelson, 1999; Regnerus, 2003). Girls are more likely to attend services regularly and to report that religion is important to them (Regnerus, 2003). Donelson (1999) also reported that women attend religious services more frequently, pray more often, report more intense religious experiences, feel closer to God, have increased participation in religious activities, and display an increased need for religion. They also often assume responsibility for the religious training of youth (Donelson, 1999). In addition, some evidence suggests that women and men experience God differently (Donelson, 1999). According to Donelson (1999), women emphasize a personal relationship with God, whereas men focus on God as being powerful and judgmental. Some theories as to why women are more religious than men include the fear of death during childbirth that made women more susceptible to God, women have more time to devote to God because they usually work less, and women have an increased need for identity (Donelson, 1999).

Age and Developmental Differences

Age and development are also important factors in religiosity (Banthia et al., 2007; Diddle & Denham, 2010; Donelson, 1999; Nightingale; 2003, Regnerus, 2003; Rich & Cinamon, 2007). According to Banthia et al. (2007), older individuals are more likely than young individuals to rely on religious beliefs and practices. Nightingale (2003) also found that religious beliefs are often developed later in life after having experienced many life struggles. According to Diddle and Denham (2010), spiritual needs may increase or become more important in the elderly, chronically ill, or those approaching death. Diddle and Denham (2010) considered that perhaps religion and spirituality become more salient as one considers the meaning and purpose of life during the later stages of life.

According to Donelson (1999), from a cognitive developmental view, young children view religion concretely and teenagers are able to view it abstractly and symbolically. According to Markstrom, Huey, Morris-Stiles, and Krause (2010), adolescence marks the development of formal operational thought and interest in existential matters (purpose and meaning of life) and a quest for identity. Donelson (1999) reported that Erik Erikson asserted that identity formation is a major task of adolescence and emphasized the role of religion in identity development. Unfortunately, according to Donelson (1999), the research on the role of religion in identity development is sporadic and incomplete in the literature.

Regnerus (2003) reported that religious doubt is common in youth and found one study that reported 78% of youth indicated that they had doubts. Religious doubting was often associated with adverse life events, conflictual family patterns, and emotional

distress (Regnerus, 2003). Regnerus (2003) reported that revivalists historically targeted adolescents to provoke emotions that were often easily evoked in youth. According to Regnerus (2003), religious influences also vary across the lifespan, and adolescent development is grounded on a process of maturation and cognitive changes. Regnerus (2003) reported that an understanding of religious influence at each life stage is important.

Some researchers, such as Rich and Cinamon, (2007), noted that there are stages of development regarding spirituality and that adolescent and adult conceptualizations may differ. They reported that life stages and developmental tasks such as self-identity, career plans, and family life plans, may influence religious beliefs and thinking over time may become more reflective. In 1981, Fowler argued that the stages of faith development are a process of making meaning out of life in which children, then adolescents, then adults create loyalties to centers of values and fashion a “master story” (as cited in Regnerus, 2003). According to Desrosiers et al., (2011), Fowler also proposed that adolescence and early adulthood are characterized by movement toward a more “intrinsic” faith commitment fostered by ability to critically reflect on particular beliefs and to articulate verbally and internalize them, and by the tendency for adolescents to search for meaning, purpose, and identity. Allport, in 1950, discussed two types of religion, extrinsic (taking over family religion and inherited) and intrinsic (personalized, internalized, and associated with identity achievement; as cited in Donelson, 1999).

Donelson (1999) reported that Allport (1950) suggested that extrinsic individuals have taken over the ancestral religion much as they take over family jewels, and in contrast, intrinsic individuals have shaped their religious commitments in a personalized

way similar to that of identity achieved people. According to Allport and Ross (1967), individuals fall within a continuum of two poles; extrinsically motivated and intrinsically motivated. Extrinsically motivated individuals “use” their religion, and intrinsically motivated persons “live” their religion. Extrinsic individuals use their religion for their own ends to find security, solace, sociability, and status. Intrinsic individuals internalize their religion and live it; they come to thank God, acknowledge God’s glory, and ask God’s guidance, not to see what they can get from God (Allport & Ross, 1967).

Allport and Ross (1967) also found that extrinsically motivated individuals are more prejudiced. They argued that researchers should keep in mind the two crucial distinctions between these two religious attitudes and suggested that not only knowing if a person is religious, but also knowing the importance that religion plays in a person’s life is important. Another factor that is important to mention is changes in religious involvement in addition to cognitive beliefs (Regnerus, 2003). According to Regnerus (2003), religious involvement also varies over the course of adolescence, and frequency of religious attendance tends to decline between 8th and 12th grade. Smith and Denton (2005) noted that religious activities are competing among many other factors for time and attention.

Historical Differences

In addition to cultural and affiliation differences, cultural changes in religious activities continue over time. According to Gillum and Griffith (2010), religious activities have been long prevalent in the United States since the middle of the last century and are much more prevalent in the United States than in any other industrialized nation. However, according to Passalacqua and Cervantes (2008), America’s religious

history has changed dramatically as a result of diversity. Although belief in God reflects the attitude of 95% of the United States' population, the meaning of spirituality has become increasingly acknowledged (Passalacqua & Cervantes, 2008).

Newberg and Waldman (2009) noted that in the 1970s many young adults became disenchanted with the traditional values of America as a result of the societal problems centered on the Vietnam War and civil rights. They reported that two thirds of the baby boom generation turned away from the religious activities of their parents to seek a more spiritual connection. Many turned to the religious philosophies of the East because those traditions provided techniques that gave them direct experiences of peace. Newberg and Waldman (2009) pointed out that although research shows a general decline in traditional religions over the past 30 years, this decline has been replaced by a growing interest in *spirituality*, a term that describes a broad range of individual values and personal theologies that is not connected to traditional religious institutions. Thus, Newberg and Waldman (2009) concluded that God is as popular as ever, but God significantly differs from historical religious beliefs. Newberg and Waldman (2009) reported that each generation is literally reinventing God in an image that points toward an acceptance and appreciation of our pluralistic world. They suggested that there is a neural evolution of God from an "authoritarian" God to a "mystical" god.

A research report by the NSYR (2008) examined religious and spiritual change in the lives of 2,530 adolescents across a three year span, and although no dramatic shifts were found, the study revealed a small, but consistent, decrease in conventional religious beliefs and practices (Denton et al., 2008). According to the research report, the changes in religiosity may be accounted for by several reasons, such as adolescent development,

fewer opportunities for youth group involvement, busy schedules, and adolescent perception that religion is somewhat less important in shaping their lives (Denton et al., 2008). However, data from the study did not reveal a radical movement toward Eastern religions, and most students were likely to affiliate with the same religion as that of their parents (Denton et al., 2008).

An interesting concept brought up by Cohen and Hill (2007) included the idea that spirituality has been proposed as being more universal and individualized than religiousness, and spirituality is a term adopted by Protestants as a way of communicating that their religion focuses primarily on a personal and individual, not institutional, relationship with God. According to Cohen and Hill (2007), Bellah suggested in 1985 that the growing emphasis on spirituality could be the result of the cultural development of religion as increasingly privatized, personal, and experientially expressive. However, King et al. (2006) suggested that spirituality differing from religion is only a concept relevant to mainly people from Western Europe and Christian cultures.

The best ways to measure religion and spirituality have been debated in the literature (Banthia et al., 2007). Definitions of the key variables vary and the possible existence of intervening variables, as well as individual dynamics, makes generalizations difficult (Wulff, 2008). Subjectivity and self-reports also create challenges (Ho & Ho, 2007). Ho and Ho (2007) suggested that spirituality is often an elusive concept that makes conducting research difficult because of the way it is defined and measured. One of the most difficult challenges is that different conceptualizations often differ in psychological and physical outcomes (Banthia et al., 2007). According to Passalacqua and Cervantes (2008), religion and spirituality are often overlapping constructs that are

interconnected and both entail a sense of meaning and purpose and relationship to mystical aspects of human experience, although, they are also as diverse as culture.

Definitional Differences: Religion Versus Spirituality

Religion is often a concept that includes social, denominational, and behavioral characteristics that involve group membership (Passalacqua & Cervantes, 2008).

According to Ho and Ho (2007), religion refers to later institutional development, characterized by canonizations, elaborations of rites, and administration of organized clergies and usually refers to beliefs, sentiments, and practices that are anchored in a particular religion and its expression is often denominational, external, cognitive-behavioral, ritualistic, and public; however, it can also be personal.

According to Ho and Ho (2007), spirituality refers to a deep personal concern about psychological and moral well-being regardless of theological, dogmatic, ritualistic, magical, or mystical aspects often associated with religious life. It is a “system of thought” with no connection to institutional or denominational affiliation, and spiritual experiences tend to be universal, ecumenical, internal, affective, spontaneous, and private. It is the overarching values, meanings, and principles by which one conducts one’s life (Ho & Ho, 2007).

According to Miller in 1998, “spirituality is typically understood at the level of the individual, and in contrast, religion is a social phenomenon, an organized structure with many purposes, one of which has historically been the development of spirituality in its members” (as cited in Bliss, 2009). According to Ho and Ho (2007), being religious without spirituality and being spiritual without religiosity is possible. For example, one can attend church and denominational activities without ever really “believing” or feeling

a spiritual connection, and in contrast, one can be spiritual without attending church or identifying with a particular belief system or denomination (Ho & Ho, 2007).

Religiosity as a Learned Concept

Geographical differences. Many researchers believe that religion and spirituality are learned or inherited through culture and that religious and spiritual behavior is taught and regulated through ritual and tradition (Cohen & Hill, 2007). According to Diddle and Denham (2010), spirituality, faith, and religion are not isolated personal traits but their influence is from larger societal exchanges across multiple systems over time and is often defined by one's culture and it permeates many daily actions and serves as a foundation for many societal values and perspectives.

According to Ellison (1995), spirituality is culturally specific and a contextually driven construct. He argued that geographic factors may shape people's religious experiences and spiritual beliefs (as cited in Douglas, Jimenez, Lin, & Frisman, 2008). Regnerus (2003) also found geography to be a factor. According to Regnerus (2003), a review of research found that living in the South and rural living were found to be related to higher levels of religiosity.

