

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

AN ASSESSMENT OF DROPOUT RATES OF FORMER STUDENT MINISTRY
PARTICIPANTS IN SELF-IDENTIFIED EVANGELICAL CHURCHES
WITH 500-2000 IN WEEKLY ATTENDANCE

A Prospectus Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Derik Wade Idol

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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ABSTRACT

Over the last quarter-century, there has been a consistent call to reconceptualization and at times reject the youth ministry task resulting from the universally accepted church dropout statistic post-high school graduation. In 2008, Brandon Shields presented a falsification study that disproved the theory that high school graduates are leaving the church at a rate of 70-90% at Southern Baptist Megachurches. The purpose of this study was to examine the claim that 70-90% of youth ministry graduates are leaving the church by researching 17 self-identified Evangelical churches of 500-2000 in average church attendance. The research design was a quantitative replication study of the Shields (2008) study. The researcher found a significant correlation among emerging adults in the sample population between current levels of church involvement and previous youth ministry commitment. The data revealed an overall retention statistic of 95.4% for the 502 participants in the research study with 74.3% of the participants having a current level of involvement in the moderate to high-level category verifying Shields findings. Emerging adults with previous youth ministry commitment are not leaving the church.

Keywords: Church Drop Out, Retention, Emerging Adults, Youth Ministry Commitment, Church Involvement

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this research study to youth ministry leaders who are faithfully serving students in the local church and parachurch. Also, I would like to dedicate this to my best friend, partner in ministry, and love of my life, Meagan Idol. Also, to my incredible children Abby and Austin. You are precious gifts from the Lord, and I praise Him every day for you. Finally, to my parents, Gary, and Cindy: thank you for your support and love.

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List of Abbreviations

Youth Ministry Retention Questionnaire (YMRQ)

Southern Baptist Church (SBC)

Family Integrated Church (FIC)

Liberty University (LU)

Faith Journey of Young Adults (FJYA)

Lasting Faith Scale (LFS)

Youth Ministry Comfort and Connection Scale (YMCCS)

Church Comfort and Connection Scale (CCCS)

Youth Ministry Commitment Levels Scale (YMCLS)

Current Church Commitment Levels Scale (CCCLS)

Modified Youth Ministry Commitment Scale (MYMCS)

Modified Current Church Involvement Scale (MCCIS)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

Youth ministry literature over the last two decades reveals a universally accepted phenomenon that emerging adults are leaving the church after graduation from high school at a rate of 70-90% (Barna, 1991; Dudley, 1999; Kinnaman, 2016; LifeWay 2007, 2017). Proponents and opponents of youth ministry agree these statistics are valid and age-graded youth ministry practice shoulders much of the blame (Baucham, 2011; Murashko, 2011; Brown, 2011; Stetzer, 2014; Brown 2016; McGarry, 2019). It is rare to find a published work on youth ministry that does not mention and use the church dropout rate statistics of churched emerging adults as a reason for the solutions being proposed in the work. For example, McGarry (2019), in *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, offers the dropout rate as the first of three foundational problems of today's youth ministry landscape. Shields (2008) writes, "These statistics have been advocated as near-gospel truth for at least a decade now. Even the most cursory internet search revealed 194,000 references (blogs, articles, websites)" (p. 6). In the twelve years since Shields's dissertation, a simple google search of youth ministry dropout statistics reveals that the number has blossomed to over 3,000,000 references in blogs, articles, and websites.

The impact of the dropout statistics on youth ministry culture and training has been significant. If the proposed statistics are actual and youth ministry shoulders the blame as affirmed in the literature, youth ministry theory and practice must be revisited and retooled. However, if the statistics are faulty, then youth ministry has been targeted under false pretense, and the call for a shift in ministry theory and practice is unfounded. Additionally, the study would impact morale and personal fulfillment for the youth ministry practitioner and elevate the value of youth ministry in the local church.

Dropout Statistical Data in the Precedent Literature

The statistical data in the literature supports the universally accepted phenomenon that emerging adults are leaving the church at a rate of 70-90%. This section will investigate the primary sources in the precedent literature of statistical data claims about the high school graduates' dropout rate. The significance of the statistical claims is found in the source identity of the claimants. Sources include respected youth ministry movement leaders, researchers, and organizations in the church ministry orbit. A robust investigation of the statistical claims reveals that much of the presented data is anecdotal, unreliably researched, or does not specifically measure the impact of youth ministry commitment on current church involvement. This section will primarily focus on the statistical claims from genesis to present. It will explain known discrepancies related to the reliability of the data in the literature when present. Since this research study is a replication study of Brandon Shields 2008 study, the statistical claims will be organized in descending order by the claim's date and demarcated into three sections with the Shields (2008) study as the reference point:

1. The claims in the literature before 2008 (predating Brandon Shields's dissertation).
2. The claims in the literature after 2008 (since Brandon Shields's dissertation).
3. The findings in Shields's dissertation. The Shields (2008) dissertation was chosen as a point of reference since this is the only statistical research found in the literature that challenges the claims that students drop out of church post-high school graduation.

Dropout Rates in the Literature Before 2008

Shields (2008) argues, "An examination of the social science and youth ministry literature over the last twenty years yielded six primary sources for the so-called "dropout rate" that is being used to question the modern youth ministry paradigm" (p. 5). The six primary sources are Barna, Jay Strack, Josh McDowell, T. C. Pinckney, The Southern Baptist

Convention's Council on Family Life, and LifeWay Research. In addition to the six primary sources Shields investigated, a seventh study was published by Wesley Black, professor of youth ministry at Southwestern Seminary shortly following the Shields study.

Barna Research

The first mention in the literature was made by Barna in 1991. The research conclusion claimed the data supported that most teenagers (61%) exited the church following high school graduation (Barna 1991). Interestingly, Barna was not researching the dropout rates of students or emerging adults in the study, and the study did not provide questioning regarding youth ministry involvement. Instead, the research study was focused on orthodox Christian beliefs and responses from within the church.

Jay Strack

The second is a statement Jay Strack made at a conference in the early to mid-1990s: “90% of young people were leaving the church after high school graduation.” Strack is an author, speaker, and CEO of Student Leadership University. He is a respected and prominent leader in the youth ministry movement over the last forty years. In an interview with Brandon Shields in 2006, Strack admitted basing this statistical conclusion on a "gut feeling" instead of empirical research evidence (Shields, 2008, p. 5).

Josh McDowell

The third claim is from Josh McDowell, a famed youth speaker, author, and apologist. Josh McDowell suggests that between 85-93% of teenagers were abandoning the church after high school. These statistics appear to be anecdotal, and there is no reference to a research study backing these statistical claims in the literature. Shields (2008) states, "While this researcher can

find no published works from this period where McDowell puts these observations in writing, they did begin to surface recently in interviews and books" (p. 6).

T. C. Pinckney

The fourth claim, in 2001, is by T. C. Pinckney, who reported to the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee his observation that 70% of teenagers involved in church youth ministries leave the church within two years of their high school graduation. Pinckney (2001) writes,

In a talk at Southwestern Seminary, Josh McDowell noted that less than 1/3 of today's youth attend church. If he is right and 67% do not go to church, then we lose 70% of those who do, which means that within two years of finishing high school, only 10% of youth Americans will attend church. (p. 1)

SBC's Council on Family Life

The fifth statistic is from the SBC's Council on Family Life, which reporting that 88% of Evangelical children leave the church shortly after graduation (Lee, 1991).

LifeWay Research

The sixth statistic is from LifeWay Research (2007), stating that "two-thirds of young adults who attend a Protestant church for at least a year in high school will stop attending church regularly for at least a year between the ages of 18-22" (p. 1). This statistical claim is unique in that it does not fully suggest emerging adults are leaving the church forever but there is at least a year of disconnection from the church during this age range. In 2017, a replication study of the 2007 study was completed by LifeWay and is discussed in the next section.

Wesley Black, Southwestern Seminary

Black (2006, 2008) conducted a Faith Journey of Young Adults (FJYA) study of both young adults who are active and those who are inactive in church involvement. The core of the study was to determine how parents and ministry leaders can retain church attendance among

emerging adults. Black developed the Lasting Faith Scale (LFS) to measure the probability of young people continuing to be involved in the local church after high school. The research did not focus on whether emerging adults were leaving the church but on prescriptive solutions to stop them from leaving the church. However, he agrees with the dropout statistics suggesting “there is a major problem with emerging adult attendance in the modern church (Black, 2008, p. 28).

Dropout Rates in the Literature After 2008

The Barna Group

The Barna Group conducted a research project from 2007-2011 on emerging adults entitled the *You Lost Me Project*.

The You Lost Me Project was a multiphase and mixed-method research project. The research study began with qualitative interviews conducted by phone and with in-person participants. The second phase involved quantitative online surveys by those 18-29 years old (p. 247).

David Kinnimen, the President of the Barna Group, in the book *You Lost Me*, reveals the findings from the study. Kinnimen (2016) states that "millions of young adults leave active involvement in church as they exit their teen years" (p.19). Barna Group (2016) research posits plainly, "Millennials are leaving the Church":

Nearly six in ten (59%) young people who grow up in Christian churches end up walking away. The unchurched segment among Millennials has increased from 44% to 52% in the last decade, mirroring a more significant cultural trend away from churchgoing in America. (p. 1)

LifeWay Research

LifeWay conducted a replication study of the 2007 research study in 2017.

In 2017, LifeWay Research stated that 66% of the surveyed population said they stopped attending church compared to 70% in 2007. LifeWay Research (2019) stated in the article “Most Teenagers Drop Out of Church as Young Adults,” that "the dropout rate for youth adults accelerates with age, 69 percent say they were attending at age 17, that fell to 58 percent at age 18 and 40 percent at age 19. Once they reach their 20s, around 1 in 3 say they were attending church regularly." The LifeWay study found that church attendance peaks at age 15, with more than 75% regularly attending at that time. At 18, however, that number fell to 58%, and by age 19, only 4 in 10 former regular attenders still attended church. LifeWay also found that about two-thirds of dropouts return to worship services once they get older, and by age 21, one-third attended church services regularly. That percentage remained constant through age 30.

The more recent studies are still grim but offer a slightly more optimistic outlook than the earlier statistical claims. It is noteworthy to point out the dramatic drop in church involvement reported at a very short time after graduation.

Dropout Statistics Universal Acceptance

As previously mentioned, Black (2008), in agreement with the dropout statistics, suggests a significant problem with emerging adult attendance in the modern church (p. 28). The germane youth ministry literature uncovered a universal acceptance of the claims of a post-high school graduation exodus. In many cases, the literature is connected to the upper echelon of Christian institutions training future youth ministry leaders and the impetus for books and articles on youth ministry praxis. The following is not an exhaustive list but rather an indicator of how deeply entrenched this phenomenon is in youth ministry culture and leadership. The list will only contain works over the last ten years to show the dropout statistics' present impact. It is rare to

find a published work on youth ministry that does not mention and use the dropout rate statistics to determine the prescriptive solutions proposed in the work.

Liberty University Center for Youth Ministries

In the book *Youth Ministry Essentials*, Brown and Vandegriff take an optimistic angle quoting from LifeWay Research that states roughly 70% of youth adults drop out of church: "This number is lower than the often-touted '86 percent' of students who don't stick around; however, it is still a cause for concern" (Brown & Vandegriff, 2015, p. 30). Brown and Vandegriff propose reasoning for why students are leaving the church at an alarming rate and prescribe solutions to combat the problem. Brown and Vandegriff were youth ministry professors and leaders in the CYM at Liberty University when authoring this seminal work.

Fuller Youth Institute

The Fuller Youth Institute conducted a "College Transition Project" to nurture and produce lasting faith in the next generation. The purpose of the project was primarily to discover practical ideas that could aid with faith formation. The impetus of the project was the staggering statistics of church dropout rates following graduation. The project resulted in the book *Sticky Faith*, which states, "40-50 percent of kids who graduate high school will fail to stick with their faith in college" (Powell et al., 2011, p. 15). This number is a lower projection from previously stated research statistics but reveals adoption and agreement with the premise that a large majority of students are leaving the church post-high school graduation. This research study is optimistic that the statistic is actually 40-50%—dramatically smaller than 70-90%.

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

While this research study will focus on the United States, it is worth noting that literature trends across the border in Canada. The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada initiated two

significant studies in the last decade that address church dropout rates of young adults: The Hemorrhaging Faith Study (2011) and the Renegotiating Faith Study (2018).

The Hemorrhaging Faith Study

The Hemorrhaging Faith Study involved 2,049 young people between the ages of 18 to 34 years old. One of the significant findings from the 2011 Hemorrhaging Faith (HF) study was the "hemorrhaging" of religious affiliates. The research revealed that of those raised in the Christian faith, only half of Catholics (47%), one-third of Mainline Protestants (36%), and two-thirds of Evangelicals (64%) retained their religious affiliation into young adulthood.

Renegotiating Faith Study

The Renegotiating Faith study was produced by a young adult transition partnership that includes The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, Power to Change-Students, InterVarsity Christians Fellowship, Youth for Christ, and Truth Matters. The study isolated almost 2,000 young adults, 18 to 28 years old, with a Christian upbringing. The Renegotiating Faith research study found:

Catholics keep 55% of their more-than-nominal teen affiliates into young adulthood, Mainline Protestants keep 53%, and Evangelicals keep 64%. While a third of church teen affiliates are moving to the ranks of the combined group of Atheist, Agnostic, Spiritual, and None (AASN), there is a new development. About one in twenty Christian teens are converting by the time of young adulthood to other world religions, usually Buddhism and Islam. About half of teens continued their level of religious service attendance into young adulthood, while 45% said their attendance level dropped, and only 6% reported an increase. (p. 13)

The Hemorrhaging Faith Study (2011) and the Renegotiating Faith Study (2018) revealed a 64% retention rate of Evangelical young adults. To some degree, levels of church involvement were a part of the Renegotiating Faith Study. The "more-than-nominal" Evangelical commitment retention rate of 64% is dramatically higher than the statistical data revealed in the previously

stated studies of young adults in the United States. However, it still affirms a problem with young adult church retention.

Voddie Baucham

Voddie Baucham (2011), a Family Integrated Church proponent, is an author, pastor, and dean of theology at African Christian University. He uses the dropout statistics to argue the failure of modern youth ministry in the book *Family Driven Faith*, where he posits the following:

According to researchers, between 70 and 88 percent of Christian teens are leaving the church by their second year in college. That's right; modern American Christianity has a failure rate somewhere around eight (almost nine) out of ten when it comes to raising children who continue in the faith. (pp. 10-11)

It is Baucham's view that modern youth ministry is the problem and churches should abandon the unbiblical ideology.

Michael McGarry

McGarry (2018) wrestles with the tension caused by the dropout rates in the introduction of the book *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry* by stating, "The statistics about the 'dropout rate' are not mere numbers to us, but students whom we have known and served and loved in the name of Christ" (p. 2). McGarry shares many empathetic student ministry leaders' sentiments about the implication of the dire statistics in the literature. McGarry (2018) then argues that the dropout rate statistics are a leading factor in the impetus for writing the book and acknowledges that the statistics on the dropout rates are virtually gospel: "It is well known that the majority of church-attending teenagers abandon their faith after high school" (p. 6).

Ben Trueblood

Ben Trueblood is the director of Student Ministry Resources at LifeWay. He is an author and respected leader in the youth ministry movement. In his book, *Within Reach: The Power of Small Changes in Keeping Students Connected*, Trueblood (2018) presents the dropout rate

statistics by reporting the LifeWay study: "60 percent of students who were active in their church during high school no longer remained active in the church between ages 18-22" (p. 22). The statistics present the problem, and the book offers solutions.

As previously stated, this list is not meant to be exhaustive but rather a sampling of the acceptance of the dropout rate statistics in the precedent literature from pinnacle leaders, authors, academic institutions, and organizations producing training content and resources for youth ministries.

Background of the Problem

The emerging adult church dropout rate is not only universally accepted as a true phenomenon, but the literature suggests that youth ministry shoulders the blame. Baucham (2011) places the dropout rate responsibility directly on the youth ministry movement by rhetorically asking, "Could it be that the paradigm itself (i.e., modern youth ministry) is broken?" (p. 176) Opponents of youth ministry are diligent in exploiting the statistics and anecdotes that affirm the number of churched teenagers' decreasing when transitioning to adulthood. Scott Brown, director of the Family Integrated Church, told the Christian Post that "today's modern concept of youth ministry is a 50-year failed experiment" (Murashko, 2011, p. 1). Brown (2011) writes that youth ministry is "a weed in the church" that should not only be reformed but uprooted. Meyer (2020), founder of Unlearn.com, affirms this position by stating, "Youth ministry is failing because if they (youth ministries) were training children the right way, they wouldn't be leaving the church in droves" (p. 2). Olshine (2013) argues that youth ministry is a mistake and is taking away from the responsibility of parents to disciple children at home. According to Olshine (2013), youth ministry has "got it wrong" in recent history:

Youth ministries have taken away the Deuteronomy six edict parents have to disciple their children. He says the solution to empowerment is to "find ways to give the ball back

to Christian parents, where it belongs, as the primary spiritual caregivers of their teens. (p. 4)

Even proponents of youth ministry are enticed to hold student pastors and youth ministries accountable. As previously mentioned, it is rare to find a published book, conference, or cohort that does not mention and use the dropout rate statistics to build a case for a prescriptive solution. Stetzer (2014), executive director of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College and editor of Christianity Today, offers three responses to LifeWay Research, which reveals that 70% of church youth dropout. Two of the three responses are a challenge to youth ministries. Stetzer (2014) says, “If your student ministry is a four-year holding tank with pizza, don't expect young adults to stick around.” The assumption is that these statistics, if true, are tied to youth ministry practice. McGarry (2018) admits the dramatic impact on youth ministry practice and the call for youth ministry reconceptualization:

An increased number of leaders has considered the 'dropout rate' and started asking difficult questions about the validity and practice of youth ministry... This has set the stage for a new era of youth ministry, where the entire church is being called to renew its commitment to the next generation and to family discipleship. (p. 2)

The implied conclusion is that there needs to be a renewed focus on next-generation and family discipleship that is missing in youth ministry practice. The dropout statistics have led to studies on the factors that lead to higher emerging adult retention in youth ministry. Brown (2016) completed a qualitative study of church emerging adults to discover factors that lead to church retention and offer youth ministry leaders implications. The rationale for Brown's (2016) research is reversing the dropout trend: “In the end, if churches continue to lose valuable members during emerging adulthood, they will be missing a key age group in the body life and missing valuable discipleship and mentorship opportunities” (p. 21).

Statement of the Problem

The universal acceptance of the dropout rate and the suggestion that youth ministry shoulders the blame is problematic if the proposed dropout rate statistics are not accurate. Brandon Shields researched the "dropout rates" of student ministry graduates involved in Southern Baptist megachurches in the United States. The Shields study results directly contradict the claims of the dropout statistical data and provide a falsification study to the theory. Karl Popper argued that any scientific theory or hypothesis must be subjected to rigorous logical and empirical testing before it can be accepted or supported. With every experiment that verifies a theory, the theory is bolstered and supported. The opposite is true with falsification. Popper (1959) argued, "If the conclusions have been falsified, then their falsification also falsifies the theory from which they were logically deduced" (Popper 1959, 33). Therefore, in Popper's assessment, if a single reliable and viable study falsifies a theory or statement, the theory is flawed and must be revisited. Therefore, Shields's (2008) research study falsified the dropout rate theory. Additionally, Shields (2008) discovered significant flaws from the statistical claimants of the dropout statistics.

Shields's dissertation research argues that the primary statistical data used have significant flaws, including tainted samples, lack of church commitment level measuring, and anecdotal reasoning. Shields (2008) argues that the sample population was not narrowed or delimited enough, causing a broad theological spectrum to be included in the sample. The same is true for the statistical data presented after the Shields dissertation. The "Hemorrhaging Faith" and the "Renegotiating Faith" studies, for example, separate Protestants from Catholics, but that is the only delineation. In many of the studies, there is no differentiation between liberal or conservative theology. The Shields research study specifically targeted theologically

conservative churches that held a commitment to doctrinal orthodoxy. The second major flaw in the statistical data before 2008 was that the research never measured the level of commitment in student ministry before high school graduation. The only research study that measured commitment since 2008 was the Hemorrhaging Faith and Renegotiating faith studies. In both studies, however, the only criteria were that a person was considered committed if they attended church twice a month while they were in high school.

Shields (2008) developed the YMRQ instrument that is comprised of 45 structured (close-ended) questions pertaining to youth ministry commitment and the current church involvement of emerging adults. The first 15 questions measured the degree of commitment to youth ministry using extrinsic indicators (church attendance, program involvement, small group participation, etc.) and intrinsic indicators (personal fulfillment, relationships with leaders, perception of spiritual growth, etc.). The study measured four levels of commitment (Shields, 2008, pp. 118-119). Level 1 commitment included someone with "zero involvement" in youth ministry who was referred to as a "disengaged prospect." Level 2 commitment included someone who had "low involvement" who was considered a "normative attender." Level 3 commitment included someone with "moderate involvement" who was considered an "enthusiastic follower." Level 4 commitment included someone who had "high involvement" who considered an "engaged disciple." Questions 16 through 30 focused on demographical information (age, marital status, employment during high school, etc.). Questions 31 through 45 measured church involvement as a young adult. The YMRQ instrument was completed as an online survey with 316 participants, with a total number of 279 completed, usable surveys (Shields, 2008, p. 131). Shields (2008) states, "The reliability of the YMRQ was measured using a simple Cronbach's

Alpha statistic. The result of this statistical measure revealed a score of .89, which was well above the necessary reliability threshold of .80” (p. 125).

Shields’s results were dramatically different from the statistics that predated the 2018 study and now have postdated the study. Shields found an 88% average retention rate across all commitment levels (p. 180). Shields’s analysis revealed that students with Level 4 commitment (Engaged Disciples) had a "retention rate of 92.7%," and many were leading in their church in some context post-high school graduation (p. 152). The research also reveals that those with Level 3 commitment (Enthusiastic Followers) had an "80% retention rate," and Level 2 (Normative Attender) had a "79% retention rate" (pp. 148-150).

Therefore, Shields’s study refutes the dropout claim by providing falsification for the theoretical claim that emerging adults are leaving the church after high school graduation. However, more research needs to be done. While Shields’s study provides a falsification to the dropout rate theory, the high rate (92.7%) of retention could also provide a counter-theory. Also, the research questions and hypothesis of Shields’s study need to be replicated to target a different population to determine if Shields’s study is a research outlier. According to the Encyclopedia of Research Design, “An outlier is an observation in a set of data that is inconsistent with the majority of the data” (p. 1). There is limited statistical data supporting the high dropout rates, but only one study supports the high retention rate of emerging adults. Could the population sample of megachurches with staff and resources contribute to a more dynamic ministry experience that caused the high retention rates?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative replication research study will be to examine the claim that 70-90% of actively involved student attendees drop out of church after high school. The study

will be a replication study of Brandon Shields's 2008 falsification research study while targeting a different sample. To accomplish the stated objective, the researcher will investigate the relationship between different levels of youth ministry commitment during high school and current levels of church involvement at self-identified Evangelical churches that average 500 to 2000 in weekly attendance.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

- RQ1.** To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit Level 1 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently committed to a local church?
- RQ2.** To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit Level 2 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently involved with a local church?
- RQ3.** To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit Level 3 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently involved with a local church?
- RQ4.** To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit Level 4 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently involved with a local church?
- RQ5.** To what degree, if any, are demographic variables significantly related to levels of youth ministry commitment and current local church involvement?
- RQ6.** What is the relationship between different levels of youth ministry commitment during high school and the level of current local church involvement?
- RQ7.** To what degree, if any, does the study verify or contradict the result of the Shields study?

Assumptions and Delimitations

Research Assumptions

This study operates on a number of assumptions.