Family characteristics. Adolescent religious development is also largely shaped by family characteristics, and a review of research has found that parental religious habits by far constitute the most powerful and strongest influence (Regnerus, 2003). Research has found that mothers are likely to be more influential than fathers for adolescent children, and religious socialization is more likely to occur in families characterized by warmth and closeness (Regnerus, 2003). In addition, parental religious influence also appears to be more likely to influence girls than boys and is more effective if both parents

are religious (Regnerus, 2003). Donelson (1999) also reported that mothers play the dominant role in the socialization of religion for boys and girls; however, mothers have more impact on girls than on boys. According to Donelson (1999), peers are also influential, but the parental encouragement of peers plays a big part as well.

Most of the research demonstrates that the concept of religion and spirituality is a learned concept. However, some researchers also believe that every human brain, from early childhood, contemplates that a spiritual realm exists (Newberg & Waldman, 2009). In a qualitative study of Israeli Arab and Jewish adolescents, Rich and Cinamon (2007) also found a broad agreement regarding transcendence as the essential component of spirituality, and spirituality has taken root regardless of background or cultural group.

Summary

A review of literature indicates that religion played a vital role in the founding of America as well as the development of the American educational system. Religion and moral education, specifically prayer and Bible reading, were once essential parts of the school day. However, over the years, religion has been taken out of the educational realm and is no longer considered an important variable in producing positive educational outcomes. Many people believe that the lack of religion and moral education in schools today has led to a moral relativism that is confusing to youth and has contributed to the moral decay of society. Many researchers have documented the relationship between the decline of the nation and the self-regulation of adolescents.

In recent years, several efforts have attempted to return religion back to schools. Many people believe that religion is an important part of education in terms of literature, American history, and multicultural sensitivity. Advocates demonstrate that teaching

about religion is legally grounded, and several curricula have been developed that can be implemented successfully. Research demonstrates that religion is important to youth, and a majority of them identify as Christian, although some evidence suggests that their beliefs are somewhat different from historical Christian beliefs. Research also indicates that religion in youth is correlated to many positive outcomes for a variety of reasons.

However, some research suggests that religion has negative outcomes as well. Results in the literature are mixed because of the differences and difficulty in defining and measuring the concept. When studying this topic, one should remember that many multicultural factors impact religion and need to be addressed.

Confusion continues regarding the role of religion in education. As a result of the recent debates over religion in schools, interest in studying religion and youth has increased. However, research suggests that religious schools are often examined instead of the religiosity of students because of the difficulty of studying religion in public schools. The research that has been completed on the religiosity of youth often focuses on specifically church attendance, importance of religion, or the Christian faith. In addition, most of the research has been attained only through using religion as an add-on variable. More research is needed, especially in terms of specific religious beliefs, experiences, and behaviors of youth.

Research indicates that religious cognitive beliefs, religious emotional attachment, and religious behavioral commitment may all impact youth executive-functioning skills, specifically self-regulation, for several reasons. More research is needed in this area, as well as in the specific areas of prayer, scripture reading, and moral absolutes, which have been taken out of schools. Surprisingly, little research has been conducted in these areas.

Some researchers note that if religion is ever going to be returned to schools, additional data are needed to support that religion is beneficial to educational outcomes, academically and behaviorally. Studying which specific components of religiosity are influential to youth would be beneficial to the education system and would help guide adults in working with youth. Americans need to ask themselves, what is the ultimate goal of education? Many people would argue that character education, teaching goal-directed behavior, self-regulation, and empathy is one of the most important purposes of school because it involves skills needed to function in society. However, very little time is devoted to it compared to other subjects. Studying these specific areas will hopefully provide additional support for returning these aspects of religion to education.

Chapter 3

Methods

Overview of the Research Design

This study used a quantitative research design analyzing shelf data from the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), a research project that was created to provide a nationally representative picture of religiosity and spirituality in the lives of adolescents (www.youthandreligion.org). NSYR is directed by Christian Smith, Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Notre Dame, and Lisa Pearce, Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Carolina at Chapel Hill, and is supported by the Lilly Endowment Inc. (www.youthandreligion.org). The NSYR dataset is available to the general public for analysis and can be accessed through the website of the Association of Religion Archives (ARDA; www.youthandreligion.org).

Measures

The NSYR used both quantitative and qualitative methods along with cross-sectional and longitudinal research designs to gather the most comprehensive information. A randomized telephone survey of American youth and their parents was completed between July 2002 and April 2003 (Wave 1), and follow-up surveys were completed in 2005 (Wave 2) and 2007-2008 (Wave 3; www.youthandreligion.org). According to Smith and Denton (2003), the surveys were conducted by researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill by employing a random-digit dial (RDD) telephone method to generate numbers representative of all households in the 50 United States. All waves of the survey were conducted by telephone using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system (Smith & Denton, 2003).

Face-to-face interviews were also conducted with a subsample of the surveyed youth in 2003, 2005, and 2008, and entailed in-depth and personal discussions about their religious, spiritual, family, and social lives. The questionnaire used in the personal interviews expanded upon the original survey questions. Youth were selected for the personal in-depth interviews using a stratified quota sample and were given a \$30 monetary incentive (www.youthandreligion.org).

Original survey interviews were completed in 40 minutes with a randomized youth in the household, as well as a 30-minute survey with the parents. Resurveyed interviews took approximately 45 minutes. In-person, in-depth interviews were digitally recorded and averaged 2 hours. The personal interviews were completed in 45 states by 17 different interviewers, who were matched with the interviewees on gender and race. The interviewers all participated in a 2 day training (www.youthandreligion.org).

Participants

Participants in the original telephone survey included 3,290 English- and Spanish-speaking youth ages 13-17 years. The second wave resurveyed 78% of the original youth, and the third wave resurveyed 77% (www.youthandreligion.org). Personal in-depth interviews were conducted with 267 of the youth in 2003, 120 of the youth in 2005, and 230 of the youth in 2008 (www.youthandreligion.org). According to Smith and Denton (2003), diagnostic analyses comparing NSYR data with U.S. census data on comparable households and with comparable adolescent surveys, such as Monitoring the Future, the National Household Education Survey, and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, confirmed that the NSYR provided a nationally representative and unbiased sample of U.S. teenagers ages 13-17 years and their parents living in

households. However, NSYR also oversampled Jewish households to conduct meaningful analysis of Jewish youth, bringing the total number of youth surveyed in Wave 1 to 3,370 youth (Smith & Denton, 2003).

According to Smith and Denton (2003), characteristics of the youth surveyed in 2002-2003 included the following information. The weighted sample consisted of male participants (50%) and females participants (50%). The ages of the adolescents in the sample consisted of 13 years old (19%), 14 years old (20%), 15 years old (21%), 16 years old (21%), and 17 years old (20%). Participants rated themselves as the following ethnicities: Caucasian or Hispanic (78%), African American (16%), Asian/Pacific Islander (0%), and American Indian/Mixed or Other (5%). Of the participants, 17% were from the Northeast region, 22% from the Midwest, 37% from the South, and 24% from the West. Seventy percent were living in married couple households. Income included the following: less than \$10K (5%), 10-20K (10%), 20-30K (10%), 30-40K (11%), 40-50K (11%), 50-60K (8%), 60-70K (9%), 70-80K (8%), 80-90K (6%), 90-100K (5%), and more than 100K (19%). Of the adolescents, 87% attended public school, 7% private religious school, 2% private secular, and 2% were home-schooled. Teen religious affiliation included Protestant (52%), Catholic (23%), Mormon (2.5%), Jewish (1.5%), Jehovah's Witness (0.6%), Muslim (0.5%), Buddhist (0.3%), Pagan or Wiccan (0.3%), Hindu (0.1%), Other/Don't Know/Refused (0.8%), not religious (16%), and with two different faiths (2.8%; Smith & Denton, 2005; see Table 1 in Chapter 4).

Research Questions

1. Is there a relationship between belief in God and academic outcomes?
 - a. Do youth who believe in God perform academically better than students who do not?
 - b. Are youth who believe in God more likely to aspire to go to college?
2. Is there a relationship between a belief in God and behavioral outcomes?
 - a. Do youth who believe in God demonstrate better overall behavioral self-regulation skills (less likely to demonstrate risky behaviors, such as substance use, sexual activity, lack of moral reason, and delinquency)?
3. Is there a relationship between believing in moral absolutes and academic outcomes?
 - a. Do youth who believe in moral absolutes perform academically better than students who do not?
 - b. Are youth who believe in moral absolutes more likely to aspire to go to college?
4. Is there a relationship between believing in moral absolutes and behavioral outcomes?
 - a. Do youth who believe in moral absolutes demonstrate better overall behavioral self-regulation skills (less likely to demonstrate risky behaviors, such as substance use, sexual activity, lack of moral reasoning, and delinquency)?
5. Is there a relationship between a perceived closeness to God and academic outcomes?

- a. Do youth who feel close to God perform academically better than students who do not?
 - b. Are youth who feel close to God more likely to aspire to go to college?
6. Is there a relationship between perceived closeness to God and behavioral outcomes?
 - a. Do youth who feel close to God demonstrate better overall behavioral self-regulation skills (less likely to demonstrate risky behaviors, such as substance use, sexual activity, lack of moral reasoning, and delinquency)?
7. Is there a relationship between religious service and academic outcomes?
 - a. Do youth who attend religious services more often perform academically better than students who do not?
 - b. Are youth who attend religious services more often more likely to aspire to go to college?
8. Is there a relationship between religious service attendance and behavioral outcomes?
 - a. Do youth who pray more often demonstrate better overall behavioral self-regulation skills (less likely to demonstrate risky behaviors, such as substance use, sexual activity, lack of moral reasoning, and delinquency)?
9. Is there a relationship between praying and academic outcomes?
 - a. Do youth who pray more often perform academically better than students who do not?
 - b. Are youth who pray more often more likely to aspire to go to college?
10. Is there a relationship between praying and behavioral outcomes?

- a. Do youth who pray more often demonstrate better overall behavioral self-regulation skills (less likely to demonstrate risky behaviors, such as substance use, sexual activity, lack of moral reasoning, and delinquency)?
11. Is there a relationship between reading from religious scripture and academic outcomes?
- a. Do youth who read from scripture more often perform academically better than students who do not?
 - b. Are youth who read from scriptures more often more likely to aspire to go to college?
12. Is there a relationship between reading from religious scripture and behavioral outcomes?
- a. Do youth who read from scripture more often demonstrate better overall behavioral self-regulation skills (less likely to demonstrate risky behaviors, such as substance use, sexual activity, lack of moral reasoning, and delinquency)?
13. Which aspect of religiosity is most important in establishing a positive relationship with academic and behavioral outcomes (cognitive beliefs, emotional attachment, or behavioral commitment)?
14. Are there significant religious group affiliation differences in terms of cognitive beliefs, emotional attachment, behavioral commitment (frequency of prayer, scripture reading, and belief in moral absolutes), and academic and behavioral outcomes?

Research Analyses

To provide answers to the specific research questions, descriptive and inferential statistics were calculated on the original telephone survey (Wave 1) using Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS). A correlation and regression study examined the relationship between the predictor variables of religious cognitive beliefs (belief in God and belief in moral absolutes), religious emotional attachment (perceived closeness), and religious commitment (frequency of religious service attendance, frequency of prayer, and frequency of scripture reading), and the outcome variables of academic and behavioral outcomes. Academic outcomes included the variables of Academic Grades and Academic Aspirations. Behavioral outcomes included the following variables of Substance Use, Sexual Activity, Lack of Moral Reasoning, and Delinquency, which were all recoded to form the new variable of “Overall Behavioral Self-Regulation.” The internal reliability for this new recoded variable was good, and the alpha estimate was .74. The four variables that made up the Overall Behavioral Self-Regulation variable were also recoded: Substance Use (included the variables of the frequency of drinking alcohol and frequency of using marijuana), Sexual Activity (included the variables of yes or no engaging in oral sex and frequency of engaging in oral sex and yes or no engaging in sexual intercourse and frequency of having sexual intercourse), Lack of Moral Reasoning (included the variables of frequency of lying, frequency of cheating, and frequency of keeping secrets), and Delinquency (included frequency of cutting or skipping classes, and frequency of suspensions and expulsions). One-way ANOVAs also explored the differences across religious affiliations.

Research Hypotheses

According to McCloskey et al. (2009), executive-functioning skills are often defined as directive capacities of the human brain and is not a unitary construct, but multiple functions that govern conscious perceptions, feelings, thoughts, and actions (McCloskey et al., 2009). Gioia et al., 1996, refers to executive functions as a collection of processes or interrelated functions responsible for guiding, directing, and managing cognition, emotion, and behavior (as cited in McCloskey et al., 2009). Many different directive capacities of executive functioning have been noted by various researchers, but for the purpose of this project, the following areas will be of interest: planning and purposeful, goal-directed, problem-solving behavior; self-regulation, inhibition, and self-monitoring; and social awareness and empathy.

God can have power and impact over executive-functioning skills; He can guide, direct, and manage cognitions, emotions, and behavior. At the very least, people can believe that God does. However, in order for God to be able to guide, direct, and manage cognitions, emotions, and behavior, several components are needed. There needs to be a cognitive belief, emotional attachment, and behavioral commitment to Him. If one believes in God, perceives a connection or personal closeness to God, and makes a personal commitment to follow God (pray, read scripture, and believe in God's moral absolutes), goal-directed behavior, self-regulation, and empathy should increase. A review of literature demonstrates some of these components and provides a rationale for this hypothesis. According to McCullough and Willoughby (2009), the hypothesis that religion exists to control people's behavior is one of the oldest hypotheses in the scientific study of religion.

Overall, the author believed that religious belief, attachment, and commitment will increase executive-functioning skills, specifically self-regulation skills that will ultimately increase academic and behavioral success as measured by academic grades and academic aspirations and overall behavioral self-regulation. Research indicates that frontal lobes are important in the development of executive functions, and to the extent that religious beliefs, attachment, and commitment involve the Theory of Mind and the frontal lobes; religious beliefs, attachment, and commitment must also improve executive functions. However, a review of literature also demonstrates that many cultural differences in regards to religion also need to be taken into consideration and may affect outcomes.

It was specifically hypothesized that

1. There will be a positive relationship between religious cognitive belief in God and moral absolutes and academic and behavioral outcomes.
2. However, ultimately, the relationship with God is thought to be the most important factor in impacting academic and behavioral results; therefore, it is hypothesized that the greater the emotional attachment to God (as measured by perceived closeness to God) and the greater the behavioral commitment to follow God (as measured by frequency of attendance at religious services, prayer, and bible or scripture reading), the greater the positive relationship with academic and behavioral results.
3. It is also hypothesized that there will be differences across religious affiliations in terms of religious cognitive beliefs, emotional attachment, and behavioral commitment, as well as in academic and behavioral outcomes.

Null hypotheses include the following:

1. There will be no relationship between religious cognitive beliefs, emotional attachment, and behavioral commitment and academic and behavioral outcomes.
2. The relationship will not be greater for emotional attachment and behavioral commitment than cognitive belief.
3. There will be no religious affiliation differences.

Chapter 4

Results

This quantitative study used the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) existing dataset to further examine specific components of religiosity and its relationship with the self-regulation of adolescents. The NSYR surveyed 3,370 youth across the United States. Demographics are included in Table 1 and are taken from the NSYR (www.youthandreligion.org).

Table 1

Characteristics of the Youth

Characteristics of the youth	Percentage
Gender	
Males	50
Females	50
Age (years)	
13	19
14	20
15	21
16	21
17	20
Ethnicity	

Caucasian or Hispanic	78
African American	16
Asian/Pacific Islander	0
American Indian/Mixed or Other	5
Living arrangements	
Living in married couple households	70
Living in non-married households	30
Income	
Less than \$10K	5
10-20K	10
20-30K	10
30-40K	11
40-50K	11
50-60K	8
60-70K	9
70-80K	8
80-90K	6
90-100K	5
More than 100K	19
Type of school	
Public school	87
Private religious school	7
Private secular	2
Homeschooled	2

Region	
Northeast	17
Midwest	22
South	37
West	24
Teen religious affiliation	
Protestant	52
Catholic	23
Mormon	2.5
Jewish	1.5
Jehovah's Witness	0.6
Muslim	0.5
Buddhist	0.3
Pagan or Wiccan	0.3
Hindu	0.1
Other/Don't Know/Refused	0.8
Not religious	16
Two different faiths	2.8

The specific questions that this study explored include the following: Is there a significant relationship between religious cognitive beliefs (belief in God and belief in moral absolutes) and academic and behavioral outcomes (academic grades and academic aspirations and overall behavioral self-regulation, as well as substance use, sexual

activity, lack of moral reasoning, and delinquency)? Is there a significant relationship between religious emotional attachment (perceived closeness) and academic and behavioral outcomes? Is there a significant relationship between religious behavioral commitment (frequency of attending religious services, prayer, and scripture reading) and academic and behavioral outcomes? Most importantly, which one of these factors is the most important component in predicting academic and behavioral success? Lastly, are there religious group affiliation differences in terms of religiosity and academic and behavioral outcomes? The Appendix includes the specific questions used in this study, as well as the descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percents. Table 2 is a summary of total number of students who answered the questions (*N*), means, and standard deviations of the questions utilized in this study.

In order to answer the research questions, some of the NSYR questions were recoded. For example, Substance Use combined questions Y164 and Y167 (alcohol and marijuana use), and alcohol was reversed in direction for scoring to be compatible with marijuana. Questions Y170, Y172A, Y173, and Y177, which asked if youth had oral sex or sexual activity and how many times, were combined to form the Sexual Activity question. Question Y98 (Lack of Moral Reasoning) was reversed in order to be going in the same direction as the other questions, and question Y161 and Y162 were combined to create the Delinquency scale, which asked the youth if they ever skipped or cut classes and if they were expelled or expelled, and then adjusted and recoded the number of times so they were compatible with each other. Lastly, all four new questions (Substance Use, Sexual Activity, Lack of Moral Reasoning and Delinquency) were recoded to create an Overall Behavioral Self-Regulation scale. The internal reliability of

the variables that made up Overall Behavioral Self-Regulation was good. The alpha estimate was .74. The total number of youth who responded to all the questions that made up the Overall Behavioral Self-Regulation scale was low (24%); however, it was still statistically significant using those numbers. Youth who did not respond to any of the questions in Substance Use, Sexual Activity, Lack of Moral Reasoning, or Delinquency were counted as missing and were not calculated in the total Overall Behavioral Self-Regulation scale.

Table 2

N, Means, and Standard Deviations for Religious Beliefs, Emotional Attachment, Commitment, and Academic and Behavioral Outcomes

Measure	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Belief in God	2931	1.04	.17
Belief in moral relativism	3248	1.52	.50
Perceived closeness to god	3250	4.13	1.18
Frequency of religious attendance	2746	3.80	1.80
Frequency of prayer	3360	4.33	2.02
Frequency of scripture reading	3358	2.57	1.73
Academic grades (reversed)	3034	6.42	1.60
Academic aspirations (all students)	3311	5.95	.95
Substance use (reversed)	3360	3.17	1.81
Sexual activity (combined)	1153	3.29	2.59
lack of moral reasoning (reversed)	3350	7.83	3.25

Delinquency (recoded)	3239	2.80	1.22
Overall behavioral self-regulation (recoded)	825	18.98	6.60
Religious affiliation	2957	-	-

Religious Cognitive Beliefs

Academic Outcomes

The results of this study did not find a significant relationship between religious cognitive beliefs and academic outcomes. Belief in God was not significantly correlated with academic grades or academic aspirations. This study also did not find any significant relationship between belief in moral absolutes and academic grades or aspirations (see Table 3).

Table 3

Correlations of Religious Beliefs and Academic Outcomes

Measure	Belief in God	Belief in moral absolutes
Academic grades	.03	.03
Academic aspirations	-.02	.03

Note. *Coefficient is significant at $p < .05$. **Coefficient is significant at $p < .01$.

Behavioral Outcomes

Although religious beliefs did not appear to have a significant relationship with academic outcomes, this study found that religious beliefs were significantly correlated with many behavioral outcomes. Belief in God was significantly correlated with overall behavioral self-regulation, $r = .11$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$, as well as substance use, $r = .13$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$, sexual activity, $r = .13$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$, lack of moral reasoning, $r = .04$, p (one-tailed) $< .027$, and delinquency, $r = .07$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$ (see Table 4).