1. Young adults have a clear memory and can recall their youth ministry experiences during high school, including program involvement and personal spiritual formation.
2. The spiritual development of adolescents and young adults can be measured, to some degree, through church commitment and involvement studies.

3. Based on the precedent literature, long-term relationships, conservative theology, and evangelistic programming (including discipleship) are accurate gauges of a dynamic youth ministry.

Delimitations of the Research Design

1. To gain an accurate understanding of post-youth ministry retention, this study will be delimited to young adults who graduated from high school prior to the year 2021 and after 2011. Sampling young adults in this range will allow for more precise data on the effectiveness of modern youth ministry. Also, the proximity to high school graduation and post-graduation church participation will be fresher in their memory.
2. The research will be delimited to theologically conservative, self-identified Evangelical churches. The sample selected for analysis will be theologically conservative churches. Churches that are not committed to traditional doctrines, such as the inerrancy of scriptures, the vicarious atonement, bodily resurrection of Jesus, the sufficiency of Christ for salvation, the Gospel, and the Trinity, will not be included in the study. The theological background of the denomination or pastor of the church could impact the results of the research. Students that previously attended churches that do not self-identify as Evangelical will not be measured in the study. Also, the research will be delimited to local church youth ministries. There are many parachurch youth ministry organizations. Young adults involved exclusively in the parachurch youth ministry context, while being absent from local church attendance, will not be included in the study.
3. The research will be delimited to self-identified Evangelical church young adults committed to their youth ministry during high school. While the level of commitment will be different, some degree of commitment is required. The research will not include those who were unchurched in high school but have since become involved in a church. The purpose of the current study will be to examine the relationship between previous levels of commitment and current levels of church involvement. As such, an investigation of the unchurched will be beyond the scope of the research.
4. The research will be delimited to churches that have a full-time, compensated student pastor. Churches with full-time compensated student pastors reveal a commitment to investing resources in the next generation.
5. The research will be delimited to churches in the United States. There are robust student ministries across the globe. International students will not be measured in the study.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this research study, the following definitions will bring clarity and guidance to the terms and thoughts that are frequently expressed.

1. *Youth pastor*: For the purposes of this study, a youth pastor is a biblically qualified, professionally trained, and financially compensated employee of a church. The primary responsibilities are to provide leadership for middle and/or high school student ministry in evangelism, discipleship, serving, and parental engagement.
2. *Adolescence*: Adolescence is derived from the Latin “adolescere,” meaning “to grow into maturity” or “to grow up.” The first psychologist to advance the psychology of adolescence was G. Stanley Hall (1844-1924). He described adolescence as a period of “storm and stress.” Throughout history, the age of adolescence has gradually been extended. In the 1940s, adolescence was considered 14 to 18-years-old. Today, adolescence is regarded as 10 to 25-years-old in three distinct categories: early adolescence (10-13), middle adolescence (14-18), and late adolescence (19-25). For the purpose of this study, the terms “adolescent,” “student,” “teenager,” and “youth people” will be used interchangeably to describe this life stage.
3. *Retention*: Shields (2008) posits that “retention is the process of assimilating active high school youth ministry participants into the life of the larger church post-youth ministry” (p. 18). For the purposes of this study, retention will be measured by four levels of current church involvement: no involvement, low involvement, moderate involvement, and high involvement.
4. *Emerging Adults*: Powell (2016) defines emerging adults or young adults as those between “19- to 29-year-olds” (p. 29).
5. *Megachurch*: Churches that have an average weekly attendance of 2000 congregants or more.
6. *Replication research studies*: Test theories by repeating an original study while applying a different situation or population.
7. *Falsification theory*: The theory that if one study refutes a previously held theory, the hypothesis is falsified and must be changed or rejected.

Significance of the Study

It has been over a decade since Shields (2008) wrote, "A good deal of youth ministry literature written in the last decade has used dropout statistics as a springboard to launch into

critiquing and reconceptualizing the youth ministry task" (p. 3). Shields (2008) hoped the research conclusion from his study would temper the criticism of youth ministry:

By empirically falsifying the dropout statistics so ardently supported in the precedent literature, it is the hope of this researcher that perhaps the tidal wave of criticisms aimed at youth ministry over that last decade can be stemmed to some degree. (p. 181)

Unfortunately, that hope did not translate to reality. As presented in the research concern, very little has changed since 2008. Twelve years after Shields's dissertation, the literature and culture of youth ministry are still being impacted by the accepted dropout rate statistics. More statistics have been presented since the Shields dissertation that align with the pre-Shields data, with no study affirming or acknowledging the data from the Shields study.

Youth ministry has been considered a failure by many as a result of the church's emerging adult dropout rates. There has been a perpetual call over the last 20 years for an overhaul of youth ministry by some and annihilation by others. This would be a huge mistake based on the limited statistical data to support this pessimistic conclusion. Based on the high retention statistics revealed in the Shields study, the damage of compromising youth ministry practice with falsified statistics would be detrimental to the next generation in the local church.

In fact, there is no indication that participants in the research studies that affirm the dropout rates blamed youth ministry for their lack of church attendance post-high school graduation. In the research studies conducted by the Barna Group and LifeWay Research, the reasons for the participants leaving the church had nothing to do with youth ministry. The Barna Group (2011) revealed that 11% lose faith in Christianity, 40% leave the church but still call themselves Christians, 20% disconnect from church and express frustration about "church culture" and disconnects with society, and 30% stay involved. The LifeWay (2017) research study revealed that the top five reasons that youth leave the church were moving to college

(34%), church members seemed judgmental or hypocritical (32%), they didn't feel connected to relationships in the church (29%), they disagreed with the churches political and social stances (25%), and time limitations due to work responsibilities (24%). In other studies, when questions were asked about youth ministries and student pastors, the participants have been affirming (Ji & Timeifuna, 2011; Powell et al., 2008). Brown (2016) conducted a qualitative study seeking factors that increased emerging adult retention and mentioned several interviews with emerging adults that specifically pointed out the difference a youth pastor made in their life: "My youth pastor made a huge difference" (p. 13).

Additionally, a falsification study has been completed that significantly refuted the dropout statistics. The study found that students committed to youth ministries of Southern Baptist megachurches were actively involved in the church as emerging adults at a rate of 92.7%. That means the dropout rate in this study was 7.2%. This one statistic is the metaphorical "black swan" that delegitimizes the dropout claims. More research is needed due to the limited statistical data in the literature on emerging adult attendance and youth ministry commitment levels. Future research should focus on the premise that a higher commitment in youth ministry will impact retention as a young adult. Shields found that there was a high retention rate even for the lower levels of youth ministry commitment. Two questions needed to be considered in the research: (1) Was Shields's study an outlier due to research bias or a sample's unique profile? (2) Was Shields's study the genesis of new theoretical development in the field of youth ministry retention? There was need for a replication study that targeted differing church sizes, a need that this study addressed. Loannidis (2012) states, "Efficient and unbiased replication mechanisms are essential for maintaining high levels of scientific credibility" (p. 646).

Summary of the Design

The survey questionnaire was distributed to the participants through student pastors of 17 selected churches that met the inclusion criteria by email, text messaging, and social media platforms. Since this is a replication study, the research instrument used to measure church involvement was the Youth ministry Retention Questionnaire (YMRQ) developed by Brandon Shields in 2008. Shields (2008) describes the YMRQ as an instrument comprised of 45 structured (closed-ended) questions pertaining to past youth ministry commitment and current church involvement, as well as demographic information including age, gender, type of high school attended, level of education, and current religious affiliation. The YMRQ was modified to 44 questions by removing a demographic question asking for the name of the participant for anonymity. The YMRQ measures both extrinsic indicators (church attendance, program involvement, small group participation, etc.) and intrinsic indicators (personal fulfillment, relationships with leaders, perceptions of spiritual growth, etc.). The study combined self-reported attendance questions (each with four possible “forced” responses) with a series of Likert-type responses ranging from 1 (I tend to strongly disagree) to 4 (I tend to strongly agree). A four-option symmetrical scale was used, applying balanced questioned responses on either side of the scale from strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Each answer aligns with a point value that will collectively provide a church involvement and youth ministry retention score through the three sections of the questionnaire. The study targeted a minimum of 300 survey respondents for statistical analysis to establish the appropriate confidence level. 502 survey respondents were used in the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to review the precedent literature regarding youth ministry retention, effectiveness, and statistical data. The literature review will provide a theological and theoretical basis alongside the related literature in the field of youth ministry, adolescent development, church commitment, and spiritual formation. The objective is to justify the current research study's need and identify a gap in the literature that this study will fill.

Theological Framework for the Study

Biblical and Theological Foundation of Youth Ministry

The foundation of ministry methodology or model should have a basis in the biblical text. Therefore, youth ministry must be supported, understood, and programmed with the appropriate biblical boundaries and theological attention. Bunge (2008) argues for the significance of considering biblical and theological perspectives on parents, children, and faith formation in the youth ministry task. Bunge (2008) posits that a biblical foundation strengthens all areas of work with or on behalf of children and young people, whether in children's ministry, youth and family ministry, religious education, or child advocacy.

The first question that must be answered is, "Where is youth ministry found in the Bible?" There are many youth ministry opponents that declare that youth ministry is not mentioned in the Bible and should be avoided (Baucham, 2011; Renfro, 2009). McGarry (2019) offers a challenge to the claims of youth ministry opponents:

There is no verse that explicitly commands youth ministry, but the family and the community's mandate to raise up the next generation in the fear and obedience of the Lord is overwhelming...Biblical Youth ministry is an application of the frequent commands to pass on the commands of God to the next generation. (p. 19)

The biblical responsibility to disciple the next generation was rooted in the home but extended to the entire community. The people of God were given strict and poignant warnings against failure to disciple the next generation to faith maturity (New International Version, 1973/2011, Joshua 24, Judges 2:10).¹ This section will explore the precedent literature in regard to a biblical and theological foundation of youth ministry.

Hebrew Model of Education

The Hebrew model of education was the pillar of the next-generational spiritual formation outlined in the Old and New Testaments. According to Anthony (2003), it was essential that "faith be passed on to the future generations" (p. 24). The Hebrew model of education included a triad of fundamental components of faith transmission: the home, the synagogue, and the Mosaic Law. The home was an essential environment for spiritual knowledge and growth from parental modeling to instruction in the Hebrew model of education. The Old and New Testaments offer guidance and instruction for parents and their responsibility in raising children: "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Solomon writes the Proverbs as wisdom instruction for a father to guide his children. Historically, the home was the first and most essential place for schooling in the Hebrew education model. The primary source of the curriculum was the Law and the modeling of the parents' faith. Zuck (2001) explains that the Torah offers a number of different methods utilized by parents when educating children: "teaching by example (Deuteronomy 6:5-8, 31:12), oral communication (Deuteronomy 6:6-7, 11:18-19), informal discussions that occurred during the day (Deuteronomy 6:7, 11:19), while answering questions (Exodus 12:26, 13:14, Deuteronomy 6:20-21), through the use of visual aids and object lessons

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the Bible are from the New International Version (1973/2011).

(Deuteronomy 6:9, 11:20), and while observing or participating in religious festivals and ceremonies during the year (Deuteronomy 16:16)" (p. 342). Anthony (2003) argues that rabbis viewed the home as an extension of the tabernacle and as a place of prayer, study, and assembly.

The role of the home in the spiritual formation of the next generation has robust support in scripture. The Family Integrated Church has taken the role of the home in scripture to espouse the idea that youth ministry is unbiblical and promotes the abdication of the parental discipleship responsibility. McGarry (2019) challenges this conclusion by stating that "parents were given the primary calling to impress the commands of Scripture on their children's minds and hearts, but this was never meant for parents alone" (p. 19). The expectation was that all older generations would participate in the raising up of the younger generations. In the Old Testament, there is evidence of family discipleship (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), intergenerational worship (Psalm 71:18; 78), and the separation of children in worship (Nehemiah 8:1-3). In the New Testament, Jesus selects young men as disciples (Matthew 17:24-27), older men and women are commanded to invest in the next generation (Titus 2:1-7), and Paul disciples Timothy and Titus, young men who are not his children (1 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:5). The Old and New Testaments affirm that discipleship of the next generation extended beyond the home.

The synagogue was the second component of the Hebrew model of education. The synagogue was the primary gathering place for worship and adult instruction following Babylonian captivity. Eventually, the synagogue became an essential component of educating young men and women from five to twelve years old (Anthony, 2003). Children would go to these schools to learn from adult teachers and mentors outside of the home. For this research dissertation, it is essential to grasp that the scriptures teach that older women and men have a responsibility to disciple the young:

Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. (Titus 2:3-6)

This passage of scripture uses the plural form to show that there should be multiple adult influences in the life of a young person as a foundation for spiritual formation. The community needed to share in the discipleship of the young. Knight (1992) affirms this interpretation of Titus chapter two in his commentary of the Greek text of the Pastoral Epistles by stating, "But this is put into perspective when we realize that Christians are constantly being taught in the NT to love, whether it be God or fellow Christians and neighbors (here the closest neighbor)" (p. 307). Furthermore, attendance at the Synagogue schools became mandatory in AD 64 for every community with ten or more families when Joshua ben Gamala, the high priest during the last days of the temple, ordered it (Anthony, 2003).

The Hebrew model of education's final component was the Mosaic Law's centrality in the educational curriculum. Anthony (2003) states, "Every single subject (reading, writing, problem-solving, mathematics, and memorization skills) incorporated the Mosaic law into its teaching" (p. 234). The Mosaic Law was the foundational thread in the home and the synagogue instruction.

Greek Influence on First Century Education

The Greek culture had a profound impact on Rome and the first century Jews. The diaspora following the Babylonian captivity and the eventual conquering of the world by Alexander the Great resulted in many Jews being detached from the Hebrew language. Greek became the world language. The necessity for the Hebrew Scriptures to be translated into a known language of the people was increasing. In the 3rd century BCE, the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek. The Septuagint provided accessibility to the scriptures for the Greek-

speaking Jews. Greek culture is influencing the language and life of the Jewish people in the First Century. The Greeks were differed from the Jews in religious belief and expression. The Greeks were polytheistic with a pantheon of gods to worship. Kerenyi (1962) quotes from Walter Otto's 1926 lecture explaining the Greek idea of God,

Wherever religion and culture are still found in their native strength, they are fundamentally one, and more or less to be identified one with another. In such a case religion is not valued additional to cultural goods but the most profound revelation of the peculiar content and essence of a culture. (p. 13)

The Greeks believed the gods were involved and controlled everything from agriculture, weather, the seas, and most of life circumstances.

The Greeks by nature were inquisitive and encouraged the free exchange of opposing views. Greek education was diverse in practice based on region. As an example, the Spartans maintained that children did not belong to their parents, but to Sparta. Spartan education was about discipline and preparing each to become a soldier (Anthony & Benton, 2011). Intellectual development was seen as a waste of time and ethics were subjective. Boys were taught to steal from one another to prepare for reconnaissance missions as a soldier (Freeman, 1969). "It was said that the greatest honor of a Spartan mother was to see her son return from the battlefield carried on his shield, having given his life for the protection of his country" (Anthony & Benson, 2011, p. 49). The Athenians, in contrast, began formal education at the age of six with a focus on developing the mind. Then took an educational path towards higher education. The Athenians valued a balanced and well-rounded liberal arts education (Anthony & Benson, 2011). Individual attention was given to each child to move at the pace of the child's understanding. Philosophy and rhetoric were championed. The Apostle Paul even finds himself in Athens sharing the gospel and a philosophical exchange with Stoic and Epicurean philosophers (Acts 17). The influence of Greek culture has had a deep impact on history. Anthony and Benson (2011) suggest that "No

culture has had so profound an impact upon the way we live today as that of the Greeks” (p. 68). The Greeks were conqueror by the Romans, but the Romans could never conqueror the Greek culture that infiltrated life in Rome.

Roman Education

The Roman form of education is important as it laid the foundation for the birth of Christianity. Jesus was born in a world under Roman control. The Roman Empire continued to be the world power for centuries after Jesus’ death. The Romans placed high importance on education in the home. The family was central to educating children, particularly the father (Anthony & Benson, 2011). The Romans emphasize personal integrity and character development over intellectual elitism or the physical prowess of a warrior. This was in contrast to the Greek Athenian and Spartan cultures. Character was preeminent in the training of a child, even before reading, writing, and mathematics (Anthony & Benson, 2003). Also, the Romans held in high regard the contributions that each would make to the community as a result of character. Cicero argued that education should be based on pragmatic ideals and that an educated man should make a contribution to his community (Too, 2001). The educated would exhibit behavior that would reflect their desire to improve the community and to serve as a model for future generations.

Jesus Models Youth Discipleship

Stier (2015) states in *Youth ministry in the 21st Century*, "Jesus was a youth leader" (p. 3). Jesus gave three years of spiritual investment and formation to the lives of the young disciples that followed Him. A glimpse into the age of disciples is revealed in Capernaum (Matthew 17:24) when the collectors of the temple tax asked Peter if Jesus was going to pay up:

After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?" "Yes, he

does," he replied. When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. "What do you think, Simon?" he asked. "From whom do the king of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own children or from others?" "From others," Peter answered. "Then the children are exempt," Jesus said to him. "But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth, and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours. (Matthew 17:24-27)

The two-drachma temple tax's annual payment was for the temple upkeep and a "matter of national pride" for the Jewish community (France, 1994, p. 927). Jesus instructs Peter to catch a fish that will have a four-drachma coin to cover the tax for the two of them and states, "The children are exempt." The context of "children" is disputed by commentators and the argument for a metaphorical interpretation to the children of God (Nolland, 2005, p. 726). Additionally, the temple tax was required for Jewish adults 20 years old and older (Stier, 2015; McGarry 2019). Matthew 17:24-27 correlates to Exodus 30:14, stating, "All who cross over, those twenty years old or more are to give an offering to the Lord." All of the disciples were present, but only Peter had to pay to the tax. That would suggest that the other disciples were under 20 years old. This would also align with the rabbinical tradition of selecting disciples. Rabbis would select students at the age of 12 to 13 years old to follow as a disciple (Laan, 2015). Though young men from the ages of thirteen to nineteen years old were not viewed as adolescents, as in the modern context, they were still being developed by older men. The rabbis and Jesus were not parents of these young men but were highly influential in the spiritual formation during the early years of their life.

Peter is the leader of the disciples. Peter is listed at the top of every list of the disciples in the New Testament (Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:13-19, Luke 6:12-16, and Acts 1:13-14). Peter is the first to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. In Matthew 16, Jesus asks Peter, "Who do you say I am?" Peter replies, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus

replies, "On this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Peter was the first disciple to step out and speak up. Peter cut off the ear of Malchus (John 18:10), walked on water (Matthew 14:22-33), followed Jesus in the courtyard (Luke 22), rebuked Jesus (Matthew 16), and was the disciple that stood up to preach on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Peter is mentioned in nine books of the Bible and over 180 times. That is three times more than John, the second most mentioned disciple in the Bible. Peter is the eldest, and his age is likely the reason for the position he takes among the disciples. Also, Peter is the only disciple whose biblical life includes evidence of marriage. McGarry (2019) says, "The silence regarding the marital status of all the apostles except Peter is noteworthy since Avot 5:1 expected most Jewish men to begin pursuing marriage at eighteen years old" (p. 47).

Also, in Luke 3:23, the scripture states that Jesus was "about 30-years of age" when He began His public ministry. It would have gone against tradition for Jesus to have selected disciples who were older than Himself and highly offensive for Him to have referred to them as "little children" (*teknia*) if they were peers (Macleod, 2004, p.56). Also, McGarry (2019) argues:

The behavior of the disciples (wanting Jesus to call down fire on those who reject Him, arguing about who will be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven, and being generally dull towards the nuanced teachings of Jesus) seems like the immaturity of adolescence. (p. 45)

Most biblical scholars believe the Book of Revelation, written by the Apostle John, should be dated in the 90s of the first century. The Apostle John would have been nearing 100 years old had he been in his late twenties when he was one of Christ's disciples. McGarry (2019) states, "A younger age for John, who is widely considered the youngest of the apostles, would place him at 15-years-old when he became a disciple and at 85-years-old when he wrote Revelation" (p. 45).

Discipleship and Jesus

To be a disciple means to be a learner or follower. The *New International Bible Dictionary* explains that the epistemological background of the word "disciple" comes from the Greek "*mathetes*" which means learner (Douglas, 1987, p. 273). Wilkins (1992) states:

From its very earliest use, *mathetes* was not simply a learner or a pupil in an academic setting. In fact, Herodotus, in whose writings the noun occurs for the first time in written Greek, uses the term to indicate a person who made a significant, personal, life commitment. (p. 75)

The word was used to describe the followers of Jesus before they were called "Christians" after the founding of the Church at Antioch (Acts 6:1-2, 7; 11:26). Rabbis would receive "disciples" in the Jewish culture before the time of Jesus, and he was following the pattern of rabbis that preceded him. However, Jesus broke the mold of the typical rabbi by selecting His disciples and speaking with authority.

Traditionally, disciples sought out rabbis for selection, but Jesus sought out the twelve disciples that would follow Him (McGarry, 2019). Jesus offers a simple invitation to each disciple: "Come and follow me" (Matthew 4:19). First-century Jewish boys understood that to follow a rabbi meant to walk as he walked and become like him (Laan, 2015). Teachers of the Law and Pharisees spoke under the authority of the rabbis that trained them. Zuck (2002) explains, "The teachers of the law quoted scripture, tradition, or other teachers to support their instructions. Their teaching was a second-hand repetition of the views and decisions of previous Rabbis. They dared not be independent in their views" (p. 48).

For example, as Morris (1974) explains, "Rabbi Eliezer piously said, 'Nor have I ever in my life said a thing which I did not hear from my teachers'" (p.109). Davies (2000) affirms this by quoting Rabbi Hillel (B.C. 70- A.D. 10), who was speaking on the matters of the day: "They did not receive his teaching until he said. Thus I heard from Shemaiah and Abtalion" (Davies,

2000, Vol. 1, p. 726). The rabbi would train the disciple in the same way he was taught. The disciple's course was to leave their present life to follow in an attitude of study, obedience, and imitation (Willard, 1999). Jesus was set apart from the teachers of the first century. Mark 1:22 sums up the sentiment of Jesus' teaching: "The people were amazed at his teaching because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law." Jesus was "not as the teachers of the law." Jesus did not quote the thoughts passed down to him from other rabbis but instead came with the Father's authority in Heaven. Even His opponents recognized the difference in His teaching. The Pharisees and Herodians tried to trap Jesus through questioning about paying taxes to the Roman government and "were amazed" by His response (Matthew 22:22; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:26). He also used a diversity of teaching methods from object lessons, figures of speech, parables, experiential learning, and proclamation, to name a few (Anthony & Benson, 2011). Jesus was and is the true Master Teacher who teaches with authority. His teaching engaged the mind, heart, hands, and soul. Jesus unveils an holistic approach to discipleship. The Christian disciple follows and submits to the most exceptional leader, Jesus. Jesus challenges His disciples to "go and make disciples" of all nations and people (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8).

The Bible and Intergenerational Worship

The Old and New Testament offer a biblical basis for the young being integrated and educated in an intergenerational worship environment (Deuteronomy 29:10-11; Joshua 8:35; 2 Chronicles 20:13; Joel 2:16; 1 Timothy 1:2; Acts 16:1). Intergenerational ministry worship involves the incorporation of all ages in the assembly of God's people. There is a scriptural precedent for intergenerational worship as children were part of God's people (Deuteronomy 31:12, Ephesians 6:1-3). In addition, as previously mentioned, the synagogue and festivals were

a part of the educational formation of Hebrew youth of the Old and New Testaments. The synagogue and festivals involved intergenerational ministry. There were instances when the priests would assemble the entire community to proclaim the Law and expound upon its meaning. There was an expectation that children attend, pay attention, and even participate in these activities (Anthony, 2003). The role of intergenerational ministry worship is biblical and follows Hebrew educational tradition and the early church practice (McGarry, 2019).