Belief in moral absolutes was not found to have any significant relationship with overall behavioral self-regulation; however, belief in moral absolutes was significantly correlated with substance use, $r = -.09$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$, lack of moral reasoning, $r = -.07$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$, and delinquency, $r = -.04$, p (one-tailed) $< .015$. Belief in moral absolutes was not significantly correlated with sexual activity (see Table 4).

Table 4

Correlations of Religious Beliefs and Behavioral Outcomes

Measure	Belief in God	Belief in moral absolutes
Overall Self-Regulation	.11**	-.05
Substance Use	.13**	-.09**
Sexual Activity	.13**	-.02
Lack of Moral Reasoning	.04*	-.07**
Delinquency	.07**	-.04*

Note. *Coefficient is significant at $p < .05$. **Coefficient is significant at $p < .01$.

Religious Emotional Attachment

Academic Outcomes

The results of this study found a significant relationship between religious emotional attachment and some academic outcomes. Perceived closeness to God was significantly and positively correlated with academic grades, $r = .09$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$. However, perceived closeness was not significantly correlated with academic aspirations (see Table 5).

Table 5

Correlations of Religious Emotional Attachment and Academic Outcomes

Measure	Perceived closeness
Academic grades	.09**
Academic aspirations	.02

Note. *Coefficient is significant at $p < .05$. **Coefficient is significant at $p < .01$.

Behavioral Outcomes

The results of this study also found that emotional attachment was significantly correlated with overall behavioral self-regulation skills (perceived closeness to God, $r = .17$, p [one-tailed] $< .000$). A more in depth analysis found that perceived closeness was significantly negatively correlated with substance use, $r = -.21$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$, sexual activity, $r = -.10$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$, lack of moral reasoning, $r = -.15$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$, and delinquency, $r = -.13$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$ (Table 6).

Table 6

Correlations of Religious Emotional Attachment and Behavioral Outcomes

Measure	Perceived closeness
Overall Self-Regulation	-.17**
Substance Use	-.21**
Sexual Activity	-.10**
Lack of Moral Reasoning	-.15**
Delinquency	-.13**

Note. **Coefficient is significant at $p < .01$.

Religious Behavioral Commitment

Academic Outcomes

Religious behavioral commitment was found to be significantly positively correlated with many academic outcomes. Frequency of religious attendance was positively correlated with academic grades, $r = .11$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$ and academic aspirations, $r = .05$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$. Frequency of prayer was also significantly correlated with academic grades, $r = .10$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$, and academic aspirations, $r = .03$, p (one-tailed) $< .03$. Lastly, frequency of reading scriptures was significantly correlated with academic grades, $r = .09$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$, but not academic aspirations (see Table 7).

Table 7

Correlations of Religious Behavioral Commitment and Academic Outcomes

Measure	Religious attendance	Prayer	Scripture reading
Academic grades	.11**	.10**	.09**
Academic aspirations	.05*	.03*	.01

Note. *Coefficient is significant at $p < .05$. **Coefficient is significant at $p < .01$.

Behavioral Outcomes

Religious behavioral commitment was also found to be significantly negatively correlated with many behavioral outcomes. Overall, frequency of religious attendance was significantly correlated with overall behavioral self-regulation skills, $r = -.09$, p (one-tailed) $< .006$. Frequency of attendance at religious services was also negatively correlated with substance use, $r = -.17$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$, sexual activity, $r = -.07$, p (one-tailed) $< .039$, lack of moral reasoning, $r = -.07$, p (one-tailed) $< .001$, and delinquency, $r = -.07$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$ (see Table 8).

Frequency of prayer was also significantly correlated with overall behavioral self-regulation, $r = -.11$, p (one-tailed) $< .001$. A more in-depth analysis revealed that frequency of prayer was also negatively correlated with substance use, $r = -.18$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$, sexual activity, $r = -.08$, p (one-tailed) $< .004$, lack of moral reasoning, $r = -.11$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$, and delinquency, $r = -.10$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$ (see Table 8).

Frequency of reading scripture was also found to be significantly correlated with overall behavioral self-regulation, $r = -.15$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$. Frequency of reading religious scripture was negatively correlated with substance use, $r = -.22$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$, sexual activity, $r = -.09$, p (one-tailed) $< .002$, lack of moral reasoning, $r = -.14$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$, and delinquency, $r = -.09$, p (one-tailed) $< .000$ (see Table 8).

Table 8

Correlations of Religious Behavioral Commitment and Behavioral Outcomes

Measure	Religious attendance	Prayer	Scripture
Overall Self-Regulation	-.09**	-.11**	-.15**
Substance Use	-.17**	-.18**	-.22**
Sexual Activity	-.07*	-.08**	-.09**
Lack of Moral Reasoning	-.07**	-.11**	-.14**
Delinquent Behavior	-.07**	-.10**	-.09**

Note. *Coefficient is significant at $p < .05$. **Coefficient is significant at $p < .01$.

The Most Powerful Predictors

In addition to the correlation study, a multiple regression analysis was used to explore if certain religiosity factors predicted specific outcome variables. A summary can be found in Table 9.

Table 9

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Outcome Variables of Self-Regulation (N=3370)

Variable	R^2	F	p
Academic grades	.02	8.80	.000**
Academic aspirations	.00	1.90	.091
Overall Self-Regulation	.04	6.07	.000**
Substance Use	.08	46.65	.000**
Sexual Activity	.01	1.41	.219
Lack of Moral Reasoning	.04	21.35	.000**
Delinquency	.02	12.10	.000**

Note. **Significance set at $p < .01$.

Academic Grades

A multiple regression analysis was first used to test if belief in moral absolutes, perceived closeness to God, and frequency of religious attendance, prayer, and scripture reading predicted academic grades. The results of the regression indicated that one predictor explained 2% of the variance, ($R^2 = .02$, $F(5, 2362) = 8.80$, $p < .000$). Religious attendance was the most powerful predictor of academic grades, $\beta = .09$, $p < .000$ (see Table 10).

Table 10

Multiple Regression Analysis for Academic Grades

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Constant	5.75	.16	
Belief in moral absolutes	.03	.07	.01
Perceived closeness to God	.05	.04	.03
Religious attendance	.08	.02	.09**
Prayer	.03	.02	.03
Scripture reading	.02	.02	.02

Note. **Significant at $p < .01$.

A multiple regression analysis was also used to test if belief in moral absolutes, perceived closeness to God, and frequency of religious attendance, prayer, and reading scripture predicted academic aspirations. The results of the multiple regression indicated that none of the variables explained the variance well (see Table 11).

Table 11

Multiple Regression Analysis for Academic Aspirations

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Constant	5.93	.09	
Belief in moral absolutes	.04	.04	.02
Perceived closeness to God	-.02	.02	-.03
Religious attendance	.03	.01	.06
Prayer	-.00	.01	-.01
Scripture reading	.00	.01	.00

Behavioral Outcomes

A multiple regression analysis was used to test if moral absolutes, perceived closeness to God, and frequency of religious attendance, prayer, and scripture reading predicted overall behavioral self-regulation skills. The results of the regression indicated that two predictors explained 4% of the variance, $R^2 = .04$, $F(5, 819) = 6.07$, $p < .000$. Perceived closeness, $\beta = .25$, $p < .002$, and reading religious scripture, $\beta = .17$, $p < .027$, predicted self-regulation well. Perceived closeness to God was the best overall predictor (see Table 12).

Table 12

Multiple Regression Analysis for Overall Behavioral Self-Regulation

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Constant	23.40	1.06	
Belief in moral absolutes	-.18	.25	-.01
Perceived closeness to God	-.75	.25	-.12**
Religious attendance	-.07	.14	-.02
Prayer	.01	.15	.00
Scripture reading	.38	.17	-.09*

Note. * Significant at $p < .05$. **Significant at $p < .01$.

A multiple regression analysis was also used to test if belief in moral absolutes, perceived closeness to God, and frequency of religious attendance, prayer, and reading scripture predicted substance use. The results of the multiple regression indicated that three predictors explained 8% of the variance, $R^2 = .08$, $F(5, 2597) = 46.65$, $p < .000$. Perceived closeness to God predicted substance use, $\beta = -.14$, $p < .000$, as did religious service attendance, $\beta = -.09$, $p < .000$ and reading religious scripture, $\beta = -.15$, $p < .000$ (see Table 13).

Table 13

Multiple Regression Analysis for Substance Use

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Constant	4.85	.16	
Belief in moral absolutes	-.08	.07	-.02
Perceived closeness to God	-.22	.03	-.14**
Religious attendance	-.08	.02	-.09**
Prayer	-.01	.02	.01
Scripture reading	-.14	.02	-.15**

Note. ** Significant at $p < .01$.

A multiple regression analysis was also used to test if belief in moral absolutes, perceived closeness to God, and frequency of religious attendance, prayer, and reading scripture predicted sexual activity. The results of the regression indicated that none of the predictors explained the variance well (see Table 14).

Table 14

Multiple Regression Analysis for Sexual Activity

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Constant	3.63	.41	
Belief in moral absolutes	.13	.18	.03
Perceived closeness to God	-.10	.09	-.04
Religious attendance	-.08	.05	-.06
Prayer	.02	.06	.01
Scripture reading	-.05	.06	-.03

A multiple regression analysis was also used to test if belief in moral absolutes, perceived closeness to God, and frequency of religious attendance, prayer, and reading scripture predicted moral reasoning. The results of the regression indicated that three predictors explained 4% of the variance, $R^2 = .04$, $F(5, 2596) = 21.35$, $p < .000$. Belief in moral absolutes predicted moral reasoning, $\beta = -.05$, $p < .009$, as did perceived closeness to God, $\beta = -.10$, $p < .000$, and reading religious scripture, $\beta = -.12$, $p < .000$ (see Table 15).

Table 15

Multiple Regression Analysis for Lack of Moral Reasoning

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Constant	10.14	.30	
Belief in moral absolutes	-.33	.13	-.05**
Perceived closeness to God	-.29	.07	-.10**
Religious attendance	.03	.04	.02
Prayer	-.02	.04	-.01
Scripture reading	-.22	.04	-.12**

Note. **Significant at $p < .01$.