Theoretical Framework for the Study

History of Modern Youth ministry

The history of the modern youth ministry movement is a phenomenon with relatively recent beginnings. Youth ministry historian Senter (1992) argues that through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there were three historical cycles that galvanized the influence and critical nature of the youth ministry: The first cycle (1824-1875), the second cycle (1881-1925), and the third cycle (1935-1987). According to Senter (1992), there six ingredients to the three cycles:

1. The cycle started amid a period of rapid social change.
2. Grassroots youth ministry movements started under the direction of the Holy Spirit.
3. An acknowledged leader emerged in the form of a nationally recognized youth ministry organization.
4. Imitators began using the essential strategy without the original well-focused purpose.
5. There was a period of stagnation.
6. An event outside of youth ministry changed the environment and set the stage for the next cycle.

In his later work, Senter (2010) expounds on his earlier conclusion on historical youth ministry movements:

Three factors tended to converge when a new cycle of youth ministry began. Secularization and the loss of Christian moorings, compounded by times of social unrest and change, in settings where there was a critical mass of Christians form the economic

middle class, gave rise to innovation in helping young people experience God's presence. Five characteristics shaped these movements – a visionary, a simple system, media coverage, a spokesperson, and a sense of revival, that is, the sense that God was involved in what was happening both individually and on a larger scale. (p. 93)

This section of the research study will survey the three historical cycles of the youth ministry movement to comprehend the present condition of modern youth ministry more accurately.

The First Cycle: The Period of Associations (1824-1875)

The first cycle was ushered in by a period of rapid social change resulting from the industrial revolution. According to Senter (1992), the period was directed by social dislocation. This propelled leaders and associations to address the needs of young people as led by the Holy Spirit. According to Senter (2010), "Most of these societies featured a type of pomp and ceremony that attracted young people to participate, and then the associations attempted to stimulate an interest in accepting the Christian values they advocated" (p. 103).

Sunday school became a crucial part of the first cycle of youth ministry in the United States. Though Sunday School was founded much earlier (1780) by Robert Raikes in England, the American Sunday School Union's founding in 1824 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania catapulted young people's Christian education forward in the United States. The success of Sunday School provided a pathway for subsequent youth ministry movements and parachurch organizations. A second movement known as the Cadets of Temperance or juvenile temperance movements started in 1943 after the American Sunday School Union's success. According to the *Cyclopedia of Temperance and Prohibition* by 1891, membership of the Cadets of Temperance had grown to ten thousand adolescents. The juvenile temperance societies were gatherings of young people from the ages of 12 to 21 years old that were meant to help establish good moral character and alcohol abstinence among young people. Senter (2010) posits, "Though focused on an abstinence from alcoholic beverages, the movement provided a means of preserving youth for a life of

Christian living" (p. 100). The next parachurch association that was birthed during the first cycle was the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), founded by George Williams in 1851, and the Young Women's Christian Association in 1858.

These associations started with a Christ-centric mission and vision, but over time, they led to stagnation. The period of stagnation arose in the first cycle through internal and external challenges. Sunday schools found it very difficult to provide leadership and supervision to the thousands of schools started by the American Sunday School Union. The lack of leadership and training resulted in poorly prepared lessons and diminished effectiveness. Also, eventually, the YMCA and YWCA lost their initial purpose and identity as a Christian organization. Externally, the Civil War and the Supreme Court decision that provided the path for the birth of public education (1875) led to the end of the first cycle (Senter, 2010).

The Second Cycle: The Period of Youth Societies (1881-1925)

According to Senter (2010), "The second cycle of youth ministry in the United States has the most clearly marked starting point of the three cycles that span the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (p. 152). Frank Clark formed the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor in 1881 as a response to social urbanization, which started the Second Cycle. Educational historian Cremin (1988) refers to this time in history as the "metropolitan experience." The cities were booming, manufacturing was at a peak, and the economy was thriving. Senter (2010) states that "53 percent of the labor force in 1870 was engaged in farming; by 1920, 73 percent held nonagricultural jobs" (p. 152). There was a need to address the education of the next generation with the new realities of parents' occupational choices and pressures. During the second cycle, there was a continuation of Sunday School, the YMCA, and YWCA and the introduction of youth ministry societies: The Society for Christian endeavor and the denominational youth

societies. Frank Clark started the Society of Christian Endeavor to solve the disconnect that youth experienced between Sunday school and the church. Also, the Christian Church was fragmenting over fundamental doctrine and the traditional conservative values. Clark believed that adolescence had the maturity and ability to make profound spiritual commitments.

Previously, youth had been classified as children and not considered capable of active Christian involvement. The Christian Endeavor Society required students to sign a pledge of accountability for attendance to every meeting and they needed to share personal spiritual progress once a month with the group (Senter, 2010). The success of the Society of Christian endeavor was meteoric. By 1892, a little over a decade since it began, the Southern Presbyterian journal stated:

There is scarcely a land on the face of the earth without its societies of Christian endeavor. The last year has been the year of greatest growth in the history of the movement. Almost every Evangelical denomination in America has either adopted the society as its own or allows its existence without opposition. There are now at least 22,000 societies and with a million and a quarter members in all parts of the world. (p. 147)

The modern concept of "youth ministry" borrows significantly from concepts and direction of Clark's vision. The Society of Christian Endeavor created publications for youth, devised youth programs, and sponsored events. Also, society was primarily funded by donations from the youth that participated (Senter, 1992).

The stagnation period occurred when imitators without a Christ-centered purpose entered the scene and when youth society programs drifted from their original mission. Imitators that were wholesome but non-church youth agencies (such as boy scouts, girl scouts, campfire girls, 4-H clubs, & boys clubs) started all over the United States during this time. Youth society programs became generic, and there was a breakdown of connections between denominational leaders and the local church youth societies (Senter, 1992).

The end of the second cycle came about with an outside event that had dramatic implications for Christian education. The Scopes Monkey Trials of 1925 brought the debate of liberal and conservative views of the Bible to a nationally publicized trial. John Scopes was a Tennessee teacher accused of breaking the law by teaching evolution in a public-school classroom. William Bryan was the prosecutor and a devout Christian. Clarence Darrow was the defense attorney and a proponent of the evolutionary theory. Darrow called Bryan to the stand to testify. Bryan underwent a withering cross-examination by Darrow about belief and the Bible. The case gained national media attention. Bryan's side won the case. According to Senter (1992), Bryan won the battle, but not the war. The case was overturned a few weeks later in higher courts—a substantial victory for the atheistic evolution movement.

The Third Cycle: The Period of Relational Outreach (1933-1989)

There was rapid social change in the third cycle of youth ministry. In the 1920s, the country was in the middle of Great Depression. Previous models of ministry to youth had lost touch with the youth of the time. The rigidity of youth societies made it challenging to attract and keep the youth of the church engaged. There was a renewed emphasis on building relationships with the next generation. According to Senter (2010), "The answer came in the proposal to transform youth societies into youth fellowships and limit membership to high school or junior high school age" (p. 190). The idea was transformative, and youth were once again attracted to the relational aspects of these new fellowships. The task of finding adults that would endure the immaturity of the young, however, eventually led to the church hiring staff to give focused attention to the next generation. In 1932, the first youth pastor was hired. Youth pastors and parachurch organizations adopted a missional form of relational outreach. The third wave's grassroots movements included city-wide youth rallies in the 1930s-50s (Senter, 1992). These

rallies included Billy Graham's crusades, Jack Wyrzten's "Word of Life" rallies, and Jim Rayburn's Young Life rallies. Many of the parachurch organizations of this period are still making a difference in the young generations today. Notable parachurch organizations that were started during the third cycle include Young Life (1941), Youth for Christ (1947), AWANA (1950), Fellowship of Christian Athletes (1954), Word of Life (1950's), Student Venture (1966), Youth Specialties (1967), Group (1974), and Sonlife (1979). In the 1970s and 80s, the rise of the Christian music industry, large youth conferences, and Christian camps were significant influencers of the youth ministry movement.

The Family Integrated Church and Age Graded Ministry

Family Integrated Church

The Family Integrated Church (FIC) model emphasizes intergenerational ministry and the parents' (or guardians') responsibility to evangelize and disciple children. Proponents of the Family Integrated Church argue that the idea is based on scripture and church history, and therefore, any example of age-graded or age-segregated ministry should be avoided. According to Jones (2009), the family-integrated ministry model holds to the position that "all age-graded classes and events are eliminated from the ministry of the church," while emphasizing "intergenerational ministry and the parents' responsibility to evangelize and disciple own their children" (p. 42). According to Baucham (2011), a proponent of the FIC defines the movement:

The family-integrated church movement is easily distinguishable in its insistence on integration as an ecclesiological principle...Our Church has no youth ministries, children's ministries, or nursery. We do not divide families into parts. We do not separate the mature women from the young girls who need their guidance. We do not separate the toddler from his parents during worship. In fact, we don't even do it in Bible study. We see the Church as a family of families. (pp. 191-95)

The FIC does not exclude those who do not have a traditional family of parents and children, such as singles, and the family is not viewed as the church. According to FIC Pastor

Renfro (2009), "The family is not the church, and the church is not the family. Both are institutions working together within clearly defined jurisdictional lines to bless each other and to expand Christ's kingdom" (p. 72).

The popularity of the FIC has grown over the last fifteen years and is the required ministry model for certain denominations, such as the Primitive Baptist and Covenant Presbyterians, and has been adopted by a variety of churches across various denominations. The FIC does not invest money, time, or staffing toward the next generation ministry. The message from FIC proponents is that age-segregated ministries, such as children and youth ministries, have been a disastrous failure as revealed by the pervasive dropout statistics of high school graduates from church in the literature. FIC proponent Baucham (2011) says:

According to researchers, between 70 and 88 percent of Christian teens are leaving the Church by their second year in college. That's right; modern American Christianity has a failure rate somewhere around eight (almost nine) out of ten when it comes to raising children who continue in the faith (pp. 10-11).

The FIC movement identifies youth ministry as the responsible party for the faith exodus of youth adults. According to Baucham (2011), the responsibility falls directly on the Youth ministry movement. He rhetorically asks, "Could it be that the paradigm itself (i.e., modern youth ministry) is broken" (p. 176). The FIC believes modern youth ministry has promoted the parental discipleship mandate's abdication and placed it on professional youth ministry.

According to Olshine (2013), youth ministry has "got it wrong" in recent history:

Youth ministries have taken away the Deuteronomy six edict parents have to disciple their children. He says the solution to empowerment is to "find ways to give the ball back to Christian parents, where it belongs, as the primary spiritual caregivers of their teens (p. 4).

While the Family Integrated Church (FIC) espouses crucial components of next-generational discipleship, the role of parents, and intergenerational ministry, some critical

principles are missing that limit the model. In the Christian Post article, "*If the family is central, Christ isn't*," Carpenter (2013) agrees with the importance of the home in the discipleship of children, but he offers caution and lists eight problems with the Family Integrated Church:

(1) The sufficiency of scripture: that scripture doesn't explicitly teach it; (2) Divisiveness; (3) Contradicts other passage of scripture (Titus 2); (4) Undermines the Authority of the Offices in the Church: that pastors are called to teach in churches, not fathers; (5) The FIC Misreads Church History: that there have been age-segregated movements from the early days of church history; (6) The FIC is a Cure for a Disease that's Not Prevalent: that what it objects to isn't a widespread problem; (7) Misdefinition of the Church: that the Church consists of individual believers, not family units; (8) Familism: that it appears to make the family the ultimate loyalty. (p. 1)

One of the FIC's predominant limitations is the disconnect that occurs when ministering to the next generation in today's culture and context. Shields (2009) responds to FIC methodology by stating, "Aspects of the family-integrated perspective trouble me. They trouble me because I believe they blunt the local church's efforts to penetrate youth culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ" (p. 79). According to Shields (2009), there are three specific points of contention with the FIC model:

First, family-integrated congregations describe the Church primarily as a "family of families" when actually the Church is not a "family of families" but the family of God. Second, family-integrated churches are structured in such a way that public-school families are less likely to be reaching for Christ. And third, although they claim to be completely integrated, even so-called family-integrated churches selectively segregate member. (p. 79)

There is a pervasive and growing problem with developing adolescence who grow up in broken homes. According to the Census Bureau (2016), 31% of children grow up in a home without two parents. Census data also reveals that about 38% of opposite-sex, unmarried couples have children under age 18 living with them. Glidewell (2013) shares, "In 1966 half of families in America were traditional nuclear families but by 1976 that number dropped to 35%, and now only 7% could be categorized as living in traditional homes" (p. 62).

The prevalence of broken home life in the United States is a significant problem. In addition, the Pew Research Center's 2018 and 2019 studies reveal that the parents of the next generation are the most unchurched adult population in United States history. It is therefore appropriate for and responsible of the youth ministry leader to challenge believing parents to disciple and evangelize their children in the faith and to recognize that believing parents are not in every child's background. The FIC works well for Christian families, but what about the millions of children and youth growing up in homes absent of Christian influence? Strother (2009) poses a similar question: "How do family-integrated churches plan to reach nontraditional families and help these families understand themselves as full participants in the body of Christ?" (p. 85). The philosophical tension of Christianity and cultural engagement is rife in this discussion found in the literature. Niebuhr (1951) address the tension and offers five potential adoptive positions.

Niebuhr's Christ and Culture

Niebuhr's work was to "set forth typical Christian answers to Christ and culture" (Carson, 2008, p. 9). Niebuhr (1951) presents a five-fold paradigm to Christ and culture: (1) Christ against culture, (2) The Christ of culture, (3) Christ above culture, (4) Christ and culture in paradox, and (5) Christ the transformer of culture (Carson, 2008). According to Niebuhr, there are two extreme positions to "Christ and culture" with the historical majority maintaining the more centered positions of the other three. Below is a brief explanation of each including the primary flaws with each.

Christ against culture argues for an avoidance and adversarial approach to a sinful and counter Christian world (Niebuhr, 1951). Niebuhr classifies those that take this position as the extreme fundamentalist. Even alleged proponents, such as Tertullian and Tolstoy, of this

paradigm, reveal the challenges with the position. Niebuhr (1951) explains, “The radicals give the impression that sin abounds in the culture, while light and piety attach themselves to Christians” (p. 70). The position creates an “us” versus “them” mentality.

The Christ of culture position feel equally at home in the culture as with fellow believers. Those that maintain this position are cultural Christians that tend to be liberal theologically and light on sin, including their own. Niebuhr reveals that this position “attracted many people to Jesus, precisely because it does not make him seem as alien as the first position does” (Carson, 2008, p. 18). When worldliness attracts people to Christianity, then what version of Christianity are people being drawn to?

Christ above culture seeks to synthesize Christ and culture by following the tension that exists between them. Niebuhr (1951) argues that this position has been held by the majority in history. This position attempts to understand sin and grace biblically. Carson (2008) points out that this view tends to institutionalize Christ and the gospel by attempting to create a neat system of agreeance.

Christ and culture in paradox is the position of “Christ above culture” understood through the lens of dualism. The position holds that the core issue is a distinct differentiation between God and humankind. There is a recognition of the human’s sinful condition that has resulted in a separation from God. Carson (2008) explains that the view is similar to “Christ against culture” with the understanding that culture cannot be eluded and often leads to a negative perception — thus created paradoxical realities that cannot be avoided when evaluating culture. The problems with this position are that it does not provide a complete understanding. Niebuhr (1951) suggests that this position can lead Christians towards antinomianism and cultural conservatism. Christ

the transformer of culture is focused on the conversion of culture. The position is much more positive than the dualist perspective.

Age-Graded Ministry

Professional pastors of children, students, next generations, or families minister to the next generation and families who would never attend a church while also partnering with parents of believing students. Age-graded ministry offers separate meeting opportunities for students to grow spiritually in age-appropriate environments. Age-graded ministry considers the various developmental stages children and youth go through in order to cater to the needs of each age group. In Titus 2:1-8, Paul uses the plural form to show that there should be multiple adult influences in the life of a young man and woman as a foundation for their spiritual formation. Modern youth ministry philosophy of age-graded ministry does not exclude the role of the parent as the FIC would claim. While age-graded ministry that does not engage and equip parents to disciple their children is insufficient, age-graded ministry can be a tremendous asset in supporting parents to discover how to engage their children in every season of life. Joiner (2012), in regard to partnering with parents, says, "Regardless of their issues, baggage, and brokenness, every parent wants to be a better parent" (p. 85). A reciprocal relationship should exist between ministry leaders and parents. Children spend significantly more time with their parents than with ministry leaders. On average, parents spend 3000 hours with their children a year and have substantially more influence in the lives of their children than have ministry leaders (Joiner, 2012). The age-graded ministry leader must build a strategy to engage, equip, support, and reinforce parental discipleship. Research points to the value of having multiple adult spiritual leaders in young people's lives, which include student ministry pastors and volunteer church leaders (Ivy & Joiner, 2015; Joiner, 2012). Additionally, research reveals that the presence of

multiple adult spiritual leaders in a young person's life allows them to become more receptive to spiritual adventure and exploration (Good, 2008). Shields's (2008) dissertation affirmed the significance of age-graded ministry by revealing that 92.7% of committed students in youth ministries who graduated high school at Southern Baptist megachurches were actively involved in church in college. These results show the dramatic impact of youth ministry on the lives of young people and on their future adult faith formation.

Dropout Rates in the Literature

What does the research reveal about the dropout rates of emerging adults? This section will investigate the primary sources in the precedent literature that make statistical data claims about high school graduates' church dropout rates. The statistical claims will be separated into three sections: 1. The claims in the literature before 2008 (predating Brandon Shields's dissertation). 2. The claims in the literature after 2008 (since Brandon Shields's Dissertation). 3. The findings in Shields's dissertation.

Dropout Rates in the Literature Before 2008

Shields (2008) argues, "An examination of the social science and youth ministry literature over the last twenty years yielded six primary sources for the so-called 'dropout rate' that is being used to question the modern youth ministry paradigm" (p. 5). The six primary sources are Barna, Jay Strack, Josh McDowell, T. C. Pinckney, The Southern Baptist Convention's Council on Family Life, and LifeWay Research.

The first mention in the literature was by Barna in 1991. He claimed that the data supported that most teenagers (61%) exited church following high school graduation (Barna 1991). Interestingly, Barna was not researching church dropout rates of students in his study, and the study did not provide questioning in regard to ministry involvement.

The second mention was a claim made by Jay Strack in the early-to-mid-1990s that 90% of young people were leaving the church after high school graduation. Strack was a prominent leader in the youth ministry movement as the CEO of Student Leadership University. He was also an author and speaker. In an interview with Brandon Shields in 2006, Strack admitted to basing this conclusion on a "gut feeling" and not on empirical research evidence.

The third claim was from Josh McDowell, a famed youth speaker, author, and apologist. Josh McDowell suggests 85% and 93% of teenagers abandoned the church after high school. Shields says, "While this researcher can find no published works from this period where McDowell puts these observations in writing, they did begin to surface recently in interviews and books" (p. 6).

The fourth claim, in 2001, was by T. C. Pinckney, who "reported to the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee his observation that 70% of teenagers involved in Church Youth Ministries stopped attending church within two years of their high school graduation" (Shields, 2008, p. 6). Pinckney (2001) writes:

In a talk at Southwestern Seminary, Josh McDowell noted that less than 1/3 of today's youth attend church. If he is right and 67% do not go to church, then we lose 70% of those who do, that means that within two of finishing high school, only 10% of youth Americans will attend church. (p. 1)

The fifth statistic was from the SBC's Council on Family Life, which reported that 88% of Evangelical children leave the church shortly after graduation (Lee, 1991). The sixth statistic is from LifeWay Research (2007): "Two-thirds of young adults who attend a Protestant church for at least a year in high school will stop attending church regularly for at least a year between the ages of 18-22" (p. 1).

Dropout Rates in the Literature After 2008

The Barna Group conducted a multi-year (2007-2011) research project on emerging adults, titled the "*You Lost Me Project*":

The methodology of the You Lost Me project was a multiphase and mixed-methods research project. The research study began with qualitative interviews conducted by phone and in-person participants. The second phase involved quantitative online surveys to those ages 18-29 years-old (p. 247).

David Kinnimen, the President of the Barna Group, in the book *You Lost Me*, reveals the findings from the study. Kinnimen (2016) states that "millions of young adults leave active involvement in church as they exit their teen years" (p.19).

Barna Group (2016) research stated plainly, "Millennials are leaving the Church," revealing that trends show "nearly six in ten (59%) young people who grow up in Christian churches end up walking away. The unchurched segment among millennials has increased from 44% to 52% in the last decade, mirroring a larger cultural trend away from churchgoing in America."

LifeWay conducted a 2017 study that replicated the 2007 study. In 2017, LifeWay stated that 66% of the surveyed population said they stopped attending church compared to 70% in 2007. LifeWay Research (2019), in the article *Most Teenagers Drop Out of Church as Young Adults*, stated, "The dropout rate for youth adults accelerates with age, 69 percent say they were attending at age 17, that fell to 58 percent at age 18 and 40 percent at age 19. Once they reach their 20s, around 1 in 3, say they were attending church regularly."

Curiously, in the research conducted by the Barna Group and LifeWay Research, the reasons for the participants leaving church had nothing to do with youth ministry. The Barna

Group (2011) revealed that 11% lose faith in Christianity, 40% leave the church but still call themselves Christians, 20% disconnect from church and express frustration about "church culture" and its disconnection with society, and 30% stay involved. The 2017 LifeWay research study reveals that the top five reasons youth leave the church were moving to college (34%), Church members seemed judgmental or hypocritical (32%), they didn't feel connected to relationships in the church (29%), they disagreed with the churches political and social stances (25%), and time limitations due to work responsibilities (24%).

Dropout Statistics Universal Acceptance

The germane youth ministry literature uncovered a universal acceptance of the claims of a post-high school graduation exodus. In many cases, the literature is connected to the top-tier Christian institutions' training of future youth ministry leaders and is the impetus for books and articles on youth ministry praxis.

Liberty University Center for Youth ministry

In the book *Youth Ministry Essentials*, Brown and Vandegriff (2015) offer an optimistic angle when quoting from LifeWay research, which states that roughly 70 percent of youth adults drop out of church: "This number is lower than the often-touted '86 percent' of students who don't stick around; however, it is still a cause for concern" (Brown & Vandegriff, 2015, p. 30). The authors propose reasoning for why students are leaving the church at an alarming rate and prescribe solutions to combat the problem. Brown and Vandegriff were youth ministry professors at Liberty University through 2019.

Fuller Youth Institute

The Fuller Youth Institute conducted a "College Transition Project" to nurture and produce lasting faith among those in the next generation. The purpose of the project was

primarily to discover practical ideas that could aid with faith formation. The impetus of the project was the staggering statistics of church dropout rates following graduation. The project resulted in the book *Sticky Faith*, which states, "40-50 percent of kids who graduate high school will fail to stick with their faith in college" (Powell et al., 2011, p. 15).

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

While this research study will focus on the church in the United States, it is worthy to note the trends in literature outside of the United States. The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada initiated two significant studies in the last decade that address church dropout rates of young adults: The Hemorrhaging Faith Study (2011) and the Renegotiating Faith Study (2018).

The Hemorrhaging Faith Study involved 2,049 young people between the ages of 18 to 34 years old. One of the significant findings from the 2011 Hemorrhaging Faith (HF) study was the "hemorrhaging" of religious affiliations. The research revealed that of those raised in the Christian faith, only half of Catholics (47%), one-third of Mainline Protestants (36%), and two-thirds of Evangelicals (64%) retained their religious affiliation into young adulthood.

Renegotiating Faith was produced by a young adult transition partnership that included The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, Power to Change-Students, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Youth for Christ, and Truth Matters. The study isolated almost 2,000 young adults, 18 to 28 years old, with a Christian upbringing. The Renegotiating Faith research study found:

Catholics keep 55% of their more-than-nominal teen affiliates into young adulthood, Mainline Protestants keep 53%, and Evangelicals keep 64%. While a third of church teen affiliates are moving to the ranks of the combined group of Atheist, Agnostic, Spiritual, and None (AASN), there is a new development. About one in twenty Christian teens are converting by the time of young adulthood to other world religions, usually Buddhism and Islam. About half of teens continued their level of religious service attendance into young adulthood, while 45% said their attendance level dropped, and only 6% reported an increase. (p. 13)

The Hemorrhaging Faith Study (2011) and the Renegotiating Faith Study (2018) revealed a 64% retention rate of Evangelical young adults. To some degree, levels of church involvement were a part of the Renegotiating Faith Study. The "more-than-nominal" Evangelical commitment retention (64%) is dramatically higher than the statistical data revealed in the previously stated studies of United States young adults, but it still affirms a problem with young adult church retention.

Voddie Baucham

Voddie Baucham, a Family Integrated Church proponent, is an author, pastor, and dean of theology at African Christian University. He uses the dropout statistics to argue modern youth ministry has failed in the book *Family Driven Faith*, where he posits, "According to researchers, between 70 and 88 percent of Christian teens are leaving the church by their second year in college. That's right; modern American Christianity has a failure rate somewhere around eight (almost nine) out often when it comes to raising children who continue in the faith" (pp. 10-11). Baucham's view is that the modern youth ministry is the problem and that churches should abandon the unbiblical ideology.

Michael McGarry

McGarry (2018) wrestles with the tension of the dropout rates in the introduction of *A Biblical Theology of Youth ministry*, stating, "The statistics about the 'dropout rate' are not mere numbers to us, but students whom we have known and served and loved in the name of Christ" (p. 2). McGarry shares many empathetic student ministry leaders' sentiments about the implication of the dire statistics in the literature. McGarry (2018) continues, arguing that the dropout rate statistics were a leading factor in writing the book and acknowledges that the

statistics on the dropout rates are virtually gospel: "It is well known that the majority of church-attending teenagers abandon their faith after high school" (p. 6).

Ben Trueblood

Ben Trueblood is the director of student ministry resources at LifeWay. He is an author and leader in the youth ministry movement. In his book, *Within Reach: The Power of Small Changes in Keeping Students Connected*, Trueblood (2018) reports the LifeWay study: "66 percent of students who were active in their church during high school no longer remained active in the church between ages 18-22" (p. 22). The statistics present the problem, and the book offers solutions.

The Shields 2008 Dissertation Findings

Brandon Shields researched the "dropout rates" of SBC megachurch student ministry graduates. The results of the 2008 study directly contradicted the claims from the statistical data related to the church dropout rates of young adults. Shields's dissertation argues that the primary statistical data used by other studies have significant flaws. These flaws included tainted samples, not measuring level of Church commitment, and anecdotal reasoning. Shields (2008) argues that the sample population was not narrowed or delimited enough, which caused a broad theological spectrum to be included in the sample. The Shields research study specifically targeted theologically conservative churches that held a commitment to doctrinal orthodoxy. In many of the dropout rate studies, there is no differentiation between liberal or conservative theology among studied churches. The second major flaw in the statistical data before Shields's 2008 study was that the research never measured the level of commitment young people had in student ministry before high school graduation. The student who attended a few times in high school may claim, "I attended Youth ministry or church," but should those students be consider

churched in the same way as those who attended regularly? Also, Shields argues that no research study backed the statistical claims in some cases and conclusions were drawn predominately from anecdotal ideas developed by the author's feelings. Shields discovered flaws in every data set and sample that claimed the church's young adult dropout rate. If the data on the church's dropout rates is flawed, then the call for an overhaul of youth ministry is overstated.

Shields (2008) developed the YMRQ instrument to measure the level of youth ministry commitment and mitigate the problems of previous studies. Four levels of commitment were measured in the survey (Shields, 2008, pp. 118-119). Level 1 commitment was someone with "zero involvement" in youth ministry and was referred to as a "disengaged prospect." Level 2 commitment was someone who had "low involvement" and was considered a "normative attender." Level 3 commitment was someone with "moderate involvement" and was considered an "enthusiastic follower." Level 4 commitment was someone who had "high involvement" and was considered an "engaged disciple." The YMRQ instrument was completed as an online survey. There were 316 participants in the study, yielding a total number of 279 usable completed surveys (Shields, 2008, p. 131).

The research project results were dramatically different from the statistics that predated the study and that have been concluded since the 2008 study. Shields found an "88% retention rate" across all commitment levels (p. 180). Shields's analysis revealed that students with Level 4 commitments (Engaged Disciples) had a "retention rate of 92.7%" and that many were leading in their church context post-high school graduation (p. 152). Also, the research revealed that Level 3 commitments (Enthusiastic Followers) had an "80% retention rate", and Level 2 (Normative Attender) had a "79% retention rate" (pp. 148-150). Shields's study refuted the claim that droves of students were walking away from the church, and yet, twelve years after Shields's

dissertation, the literature and culture of youth ministry are still being impacted by the high dropout rate statistics from previous and more recent studies. More recent statistics have been presented since the Shields dissertation that align with the pre-Shields data, but there has of yet been no study affirming the data from the Shields study.

Related Literature

Adolescence and Emerging Adults

Adolescence is derived from the Latin “adolescere”, meaning “to grow into maturity” or “to grow up.” The first psychologist to advance the psychology of adolescence was G. Stanley Hall (1844-1924). He described adolescence as a period of “storm and stress” (Hall, 1904). Keniston (1971) explains that Hall observed a change in human development in the decades following the Civil War. The practice of child labor and industrial machinery replaced the children in the workplace pushed them towards education. The transition from working during the day alongside of parents to being with peers in an education environment was a dramatic shift that ushered in a distinct season of life for adolescence. Throughout history, the age of adolescence has gradually been extended. In the 1940s, adolescence was considered 14 to 18-years-old. Paediatrics and Child Health in 2003 defines adolescence as, “Adolescence begins with the onset of physiologically normal puberty, and ends when an adult identity and behavior are accepted. This period of development corresponds roughly to the period between the ages of 10 and 19 years” (p. 577). In just 15-years psychologist and sociologist presently regard the range of adolescence as 9 to 25-years-old in three distinct categories: early adolescence (10-13), middle adolescence (14-18), and late adolescence (19-25). Sawyer et al. (2018) explain that the research reveals, “An expanded and more inclusive definition of adolescence is essential...Rather than age 10–19 years, a definition of 10–24 years corresponds more closely to adolescent growth

and popular understandings of this life phase” (p. 223). Sawyer et al. (2018) explains that the age has decrease to as low as 9-years-old due to the onset of accelerated puberty in nearly all populations. The later age of 25-years-old is impacted by the combination of prolonged growth and education coupled with delayed marriage and parenthood. The later age has shaped the defining of emerging adults and the developmental progression through this distinct life stage. Many terms have materialized in the literature to describe this phenomenon over the last two decades: “Young adults”, “extended adolescence”, “youthhood”, and “adulthood.” The most widely accepted and utilized terminology in the literature to describe the late adolescence time period is “emerging adults.” The word pairing and terminology of emerging adulthood was coined by Jeffrey Arnett in the 1990s. Arnett (2004) posits,

This period is not simply an 'extended adolescence,' because it is much different from adolescence, much freer from parental control, much more a period of independent exploration. Nor is it really 'young adulthood,' since this term implies that an early stage of adulthood has been reached, whereas most young people in their twenties have not made the transitions historically associated with adult status - especially marriage and parenthood - and many of them feel they have not yet reached adulthood. It is a new and historically unprecedented period of the life course, so it requires a new term and a new way of thinking. (p.4)

For the purposes of this research study, emerging adulthood will be presented as a distinct life stage based on Arnett’s research. The age range of study participants that are selected for the study have been based on the emerging adulthood categorization of those between 19- to 29-years of age (Powell, 2016, p. 29).

It’s Just a Phase Project

The research reveals that during the normative developmental stages of adolescence, young people are characteristically more receptivity to spiritual adventure and exploration (Good, 2008). At every age, young people go through different developmental stages that affect how they learn, think, and process. It can even cause potential harm to children to discuss

specific ideas (even biblical ideas) with them in certain ways if their minds are not yet developed enough to process the ideas appropriately. At each stage of development, the next generation asks different questions about life and processes information in unique ways. The groundbreaking research done by the Phase Institute reveals the following:

Toddlers think like an artist, are motivated by safety, and that adults must embrace their physical needs. Elementary school children think like a scientist, are motivated by fun, and that adults should engage their interest. Middle School kids think like an engineer, are motivated by acceptance, and adults must affirm their personal journey. High school students think like a philosopher, are motivated by freedom, and adults must mobilize their potential. (pp. 42-43)

Everyone ministering to those of the younger generation must recognize the developmental stages and how they impact how the Bible is taught to help engage the person's heart, mind, hands, and feet. Catherine Stonehouse affirms the significance of a different approach to next-generation ministry than for adult ministry: "Children are most like adults in their feelings. They are least like adults in their thinking; more information does not make them think like us" (Ivy & Joiner, 2015, p. 91). The FIC model's removal of age-segregated ministry does not account for the different developmental stages of the next generation. In addition, the research argues for the presence of multiple adult spiritual leaders in the life of young people, which includes student ministry pastors and volunteer church leaders (Ivy & Joiner, 2015; Joiner, 2012). Shields's (2008) research was delimited to churches that had full-time youth pastors. The results show a dramatic impact youth ministry had on the next generation's life and future adult faith. Therefore, the elimination of all age-segregated ministries is a mistake and should be avoided. Scripture shows that the spiritual formation of young people in the OT and NT involved the home, the synagogue or church, and outside adult influence. For the Christian church today, the home, the church, and other adult Christian leaders should each play a role in the discipleship of the next generation.

The Decline of Christian Values in Western Culture

Many have taken on the task of explaining the decline of Christian values in Western culture and presented prescriptive solutions to the problem. This literature review will not include the prescriptive solutions but will present a few relevant works pointing to the decline. In the *Benedict Option*, Dreher (2017) argues that there has been a 1500-year decline in Christian values and theological footing. Dreher (2017) contends that the breakdown of the natural family, the loss of traditional moral values, and the disintegrating of communities has contributed to the philosophical and theological fragmentation of our society. Secularism, liquid modernity, and post-modern relativism have dominated a current culture that has turned hostile towards Christianity. The church appears to be rapidly losing influence in the Western world. Dreher (2017) says, “American Christians are going to have to come to terms with the brute fact that we live in a culture, one in which our beliefs make increasingly little sense. We speak a language that the world more and more either cannot hear or finds offensive to its ears” (p. 12).

Dreher (2017) traces the historical contributing factors of fragmentation in Christianity from the Fourteenth Century through today. From metaphysical realism being toppled by Ockham’s nominalism to Freud and the sexual revolution. The church has not avoided the indoctrination of these historical culture movements. Many in the church have adopted a blended subjective pseudo-Christian belief system. Dreher (2017) that the psychological man owns the culture of today, including most churches. Sociologist Rieff (2006) describes the shift in the Western consciousness from the “religious man” to the “psychological man.” He states, “Religious man was born to be saved. Psychological man is born to be pleased”. Rieff (2006) argued that Western culture had spiritualized desire and embraced the “secular gospel” of self-fulfillment. Many in the church today filter what they believe to be true about the Bible through

their feelings and experiences. In turn, they have created their own version of Christianity that is more about self than it is about God.

Rationale of the Study and Gap in the Literature

Youth ministry has been considered by many to be a failure as a result of the church dropout rates. Over the last 20 years, some have called for an overhaul of youth ministry while others have called for the obliteration of youth ministry. Shields (2008) hoped that his research conclusion would temper the criticism of youth ministry:

By empirically falsifying the dropout statistics so ardently supported in the precedent literature, it is the hope of this researcher that perhaps the tidal wave of criticisms aimed at youth ministry over that last decade can be stemmed to some degree. (p. 181)

Unfortunately, that hope did not translate to reality. In 2011, three years after Shields's study, Brown writes that youth ministry is "a weed in the church" that should not be reformed but uprooted. In 2018, McGarry admitted that these statistics have had a dramatic impact on youth ministry practice: "An increased number of leaders has considered the 'dropout rate' and started asking difficult questions about the validity and practice of youth ministry... This has set the stage for a new era of youth ministry, where the entire church is being called to renew its commitment to the next generation and to family discipleship" (p. 2). Suppose the statistics leading to these punitive conclusions are flawed and not a reflection of reality, which is what Shields research suggests. In that case, the churches perception and application of youth ministry should be reconsidered.

Shields's dissertation suggests that the high dropout statistics are flawed and that the church's response is an overreaction to corrupt data. This researcher will do a replication study of Shields's dissertation to determine if the data aligns with Shields's research or the other statistic

data. The researcher will focus on a different sample to follow Shields's recommendations for further investigation:

Future research could involve replicating the current study in a non-megachurch environment. Admittedly, the dynamics of a megachurch and the surrounding metropolitan areas provide unique socio-cultural factors that may have an impact on retention and dropout. Also, it must be acknowledged that most churches in America are "small churches," so the megachurch is still somewhat of an anomaly in Southern Baptist life. Smaller-knit communities could potentially facilitate more significant levels of retention or, conversely, encourage rebellion and dropout in a completely different way than megachurches (p. 183).

The church size of Shields's research population does not represent the majority of churches today. Shields recognizes this by stating, "Admittedly, these churches represent a small slice of the total youth ministry enterprise" (p. 180).

Shields's research sample included young adults who had attended Southern Baptist Megachurches. For the purposes of this research study, self-identified Evangelical churches that meet the inclusion criteria will be examined. The churches chosen for this research study will be delimited to theologically conservative evangelical churches. The size of the churches chosen for this research study will be 500-2000 in average weekly attendance.

Also, Shields (2008) argues that "the YMRQ instrument needs to be tested in multiple church environments before broad-based conclusions can be drawn about youth ministry" (p. 183). This study will utilize the YMRQ instrument as a replication study.

Despite the research in 2008, the claim that students are leaving the church by the masses remains prevalent in current literature. Research conducted since 2008 contradicts the results of Shields's study, but none of the studies on students in the United States identify levels of youth ministry commitment.

The data collected by Shields (2008) is twelve years old. The predominant population of Shields's research study was millennials. In contrast, this study will consist mostly of

Generation Z.

Gap in the Literature

The literature reveals a substantial gap in the area of emerging adult church retention and the correlation to youth ministry success and failure. There has been no single research study done on youth ministry commitment levels and emerging adult church retention of theologically conservative churches that are smaller than 2000 in average weekly Sunday attendance. The Shields dissertation is the only research study of United States churches that includes varying levels of commitment as a measurable component in an empirical research study. The Shields dissertation is narrowed and delimited to Southern Baptist Megachurches, and the YMRQ has only been used in this one study. This writer proposed that a replication study of Shields's dissertation be implemented targeting a different sample population and church size to fill the research gap.

Profile of the Current Study

The current study is a quantitative survey design utilizing falsification or verification theory. The reasons for implementing a quantitative survey method in the research design are (a) the design is cross-sectional non-experimental, (b) the researcher is not the instrument (qualitative), and (3) survey design provides rapid turnaround in the data collected for analysis. The study is a replication study of Shields's previously completed quantitative falsification study in 2008. The current research aligns with the previous study by replicating on theory and methodology to strengthen the literature on the topic. The research questions for the study are guided by the same research questions Shields proposed. This researcher followed the recommendation in the "further study" section of Shields's (2008) dissertation, which suggests the study be replicated with a different population. The sample for this study is former youth

ministry participants from self-identified Evangelical churches in the United States with a weekly average attendance of 500-2000 attendees.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter will explore the methodology of the research study. The research study is a quantitative replication study of Brandon Shields's (2008) dissertation assessing the church dropout rates of emerging adults. Quantitative research methodology is the most appropriate design selection for the current research study. Patton (2002) explains the difference in qualitative and quantitative design:

Qualitative methods facilitate the study of issues in-depth and detail. Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative design inquiry. Quantitative methods, on the other hand, require the use of standardized measures so that the varying perspectives and experiences of people can be fit into a limited number of predetermined response categories to which numbers are assigned. (p. 14)

The study focuses on numeric statistics gathered from survey instrumentation. The researcher was not the instrument (qualitative). Rather, the YMRQ survey serves as the instrumentation for the design. Interviews and observation were not employed in the study. The design is focused on testing theories and looking at the relationship between church retention and youth ministry commitment variables. Creswell (2018) states:

One component of reviewing the literature is determining what theories might be used to explore the questions in a scholarly study. In quantitative research, researchers often test hypotheses stemming from theories. In a quantitative dissertation, an entire section of a research proposal might be devoted to presenting the broader theory guiding the study hypothesis. (p. 49)

The researcher tests the theory, collects data to test the theory, and affirms or denies the theory's validity related to the research topic. The researcher employed this exact process for the current research study. The dissertation study is a replication of a falsification study. It is critical that quantitative analyses are replicated, and theories are tested over time to build a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon. Phillips and Burbules (2000) argue that theories are to be tested and the collection of data is analyzed to determine if the theory is supported or

refuted. There are conflicting data samples in the study of church retention among emerging adults. This research study fills a gap in the data to build a more robust understanding of what is actually happening to the spiritual life of emerging adults who have recently graduated high school. This chapter will explain the problem, population, sampling techniques, and all of the core components of the methodological design for this study.

Research Design Synopsis

The Problem

The precedent youth ministry literature over the last two decades reveals there has been a universally accepted phenomenon in which emerging adults are leaving the church at a rate of 70-90% after graduation from high school (Barna, 1991; Dudley, 1999; Kinnaman, 2016; LifeWay, 2007, 2017). In the literature, both proponents and opponents of youth ministry agree these statistics are valid and that age-graded youth ministry practice shoulders much of the blame for the alarming statistics (Baucham, 2011; Murashko, 2011; Brown, 2011; Stetzer, 2014; Brown 2016; McGarry, 2019). In fact, it is rare to find a published work about youth ministry that does not mention and use the church dropout rate statistics of churched emerging adults as a reason for the prescriptive solutions being proposed in the work. Referring to the dropout statistics, Shields (2008) writes, “These statistics have been advocated as near-gospel truth for at least a decade now. Even the most cursory internet search revealed 194,000 references (blogs, articles, websites)” (p. 6). In the twelve years since Shields’s dissertation, a simple google search of youth ministry dropout statistics reveals the number has blossomed to over 3,000,000 references in blogs, articles, and websites.

The impact of the dropout statistics on and implications for youth ministry culture and training have been significant. If these statistics are accurate and youth ministry shoulders the

blame, youth ministry theory and practice must be revisited and retooled. However, if the statistics are bogus, then youth ministry has been targeted on false pretense, and the call for a shift in ministry theory and practice is unfounded.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative replication research study is to examine the claim that 70-90% of actively involved student attendees drop out of church after high school. The design replicated Brandon Shields's 2008 falsification research study while targeting a different sample. To accomplish the stated objective, the researcher investigated the relationship between different levels of youth ministry commitment during high school and current levels of church involvement in theologically conservative, self-identified churches that average 500 to 2000 in weekly attendance.

Research Questions

RQ1. To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit level 1 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently committed to a local church?

RQ2. To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit level 2 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently involved with a local church?

RQ3. To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit level 3 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently involved with a local church?

RQ4. To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit level 4 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently involved with a local church?

RQ5. To what degree, if any, are demographic variables significantly related to levels of youth ministry commitment and current local church involvement?

RQ6. What is the relationship between different levels of youth ministry commitment during high school and the level of current local church involvement?

RQ7. To what degree, if any, does the study verify or contradict the result of the Shields study?

Research Design and Methodology

The methodology for this study was a quantitative replication study. Ioannidis (2012) states, “Efficient and unbiased replication mechanisms are essential for maintaining high levels of scientific credibility” (p. 646). Replication studies are critical for strengthening or weakening held theories or hypotheses. This study will be a direct replication study. As Plucker and Makel (2018) explain, “A researcher undertaking a replication study must decide if it will be direct or conceptual” (pp. 1409-1412). Direct replication stays closely tied to the original study design while the conceptual uses elements of the original study but has more freedom in the design. The original study that will be replicated was a falsification study of the theory of emerging adult dropout rates.

A falsification or verification research design tests existing hypotheses and theories through replication to bolster or challenge previous research. Karl Popper developed the idea of falsification theory or verification theory in the 1950s. Karl Popper is generally regarded as one of the greatest philosophers of science of the 20th century (Thornton, 2016). The idea of a falsification or verification study is to consistently replicate studies to determine if proposed theories are true (verified) or false (falsified). Thornton (2016) explains falsification theory in the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*:

A theory is scientific if and only if it divides the class of basic statements into the following two non-empty sub classes: (a) the class of all those basic statements with which it is inconsistent, or which it prohibits – this is the class of its potential falsifiers (i.e., those statements which, if true, falsify the whole theory, and (b) the class of those basic statements with which it is consistent, or which it permits (i.e., those statements which if true, corroborate it, or bear it out). (p. 1)

Popper argued that any scientific theory or hypothesis must be subjected to rigorous logical and empirical testing before it can be accepted or supported. With every experiment that verifies a theory, the theory is bolstered. The opposite is true with falsification. Popper (1959) argued, “If

the conclusions have been falsified, then their falsification also falsifies the theory from which they were logically deduced” (Popper, 1959, 33). Therefore, in Popper’s assessment, if a single reliable and viable study falsifies a theory or truth statement, the theory is flawed and must be revisited. There are two conclusions that result from a falsification study: (a) the theory may be true in certain circumstances, but the negative data would suggest that the implications must be revised, and the theory adjusted according to further testing; (b) the theory is to be rejected as false. Popper’s famous example is the statement, “All swans are white” (Popper, 1959). The theory only remains valid as long as there is not a single example that opposes the theory. If just one black swan is observed, the theory is falsified and would need to be changed or rejected. Falsification and verification studies are crucial for theory development, and the scientist must commit to consistent theoretical research. Witteloostuijn (2016) posits:

We, as researchers, should try, time and again, to prove that we are wrong. If we find the evidence that indeed, our theory is incorrect, we can further work on developing a new theory that does fit with the data. Hence, we should teach the younger generation of researchers that instead of being overly discouraged, they should be happy if they cannot confirm their hypothesis. (p. 469)

Shields’s (2008) study provides a falsification to the dropout rate theory; the high rate (92.7%) of retention could provide a counter-theory. The purpose of this replication study was to determine if Shields’s study was an outlier. According to the Encyclopedia of Research Design, “An outlier is an observation in a set of data that is inconsistent with the majority of the data” (p. 1). There is certainly limited statistical data supporting the high dropout rates, but only one study supports the high retention rate. Was the Shields study an outlier? Could the population sample of megachurches with greater staff and resources contribute to a more dynamic ministry experience that affected the high retention rates? The study needs to be replicated for three primary reasons. First, the study being replicated was completed 13 years ago, and new data and testing are

needed in the study field. Secondly, a sampling from a population of churches that are not megachurches needs to be added to the research literature. Third, the study may contribute to a new theory involving emerging adult church retention by adding another study to the literature that supports the high retention rate theory.

Population(s)

The population for this study was former youth ministry participants who graduated high school between the years 2011-2021 from 17 different self-identified Evangelical churches in the United States with a weekly average attendance of 500-2000 attendees.

Sampling Procedures

The goal of the sampling procedure was to get a representative sample of the population being studied. In this research study, a hybrid of purposive and cluster sampling was employed to answer the research questions. Etikan et al. (2016) explain that purposive or judgment sampling “is a nonrandom technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of participants...the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience” (p. 2). The purposive sampling identified dynamic youth ministries that meet the criteria for inclusion in the research study. The sample contained 17 self-identified theologically conservative Evangelical churches in the United States with dynamic youth ministries that have an average attendance of 500-2000 weekly attendance in Sunday morning worship services.