Lastly, a multiple regression analysis was also used to test if belief in moral absolutes, perceived closeness to God, and frequency of religious attendance, prayer, and reading scripture predicted moral delinquency. The results of the regression indicated that two predictors explained 2% of the variance, $R^2 = .02$, $F(5, 2512) = 12.10$, $p < .000$. Perceived closeness to God predicted delinquency well, $\beta = -.10$, $p < .000$, as did religious service attendance, $\beta = -.09$, $p < .000$ (see Table 16).

Table 16

Multiple Regression Analysis for Delinquency

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Constant	3.41	.11	
Belief in moral absolutes	-.01	.05	-.00
Perceived closeness to God	-.10	.03	-.10**
Religious attendance	-.06	.01	-.09**
Prayer	.01	.02	.01
Scripture reading	-.01	.02	-.02

Note. **Significant at $p < .01$.

Religious Group Differences

In addition to a correlation and regression analysis, this study utilized a one-way ANOVA to look at differences across religious affiliations. Results of a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) found significant differences for religious affiliation and all aspects of religiosity, as well as for academic grades, academic aspirations, substance use, and delinquency: belief in God, $F(7, 2652) = 25.96, p < .000$, belief in moral absolutes, $F(7, 2849) = 8.79, p < .000$, perceived closeness, $F(7, 2904) = 31.33, p < .000$, frequency of religious service attendance, $F(7, 2693) = 29.50, p < .000$, frequency of prayer, $F(7, 2942) = 50.07, p < .000$, frequency of scripture reading, $F(7, 2943) = 45.55, p < .000$, academic grades, $F(7, 2669) = 5.62, p < .000$, academic aspirations, $F(7, 2902) = 4.63, p < .000$, overall behavioral self-regulation, $F(7, 2949) = 5.52, p < .000$, substance

use, $F(7, 2941) = 10.13, p < .000$, and delinquency, $F(7, 2844) = 4.44, p < .000$. No main effects were found for religious affiliation, sexual activity, and lack of moral reasoning.

See Table 17 for a summary and Table 18 for a summary of means and standard deviations for all religious affiliations and predictor and outcome variables. No post-hoc tests were performed on sexual activity because at least one group had fewer than two cases.

Table 17

One-Way Between Group ANOVAs Using Religious Affiliation as the Independent Variable

Variable	SS	df	MS	F	p
Belief in God	2.40	7	.34	25.96	.000*
Moral absolutes	14.98	7	2.14	8.79	.000*
Perceived closeness	254.92	7	36.42	31.33	.000*
Service attendance	616.45	7	88.06	29.50	.000*
Prayer	1132.30	7	161.76	50.07	.000*
Scripture reading	871.47	7	124.50	45.55	.000*
Grades	97.64	7	13.95	5.62	.000*
Aspirations	25.93	7	3.70	4.63	.000*
Overall regulation	1523.95	7	217.71	5.52	.000*
Substance use	212.59	7	30.37	10.13	.000*
Sexual activity	68.17	7	9.74	1.43	.188

Moral reasoning	129.41	7	18.49	1.77	.088
Delinquency	44.28	7	6.33	4.44	.000*

Note. Significance set at the $p < .05$ level.

Belief in God

Post hoc tests revealed that in terms of belief in God (see Table 26), nonreligious students ($M = 1.10$, $SD = .31$) were significantly less likely to believe in God than Catholic ($M = 1.0$, $SD = .06$), Christian ($M = 1.0$, $SD = .07$), Protestant ($M = 1.0$, $SD = .000$), and Jewish ($M = 1.04$, $SD = .20$) students. Students of half of two religions ($M = 1.17$, $SD = .39$) and students with another religion, $M = 1.11$, $SD = .32$ were also significantly less likely to believe in God than other students, including Muslim/Islamic students ($M = 1.0$, $SD = .000$; see Table 18).

Belief in Moral Absolutes

Post-hoc tests revealed that in terms of belief in moral absolutes, Christian students ($M = 1.59$, $SD = .49$) were significantly more likely to believe in moral absolutes than Catholic ($M = 1.48$, $SD = .50$), Jewish ($M = 1.32$, $SD = .47$), and non religious students ($M = 1.45$, $SD = .50$). Catholic students were also significantly more likely to believe in moral absolutes than Jewish students (see Table 18).

Perceived Closeness

Post-hoc tests revealed that in terms of perceived closeness, Christian students ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 1.05$) felt significantly closer to God than did Catholic students ($M = 4.15$, $SD = .98$) and students with another religion ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.28$). Compared contrasts also

indicated that Jewish students ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.19$) differed significantly in perceived closeness with God from other students, such as Catholic students ($M = 4.15$, $SD = .98$), Christian students ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 1.05$), students with another religion ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.26$), and half one religion and half another religion ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.08$). Overall, Jewish students felt significantly less close to God than did these other students. In addition, nonreligious students ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.36$), of course, felt significantly less close to God than did Catholic students and Christian students, as well as students with another religion (see Table 18).

Religious Service Attendance

Post-hoc tests revealed that in terms of religious attendance, Christian students ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.74$) were significantly more likely to attend religious services than were Catholic ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.68$) and Jewish students ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.60$). Jewish students were significantly less likely to attend religious services than were all other students, except Muslim/Islamic students. Of course, nonreligious students were significantly less likely to attend religious services than were many other groups, including Catholics, Christians, and students of another religion ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.86$; see Table 18).

Prayer

Post-hoc tests revealed that in terms of frequency of prayer, Christian students differed significantly. Christian students ($M = 4.95$, $SD = 1.76$) prayed significantly more than did Catholic students ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.83$), Jewish students ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.55$), and students of another religion ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.10$). Jewish students also prayed significantly less than did Catholic students and students of another religion. Of course,

non-religious students prayed significantly less than did many others ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.10$), such as Catholics, Christians, and students of another religion (see Table 18).

Scripture Reading

Post-hoc tests revealed that in terms of frequency of scripture reading, Christian students ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.78$) were significantly more likely than all other groups, except Protestants and Muslim/Islamic students, to read scripture. Muslim/Islamic students ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 2.02$) were significantly more likely to read scripture than were Jewish students ($M = 1.61$, $SD = 1.26$) and non-religious students ($M = 1.89$, $SD = 1.41$; see Table 18).

Academic Grades

Post-hoc tests revealed that in terms of academic grades, Jewish students differed from many other students. Jewish students earned significantly higher grades ($M = 7.24$, $SD = 1.26$) than those of Catholic students ($M = 6.3$, $SD = 1.60$), Christian students ($M = 6.48$, $SD = 1.58$), students with another religion ($M = 6.42$, $SD = 1.58$), and non religious students ($M = 6.09$, $SD = 1.58$). In addition, Christian students ($M = 6.48$, $SD = 1.58$) differed significantly from students who are not religious ($M = 6.09$, $SD = 1.58$) in academic grades (see Table 18).

Academic Aspirations

Compared contrasts also revealed that Jewish students ($M = 6.42$, $SD = .74$) differed significantly from the following students in academic aspirations: Catholic students ($M = 5.97$, $SD = .88$), Christian students ($M = 5.98$, $SD = .02$), students with another religion ($M = 5.92$, $SD = 1.18$), and nonreligious students ($M = 5.87$, $SD = .97$). Jewish students were more likely to have higher academic aspirations (see Table 18).

Overall Behavioral Self-Regulation

Post-hoc tests revealed that in terms of overall behavioral self-regulation, nonreligious students ($M = 17.06$, $SD = 6.94$) were significantly more likely to have less self-regulation than Christian ($M = 14.36$, $SD = 6.11$) and Catholic ($M = 14.57$, $SD = 6.10$) youth (see Table 18).

Substance Use

Post-hoc tests also revealed that in terms of substance use, students with another religion ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 2.31$) and non-religious students ($M = 5.87$, $SD = .97$) were significantly more likely than Catholic students ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.71$) and Christian students ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.62$) to use substances. Christian students were also less likely to use substances as frequently as Jewish students ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.10$) (see Table 18).

Delinquency

Lastly, post-hoc tests revealed that nonreligious students also significantly differed from other students in delinquency. Nonreligious students ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.38$) were more likely than Catholic students ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.10$), Christian students ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 1.18$), and Jewish students ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.13$) to exhibit delinquent behaviors (see Table 18).

Table 18

Means and Standard Deviations of Religious Affiliation and Religious Beliefs, Emotional Attachment, Commitment, and Academic and Behavioral Outcomes

Measure	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Belief in God		
Catholic	1.00	.06
Protestant	1.00	.000
Christian	1.00	.07
Jewish	1.04	.20
Muslim/Islamic	1.00	.000
Another religion	1.11	.32
Half one religion	1.17	.39
Not religious	1.10	.31
Belief in moral absolutes		
Catholic	1.48	.50
Protestant	1.35	.49
Christian	1.59	.49
Jewish	1.32	.47
Muslim/Islamic	1.50	.52
Another religion	1.45	.50
Half one religion	1.36	.51

Not religious	1.54	.50
Perceived closeness		
Catholic	4.15	.98
Protestant	4.11	1.24
Christian	4.40	1.05
Jewish	3.38	1.19
Muslim/Islamic	4.15	.99
Another religion	3.99	1.28
Half one religion	4.50	1.08
Not religious	3.43	1.12
Religious service attendance		
Catholic	3.59	1.68
Protestant	3.00	1.78
Christian	4.11	1.74
Jewish	2.60	1.60
Muslim/Islamic	2.92	1.62
Another religion	3.49	1.86
Half one religion	2.91	1.81
Not religious	2.61	1.76
Prayer		
Catholic	4.26	1.83
Protestant	3.95	2.04
Christian	4.95	1.76

Jewish	2.60	1.55
Muslim/Islamic	4.14	1.96
Another religion	4.13	1.10
Half one religion	4.17	1.85
Not religious	3.21	1.10
Scripture reading		
Catholic	2.04	1.38
Protestant	2.16	1.61
Christian	3.10	1.78
Jewish	1.61	1.26
Muslim/Islamic	3.29	2.02
Another religion	2.26	1.56
Half one religion	1.50	.80
Not religious	1.89	1.41
Academic grades		
Catholic	6.39	1.61
Protestant	6.35	1.58
Christian	6.48	1.58
Jewish	7.24	1.26
Muslim/Islamic	7.15	1.86
Another religion	6.42	1.58
Half one religion	7.10	1.73
Not religious	6.09	1.58