Table 1*Sample Church Youth Ministries for Inclusion*

<i>Location</i>	<i>Church Name</i>
Pickerington, OH	Violet Baptist Church
Moseley, VA	Parkway Baptist Church
Tonawanda, NY	Kenmore Alliance Church
Thomasville, NC	Mt. Zion Wesleyan Church
Sugar Hill, GA	Sugar Hill Church
Martinez, GA	Abilene Baptist Church
Harrisonburg, VA	Crosslink Community Church
Williamsville, NY	Eastern Hills Church
Benton, LA	Cypress Baptist Church
Monroe, NC	Hopewell Baptist Church
Findley, OH	Living Hope Church
Lowell, MI	Impact Church
Easily, SC	Mt. Airy Baptist Church
Greeley, CO	Generations Church
Indianola, IA	Indianola Community Church
Bettendorf, IA	Heritage Church
Richmond, IN	LifeSprings Church

To ensure appropriate representation of churches across the attendance range, a cluster sampling was taken of (1) a minimum of three churches that average 500-1000, (2) a minimum of three churches that average 1000-1500, (3) a minimum of three churches that average 1500-2000 in weekly church attendance. Permission was sought and obtained from each church to include the name of the church in the study.

The recent youth ministry participants from the selected churches who have graduated high school (2011-2021) were the sample population for the study. The study targeted a minimum of 300 survey respondents for statistical analysis to establish the appropriate confidence level. Survey Systems sample size calculator was used to determine the confidence level interval. There were 623 usable responses that were submitted through Qualtrics. 118 of the responses were not used for being incomplete or submitted after the

researcher closed the survey for data analysis. 502 useable surveys from participants were used for data analysis in the study.

Limits of Generalization

There was a purposeful delimitation of the research population and sample selection from the following groups:

1. Participants from self-identified Evangelical churches that do not hold to conservative theological beliefs.
2. Participants with church affiliation that do not self-identify as Evangelical.
3. Churches that do not meet the delimited size range from this study (500-2000) in weekly attendance.
4. Young adults who were actively involved in youth ministries but did not have: (a) a full-time compensated youth pastor with a minimum of a four-year tenure at the church, (b) an age-graded ministry philosophy of ministry, and (c) an intentional and systematic evangelism and discipleship strategy.
5. Young adults who were actively involved in parachurch youth ministry organizations in high school (FCA, Young Life, etc.) but do not participate in local church youth ministries.
6. Young adults who graduated high school outside of the range for the current study (prior to 2010 and after 2020).
7. Any survey participant under the age of 18 who entered the research population sample by skipping grades or involvement in early college.
8. Young adult participants with youth ministry involvement outside of the United States.

Ethical Considerations

This section will discuss ethical considerations for the study. Full consideration and compliance with Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity's Christian Leadership in Education doctoral program was undertaken in this study. The researcher fully disclosed the researcher's position and intentions

with the churches and population sample. Proper informed consent and permission letters were collected from participating churches and survey participants when necessary.

The data collected will be protected with anonymity and confidentiality and discarded three years after the conclusion of the study. There will be zero personal, or organizational (church) information presented in the research study without written consent from the participating church or person(s).

The research study was a social science research study with human subjects. The researcher has taken and passed the mandatory social and behavioral research training course (CITI).

Proposed Instrumentation

Since this is a replication study, the research instrumentation that was utilized to measure youth ministry involvement and church retention is the Youth Ministry Retention Questionnaire (YMRQ) developed by Brandon Shields in 2008. Permission to use and adjust the research instrument with slight modifications has been granted through written communication with the instrument developer. The modifications are presented in the evaluation of the design section in chapter four of the current study. Shields (2008) describes the YMRQ as an instrument "comprised of 45 structured (closed-ended) questions pertaining to two categorical measures, youth ministry commitment and current church involvement, as well as demographic information including age, gender, type of high school attended, level of education, and current religious affiliation" (p. 123). The YMRQ measures both extrinsic indicators (church attendance, program involvement, small group participation, etc.) and intrinsic indicators (personal fulfillment, relationships with leaders, perceptions of spiritual growth, etc.) related to church involvement and commitment. There were a few questions on the YMRQ that needed to be modified for the

current research outcomes and population adjustment. Also, one the demographic question asking for the name of the participant was removed to keep the survey anonymous. The YMRQ adjustment resulted in a 44-question survey.

The first 15 questions of the YMRQ measured the degree of previous commitment and involvement in youth ministry using both extrinsic and intrinsic religiosity through a revised version of Gorsuch and McPherson's (1989) 14-question instrument. The instrument's questions in the first section focused on the four levels of commitment (disengaged prospect, normative attender, moderate involvement, and enthusiastic follower) measured in the survey. The study combined self-reported attendance questions (each with four possible "forced" responses) with a series of Likert-type responses ranging from 1 (I tend to strongly disagree) to 4 (I tend to strongly agree). Allen (2007) explains that a Likert scale "ranks responses from high to low or best to worst using five to seven levels" (p. 1). The Likert scale was devised in order to "measure 'attitude' in a scientifically accepted and validated manner in 1932" (Joshi et al., 2015, p. 397). A four-option symmetrical scale will be used, applying balanced questioned responses on either side of the scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Each answer aligned with a point value that collectively provide a church involvement and ministry retention score.

Questions 16 through 29 are focused on demographical information (age, marital status, employment during high school, etc.). The purpose of collecting demographical data is to ensure that the parameters for the research population are maintained and to uncover any potential relationship between church involvement and retention. The demographic information will be one of the primary vetting components for research accuracy.

Questions 30 through 44 are a slight modification of questions 1 through 15 to measure current levels of church involvement as a young adult. Therefore, Likert-type questions and a

revised version of Gorsuch and McPherson's (1989) 14-question instrument will be implemented for these questions. This researcher agrees with Shields's (2008) assessment that "structuring the survey in this manner facilitated more accurate comparisons between levels of youth ministry commitment and current church involvement" (p. 125).

Qualtrics was used as the online survey platform to initiate the survey instrument. Survey responses were assigned a 1-4 point value corresponding to the four levels of youth ministry commitment and current church involvement (zero, low, moderate, or high). The cumulative score based on the self-reported survey responses indicates the level of youth ministry commitment and current church involvement. The score breakdown is reviewed in Table 2 and Table 3 below. The scales and scores received minor adjustments during the analysis of the data. An explanation and the new scales can be seen in the evaluation of the design section of chapter four.

Table 2

Criteria for Categorizing Levels of Youth Ministry Commitment (Questions 1 through 15)

Level of Youth ministry Commitment	Criteria for Inclusion
Level 1 – Disengaged Prospect	Score of 15-25 on self-reported measures of youth ministry commitment.
Level 2 – Normative Attender	Score of 26-37 on self-reported measures of youth ministry commitment.
Level 3 – Enthusiastic Follower	Score of 38-49 on self-reported measures of youth ministry commitment.
Level 4 – Engaged Disciple	Score of 50-60 on self-reported measures of youth ministry commitment.

Table 3

Criteria for Categorizing Levels of Current Church Involvement (Questions 31 through 45)

Levels of Current Church Involvement	Criteria for Inclusion
Level 1 – Zero Involvement	Self-reported rating of “1” in response to question 40 of the survey.
Level 2 – Low Involvement	Score of 13-27 on self-reported measures for current church involvement.
Level 3 – Moderate Involvement	Score of 28-42 on self-reported measures for current church involvement.
Level 4 – High Involvement	Score of 43-56 on self-reported measures for current church involvement.

Validity

The YMRQ Instrument has been validated in a previous study through an expert panel of youth ministry practitioners with extensive experience in youth ministry leadership. Shields (2008) states, “These seasoned professionals were asked to comment on the proposed scales and measures of commitment ascertained from the precedent literature, and the panel unanimously supported the various components of the survey” (p. 118, See Appendix 1).

Reliability

Shields (2008) states, “The reliability of the YMRQ was measured using a simple Cronbach’s Alpha statistic. The result of this statistical measure revealed a score of .89, which was well above the necessary reliability threshold of .80” (p. 125). The reliability of the YMRQ Instrument has therefore previously been established. Since the survey involves categorization and continuous data, the researcher conducted a determination test to assess the shared variance between youth ministry commitment and current church involvement. The results from the survey will seek accuracy within three percentage points using a 95% confidence level.

Research Procedures

The first step was to identify churches that meet the inclusion criteria for the research. This included utilizing contacts through relationships with conservative Evangelical denomination leaders to recommend churches for the study and through ministry relationship contacts. Also, the researcher used social media platforms to get the word out to youth ministry leaders about the study. The response was significant and prompted the researcher to study 17 churches instead of the initial goal of 12. Permission was gathered from youth pastors at included churches through phone calls and an emailed short questionnaire to determine whether the inclusion criteria was met (APPENDIX C). The researcher spent significant amounts of time on the phone with the youth pastors in the study giving guidance.

Through a phone interview with Brandon Shields, the researcher learned that getting contacts from churches was one of the more difficult challenges in the research study. Churches are reluctant to share personal information of church attenders with an outside entity. As a result, the youth pastors at the included churches distributed the survey to the participants, as opposed to the researcher receiving a list of phone numbers, emails, and names from the churches. Qualtrics was used to build the survey and proved to be effective at immediately archiving survey responses and smooth export capabilities to SPSS for data analysis. The Qualtrics survey link was sent to church student ministry leaders through email from the researcher accompanied by an email and social media post templates for the youth pastors to utilize for distribution. The email and social media templates provided a guide that individual churches could customize to reflect their own culture and communication standards, while including the essential elements of the study.

The researcher requested that the 17 sample church youth pastors send the survey link to a minimum of 50 former youth ministry participants from the sample church. Most of the churches sent out the survey to the minimum requested. The plan was for the survey to be sent out in several waves using a snowball method until the target number of 300 surveys was reached. However, there was an excellent response from the churches, and the snowball method was not necessary. The survey was delivered to student pastors on October 11th, 2021 for distribution. In the first five days, nine of the seventeen churches had distributed the survey with over 200 useable responses reported. The survey was shut down on October 30th, 2021, with over 600 surveys started and 502 useable surveys for data analysis.

Once the survey was shut down, the survey responses were exported through Qualtrics into a Microsoft Excel Comma Separated Values (csv.) file and downloaded into SPSS, where the responses were assigned, a numerical value based on responses to the questions related to youth ministry commitment and current church involvement in keeping with the protocol detailed above. The data was shared with a statistician for further analysis of the data to assure accuracy and proper data interpretation.

The research procedures in this section for obtaining and analyzing survey data proved effective in enabling the researcher to answer the seven research questions. Once the research was completed, the researcher sent a thank you email (APPENDIX D) to the youth pastors involved in the study. Also, the results of the data for each individual church were sent to the youth pastors for their participation in the study.

Data Analysis and Statistical Procedures

Data Analysis

First, there is an overall statistic determination of all participants surveyed regarding overall youth ministry commitment and current church involvement to answer RQ6. Secondly, there is a frequency count for the total youth ministry commitment sample in each of the four levels to determine more specifically the degree to which young adults are currently involved with a church (zero, low, moderate, or high) to answer RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4. Also, a Chi-Square Test were used for Independence and t-test to compare the categories of commitment and involvement, demographic data, and the continuous data received from the surveys to answer RQ5.

Statistical Procedures

This study design implemented inferential statistical methods that made inferences about a sample of the population. It was not feasible to research the entire population of young adults with youth ministry commitment at conservative Evangelical churches. Therefore, a sampling of emerging adults from selected churches that meet the criteria were selected from the population. The independent variable that would influence the outcome of the study is youth ministry commitment levels. The dependent variable is church retention post-high school graduation. A simple Cronbach's Alpha statistic was utilized for the research. The actual statistical measures were selected in consultation with a qualified statistician and presented in chapter four.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the research methodology for a quantitative replication study to answer the seven research questions that guide this study. The population for this study was former youth ministry participants from self-identified Evangelical churches in the United States

with a weekly average attendance of 500-2000 attendees. A hybrid of purposive and cluster sampling of the inclusion population was employed to get a random representative sample for the research study. To ensure the appropriate representation of churches across the attendance range, a cluster sampling will be taken of (1) a minimum of three churches that average 500-1000, (2) a minimum of three churches that average 1000-1500, and (3) a minimum of three churches that average 1500-2000 in weekly church attendance.

Since this is a replication study, the research instrumentation that was used to measure youth ministry involvement and church retention is the Youth Ministry Retention Questionnaire (YMRQ) developed by Brandon Shields in 2008. Permission to use and adjust the research instrument, making slight modifications, has been granted through written communication from the instrument developer. The survey was designed and distributed using Qualtrics. The survey was delivered to student pastors on October 11th, 2021, for distribution. The survey was shut down on October 30th, 2021, with 623 survey respondents and 502 useable surveys for data analysis. In chapter four, the data collected was reported and analyzed.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overview

This replication research study sought to investigate the claim that 70-90% of evangelical youth ministry participants drop out of church within a short period of time following high school graduation. To test this theory properly, the researcher examined various levels of youth ministry commitment and current church involvement of emerging adults. The germane findings and statistical data are summarized and analyzed in this chapter. This chapter will discuss the compilation protocol and measures used to analyze the data, demographic and sample data, provide data analysis for the statistical findings, and evaluate the research design.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit level 1 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently committed to a local church?

RQ2. To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit level 2 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently involved with a local church?

RQ3. To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit level 3 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently involved with a local church?

RQ4. To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit level 4 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently involved with a local church?

RQ5. To what degree, if any, are demographic variables significantly related to levels of youth ministry commitment and current local church involvement?

RQ6. What is the relationship between different levels of youth ministry commitment during high school and the level of current local church involvement?

RQ7. To what degree, if any, does the study verify or contradict the result of the Shields study?

Compilation Protocol and Measures

The researcher identified 17 churches that met the inclusion criteria for the research sample. The YMRQ survey was designed and distributed through Qualtrics as an online survey link to the student pastors of the sample churches. Email was the primary vehicle of survey transmission to the student pastors of the sample churches in the study. The email from the researcher was accompanied by templates of email and social media sample posts for the youth pastors to utilize for distribution. The email and social media templates provided a guide that individual churches could customize to reflect their own culture and communication standards, while including the essential elements of the study. The researcher requested that the sample churches send the survey link to a minimum of 50 former youth ministry participants from the sample church. Some of the youth pastor complied with this request. The youth pastors at the sample churches compiled a list of former high school graduates (2011-2021) from their church databases and distributed the survey through email. Additionally, several of the youth pastors made personal invitations to the survey link to former students through social media contacts.

Initially, the plan was for the survey to be delivered in waves using a snowball method until the target number of 300 surveys was reached. However, the snowball method was not utilized due to the tremendous response from the inclusion churches. The survey was delivered to student pastors on October 11th, 2021, for distribution. In the first five days, nine of the seventeen churches had distributed the survey with over 200 useable responses reported. The survey was shut down on October 30th, 2021, with 623 surveys completed online exceeding the desired response rate of 300 usable surveys. All surveys that were incomplete or submitted after the shutdown date of the survey were removed from the study bringing the total number of useable surveys for data analysis to 502.

Qualtrics was used to build the survey and proved to be effective at immediately archiving survey responses and provided smooth export capabilities to SPSS for data analysis. Once the survey completion deadline past, the survey responses were exported through Qualtrics into a Microsoft Excel Comma Separated Values (csv.) file and downloaded into SPSS. In SPSS the responses were assigned a numerical value based on responses to the questions that correlated to youth ministry commitment and current church involvement to align with the protocol. The data was shared with a statistician for further analysis to assure accuracy and proper data interpretation.

The initial analysis of the data revealed a problem with the factor structure of the scales used to determine youth ministry commitment and current church involvement. The data revealed that the 15 questions of the youth ministry commitment scale and current church involvement scale were not measuring a single construct. To strengthen the reliability, the researcher and statistician developed two new scales that did measure a single construct and clustered the questions correctly for analysis. The first new scale used questions from the YMRQ to measure youth ministry commitment (Q1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10) and current church involvement (Q30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 39). Levels 1-4 were then mathematically determined from the new scales to compare with Shields study to answer RQ7. The second new scale measured comfort and connection in youth ministry (Q11-15) and in current church involvement (Q40-44). The new scales have a much higher internal consistency and reliability as explained in the evaluation of the design section late in this chapter.

Upon the completion of data entry, scale adjustment, and categorization, a variety of statistical measures were employed to determine what relationship, if any, existed between the four levels of youth ministry commitment during high school and the current levels of church

involvement for youth adults from different churches. Additionally, a retention statistic was computed for both the subsets of individual levels and the categorical set of youth ministry commitment. Also, the data was compared to the data from Shields 2008 research in tables and figures. The remainder of this chapter will present the statistical analysis of the data collected in this research study.

Demographic and Sample Data

In this section, the researcher will present the statistical analysis of the demographic data collected from the sample churches and youth ministries, the individual research participants, and the subcategories of persistors and dropouts. The demographic data collected from the sample churches was initiated through a separate ten question survey emailed to the student pastors of the inclusion churches (Appendix C). The survey allowed the researcher to determine whether the church met the inclusion criteria and to collect basic information about the youth ministry and youth pastor. The survey asked questions regarding the youth pastors' tenure, programmatic activities, staff dynamics, and ministry budgets. The individual research participants demographic data was collected through questions 16-29 in the YMRQ instrument. Demographic information gathered from the YMRQ instrument included items such as age, gender, type of high attended, and education level completed.

Demographics for the Sample Churches and Youth Ministries

The 17 self-identified Evangelical churches that were sampled in the research study were from four different denominations: Southern Baptist Church (8), The Wesleyan Church (6), Evangelical Free Church of America (2), and Christian Missionary Alliance (1). Also, the churches span across the United States representing 11 states (GA, VA, LA, NY, CO, IA, NC, MI, IN, OH, SC). The total worship attendance of the sample churches was 17,800 with an

average of 1047.06. All of the churches in the study met the inclusion criteria of weekly worship attendance of 500-2000 with a numeric breakdown of 10 churches (500-1000), 3 churches (1000-1500), and 4 churches (1500-2000). It is crucial to note that this research study was completed in 2021 during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, church demographics and resources were impacted from an atypical year of ministry.

The demographic data collected from the sample churches included information regarding youth pastor's tenure and longevity at current church, whether or not the church adhered to an "age-graded" ministry philosophy, offered youth ministry activities, number of paid staff, number of volunteers and students, and annual operating budget for current year (2021). Table 4 summarizes some of the general demographic data collected from the sample youth ministries.

Table 4.

Demographic Summary for the Sample Youth Ministries

<i>Category</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Yrs at Current Church	119	7
Yrs in Youth Ministry	256	15.06
Paid High School Staff	41	2.41
High School Volunteers	295	17.35
Total High School Students	1414	83.17
Total Operating Budget	\$583,820	\$34,342

Youth Pastor Experience

The longevity, experience, and tenure of youth pastors at the sample churches formed part of the dynamic criteria for the current research study. The rationale for including the criterion was the importance of sustained relationships that are crucial for the spiritual development of the next generation that was echoed in the precedent literature. The demographic

data revealed that there was robust experience in tenure among the student pastors in the research study. Kevin Flattman at Cypress Baptist Church with three years' experience was the only student pastor that had less than six years' total experience as a full-time youth pastor. Six of the student pastors had over 20 years' experience and Mat Dawson at Eastern Hills Church had 30 years of full-time youth ministry experience. Youth pastors from the sample churches had a total of 256 years' experience working with teenagers as full-time student pastors in the local church with an average of 15.06 years. The average tenure at their current church was 7 years. 14 of the 17 youth pastors had a tenure of over five years at their current church. Violet Baptist Church's youth pastor Keith Hurt had the longest current church tenure of 14 years.

Youth Ministry Philosophy and Activities

Another primary criterion for inclusion in the current research study was churches that maintained an age-graded ministry philosophy, where the next generation ministries of the church are separated into different groups for targeted age-specific evangelism and discipleship. Each of the sample churches in the study adhered to an age-graded ministry philosophy. While most of the churches researched separated middle school and high school ministries, there were a few that did not. The criterion had to be adjusted from the study being replicated due to the size of churches that differed from Shields' study.

The ministry programming and activities provided at the inclusion churches were aligned across the 17 churches. All of the churches provided youth ministry worship services, ministry events, youth camp, a version of small groups, and mission trips as a part of the ministry programming. Most of the churches provided separate leadership and evangelism training for high school students.

Youth Ministry Resources

The 17 sample churches employed a total of 41 paid staff members (full-time or part-time) to work with the student ministries. All of the student pastors at the 17 churches were full-time paid staff members. On average, the churches had 2.41 staff members working on the student ministry team. It is crucial to note that the paid staff number at a few of the churches represents staff working with high school and middle school ministry together due to church sizes of (500-2000), and not high school exclusively. Sugar Hill Church employed the most student ministry staff members at 6, while Mt. Airy Baptist, Impact Church, Hopewell Baptist, Crosslink Church, and Mt. Zion Wesleyan employed only 1 paid staff member. The ratio of paid staff members to high school students was approximately 1:35. To account for the high ratio, it is critical to remember that middle school students are under the responsibility of a portion of the staff listed, seven of the sample churches have 50 or less students in total youth ministry attendance. Also, a portion of ministry staff listed is part-time.

The sample churches reported a total of 295 adult volunteer leaders to assist them in ministering to high school students. The few ministries that have high school and middle school students together only reported the number of volunteers that are serving in the high school area of the ministry. The average number of adult volunteer leaders working with high school students was 17.35. The high school student to adult volunteer leader ratio in the sample churches was 1:4.79. This number is accurate and avoids the disclaimer for paid staff as volunteer leaders were requested for high school only.

The researcher requested the annual yearly budgets for each of the inclusion churches to examine the financial resources applied to the youth ministry departments. The total budgeted amount for the sample youth ministries in 2021 was \$583,820, with an average of \$34,342. The

largest reported annual youth ministry budget from the sample churches was \$120,000 and the smallest was \$10,000.

Demographics for Research Participants

The representative breakdown of the 502 usable survey responses of research participants from the sample churches are listed in Table 5. Sugar Hill Church (80), Indianola (68), and Violet Baptist Church (61) had the highest number of participant responses. Impact Church (11), Eastern Hills Church (11), Cypress Baptist Church (9), and Generations Church (4) had the lowest number of participant responses.

Table 5.

Breakdown of Participants from Sample Churches

Church Name:	Frequency	Percent
Abilene Baptist Church, GA	23	4.6
Crosslink Community Church	27	5.4
Cypress Baptist Church, LA	9	1.8
Eastern Hills Church, NY	11	2.2
Generations Church, CO	4	0.8
Heritage Church, IL/IA	22	4.4
Hopewell Baptist Church, NC	30	6.0
Impact Church, MI	11	2.2
Indianola Community Church	68	13.5
Kenmore Alliance Church, NY	29	5.8
LifeSprings Church, IN	26	5.2
Living Hope Church, OH	13	2.6
Mt. Airy Baptist Church, SC	45	9.0
Mt. Zion Wesleyan Church, N	28	5.6
Parkway Baptist Church, VA	15	3.0
Sugar Hill Church, GA	80	15.9
Violet Baptist Church, OH	61	12.2
Total	502	100.0

Some of the churches had more responses than reported due to 121 discarded surveys that were incomplete or submitted after the deadline for submission. 11 of the 17 churches reported over 20 research participants with an average of 29.52.

The demographics section of the survey instrument (Q16-Q29) included information regarding age, sex, educational background, marital status, and work history while in high school of the research participants (Table 6). The gender breakdown of the respondents was female (56.2%) and male (43.6%). The ages of the respondents ranged from 18 to 29 years old with a single respondent at 33 years old. The largest group was 19-year-olds (16.1%), followed by 20-year-olds (14.5%), 18-year-olds (13.3%), and 21-year-olds (12.5%). The mean age of the participants in the study was 21.57. The overwhelming majority of the high school educational demographics of participants attended public high school (84.1%), followed by home school (10%), private Christian school (4.2%), and non-Christian private school (1.2%). With regard to the highest level of education, most respondents (59.6%) reported that they had completed high school or GED equivalency, while 23.1% had completed a bachelor's degree, 12.2% have Associates degrees, 2.6% have Technical or Trade school degrees, 2.4% have a master's degree, and a single respondent had completed a Doctorate. 67.5% of respondents indicated that they are presently working towards a degree. When asked how many hours a week the respondents were employed as a senior in high school, most 34.1% worked between 10 and 20 hours per week, with 23.5% having worked between 1 and 9 hours per week, and 18.3% having worked more than 20 hours per week. 23.9% of the respondents did not work a job as a senior in high school. 89.2% of the participants were single and 10.2% were married.

Table 6.*Demographic Findings for the Survey Respondents*

Variable:	Valid N	Percentage
<i>Gender:</i>		
Female	282	56.2
Male	219	43.6
<i>Age:</i>		
18 yrs	67	13.3
19 yrs	81	16.1
20 yrs	73	14.5
21 yrs	63	12.5
22 yrs	50	10
23 yrs	49	9.8
24 yrs	37	7.3
25 yrs	14	2.8
26 yrs	14	2.8
27 yrs or more	17	3.4
<i>Type of High School Attended:</i>		
Public School	422	84.1
Home School	50	10
Christian School	21	4.2
Parochial/Catholic School	0	0
Non-Christian Private School	6	1.2
Other	2	0.4
<i>Highest Level of Education:</i>		
High School or Equivalent GED	299	59.6
Technical or Trade School	13	2.6
Associates (2 Year Undergraduate Degree)	61	12.2
Bachelors (4 Year Undergraduate Degree)	116	23.1
Masters	12	2.4
Doctorate	1	0.2
<i>Hours Per Week Employed in High School:</i>		
0 Hours	120	23.9
1-9 Hours	118	23.5
10-20 Hours	171	34.1
More than 20 Hours	92	18.3
<i>Marital Status:</i>		
Single	448	89.2
Married	51	10.2
Divorce	0	0
Missing	3	0.6

The research study replicated LifeWay Research (2007), Shields (2008), and LifeWay Research (2017) question, “How long, if at all, did you stop attending church from ages 18 to 22 years old?” For comparative purposes, LifeWay Research reported that 66% in 2017 and 70% in 2007 of the surveyed population said that they stopped attending church for at least a year between the ages of 18 to 22. The Shields (2008) study contradicted LifeWay Research with 64.9% of the sample participants reporting “I never stopped attending church,” 13.6% stopped attending for 1 to 2 months and only 9% stopped attending for more than one year (Table 7).

Table 7.

Church Dropout Timeline Between Ages 18-22 (Shields Study Findings)

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-2 months	38	13.6	13.6	13.6
3-5 months	17	6.1	6.1	19.7
6-12 months	18	6.5	6.5	26.2
More than 1 year	25	9.0	9.0	35.1
I never stopped attending church	181	64.9	64.9	100.0
Total	279	100.0	100.0	

The participants in this research study more closely aligned with the findings of Shields with 52% (N-261) of the sample reporting “I never stopped attending church,” 10.6% stopped attending for 1-2 months, and only 14.9% stopped attending for more than one year (Table 8).

The data in this study revealed that 85.1% of sample participants did not dropout of church from 18 to 22 years old for at least a year.

Table 8.*Current Study Church Dropout Timeline Between Ages 18 to 22*

Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-2 months	53	10.6	10.6	10.6
3-5 months	62	12.4	12.4	22.9
6-12 months	51	10.2	10.2	33.1
More than 1 year	75	14.9	14.9	48.0
I never stopped attending church	261	52.0	52.0	100.0
Total	502	100.0	100.0	

Finally, frequency percentages were tabulated for the Comfort and Connect subscales (measuring factor 1), Commitment Level subscales (measuring factor 2), Modified Youth Ministry Commitment Level scale (factor 1+2), and the Modified Current Church Involvement scale (factor 1+2) (see Tables 9 and 10). Additionally, Table 10 compares the Modified Youth Ministry Commitment Level scale and the Modified Current Church Involvement scale with the findings of Shields in 2008. The Shields data comparison percentages are based on the scale that Shields used through the YMRQ. The statistical data from the current research uses the modified scales created through participant responses to the YMRQ for higher reliability.

The Youth Ministry and Adult Comfort and Connection subscale (factor 1) measures the factor of relational connection and comfortability of participants (Table 9). The results revealed that the level of youth ministry relational comfort and connection was very high. Most participants 59.2% had high comfort and connection in high school, while 33.5% had moderate comfort and connection with only 1.2% reporting zero comfort and connection. 92.7% reported high or moderate relational comfort and connection to youth ministry high school. Also, the results revealed that the level of adult comfort and connection was lower in participants than in

high school, but still comparatively high. Most of the participants 47% reported high comfort and connection with their current church, while 36.9% had moderate comfort and connection with only 4% reporting zero comfort and connection. 83.9% reported high or moderate relational comfort and connection as adults.

The Youth Ministry and Current Church Commitment Levels subscale (factor 2) measures the factor of the participants level of commitment to youth ministry or church. The results revealed that the level of youth ministry commitment was very high. Most participants 48.8% reported high commitment in high school, while 42.8% had moderate commitment with only 0.6% reporting zero commitment. 91.6% reported high or moderate levels of commitment to youth ministry while in high school. Additionally, the results revealed that the level of adult commitment was lower in participants than in high school, but still high. Most participants 32.9% reported moderate commitment with their current church, while 29.5% had high commitment with only 14.3% reporting zero commitment. 62.4% reported high or moderate levels of commitment as adults.

Table 9.

Frequency Percentages for Comfort and Connection subscales (factor 1) and Commitment Level subscales (factor 2)

Variable:	Valid N	Percentage
<i>Youth Ministry Comfort and Connection Sub-scale:</i>		
Level 1 – Zero Comfort and Connection	6	1.2
Level 2 – Low Comfort and Connection	31	6.2
Level 3 – Moderate Comfort and Connection	168	33.5
Level 4 – High Comfort and Connection	297	59.2
<i>Adult Church Comfort and Connection Sub-scale:</i>		
Level 1 – Zero Comfort and Connection	20	4.0
Level 2 – Low Comfort and Connection	61	12.2
Level 3 – Moderate Comfort and Connection	185	36.9
Level 4 – High Comfort and Connection	236	47.0
<i>Youth Ministry Commitment Levels Sub-scale:</i>		
Level 1 – Zero Commitment	3	0.6
Level 2 – Low Commitment	39	7.8
Level 3 – Moderate Commitment	215	42.8
Level 4 – High Commitment	245	48.8
<i>Current Church Commitment Levels Sub-scale:</i>		
Level 1 – Zero Commitment	72	14.3
Level 2 – Low Commitment	117	23.3
Level 3 – Moderate Commitment	165	32.9
Level 4 – High Commitment	148	29.5

The Modified Youth Ministry Commitment Scale and the Modified Current Church Involvement Scale (Table 10) combines the Comfort and Connection subscale measuring factor one with the Commitment Levels subscale measuring factor two to create a modified scale from the YMRQ to measure youth ministry commitments and current church involvement. The

computed categorical data for youth ministry commitment of participants showed that the majority 49.8% were Engaged Disciples (Level 4) in high school, while 44.4% were Enthusiastic Followers (Level 3) with zero participants as Disengage Prospects (Level 1). 94.2% of participants were reported to be Engaged Disciples (Level 4) and Enthusiastic Followers (Level 3). Additionally, the results revealed that the adult involvement levels were lower in participants than in high school, but still high, especially in relations to the proposed dropout statistics in the precedent literature. The computed categorical data for current church involvement of participants showed that the majority (44.4%) had Moderate Involvement (Level 3), while 29.9% had High Involvement with only 4.6% (Level 1) having Zero Involvement. 74.3% of participants current church involvement was High Involvement to Moderate Involvement with an overall retention statistic of 95.4%.

Table 10.

Frequency Percentages for Levels of Youth Ministry Commitment and Current Church Involvement Utilizing Modified Scales (factor 1 + factor 2) with a Shields Study Comparison (Using Shields YMC and CCI Scales)

Variable:	Valid N	Percentage	Shields Study Comparison
<i>Modified Youth Ministry Commitment Scale:</i>			
Level 1 – Disengaged Prospect	0	0	0.4
Level 2 – Normative Attender	29	5.8	6.8
Level 3 – Enthusiastic Follower	223	44.4	27.2
Level 4 – Engaged Disciple	250	49.8	65.6
<i>Modified Current Church Involvement Scale:</i>			
Level 1 – Zero Involvement	23	4.6	12
Level 2 – Low Involvement	106	21.1	1.8
Level 3 – Moderate Involvement	223	44.4	35.5
Level 4 – High Involvement	150	29.9	50.7

Table 11.*Mean of Participant Response for Utilized Scales*

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Youth Ministry Comfort and Connection Scale	502	17.36	3.003
Church Comfort and Connection Scale	502	16.10	3.810
Youth Ministry Commitment Scale	502	20.75	3.408
Current Church Commitment Scale	502	17.03	5.694
Modified Youth Ministry Commitment Scale	502	38.11	5.412
Modified Current Church Involvement Scale	502	33.13	8.791

Data Analysis and Findings

The current replication study sought to discover answers to research questions posed by Shields's (2008) falsification study of the dropout rates of youth ministry graduates and to provide a statistical comparison to the data in the study being replicated. The current study assesses the validity of the claim entrenched in the precedent literature that most evangelical youth ministry graduates are leaving the church after high school graduation. Cross-tabulation analysis, also known as contingency table analysis, was used to analyze the categorical data in the research study to answer the research questions. Simple data tables are used in this section to present the data of the group and subgroups of survey respondents. Pearson's correlation coefficient and Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient were both run through SPSS to determine the relationship, if any, between variables. Also, every question and scale were bootstrapped 1000 times for data analysis. The data analyzed included the respondents of the 502 useable surveys that met the criterion for inclusion from the 17 self-identified evangelical churches (Table 5) with an average adult worship attendance of 500-2000, sampled in the study. This section presents and provides an analysis of the statistical data that answers all seven research questions in the current study.

Research Question One: Level 1 Commitment Retention

RQ1. To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit level 1 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently committed to a local church?

In response to the first research question, the researcher sought to obtain a retention statistic (from the YMRQ) for those research participants who were assigned to the Level 1 youth ministry commitment category “Disengaged Prospect.” Level 1 youth ministry commitment is identified by participants with a score of 11-16 on the Modified Youth Ministry Commitment Scale. For the survey sample, zero participants scored in the Level 1 category of youth ministry commitment (Table 12). Therefore, no statistical analysis could be conducted, or statistical relationships analyzed for Level 1 youth ministry commitment.

Table 12.

Level 1 Commitment Retention (N=0)

Current Level of Involvement	Valid N	% Of Total
Zero Involvement	0	0
Low Involvement	0	0
Moderate Involvement	0	0
High Involvement	0	0
Totals	0	0

Research Question One Conclusions

For the category of Level 1 Disengaged Prospects, the researcher could not determine any statistically significant conclusions due to zero participants scoring in this category. The researcher is not concerned that Disengaged Prospects are not in the data set since the sample churches distributed the survey through previous youth ministry contacts. This population had very little, if any, commitment to youth ministry in high school and either did not respond or the

church did not have correct contact information. There is not enough data to answer research question one.

Research Question Two: Level 2 Commitment Retention

RQ2. To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit level 2 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently involved with a local church?

In response to the second research question, the researcher sought to obtain a retention statistic (from the YMRQ) for those research participants who were assigned to the Level 2 youth ministry commitment category “Normative Attender.” Level 2 youth ministry commitment is identified by participants with a score of 17-27 on the Modified Youth Ministry Commitment Scale. Additionally, a t-test, post hoc test, and Pearson’s Chi-square tests were used to determine if significant relationships existed between current levels of involvement for the Level 2 commitment group, and to assess whether individual differences among the churches may have accounted for any variance in the data.

Table 13.

Level 2 Commitment Retention (N=29)

Current Level of Involvement	Valid N	% Of Total
Zero Involvement	6	20.7%
Low Involvement	10	34.5%
Moderate Involvement	5	17.2%
High Involvement	8	27.6%
Totals	29	100%

Retention Statistic

For the survey sample, 29 participants (5.8% of the total sample) scored in the Level 2 Normative Attender category of youth ministry commitment (Table 13). The Level 2 Normative

Attendees in high school had a 79.3% overall retention rate. 44.8% of Normative Attendees reported higher involvement as adults than in high school with 27.6% in the High Involvement category. Level 2 Normative Attendees showed an overall increase in commitment among retained participants.

Retention by Church

A breakdown of the retention success rates of the sample churches for Level 2 Normative Attendees, while in high school, is presented in Table 14. Violet Baptist Church (17.2%, N=5) and Heritage Church (13.8%, N=4) had the highest number of Level 2 participant responses. There were six (20.7%) church dropouts from participants in Level 2. The results showed that the six dropouts were from Heritage Church (33.3%, N=2), LifeSprings (33.3%, N=2), Violet Baptist (16.7%, N=1), and Indianola Community Church (16.7%, N=1). The strongest ratios of “high involvement” from participants were from Violet Baptist Church (25%, N=2) and Abilene Baptist Church (25%, N=2). Additionally, 51.7% (N=15) of participants recorded low or moderate levels of current church involvement.

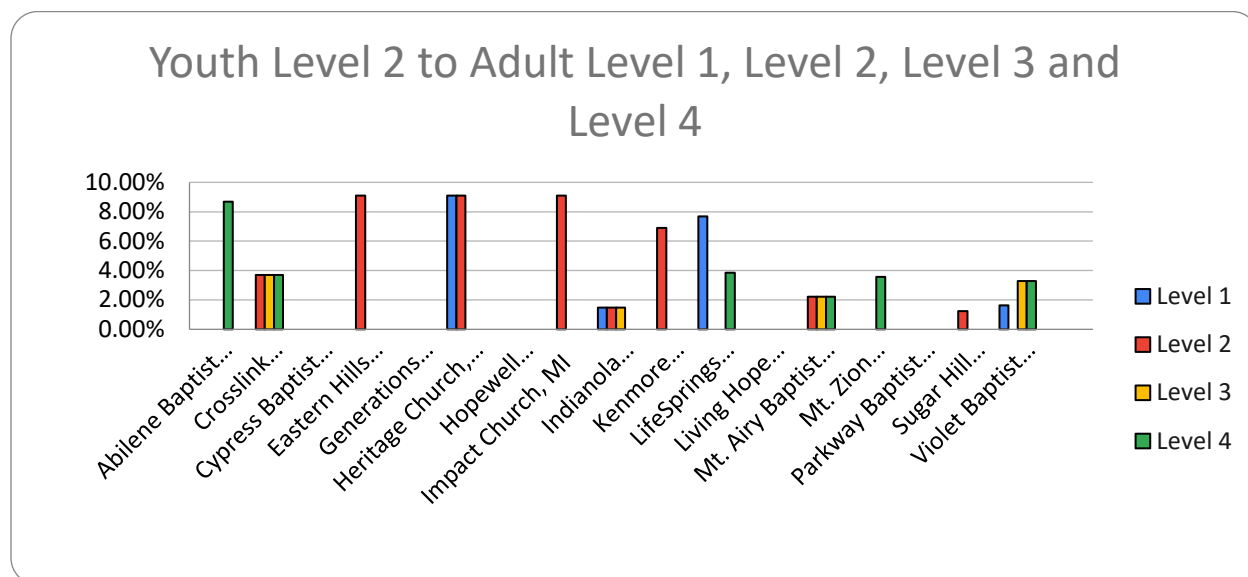
Table 14.*Level 2 Commitment Retention by Church*

Church		Church Involvement				Totals
		Zero	Low	Moderate	High	
Abilene Baptist Church	Count	0	0	0	2	2
Crosslink Community Church	Count	0	1	1	1	3
Cypress Baptist Church	Count	0	0	0	0	0
Eastern Hills Church	Count	0	1	0	0	1
Generations Church	Count	0	0	0	0	0
Heritage Church	Count	2	2	0	0	4
Hopewell Baptist Church	Count	0	0	0	0	0
Impact Church	Count	0	1	0	0	1
Indianola Community Church	Count	1	1	1	0	3
Kenmore Alliance Church	Count	0	2	0	0	2
Life Springs Church	Count	2	0	0	1	3
Living Hope Church	Count	0	0	0	0	0
Mt. Airy Baptist Church	Count	0	1	1	1	3
Mt. Zion Wesleyan Church	Count	0	0	0	1	1
Parkway Baptist Church	Count	0	0	0	0	0
Sugar Hill Church	Count	0	1	0	0	1
Violet Baptist Church	Count	1	0	2	2	5
Total		6	10	5	8	29
% Of Total		20.7%	34.5%	17.2%	27.6%	100%

Figure 1 provides a visual of the percentage movement of Level 2 youth ministry commitment to current church involvement. For example, 8.7% of Abilene's participants moved from Level 2 youth ministry commitment to Level 4 in current church involvement represented by the green bar above Abilene.

Figure 1

Youth Level 2 to Adult Levels 1 Through 4



Research Level Two Conclusions

The statistical analysis for the second research question revealed a significantly high rate of church retention for Level 2 Normative Attenders (79.3%, N=23). This means that most emerging adults who classified as Normative Attenders of youth ministries in high school from the sample churches reported that they were currently involved in the local church at a low, moderate, or high level. Additionally, 44.8% of Normative Attenders reported higher current church involvement as adults than in high school. Level 2 Normative Attenders reported the lowest retention rate (79.3%) among the four levels of current church involvement but much higher than the precedent research literature suggests. 20.7% of Normative Attenders have

dropped out of church among the sample churches. The dependent sample t-test revealed that there is a significant relationship between young adults who exhibited Level 2 commitment in high school and their current church involvement. Youth ministry commitment in high school had an impact on church involvement as an emerging adult.

Research Question Three: Level 3 Commitment Retention

RQ3. To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit level 3 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently involved with a local church?

In response to the third research question, the researcher sought to obtain a retention statistic (from the YMRQ) for those research participants assigned to the Level 3 youth ministry commitment category “Enthusiastic Follower.” Level 3 youth ministry commitment is identified by participants with a score of 28-39 on the Modified Youth Ministry Commitment Scale.

Table 15

Level 3 Commitment Retention (N-223)

Current Level of Involvement	Valid N	% of Total
Zero Involvement	12	5.4%
Low Involvement	64	28.7%
Moderate Involvement	122	54.7%
High Involvement	25	11.2%
Totals	223	100%

For the survey sample, 223 participants (44.4% of total sample) scored in the Level 3 Enthusiastic Follower category (Table 15). The Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers, in high school commitment, had a 94.6% overall retention rate. 65.9% of Enthusiastic Followers reported the same or higher involvement as adults than in high school with 11.2% increasing commitment to

the High Involvement category. The data revealed that Enthusiastic Followers are not leaving the church, but the overall excitement and involvement decreased.

Retention by Church

A breakdown of the retention success rates of the sample churches for Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers, while in high school, is presented in Table 16. Sugar Hill Church (17.9%, N=40) and Indianola Community Church (17%, N=38) had the highest number of Level 3 participant responses. There were 12 (5.4%) of church dropouts from participants in Level 3. The results showed that the 12 dropouts were from Violet Baptist Church (41.7%, N=5), Sugar Hill Church (25%, N=3), Indianola Community Church (16.7%, N=2), Eastern Hills Church (8.3%, N=1), Kenmore Alliance (8.3%, N=1), and Mt. Airy Baptist (8.3%, N=1). The strongest ratios of “high involvement” from participants were from Sugar Hill Church (20%, N=5). Additionally, 83.4% (N=186) of total participants recorded low or moderate levels of current church involvement.

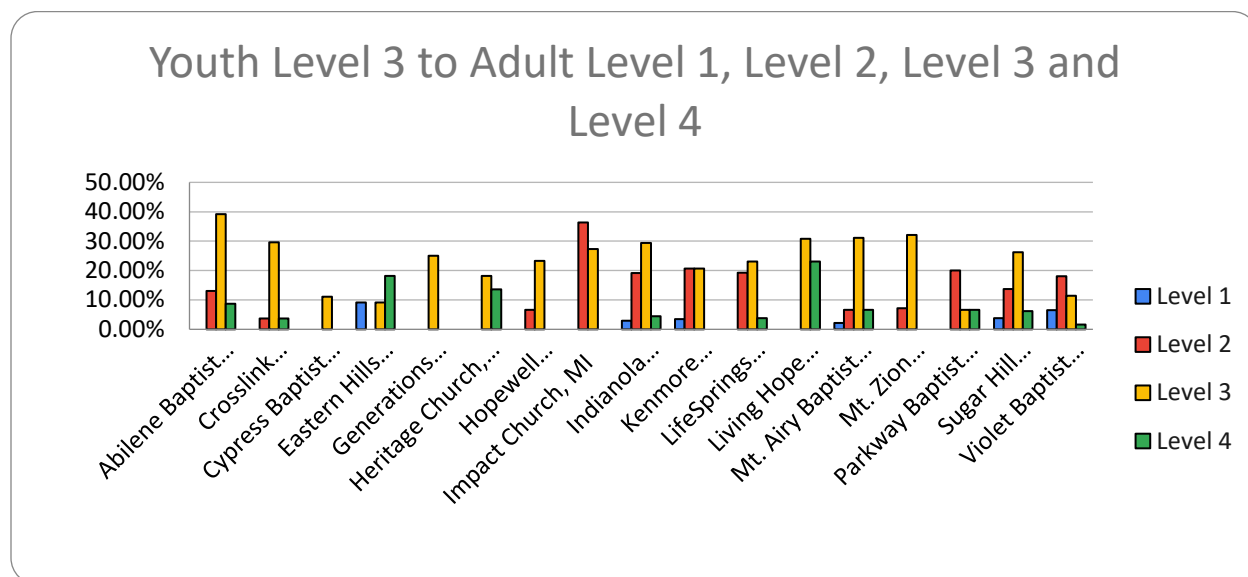
Table 16*Level 3 Commitment Retention by Church*

Church		Church Involvement				Totals
		Zero	Low	Moderate	High	
Abilene Baptist Church	Count	0	3	9	2	14
Crosslink Community Church	Count	0	1	8	1	10
Cypress Baptist Church	Count	0	0	1	0	1
Eastern Hills Church	Count	1	0	1	2	4
Generations Church	Count	0	0	1	0	1
Heritage Church	Count	0	0	4	3	7
Hopewell Baptist Church	Count	0	2	7	0	9
Impact Church	Count	0	4	3	0	7
Indianola Community Church	Count	2	13	20	3	38
Kenmore Alliance Church	Count	1	6	6	0	13
Life Springs Church	Count	0	5	6	1	12
Living Hope Church	Count	0	0	4	3	7
Mt. Airy Baptist Church	Count	1	3	14	3	21
Mt. Zion Wesleyan Church	Count	0	2	9	0	11
Parkway Baptist Church	Count	0	3	1	1	5
Sugar Hill Church	Count	3	11	21	5	40
Violet Baptist Church	Count	4	11	7	1	23
Total		12	64	122	25	223
% Of Total		5.38%	28.7%	54.71%	11.21%	100%

Figure 2 provides a visual of the movement of Level 3 youth ministry commitment to current church involvement. For example, 18.2% of Eastern Hills participants moved from youth ministry commitment Level 3 to Level 4 in current church involvement represented by the green bar above Eastern Hills Church.

Figure 2

Youth Level 3 to Adult Levels 1 Through 4



Research Question Three Conclusions

The statistical analysis for the third research question revealed significantly high rate of church retention for Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers (94.6%, N=211). This means that a very high percentage of emerging adults who classified as Enthusiastic Followers of youth ministries in high school from the sample churches reported that they were currently involved in the local church at a low, moderate, or high level. Additionally, 65.9% of Enthusiastic Followers reported the same or higher involvement as adults than in high school with 11.2% increasing commitment to the High Involvement category. Only 5.4% of Enthusiastic Followers dropped out of church among the sample churches. 11 of the 17 churches did not record a single church dropout from

those that were Enthusiastic Followers. The dependent sample t-test revealed that there is a significant relationship between young adults who exhibited Level 3 commitment in high school and their current church involvement. The data revealed that Enthusiastic Followers are not leaving the church, but the overall excitement and involvement decreased (34%) from high school to current church involvement. 54.7% of participants stayed at the same level while only 11.2% reported increased involvement.