Academic aspirations

Catholic	5.97	.88
Protestant	6.00	.91
Christian	5.98	.88
Jewish	6.42	.74
Muslim/Islamic	6.54	.52
Another religion	5.92	1.18
Half one religion	6.00	1.04
Not religious	5.87	.97

Overall behavioral self-regulation

Catholic	14.57	6.10
Protestant	14.32	7.01
Christian	14.36	6.11
Jewish	15.02	7.01
Muslim/Islamic	15.43	6.93
Another religion	15.89	7.86
Half one religion	14.42	7.61
Not religious	17.06	9.94

Substance use

Catholic	3.15	1.71
Protestant	3.16	2.06
Christian	2.98	1.62
Jewish	3.52	1.10

Muslim/Islamic	2.64	1.50
Another religion	3.72	2.37
Half one religion	3.33	2.06
Not religious	3.88	2.20
Sexual activity		
Catholic	2.96	2.60
Protestant	4.00	2.37
Christian	3.14	2.53
Jewish	3.18	2.89
Muslim/Islamic	8.00	—
Another religion	3.83	3.24
Half one religion	3.00	.00
Not religious	3.56	2.71
Lack of moral absolutes		
Catholic	7.91	3.31
Protestant	7.47	3.50
Christian	7.73	3.16
Jewish	7.63	3.30
Muslim/Islamic	9.00	3.59
Another religion	7.72	3.22
Half one religion	7.75	3.79
Not religious	8.46	3.46
Delinquency		

Catholic	2.67	1.10
Protestant	2.71	1.40
Christian	2.75	1.18
Jewish	2.64	1.13
Muslim/Islamic	2.93	1.07
Another religion	2.96	1.51
Half one religion	2.83	1.47
Not religious	3.18	1.38

Chapter 5

Discussion

Summary of the Findings

Religion was once a valued and essential part of the American educational system. However, over the years, religion has been discarded from American public schools and has become a hot topic of controversy and debate. A review of literature supports that religiosity is beneficial to youth, but this study, using the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) dataset, went a step further and examined the different components of religiosity in more detail to explore which specific aspects of religion (beliefs, emotional attachment, or commitment) are most important in impacting academic and behavioral outcomes. The hope of this study was to demonstrate that the aspects of religion that have been taken out of schools, specifically Bible reading and prayer, play an integral part in educational outcomes and provide support for re-implementing these components into schools. Another hope of the study was to explore religious affiliation differences to ascertain which religion may be the most beneficial to youth.

Religious Cognitive Beliefs

Overall, the results of this study support the fact that religiosity is an important aspect for many youth and has the ability to impact self-regulation and, therefore, educational outcomes (academic and behavioral). However, this study found that belief in God alone, or belief in moral absolutes, is not beneficial in impacting academic outcomes. A correlation study found no significant relationship between the factors of religious beliefs and academic grades or academic aspirations. However, belief in God

was found to have a significant relationship with all behavioral outcomes. Students who have a belief in God were significantly more likely to have better overall behavioral self-regulation skills: less substance use, sexual activity, lack of moral reasoning, and delinquent school behaviors. Students who believe in moral absolutes (definite rights and wrongs for everyone) were also significantly less likely to use substances, lack moral reasoning, and demonstrate delinquent behaviors, although belief in moral absolutes had no relationship with overall behavioral self-regulation skills. Interestingly, a belief in moral absolutes also had no impact or significant correlation with sexual activity.

Religious Emotional Attachment

Religious emotional attachment, as measured by perceived closeness to God, was also found to be significantly positively correlated with academic grades and negatively correlated with all behavioral outcomes (overall behavioral self-regulation, substance use, sexual activity, lack of moral reasoning, and delinquency). No relationship was found between emotional attachment and academic aspirations.

Religious Behavioral Commitment

In addition, religious commitment was found to have a significant relationship with academic and behavioral outcomes. Frequency of religious service attendance, frequency of prayer, and frequency of scripture reading were all significantly positively correlated with academic grades and negatively correlated with all behavioral outcomes. Frequency of religious attendance and prayer were the only variables that were significantly positively correlated with academic aspirations.

The Most Powerful Predictors

Overall, most of the effects sizes of this correlation study were found to be small. However, the effects sizes for emotional attachment and reading scripture on substance use were approaching moderate effect sizes. A multiple regression analysis was also utilized to examine which factors of religiosity most predicted academic and behavioral outcomes. This study wanted to examine which different aspects of religiosity (beliefs, attachment, or specific behaviors) had the greatest impact. Results indicated that religious service attendance was the most powerful predictor of academic grades. Two predictor variables were found to be the most influential for overall self-regulation. Perceived closeness to God and reading religious scripture were found to predict overall self-regulation skills well. Perceived closeness was found to be the best overall predictor.

Belief in moral absolutes was one of the most powerful predictors of lack of moral reasoning. Emotional attachment (perceived closeness to God) was also one of the most significant variables that accounted for the amount of variance in substance use, lack of moral reasoning, and delinquency. Religious service attendance was responsible for a significant amount of the variance in substance use and delinquency, and scripture reading was one of the most powerful predictors of substance use and lack of moral reasoning. None of the religiosity components were powerful in predicting academic aspirations or sexual activity well. This finding was surprising because some prior research indicated that religiosity has great effects on sexual activity. However, other research also touches upon the perplexity that African American youth, who are the most religious, also are the most sexually active

Religious Group Differences

Lastly, this study used one-way ANOVAs to explore differences across religious affiliations (Christian, Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim/Islamic, Another Religion, Half One Religion, and Not Religious) in the different components of religiosity, as well as in academic and behavioral outcomes. Results indicated that in terms of religiosity, nonreligious students, of course, as well as students of two or more faiths and students of other religions besides Christian, Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim/Islamic, were significantly less likely to believe in God. There were no other significant differences. Christian students were significantly more likely than most other students to believe in moral absolutes. Christian students were also significantly more likely than many other students to feel closer to God. Jewish students felt significantly less close to God than many other students. In terms of religious commitment, Christians were significantly more likely than many other religious students to attend religious services, pray, and read religious scriptures. Jewish students were significantly less likely than most other students to attend religious services (except Muslim/Islamic students), pray, and read scriptures. Muslim students read scriptures significantly more than did Jewish students, but not significantly more than did Christians. Nonreligious students, of course, were also significantly less likely than many other students to feel close to God, attend religious services, pray, and read scriptures

Although Jewish students measured significantly much lower than other students on religiosity scores, this study found Jewish students to have significantly higher academic grades and academic aspirations than those of many other students. Christian students also had significantly higher academic grades than those of nonreligious

students. This study found that in terms of behavioral self-regulation, nonreligious students were significantly more likely than Christian and Catholics youth to have less overall behavioral self-regulation skills. In addition, this study found that students of another religion (not including Protestant, Jewish, or Muslim/Islamic) and nonreligious students were more likely than Catholic and Christian students to have significantly higher substance use. Jewish students were also significantly more likely than Christians to use substances. Lastly, nonreligious students when compared to other students were found to display significantly more delinquent behaviors (cutting or skipping class and getting suspended or expelled from school). No statistically significant group differences were found for sexual activity or moral reasoning.

Significance of the Results

Academic Outcomes

Findings from this study support the findings from the NSYR, as well as provide additional information regarding which aspects of religiosity are most important for youth. In terms of academic outcomes, this study confirms that religious beliefs alone are not sufficient to impact academic functioning. Religious service attendance is the most powerful predictor of academic grades. This finding is consistent with prior research. However, one should note that grades were self-reported by the youth and were not directly measured by the researcher. This limitation to the study is significant.

In terms of academic aspirations, none of the religiosity factors predicted this variable well. Surprisingly, scripture reading was not found to have any significant effect on academic aspirations, a finding that is not consistent with research. However, measuring this concept on youth who are still young and who may not be sure of what

they want to do after graduation was difficult. Youth who were included in the NSYR were between the ages of 13 and 17 years. A better measure of academic outcomes would have been to measure actual college attendance after graduation. However, because of the scope of this study, Wave 3 was not investigated. It would be an interesting future study.

Behavioral Outcomes

Although belief in God and belief in moral absolutes did not produce any significant findings in academic success, religious beliefs share a significant relationship with behavior, which ultimately one can argue has an indirect impact on academic outcomes. This study found that the most powerful predictors for overall self-regulation and behavioral outcomes are attachment to God (perceived closeness) and frequency of reading scripture. These two religiosity factors were found to be the most beneficial to youth. Of these two variables, perceived closeness appears to be the most important factor. Religious services attendance was also significant in the regression studies, but did not explain a significant amount of the variance well on overall self-regulation. Surprisingly, belief in moral absolutes and prayer were not found to be powerful predictors of successful outcomes. Belief in moral absolutes was most important for moral reasoning, but that was the only statistically significant result.

Emotional Attachment

These findings are significant and important because religion, specifically prayer and scripture reading, has been taken out of schools. Many people continue to believe that beliefs alone are sufficient. Many people are under the impression that as long as one has a belief in God, that is all that is important. Public schools leave religious

training to parents and for weekends. However, this study demonstrates that what is more important than religious beliefs and is significant to youth success is the “relationship” or emotional connection with God. This predictor of successful outcomes is the most powerful.

The numerous psychological benefits of attachment are noted in the literature, and Granqvist et al. (2010) demonstrated that God meets the definitional criteria for an attachment figure and functions psychologically much like other attachments. This study supports that attachment to God is beneficial and produces many successful outcomes. Of course, more research is needed regarding how one becomes attached to God, but most likely, religious service attendance, prayer, and scripture reading all increase attachment to God because of exposure and more time spent with Him.

This information is extremely important for education, because American public education has kept children from developing an emotional connection with God for the past 50 years. Many public schools have kept the children from knowing God, from reading about God, and from talking with or about God. Building a relationship with God is hard when there is no exposure to Him. This study is also significant for education because the NSYR (2005) reported that while a majority of youth (85%) believed in God, only 38% feel close to God, most likely because only 41% attend church services regularly. In addition, only one third of youth read religious scriptures. The NSYR (2005) also reported that the more youth attend religious services regularly, the more likely they are to believe in God and moral absolutes, feel closer to God, and pray and read religious scriptures.