Research Question Four: Level 4 Commitment Retention

RQ4. To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit level 4 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently involved with a local church?

In response to the fourth research question, the researcher sought to obtain a retention statistic (from the YMRQ) for those research participants who were assigned to the Level 4 youth ministry commitment category “Engaged Disciple.” Level 4 youth ministry commitment is identified by participants with a score of 40-45 on the Modified Youth Ministry Commitment Scale.

Table 17

Level 4 Commitment Retention (N-250)

Current Level of Involvement	Valid N	% Of Total
Zero Involvement	5	2.0%
Low Involvement	32	12.8%
Moderate Involvement	96	38.4%
High Involvement	117	46.8%
Totals	250	100%

For the survey sample, 250 participants (49.8% of total sample) scored in the Level 4 Engaged Disciple category (Table 17). The Level 4 Engaged Disciple, in high school

commitment, had a 98% overall retention rate. 46.8% of Engaged Disciples reported Level 4 High Involvement category as adults. 85.2% of participants have High or Moderate Current Church Involvement as adults. The data revealed that Engaged Disciples are not leaving the church but are slightly less excited and involved overall.

Retention by Church

A breakdown of the retention success rates of the sample churches for Level 4 Engaged Disciples, while in high school, is presented in Table 18. Violet Baptist Church (13.2%, N=33) Sugar Hill Church (11.6%, N=29) and Indianola Community Church (10.8%, N=27) had the highest number of Level 4 participant responses. There were five (2.0%) church dropouts from participants in Level 4. The results showed that the 5 dropouts were from Violet Baptist Church (60%, N=3), Life Springs Church (20%, N=1), and Heritage Church (20%, N=1). The strongest ratios of “high involvement” from participants were from Hopewell Baptist Church (14.5%, N=17), Sugar Hill Church (12.8%, N=15), and Mt Airy Baptist Church (12.8%, N=15). 14 of the samples churches in the study did not have a single participant that was a Level 4 Engaged Disciple in high school leave the church. The 14 churches make up 195 (78.0%) participants in the Level 4 category.

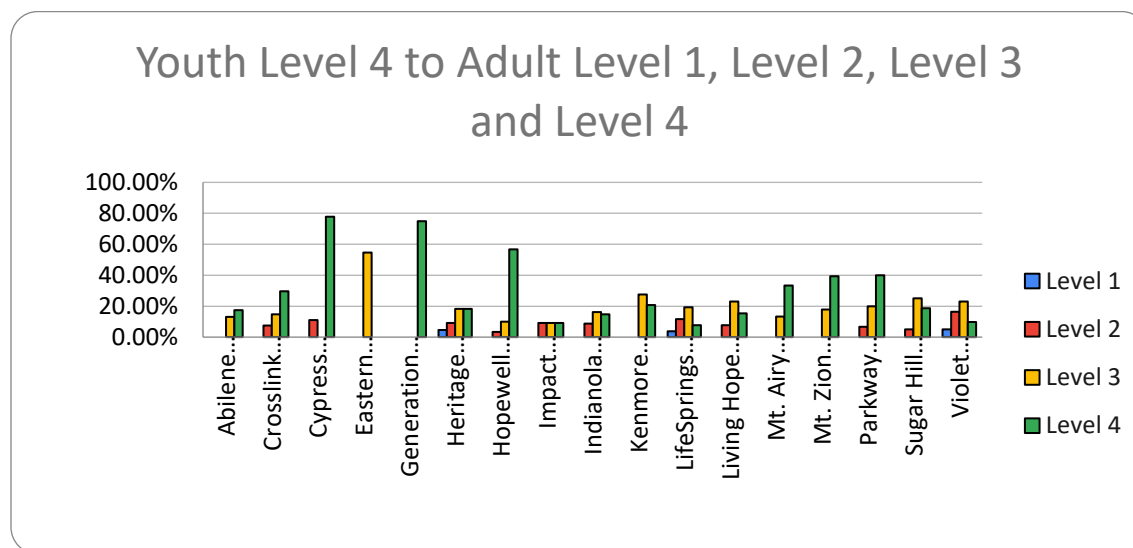
Table 18*Level 4 Commitment Retention by Church*

Church		Church Involvement				Totals
		Zero	Low	Moderate	High	
Abilene Baptist Church	Count	0	0	3	4	7
Crosslink Community Church	Count	0	2	4	8	14
Cypress Baptist Church	Count	0	1	0	7	8
Eastern Hills Church	Count	0	0	6	0	6
Generations Church	Count	0	0	0	3	3
Heritage Church	Count	1	2	4	4	11
Hopewell Baptist Church	Count	0	1	3	17	21
Impact Church	Count	0	1	1	1	3
Indianola Community Church	Count	0	6	11	10	27
Kenmore Alliance Church	Count	0	0	8	6	14
Life Springs Church	Count	1	3	5	2	11
Living Hope Church	Count	0	1	3	2	6
Mt. Airy Baptist Church	Count	0	0	6	15	21
Mt. Zion Wesleyan Church	Count	0	0	5	11	16
Parkway Baptist Church	Count	0	1	3	6	10
Sugar Hill Church	Count	0	4	20	15	29
Violet Baptist Church	Count	3	10	14	6	33
Total		5	32	96	117	250
% Of Total		2.0%	12.8%	38.4%	46.8%	100%

Figure 3 provides a visual of the movement of Level 4 youth ministry commitment to current church involvement. For example, 77.8% of Cypress Baptist participants that were Level 4 in youth ministry commitment stayed at Level 4 in current church involvement represented by the green bar above Cypress Baptist Church.

Figure 3

Youth Level 4 to Adult Levels 1 Through 4



Research Question Four Conclusions

The statistical analysis for the fourth research question revealed an extremely high rate of church retention for Level 4 Engaged Disciples (98%, N=245). This means that an extremely high percentage of emerging adults who classified as Engaged Disciples of youth ministries in high school from the sample churches reported that they were currently involved in the local church at a low, moderate, or high level. Additionally, 85.2% of Engaged Disciples were in the moderate to high involvement category. Only 2% of Engaged Disciples dropped out of church among the sample churches. 14 of the 17 sample churches did not record a single church dropout from those that were Engaged Disciples. One of the churches had three Level 4 dropouts. If that single church was removed from the sample research population, the dropout rate for the Level 4

category would be (.8%). Level 4 Engaged Disciples made up the largest segment of the sample population with 250 (49.8%) of the respondents. The dependent sample t-test revealed that there is a significant relationship between young adults who exhibited Level 4 commitment in high school and their current church involvement. Engaged Disciples are not leaving the church and maintain a high level of commitment to church as emerging adults. The data reveals a slight decrease in overall excitement and involvement in church as adults.

Research Question Five: Demographic Correlations

RQ5. To what degree, if any, are demographic variables significantly related to levels of youth ministry commitment and current local church involvement?

In response to the fifth research question, the researcher analyzed the statistical data to determine the relationship and impact of the demographic variables on youth ministry commitment and current church involvement. There were some interesting correlations discovered in the data. As an example, females were overwhelmingly more apt to share their faith than the males in the study. However, there was only one question in the demographic data that proved to garner impact on levels of current church involvement (Table 19). The question, “How long, if at all, did you stop attending church from ages 18-22?” uncovered some correlation to numbers of hours worked in high school, types of colleges attended, and current church involvement levels. After a thorough analysis of the data correlations, it was determined that the number of hours worked and types of college attended were fairly insignificant to overall retention. Though, Christian higher education proved to have the highest retention related to time period dropouts from 18-22. The data revealed a significant correlation between those that took time off from church from 18-22 and their current church involvement. The longer that a participant took off from church from 18-22 the higher the likelihood of dropping out of the church.

Table 19.

Pearson's and Spearman's Rho Correlations of Participant Responses to Duration of Stop Attendance From 18-22.

		How long, if at all, did you stop attending church from ages 18-22?
Number of hours worked in High School	Pearson Correlation	.124**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.005
	N	502
	Spearman's Rho	.136**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002
	N	502
Type of College Attended	Pearson Correlation	.153**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001
	N	495
	Spearman's Rho	.140**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002
	N	495
Modified Current Church Involvement Scale	Pearson Correlation	-.655**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	502
	Spearman's Rho	-.664**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	502

Research Question Five Conclusions

The individual demographic questions in the survey were correlated with the youth ministry commitment and current church involvement level scales using Pearson's and Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient. The demographic data from the participants surveyed revealed only one significant correlation to youth ministry commitment and current church involvement levels. The correlation was with the question, "How long, if at all, did you stop

attending church from ages 18-22?" and current church involvement. The results showed that as the duration of time away from the church increased while the participant was 18-22 years old, there was a decrease in current church involvement and an increased likelihood of dropout.

There were not any other statistically significant correlations related to youth ministry commitment and current church involvement.

Research Question Six: Relationship Between Variables

RQ6. What is the relationship between different levels of youth ministry commitment during high school and the level of current local church involvement?

In response to research question six, the researcher analyzed the data by using Pearson's and Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient and a Chi-Square Test for independence to explore the statistical relationship between youth ministry commitment and current church involvement. The results showed a significant correlation and association between youth ministry commitment and current church involvement. The data revealed that an overall retention statistic of 95.4% of the study participants who had some level of involvement in youth ministry was currently involved in the local church to some degree (Table 20). Additionally, the data indicated that 74.3% of the participants have moderate to high levels of current church involvement. The mean of commitment from church participants dropped from youth ministry commitment to current church involvement from 3.44 to 3.00 on the level 1 through 4 criteria (Table 21). Figure 4 through Figure breakdown the estimated marginal means and confidence intervals for each of the churches. For reference, factor one refers to the Modified Youth Ministry Commitment Scale score and factor two to the Modified Current Church Involvement Scale score. This means that churches are maintaining a Level 3 average of current church involvement from former youth ministry participants. Table 20 presents the retention data for all levels of youth ministry commitment and current church involvement. The level of youth ministry commitment with the

most dropouts was Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers (2.3%, N=12). Even so, the number of dropouts is only 5.4% of the Level 3 Category. Also, the ratio of dropouts for Level 3 (12 dropouts of 223 participants) is positioned much stronger than Level 2 (6 dropouts of 29 participants). Level 4 Engaged Disciples made up 48.8% of the total number of retained participants among all levels of commitment.

Table 20.

Retention Figures for All Levels of Youth Ministry Commitment

Youth Ministry Commitment Levels		Current Church Involvement				
		Zero	Low	Moderate	High	Totals
Level 1 – Disengaged Prospect	Count	0	0	0	0	0
	% Of Total	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%
Level 2 – Normative Attender	Count	6	10	5	8	29
	% Of Total	1.2%	1.2%	1.0%	1.6%	5.8%
Level 3 – Enthusiastic Follower	Count	12	64	122	25	223
	% Of Total	2.3%	12.7%	24.3%	5.0%	44.4%
Level 4 – Engaged Disciple	Count	5	32	96	117	250
	% Of Total	1.0%	6.4%	19.1%	23.3%	49.8%
Total	Count	23	106	223	150	502
	% Of Total	4.6%	21.1%	44.4%	29.9%	100%

Table 21.

Sample Church Means for Modified Youth Ministry Commitment and Modified Current Church Involvement Scales.

Churches	N	MYMCS		MCCIS	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Abilene Baptist Church, GA	23	3.22	0.600	3.22	0.671
Crosslink Community Church	27	3.41	0.694	3.22	0.698
Cypress Baptist Church, LA	9	3.89	0.333	3.67	0.707
Eastern Hills Church, NY	11	3.45	0.688	2.91	0.831
Generations Church, CO	4	3.75	0.500	3.75	0.500
Heritage Church, IL/IA	22	3.32	0.780	2.86	1.037
Hopewell Baptist Church, NC	30	3.70	0.466	3.47	0.681
Impact Church, MI	11	3.18	0.603	2.55	0.688
Indianola Community Church	68	3.35	0.567	2.81	0.797
Kenmore Alliance Church, NY	29	3.41	0.628	2.86	0.789
LifeSprings Church, IN	26	3.31	0.679	2.62	0.898
Living Hope Church, OH	13	3.46	0.519	3.31	0.630
Mt. Airy Baptist Church, SC	45	3.40	0.618	3.29	0.727
Mt. Zion Wesleyan Church, N	28	3.54	0.576	3.36	0.621
Parkway Baptist Church, VA	15	3.67	0.488	3.20	0.862
Sugar Hill Church, GA	80	3.48	0.527	2.98	0.779
Violet Baptist Church, OH	61	3.46	0.647	2.54	0.905
Total	502	3.44	0.602	3.00	0.833

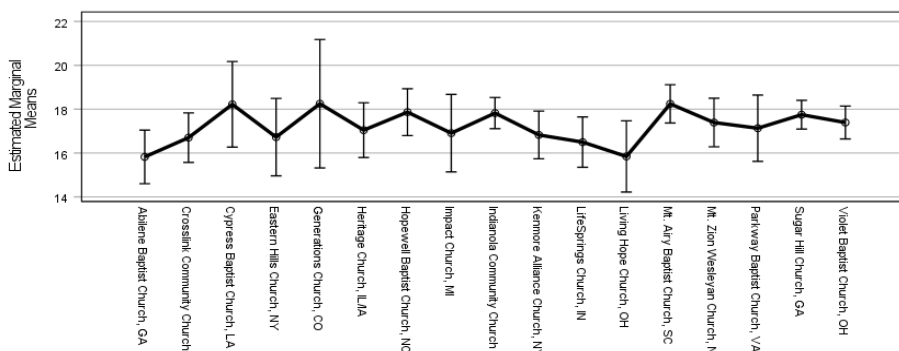
A comparison of the estimated marginal means with confidence levels for YMCCS, CCCS, YMCLS, CCCLS, MYMCS, and the MCCIS is illustrated in Figure 4 through Figure 8. The data reveals that the participant's comfort and connection, levels of commitment to the church, and levels of current church involvement decrease in the church as an emerging adult. The difference is not dramatic, but there is a difference. The participants are not leaving the church, but there is a clear decrease in excitement and involvement. Also, several churches have an increased drop-off compared to other churches in the sample. More data would need to be

collected to determine the external and internal factors that correlate to the decrease between churches. There is not enough data to draw definitive conclusions as to the difference among churches.

Figure 4

Estimated Marginal Means with Confidence Levels of Youth Ministry Comfort and Connection Scale

Estimated Marginal Means of Youth Ministry Comfort and Connection Scale



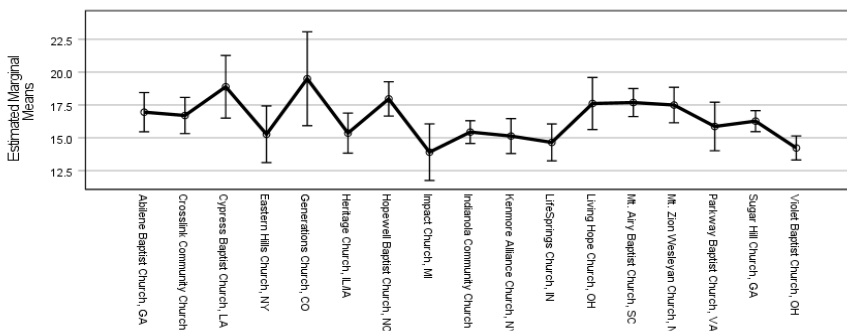
Q19 Which of the following churches did you attend most frequently for youth ministry activities during your serio...

Error bars: 95% CI

Figure 5

Estimated Marginal Means with Confidence Levels of Church Comfort and Connection Scale

Estimated Marginal Means of Church Comfort and Connection Scale



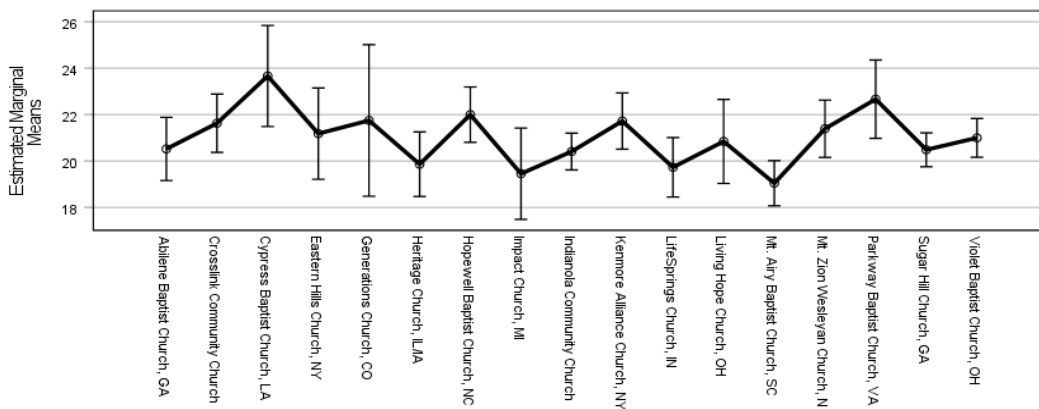
Q19 Which of the following churches did you attend most frequently for youth ministry activities during your sen...

Error bars: 95% CI

Figure 6

Estimated Marginal Means with Confidence Levels of Youth Ministry Commitment Levels Scale

Estimated Marginal Means of Youth Ministry Commitment Levels Scale



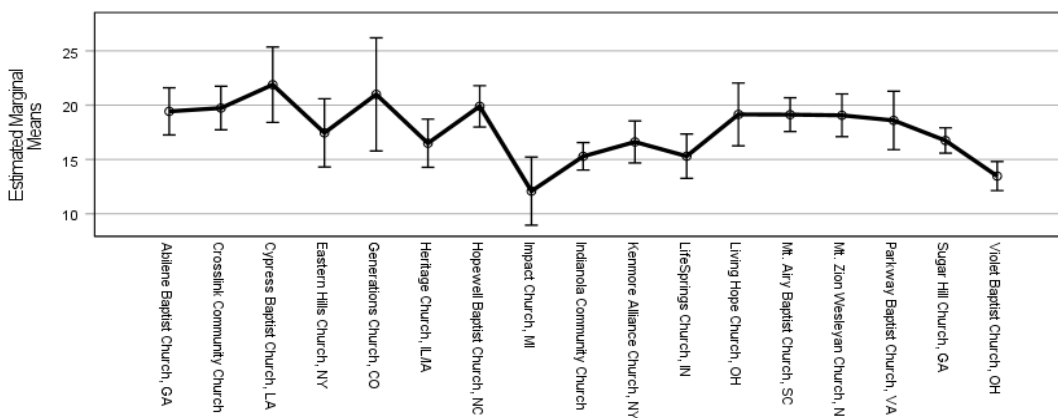
Q19 Which of the following churches did you attend most frequently for youth ministry activities during your senio...

Error bars: 95% CI

Figure 7

Estimated Marginal Means with Confidence Levels of Current Church Commitment Levels Scale

Estimated Marginal Means of Current Church Commitment Levels Scale

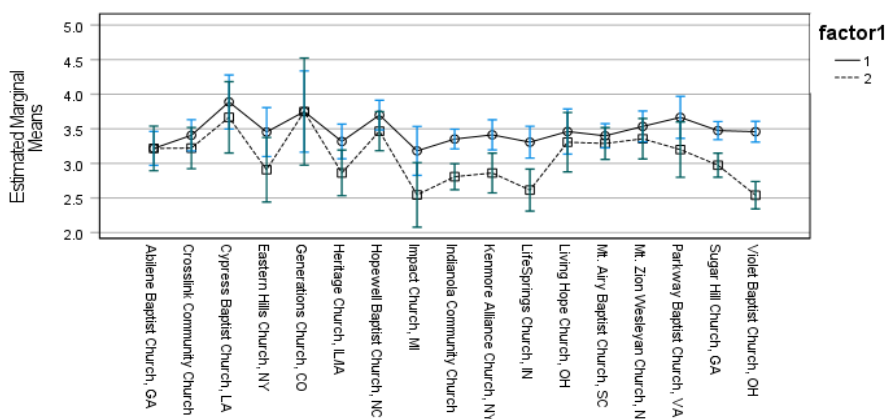


Q19 Which of the following churches did you attend most frequently for youth ministry activities during your senio...

Error bars: 95% CI

Figure 8

Estimated Marginal Means with Confidence Levels for Factor 1 (MYMCS) and Factor 2 (MCCIS)

Estimated Marginal Means of MEASURE_1

Q19 Which of the following churches did you attend most frequently for youth ...

Error bars: 95% CI

Research Question Six Conclusions

The statistical analysis of the research data revealed a significant relationship between former youth ministry commitment (factor 1) and current church involvement (factor 2). There was an overall decrease in involvement from youth ministry commitment to current church involvement. The sample churches attended proved to have some measure of influence on the current church involvement of participants. More data is needed to determine any statistical relationship between external and internal factors that would explain the decrease of emerging adult involvement between churches. Additionally, the data revealed through the Comfort and Connection subscales and Commitment Level subscales a decrease in connectivity and involvement as adults compared to the same measurements for participants in high school youth ministry. Interestingly, the decrease is not connected to youth ministry, but to their current church discipleship experience.

The data revealed an overall retention statistic of 95.4% for the participants in the research study. The data results indicated that 74.3% of the participants have a current level of involvement in the moderate high-level category. The overall mean of adult level involvement was 3.00 on the level 1 through 4 criteria. The retention statistics in this current study affirms the findings of Shields (2008) that adults who had previous involvement in youth ministry are not leaving the church. This study refutes and falsifies the claims that a high percentage of high school graduates are leaving the church that have previous youth ministry involvement. The data revealed that increased commitment to youth ministry leads to increased adult church involvement. Level 4 Engaged Disciples had higher retention than Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers. Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers had high retention than Level 2 Normative Attenders. The highest level of commitment, Engaged Disciples, maintained a high level of church involvement and the smallest decrease in church comfort and connection drop-off as emerging adults.

Research Question Seven: Shields Data Comparison

RQ7. To what degree, if any, does the study verify or contradict the result of the Shields study?

In response to research question seven, the researcher analyzed the data in the current study to determine whether the data verified or contradicted the results of Shields's study in 2008. The current study verified Shields's conclusions by revealing a high retention rate utilizing a different sample population of self-identified Evangelical churches with 500 to 2000 in average weekly attendance across all levels of youth ministry commitment. For Level 1 Disengaged Prospect, both studies had too little data to draw statistically significant conclusions. Table 22 provides a data comparison of the retention rates between the current study and the Shields study. The current study had zero Level 1 Disengaged Prospect respondents while the Shields

study only had one. The retention statistic for Level 2 Normative Attenders was identical across both studies with the current study reporting 79.3% retention while the Shields study reported 79% retention. For Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers, 94.6% of respondents in the current study and 80% in the Shields study were retained in the church. The Level 3 participants proved to have the widest percentage gap. However, Level 3 respondents had a very high retention rate compared to what has been presented in the precedent literature. In both studies, the highest retention rate was among Level 4 Engaged Disciples with 98% in the current study and 92.8% in the Shields study. Respondents across all youth ministry commitment levels had an overall adult church retention of 95.4% in the current study and 88% in the Shields study. The average retention rate across both studies is 91.7%. The current research study affirmed Shields's conclusion that students connected to youth ministries are not leaving the church.

Table 22.