The results of this study support returning religion back to public schools in some way, because perceived closeness to God was found to be one of the most important and powerful predictors in overall behavioral self-regulation. If schools want to improve outcomes, they may want to consider giving youth time to spend connecting to a higher power. Religion back in schools has the potential to increase closeness to God and exposure to His moral directives.

Religious Behavioral Commitment

Religious service attendance was a powerful predictor of many behaviors and again provides some evidence that youth exposed to God on a regular basis are more apt to have better self-regulation in certain areas, or at the very least are theorized to have a more significant personal connection with God if given more exposure. Scripture reading was also found to be one of the best predictors of overall behavioral self-regulation and has the potential to increase perceived closeness to God by exposing youth to God, His word, and moral absolutes (definite direction of right and wrong). Even though prayer was not found to be a powerful predictor of academic or behavioral outcomes, it could improve a personal connection with God that ultimately improves outcomes.

Belief in Moral Absolutes

Another significance of this study is that many researchers over the years have claimed that the removal of religion from schools has been replaced with a moral relativism that has contributed to the moral decay of society. This study finds some support for these claims. This study found that although belief in moral absolutes was not significantly correlated with academic or overall behavioral self-regulation, it was

negatively correlated specifically with substance use, lack of moral reasoning, and delinquent behaviors, such as cutting and skipping class and being suspended and expelled from school. However, belief in moral absolutes was not significantly correlated with sexual activity, and belief in moral absolutes was not found to be a significant predictor or contributor to these outcomes, except for in the case of moral reasoning, which means that other factors were accounting for a significant amount of the outcomes in these areas. Nevertheless, this study adds support to the study of religious scriptures in school, which would possibly provide moral directives and absolutes that would be beneficial to youth.

Absolute rules or guidelines, such as the Ten Commandments, are not in schools anymore. Ask any teacher and he or she will say that the biggest offense in school today is not chewing gum, but alcohol, drugs, and teenage pregnancy, as well as crime and delinquency. Could this increase in destructive behavior be the result of people no longer believing in accountability to some higher power? People do not know the rules of this higher power? People do not feel any relationship with this higher power? People are no longer given time or opportunities to connect to this higher power? At the very least, Bible courses or religion in school would expose children to religion, giving them opportunities to learn about God and His word, receive guidance and directions for living, and, ultimately, have a greater sense of accountability.

Some research suggests that religion today is evolving into a concept better known as “spirituality,” and this concept is gaining momentum in the Western world. Although not always, spirituality is frequently no longer tied to a specific God with whom a relationship can be formed. Research indicates that attachment is crucial in

development. According to research, God meets all the requirements for an attachment figure; however, many people today do not think of Him as a personal God or have a personal and perceived closeness with Him. If people think of God as distant and uninvolved in their lives, God would not have any role in guiding their behavior. This study provided some evidence that the more adolescents feel attached or a “perceived closeness” to some god, the more this feeling had an impact on their “self-regulation” and decision-making skills, and may help shape and guide behavior. Research also proves the importance of “a father figure” in shaping the lives of youth. God could possibly serve as a type of father figure in the lives of children who do not have access to one.

In addition to attachment, rules and boundaries are important for youth. Spirituality is often not as “rule governed” as religion. This lack of rules could pose negative consequences seen in the research of parenting. Passive parenting is sometimes more detrimental than any other type of parenting. Research indicates that authoritative parenting is the best practice because children need rules, structure, and discipline. Without these boundaries, children can become less compliant. The same concept can be applied to God or a belief in a god who has guidelines to follow. God can serve as an authoritative figure in peoples’ lives. He can guide and direct behavior. Educating children without considering the idea of a higher power gives them little sense of accountability. Youth who read religious scriptures more frequently demonstrate better overall self-regulation, and this study provides specific evidence on the merit of scripture reading or Bible studies for schools.

Teaching Self-Regulation

What are the goals and what is the purpose in the big picture of schooling? Few would disagree that one of the most important goals is to teach moral character to youth. Reading, writing, and math are important, but teaching these subjects are ultimately in vain if children do not have good self-regulations skills to be able to benefit from the instruction. The author of this paper is not implying that teaching self-regulation is as easy as adding religion into schools; however, the addition of religion may be part of the solution that needs serious consideration because of its ability to meet the requirement for an attachment figure and to provide boundaries, two very important concepts that in the parenting world have been deemed a necessity to foster healthy children. Religion is just one variable of many that have potential to increase successful outcomes.

Cultural Diversity

Certainly, as Sarason (1996) suggests; changing systems is not easy. America is now a cultural pizza of many religions (Tomes, 2013). As a result of the cultural explosion, the predominant religion may be challenging to determine. Hence, for some, just taking religion out of education altogether, may be easier instead of tackling that dilemma and working together to make some sort of compromise by which all children would have the opportunity to spend time with their God to form an attachment (prayer time or scripture reading), or even the opportunity to learn about other religions in order to gain cultural awareness. At least then youth could make an educated decision regarding the best religion for them and the one that makes the most sense. Teaching religion in schools is also an opportunity to incorporate cultural awareness. Religion is a major component of the world and a source of conflict in a majority of the wars; not

allowing any time on this important subject leads to increased prejudice and discrimination.

This study did demonstrate some interesting findings in regard to religious affiliations and provides support for Christian Bible study in school. Christians appear to have the greatest emotional attachment, and they are significantly more likely to attend religious services, pray, and read scripture. Christianity could be an example of how to build a relationship with God. Jewish students also fared better in academic outcomes, so a study of the Old Testament might be good as well. However, in order to address cultural sensitivity and educate youth, as well as to be fair, other religions also should be examined to compare the similarities and differences. Everyone should have knowledge of the major religions of the world and understand their basic beliefs and principles, understand where conflict arises, and learn how to live in a world despite these differences in beliefs. Everyone should be able to develop a personal relationship with his or her own God.

The author of this paper is in no way implying that the process is as simple as adding religion in schools. One should remember that, as Sarason (1996) noted in his book, schools are very complex systems with a complex history. Religion has always been at the forefront of conflict in the schools. Even touching the complexity of school change would require another paper. However, people must ask a very important question that Sarason (1996) reminds his readers of: Who owns the schools and what is their purpose? As a nation, America has given the public schools over to government, and Americans have little say in what they want their children to learn. Ultimately, the government decides what it thinks is important. Some parents do not want their children

learning about religion, but many do. There should be some way to incorporate religion that makes both sides feel comfortable, instead of an all-or-nothing attitude. One should also remember the “majority,” as Murray (1995) pointed out; although only a few people do not want religion in schools, the majority has to succumb to them. Another very important point that Jeynes (2003), among others, pointed out is that arguments for abolishment of prayer and Bible readings in school were based upon the “separation principle,” although this phrase of separation of church and state never appears in the Constitution. The goal was to keep the government out of religion, not religion out of government or schools.

Not having the opportunity for learning about religion in schools also poses many problems for some parents that may want their children to be educated in this area. Many parents may not have the financial opportunity to send their children to religious private schools. Transportation is also not available, as it is in public education. Understanding and interpreting the biblical text may be difficult for many parents to teach their children at home. This study shows support for the belief that a relationship with God is one of the most important factors in changing behaviors. One could also argue that an hour a week at Sunday school is hardly enough time to build a significant relationship with God, especially when youth are competing against so many other factors for time and attention. To develop a relationship with God, youth need time and commitment, as in any relationship or as in any other course of study.

Limitations of the Study

This study is not without critical limitations. The most critical limitation to this study is the self-report by adolescents. The self-report by adolescents may have led to

responder bias (trying to portray them-selves in a positive light). Self-reporting might have also led to unreliable information. The adolescents in this study reported their grades, and no cross reference was made with schools to conclude if the grades were accurate or not. In addition, the phone interviews were 45 minutes long, which may have led to fatigue, as well as to participant bias. Adolescents who are willing to agree to such a lengthy survey may already have higher self-regulation skills.

Another limitation may have been using a convenience sample without having any sampling control of the population. Many of the youth were of the Christian faith, even though the sample was a randomized. In addition, although the original study had 3,370 respondents, the recoding and recreating of new scales by the examiner excluded many of the youth. Any of the youth who did not respond to even one of the questions in the Substance Use, Sexual Activity, Moral Reasoning, or Delinquency sections was tallied as missing and was not included in overall results. However, even though only a small number of youth were included in the Overall Behavioral Self-Regulation scale, the results were still found to be significant.

Lastly, a limitation to the study is possible researcher bias (being a Christian and hoping for statistical significance). Although a fair and balanced perspective was carefully taken throughout the process, a Type-I error where significant results were found when there were, in fact, none is always a possibility. A third-party statistical consultant was also used hopefully to alleviate any of these types of errors; however, there is always the possibility of statistician error as well, of which the examiner is unaware.

Future Directions

This study demonstrates in a small way the importance of religion in education. However, future studies may want to control for demographic variables, as well as to examine Wave 3, especially in regards to academic outcomes, such as college attendance. Conducting a study on religious affiliation differences in terms of the regression outcomes would also be interesting. For example, reading scripture is one of the most powerful predictors, but for which group? Future directions also include continuing to gather additional information on more recent large-scale studies from which one can gather information on students across the United States. Gathering additional information on large scale studies will increase statistical power as well as provide a representative sample of the United States. More research is always needed, specifically on prayer and scripture reading. More research is also needed on which components increase attachment and perceived closeness to God. Another interesting area might be to study the differences between spiritual people and people who are spiritual but also religious. More research is needed to understand these group differences as well. In addition, religion is a very difficult variable to define and measure because, as research indicates, it has many multicultural factors that need to be taken into account. One of the biggest challenges is that religiosity waxes and wanes throughout development and life, and researchers should continue to examine these factors in adulthood. Research indicates that studies on adult religiosity are needed even more so than on youth.

There are also several ideas for interesting ways to study the role of religion in education more effectively and to see whether there is a direct causal relationship. Although this study provides evidence that a relationship exists between the factors of

perceived closeness and outcomes, it does not imply a direct causal relationship, or for that matter, direction of causality. For example, delinquent behaviors could cause youth to feel more distant from God, or students with higher academic grades may be more likely to read the Bible and understand its content. One way to establish direct causality is to develop, implement, and evaluate a moral-character curriculum based upon biblical principles and to measure its impact on academic and behavioral functioning. Another idea is to re-implement Bible study and prayer in a school district and measure outcomes. However, these studies, of course, present challenges because legally and ethically there are many implications for schools. The study of the topic of religion in schools is almost impossible because it would initiate all sorts of legal proceedings. Perhaps a way around this initiating of legal proceedings would be to offer the study of religion to students whose parents would agree to it as an afterschool study. Also, a few hundred school districts have implemented academic Bible courses in schools. Evaluations of academic and behavioral outcomes are also needed on these programs.

As a result of the difficulties and challenges in carrying out these studies, another idea for an empirical study would be to evaluate students' brain changes after religious commitment (attending church, prayer, and scripture reading). Evaluating brain changes could be done via brain scans outside of the school environment. In the Christian Bible, God implies that a person is a new creature when he or she believes and follows Him. Seeing the physical effects of how a belief in God literally changes the brain, as some researchers have begun to do, would be interesting.

Lastly, other needed areas of study are qualitative studies of students who attend religious afterschool programs. Their perceptions of religious belief, attachment, and

commitment are important, as are their perceptions of how religiosity in their lives has changed them. The community (parents, teachers, etc.) could also be studied to examine perceived changes or benefits that have occurred because of the religious programs. Grades and behavioral reports could also be collected before and after starting the afterschool program. The study could also question the students and the community to determine whether they think religion would be effective in schools.

Another interesting study would be to examine students' and even adults' knowledge of other religious beliefs, traditions, and practices. This examination might allow recognition of the number of people who are not educated on the basic religions of the world that cause so much conflict and hate and that cause cultural insensitivity.

Conclusion

In summary, over the years, religion in schools, specifically Bible reading and prayer, has been taken away. Research suggests that the removal of religion in schools may be both the cause and result of the moral decay in society. Religion may have the ability to increase the moral character of youth.

Overall, the results of this study support findings in the literature that religiosity is important for academic and behavioral outcomes. However, this study also demonstrates that some aspects of religiosity are more important than others. This study lends support to the theory that a youth's personal relationship with God can positively impact self-regulation skills and guide behavior in a positive direction. At the end of the day, character education is more important than any other subject taught. The return of religion to schools has the potential ultimately to impact the nation and society. This study also specifically demonstrates that reading religious scriptures is extremely

beneficial to behavioral self-regulation. Research demonstrates many other social, emotional, and physical benefits to religion. Therefore, religion should be considered as an important variable in increasing academic and behavioral success.

Lastly, putting religion back into schools is one of the most controversial issues talked about today and would be a monumental task to accomplish. The author is in no way implying that this task is as simple as it sounds. However, history indicates that great and influential movements have been accomplished by pushing against the “zeitgeist of the day.” The author of this study is pushing back against the mainstream culture of today and suggesting that society has it all wrong. Education and religion should not be kept separate because together they may offer many benefits and positive outcomes. At the very least, if American’s cannot find a way to incorporate religion back into schools, parents should at least have the opportunity to send their children to religious schools if they want to, which leads to the issue of “school choice reform,” another controversial topic.

Jesus states in the Christian Bible, “Do not keep the little children from me” (Matthew 19:14, Luke 18:16). A solution to some educational problems may be found in the Bible, which could be a light to the correct path. Many people argue that the Bible is filled with simple and absolute truths and, if followed, provides important accurate future revelations. Many historical figures have taken what the Bible says literally and have been correctly guided. For example, Christopher Columbus was inspired by the Bible reference to the earth being shaped like “a sphere” (Comfort, 2001). Maybe American’s too should take to heart such a simple truth as “Do not keep the little children from me.” American’s do this when they refuse any type of religious education in schools. Schools

are an important socializing agent and a huge part of children's lives. Children often spend more time at school than at home. School is the place where children should be getting access to religion. However, in today's society, God of any kind is purposely kept from the children.

Although the process of putting religion back into schools appears to be an extremely complex process, this small simple truth is profound: "Do not keep the children from God." This study lends support to this simple truth. Many people have tested the validity of the Bible and have been pleasantly surprised that its simple truths hold up. Let the reader continue to test the reliability and validity of the Christian Bible and other religious texts.

Epilogue

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old is gone, the new has come!”(2 Corinthians 5:17).

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Appendix

Questions Used from the National Study of Youth & Religion, Frequencies, and Percents

1.) Belief in God

Y126. Do you believe in God, or not, or are unsure?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	2826	83.9
No	105	3.1
Missing (Unsure/Don't Know/Refused)	439	13.0
Total	3370	100
<i>N</i>	2931	87.0

2.) Belief in Moral Absolutes

Y103. Some people say that morals are relative, that there are no definite rights
and wrongs for everybody. Do you agree or disagree?

	Frequency	Percent
Agree	1548	45.9
Disagree	1700	50.4
Missing	122	3.6
Total	3370	100
<i>N</i>	3248	96.4

3.) Perceived Closeness to God

Y128. How distant or close do you feel to God most of the time?

	Frequency	Percent
Extremely Distant	108	3.2
Very Distant	105	4.6
Somewhat Distant	581	17.2
Somewhat Close	1169	34.7
Very Close	836	24.8
Extremely Close	401	11.9
Missing (Don't Know/Refused)	120	3.6
Total	3370	100
<i>N</i>	3250	96.4

4.) Frequency of Religious Service Attendance

Y60. About how often do you attend religious services?

	Frequency	Percent
Few Times a Year	527	15.6
Many Times a Year	276	8.2
Once a Month	233	6.9
2-3 Times a Month	420	12.5
Once a Week	763	22.6

More than Once a Week	527	15.6
Missing (Don't Know/Refused)	624	18.5
Total	3370	100
<i>N</i>	2746	81.5

5.) Frequency of Prayer

Y230. How often, if ever, do you pray by yourself alone?

	Frequency	Percent
Never	487	14.5
Less than Once a Month	257	7.6
One to Two Times a Month	449	13.3
About Once a Week	418	12.4
A Few Times a Week	499	14.8
About Once a Day	723	21.5
Many Times a Day	527	15.6
Missing (Don't Know/Refused)	10	.3
Total	3370	100
<i>N</i>	3360	99.7

6.) Frequency of Scripture Reading

Y231. How often, if ever, do you read from scriptures to yourself alone?

	Frequency	Percent
Never	1404	41.7

Less than Once a Month	457	13.6
One to Two Times a Month	623	18.5
About Once a Week	315	9.3
A Few Times a Week	266	7.9
About Once a Day	204	6.1
Many Times a Day	89	2.6
Missing (Don't Know/Refused)	12	.4
Total	3370	100
<i>N</i>	3358	99.6

7.)Academic Grades

Y91. (Reversed) What kind of grades (did you get in school last year/do you usually get in school)?

	Frequency	Percent
All A's	292	8.7
Mostly A's	351	10.4
A's and B's	1120	33.2
Mostly B's	422	12.5
Bs and C's	516	15.3
Mostly C's	198	5.9
C's and D's	91	2.7
Mostly D's	20	.6

D's and F's	11	.3
Mostly F's	13	.4
Missing (Mixed, Grades Not Used, Don't Know, Refused)	336	10.0
Total	3370	100
<i>N</i>	3034	90

8.) Academic Aspirations

Y85A & B. Ideally, how far in school would you like to go?

	Frequency	Percent
No Farther in School	3	.1
Some High School (Grades 9-11)	6	.2
High School Graduate (Grade 12 or GED)	189	5.6
Technical or Vocational School	54	1.6
Some College or Associates Degree	176	5.2
College Graduate	2148	63.7
Post Graduate	735	21.8
Missing (Don't Know, Refused)	59	1.8
Total	3370	100
<i>N</i>	3311	98.2

If Teen Is Not Home-Schooled

<i>N</i>	3237	98.0
If Teen Is Home-Schooled		
<i>N</i>	74	2.0

9.) Substance Use

Y164 & Y167. (Alcohol Reversed) How often, if at all, did you drink alcohol, such as beer, wine or mixed drinks, not including at religious services, and how often, if ever, have you used marijuana? (Ranging from never to regularly or almost everyday)

	Frequency	Percent
Missing (Don't Know/Refused)	10	.3
Total	3370	100
<i>N</i>	3360	99.7

10.) Sexual Activity

Y170, Y172A1, Y173, Y177. Have you ever engaged in oral sex, or not, and about how many times have you had oral sex, and have you ever engaged in sexual intercourse, or not, and about how many times have you had sexual intercourse? (Ranging from never to many times)

	Frequency	Percent
Missing (Don't Know/Refused)	2217	65.8

Total	3370	100
<i>N</i>	1153	34.2

11.) Lack of Moral Reasoning

Y98. (Reversed) In the last year, how often, if ever, did you: (Ranging from never to very often)

- A. Do things that you hoped your parents would never find out about?
- B. Cheat on a test, assignment, or homework in school?
- C. Lie to your parents?

	Frequency	Percent
Missing (Don't Know/Refused)	15	.4
Total	3370	100
<i>N</i>	3350	99.6

12.) Delinquency

Y161 & Y162 (162 adjusted). In the last year, how often, if at all, did you cut or skip classes at school, and in the last two years how many times, if any, have you been suspended or expelled from school? (Ranging from never to more than 5 times)

	Frequency	Percent
Missing (Don't Know/Refused)	131	3.9

Total	3370	100
<i>N</i>	3239	96.1

13.) Overall Behavioral Self-Regulation

Substance Use, Sexual Activity, Lack of Moral Reasoning, and Delinquency

(variables all recoded into one variable).

	Frequency	Percent
Missing (Don't Know/Refused)	2545	76%
Total	3370	100
<i>N</i>	825	24%

**The internal reliability of the variables that made up overall behavioral self-regulation was good. The alpha estimate was .74.*

14.) Religious Affiliation

Y62. Do you generally consider yourself to be:

	Frequency	Percent
Catholic	618	18.3
Protestant	19	.6
Christian	1890	56.1
Jewish	102	3.0
Muslim/Islamic	14	.4

Another Religion	98	2.9
Half One Religion and Half Another	12	.4
Not Religious	204	6.1
Missing (Don't Know/Refused)	413	12.3
Total	3370	100
<i>N</i>	2957	87.7