Retention Comparison to Replicated Study

Levels of Youth Ministry Involvement	Current Study Retention % Self-Identified Evangelical Churches (500 to 2000)	Shields Study Retention % SBC Megachurches
Level 1 – Disengaged Prospect	No Data	Not Enough Data
Level 2 – Normative Attender	79.3%	79%
Level 3 – Enthusiastic Follower	94.6%	80%
Level 4 – Engaged Disciple	98%	92.8%
Overall Retention Statistic	95.4%	88%

There were a few statistical measures that produced different results in the current study when compared to the Shields study data. Shields found that students who graduated from public high schools had higher retention as adults than those that graduated from Christian high schools.

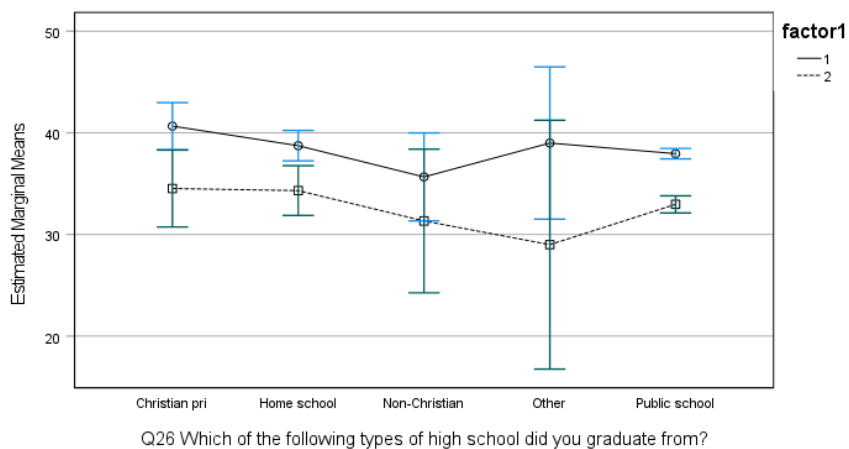
Figure 9 illustrates the data from the current study for youth ministry commitment (factor 1) and current church involvement (factor 2) applied to types of high schools from which the participants graduated. Christian school students had higher youth ministry commitment and slightly higher current church involvement. There is not enough difference between private and public schools to draw any significant statistical conclusions, but the data was different from Shields.

Also, Shields's study revealed a positive correlation between current church involvement and higher levels of education. The retention percentage of adult involvement increased as the level of education increased. The current study did not find significant correlation between higher levels of education and current church involvement (Table 23).

Figure 9

Types of High School Attended to Factor 1 and 2 comparison

Estimated Marginal Means of MEASURE_1



Error bars: 95% CI

Table 23.*Highest Level of Education and Current Church Involvement Correlation*

		What is the highest level of education you have complete?
Current Commitment Levels	Pearson Correlation	-0.020
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.662
	N	502
	Spearman's Rho	-0.009
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.839
	N	502

Research Question Seven Conclusions

The Shields study was the lone empirical research study, in the precedent literature over the last 30 years, presenting a high retention rate of emerging adults that were committed to youth ministry in high school. The Shields study contradicted the 70% to 90% statistical claim of church dropout rates proposed in the literature providing a falsification study to the dropout hypothesis. This researcher initiated a replication study of Shields's research, with a different population, to verify or falsify the results. After data comparison, the current researcher affirmed the conclusions of high retention rates in the church for emerging adults with youth ministry commitment. The data in both studies revealed a correlation to youth ministry commitment and current church involvement. The data in both studies revealed that as the level of youth ministry commitment increased, the level of current church retention increased for emerging adults. Shields's research recorded high retention rates of 79% for Level 2 Normative Attenders), 80% for Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers, and 92.8% for Level 4 Engaged Disciples. The current research study confirmed Shields's findings with high retention rates of 79.3% for Level 2 Normative Attenders, 94.6% for Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers, and 98% for Engaged Disciples.

Respondents across all youth ministry commitment levels had an overall adult church retention of 95.4% in the current study and 88% in the Shields study. The average retention rate across both studies is 91.7%. Therefore, both research projects are falsification studies that refute the claim that high school students connected to youth ministries are leaving the church in droves. In contrast, there is not a factor in the literature that has a greater impact on retaining emerging adults in the church than youth ministry commitment.

Statistical Summary and Conclusions

The following list summarizes the most pertinent statistics from this research study to answer the seven research questions.

1. There were 17 self-identified Evangelical churches sampled in the research study representing 11 states (GA, VA, LA, NY, CO, IA, NC, MI, IN, OH, SC) and four different denominations (Southern Baptist Church, The Wesleyan Church, Evangelical Free Church of America, and Christian Missionary Alliance.)
2. The total worship attendance of the sample churches was 17,800 with an average of 1047.
3. Youth pastors from the sample churches had a total of 256 years' experience working with teenagers as full-time student pastors in the local church with an average of 15.06 years. The average tenure at their current church was 7 years.
4. There were 623 completed surveys with 502 useable surveys included in the research study.
5. The dropout timeline between ages 18 to 22 of participants in this research study more closely aligned with the findings of Shields with 52% (N=261) of the sample reporting "I never stopped attending church," 10.6% stopped attending for 1-2 months, and only 14.9% stopped attending for more than one year.
6. Research question one could not be answered for Level 1 Disengaged Prospects. The researcher could not determine any statistically significant conclusions due to zero participants scoring in this category.
7. The statistical analysis for the second research question revealed a significantly high rate of church retention for Level 2 Normative Attenders (79.3%).
8. 44.8% of Level 2 Normative Attenders reported higher involvement in their current church involvement as adults than in high school.

9. Level 2 Normative Attenders reported the lowest retention rate (79.3%) among the four levels of current church involvement but much higher than the precedent research literature suggests.
10. The statistical analysis for the third research question revealed a significantly high rate of church retention for Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers (94.6%)
11. 65.9% of Enthusiastic Followers reported the same or higher involvement as adults than in high school with 11.2% increasing commitment to the High Involvement category.
12. The statistical analysis for the fourth research question revealed an extremely high rate of church retention for Level 4 Engaged Disciples (98%). Only 2% of the 250 adults in this category dropped out of the church.
13. 14 of the 17 sample churches did not have a single research participant dropout that was Level 4 Engaged Disciples.
14. The demographic data from the participants surveyed to answer research question five did not reveal a significant correlation to youth ministry commitment and current church involvement levels.
15. The statistical analysis for the sixth research question revealed a significant relationship between former youth ministry commitment and current church involvement.
16. The overall church retention statistic for the 502 research participants was 95.4% with 74.3% of the participants having a current level of involvement in the moderate to high-level category.
17. The overall mean of current church adult involvement from participants was 3.00 on the level 1 through 4 criteria.
18. The data revealed that increased commitment to youth ministry in high school leads to increased adult church involvement. Level 4 Engaged Disciples had higher retention than Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers. Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers had a higher retention than Level 2 Normative Attenders.
19. After data comparison, the current researcher affirmed the conclusions of high retention rates in the church for emerging adults with youth ministry commitment. The data in both studies revealed a correlation to youth ministry commitment and current church involvement. The data in both studies uncovered that as the level of youth ministry commitment increased, the level of current church retention increased for emerging adults.
20. Shields's research recorded high retention rates of 79% for Level 2 Normative Attenders), 80% for Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers, and 92.8% for Level 4 Engaged

Disciples. The current research study confirmed Shields's findings with high retention rates of 79.3% for Level 2 Normative Attenders, 94.6% for Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers, and 98% for Engaged Disciples.

21. Emerging adults are not leaving the church when they have youth ministry commitment in high school. The data does reveal that overall, there is a decrease in connection, comfort, and commitment as adults. They are not leaving, but there is a deficit in the way churches are engaging emerging adults.

Evaluation of the Research Design

The research design for this replication study had strengths and weaknesses. The strengths of the research design included the sample churches, the online YMRQ survey, data collection, and participant responses. The sample churches had student pastors that cared about the study and the integrity of the data enough to distribute the survey at random to former high school graduates. There was a substantial response from participants in a short amount of time. The researcher had planned on implementing a snowball distribution technique to reach the confidence number of 300 participants. The snowball distribution was not utilized as within three weeks the survey was shut down with 502 useable surveys submitted, with an average of 30 respondents per sample church. Also, the number of respondents was a strength of the study allowing the researcher to have significant data to analyze. Shields had some challenges with data collection and attributed some of those challenges to the YMRQ survey recording the participant's name in the demographic section. To strengthen the response, this researcher adjusted the instrument to be anonymous eliminating the obstacle of participants not wanting their name attached to the survey. The online survey provided an easy avenue for distribution for churches and accessibility for participants. Qualtrics proved to be a user-friendly tool for data collection and exporting files that integrated smoothly into SPSS.

In hindsight, there would be a few questions adjusted in the YMRQ. For example, "Are you a baptized member of your current church?" The question is a very Southern Baptist

question, but the current research study survey multiple denominations. The data revealed confusion to this question. Also, times have changed over the last 14 years in how membership is viewed in the church. In today's church, congregants view themselves as members if they are attending, giving, and serving in the church. Also, it was clear in the study that a large portion of participants did not know the definition of Protestant. Protestant is not a word that is used in common conversation or in the pulpit very often in today's church.

The biggest weakness of the design proved to be a few adjustments that needed to be made to the scales in the survey instrument to strengthen the data analysis. The initial analysis of the data revealed a problem with the factor structure of the scales used to determine youth ministry commitment and current church involvement through. The data revealed that the 15 questions of the youth ministry commitment scale and current church involvement scale were not measuring a single construct. To strengthen the reliability, the researcher used a statistician to assist in developing new scales that measured a single construct from the YMRQ survey and clustered questions correctly for analysis. The first new subscale used questions from the YMRQ to measure youth ministry commitment levels (Q1_2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10) and current church involvement (Q30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 39). The set of questions measuring youth ministry commitment levels has a reliability score using Cronbach's Alpha of 0.735 and McDonald's Omega of 0.732. The set of questions measuring current church involvement has a reliability score using Cronbach's Alpha of 0.891 and McDonald's Omega of 0.900. The second new subscale measured comfort and connection in youth ministry (Q11-15) and current church comfort and connection (Q40-44). Questions 11 through 15 measuring comfort and connection in youth ministry has a goodness-to-fit test (Chi-Square 22.237, df. 5, sig. 0.000) and the same reliability score using Cronbach's Alpha and McDonald's Omega of 0.812. Questions 40 through

45 measuring current church comfort and connection has a goodness-to-fit test (Chi-Square 103.507, df. 5, sig. 0.000) and a reliability score using Cronbach's Alpha of 0.893 and McDonald's Omega of 0.892. The Modified Youth Ministry Commitment Scale combines the YMCLS and the YMCCS using the following questions (Q1_2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15). The set of questions measuring the Modified Youth Ministry Commitment has a reliability score using Cronbach's Alpha of 0.813 and McDonalds Omega of 0.083. The Modified Current Church Involvement Scale combines the CCCLS and the CCCS using the following questions (Q30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44). The set of questions measuring the Modified Youth Ministry Commitment has a reliability score using Cronbach's Alpha of 0.924 and McDonalds Omega of 0.926. The new scales have a much higher internal consistency and reliability than the previous scales. Levels 1-4 were then mathematically determined from the new scales to compare with Shields's study to answer the RQ7. Further analysis of the scales used is illustrated in Tables 24 through Table 29 and Figures 10 through 11. Though a few adjustments were made to the methodology to build upon and improve on Shields's design, the result of the research study aligned with the finding of Shields.

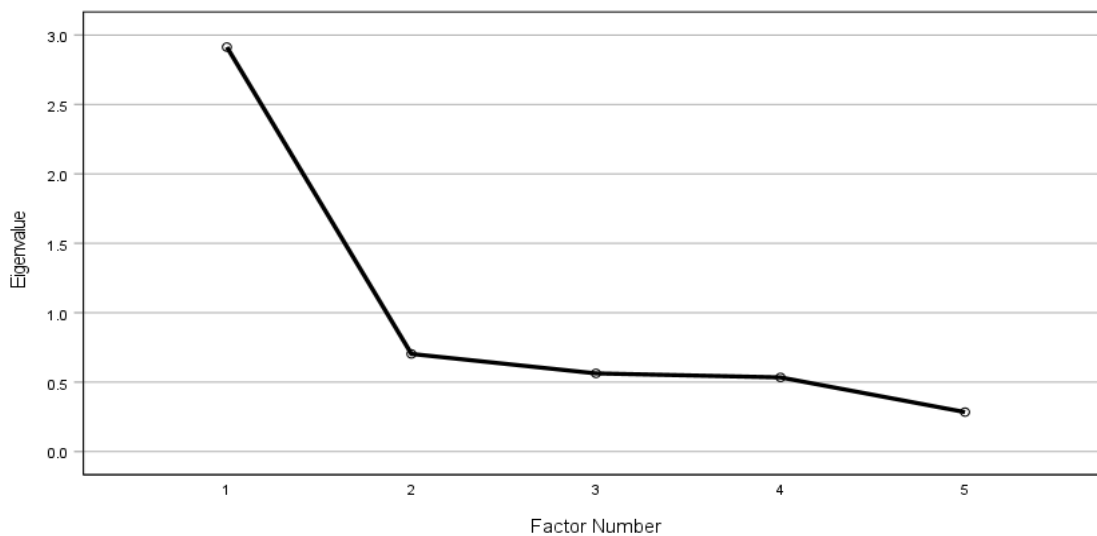
Table 24.

Total Variance Factor Analysis Explanation for Youth Ministry Comfort and Connect Scale

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues		Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings	
	Total	% Of Variance	Total	% Of Variance
1	2.914	58.278	2.432	58.645
2	0.704	14.070		
3	0.563	11.270		
4	0.534	10.690		
5	0.285	5.692		

Figure 10

Factor Analysis Screen Plot Showing a Single Factor Measurement for the Youth Ministry Comfort and Connection Scale

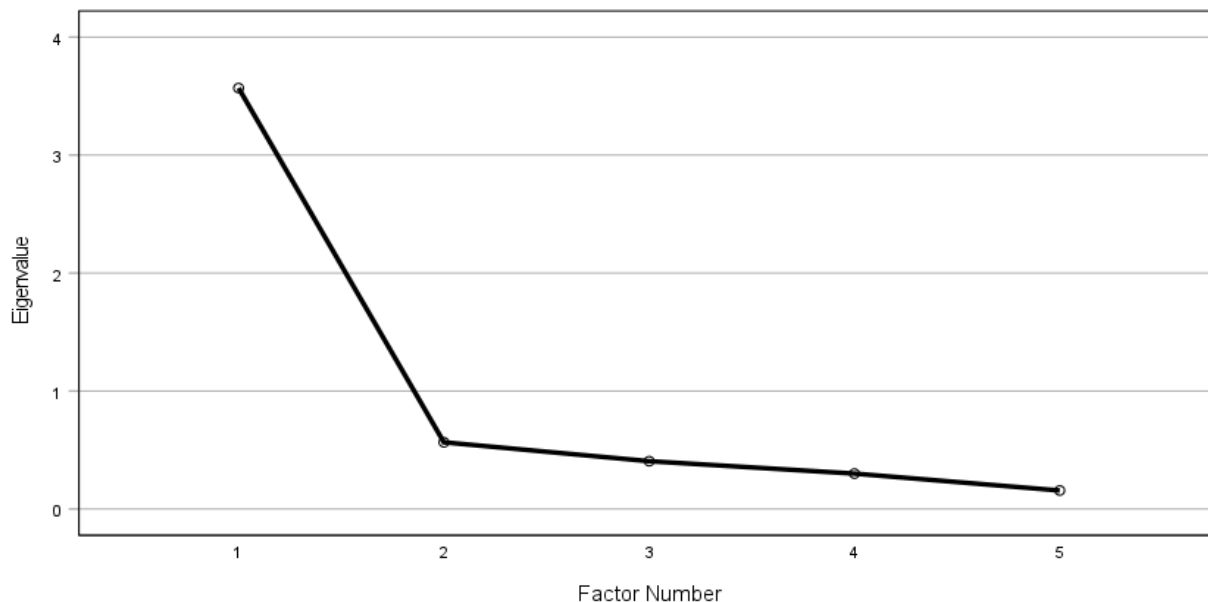
Scree Plot**Table 25.**

Total Variance Factor Analysis Explanation for Church Comfort and Connection Scale

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues		Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings	
	Total	% Of Variance	Total	% Of Variance
1	3.569	71.377	3.196	63.927
2	0.566	11.327		
3	0.406	8.123		
4	0.301	6.021		
5	0.158	3.153		

Figure 11

Factor Analysis Screen Plot Showing a Single Factor Measurement for the Church Comfort and Connection Scale

Scree Plot**Table 26**

Correlation of Youth Ministry Comfort and Connect Scale and Church Comfort and Connection Scale Using Pearson

		Youth Ministry Comfort and Connection Scale	Church Comfort and Connection Scale
Youth Ministry Comfort and Connection Scale	Pearson Correlation	1	.375**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
	N	502	502
Church Comfort and Connection Scale	Pearson Correlation	.375**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
	N	502	502
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 27

Correlation of Youth Ministry Comfort and Connect Scale and Church Comfort and Connection

Scale Using Spearman's Rho

			Youth Ministry Comfort and Connection Scale	Church Comfort and Connection Scale
Spearman's rho	Youth Ministry Comfort and Connection Scale	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.416**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
		N	502	502
	Church Comfort and Connection Scale	Correlation Coefficient	.416**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
		N	502	502
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Table 28*Paired Sample Statistics for Scales*

			Statistic	Bootstrap ^a			
				Bias	Std. Error	BCa 95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
Pair 1	Youth Ministry Comfort and Connection Scale	Mean	17.36	0.01	0.14	17.06	17.66
		N	502				
		Std. Deviation	3.003	-0.009	0.144	2.700	3.260
		Std. Error Mean	0.134				
	Church Comfort and Connection Scale	Mean	16.10	0.02	0.17	15.74	16.49
		N	502				
		Std. Deviation	3.810	-0.014	0.129	3.569	4.016
		Std. Error Mean	0.170				
Pair 2	Youth Ministry Commitment Levels Scale	Mean	20.75	0.00	0.15	20.44	21.05
		N	502				
		Std. Deviation	3.408	-0.007	0.120	3.190	3.620
		Std. Error Mean	0.152				
	Current Church Commitment Levels Scale	Mean	17.03	0.01	0.25	16.53	17.54
		N	502				
		Std. Deviation	5.694	-0.008	0.126	5.454	5.919
		Std. Error Mean	0.254				
Pair 3	Modified Youth Ministry Commitment Scale	Mean	38.11	0.01	0.25	37.56	38.63
		N	502				
		Std. Deviation	5.412	-0.012	0.182	5.065	5.738
		Std. Error Mean	0.242				
	Modified Current Church	Mean	33.13	0.03	0.40	32.35	34.00
		N	502				
		Std. Deviation	8.791	-0.023	0.244	8.342	9.185

	Involvement Scale	Std. Error Mean	0.392				
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Table 29

Paired Samples Correlations for Scales

		N	Correlation	Significance		Bootstrap for Correlation ^a			
				One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	Bias	Std. Error	BCa 95% Confidence Interval	
								Lower	Upper
Pair 1	Youth Ministry Comfort and Connection Scale & Church Comfort and Connection Scale	502	0.375	0.000	0.000	-0.001	0.048	0.285	0.464
Pair 2	Youth Ministry Commitment Levels Scale & Current Church Commitment Levels Scale	502	0.383	0.000	0.000	0.003	0.045	0.297	0.482
Pair 3	Modified Youth Ministry Commitment Scale & Modified Current Church Involvement Scale	502	0.374	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.046	0.281	0.466

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Research Purpose

The purpose of this quantitative replication research study will be to examine the claim that 70-90% of actively involved student attendees drop out of church after high school. The study will be a replication study of Brandon Shields's 2008 falsification research study while targeting a different sample. To accomplish the stated objective, the researcher will investigate the relationship between different levels of youth ministry commitment during high school and current levels of church involvement at self-identified Evangelical churches that average 500 to 2000 in weekly attendance.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1. To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit level 1 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently committed to a local church?

RQ2. To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit level 2 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently involved with a local church?

RQ3. To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit level 3 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently involved with a local church?

RQ4. To what degree, if any, are young adults who exhibit level 4 commitment levels to youth ministry during high school currently involved with a local church?

RQ5. To what degree, if any, are demographic variables significantly related to levels of youth ministry commitment and current local church involvement?

RQ6. What is the relationship between different levels of youth ministry commitment during high school and the level of current local church involvement?

RQ7. To what degree, if any, does the study verify or contradict the result of the Shields study?

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

The inferences of the research conclusions in this section were drawn from the statistical analysis outlined in chapter four of the current study. The YMRQ research instrument proved to be effective in collecting sufficient data to answer the research questions of the study. The response from participants from the 17 self-identified Evangelical churches of 500 to 2000 was substantial with 502 YMRQ survey respondents. The researcher employed a statistician to assist in the analysis of the data to assure accuracy.

Research Question One Conclusion: Level 1 Commitment Retention

In response to the first research question, the researcher sought to obtain a retention statistic (from the YMRQ) for those research participants who were assigned to the Level 1 youth ministry commitment category “Disengaged Prospect.” Disengaged Prospects are described as “teenagers who exhibited marginal characteristics of personal commitment to a local church youth ministry” (Shields, 2008, p. 167). Level 1 Disengaged prospects in this study were those participants with a score of 11-16 on the Modified Youth Ministry Commitment Scale from the responses to the YMRQ survey. For the category of Level 1 Disengaged Prospects, the researcher could not determine any statistically significant conclusions due to zero participants scoring in this category. The methodology and distribution of the survey utilized in the current study proved to be a barrier to getting responses from Level 1 Disengaged Prospects. The primary issue is attributed to the distribution of contacts through the sample church databases. Individuals with very little to zero commitment to youth ministry in high school either did not respond or the church did not have accurate contact information. The researcher is not concerned with the lack of response from Disengaged Prospects since the impetus for the study

is focused on the retention of emerging adults that maintained a level of youth ministry commitment in high school.

Research Question Two Conclusion: Level 2 Commitment Retention

In response to the second research question, the researcher sought to obtain a retention statistic (from the YMRQ) for those research participants who were assigned to the Level 2 youth ministry commitment category “Normative Attender.” Normative Attenders represent the emerging adult that had average youth ministry commitment in high school. Shields (2008) defines the participant in this category by stating,

Normative Attenders come to church at least once a month, rarely participate in camps and retreats, engaged in spiritual habits less than once a month, and exhibit feelings of being somewhat committed to youth ministry they were affiliated with in high school. (p. 168)

Level 2 Normative Attenders in this study were those participants with a score of 17-27 on the Modified Youth Ministry Commitment Scale from the responses to the YMRQ survey. There was a total of 23 research participants that scored in the Normative Attender category. The statistical analysis revealed a significantly high retention rate of 79.3% for Level 2 Normative Attenders. This means that most emerging adults who classified as Normative Attenders of youth ministries in high school from the sample churches had at minimum a low level of current church involvement. The Normative Attender dropout rate of 20.7% was the highest among levels with participants, but substantially lower than the 70% to 90% dropout statistic proposed in the literature.

Interestingly, 44.8% of Normative Attenders reported higher involvement in church as emerging adults than in high school. This means that there was an increase in current church attendance, spiritual discipline participation, and spiritual leadership as compared to high school.

The study being replicated discovered the same conclusions. The dependent sample t-test revealed that there is a significant relationship between young adults who exhibited Level 2 commitment in high school and their current church involvement. Youth ministry commitment in high school had an impact on church involvement as an emerging adult. Youth ministry leaders should be encouraged by these results and realize that even though it may not feel like a difference is being made in the life of a sporadic student attender, the data from two empirical research studies suggest otherwise. The Level 2 Normative Attender category alone falsifies the claim that most emerging adults with previous youth ministry commitment are leaving the church.

Research Question Three Conclusion: Level 3 Commitment Retention

In response to the third research question, the researcher sought to obtain a retention statistic (from the YMRQ) for those research participants who were assigned to the Level 3 youth ministry commitment category “Enthusiastic Follower.” Enthusiastic Followers were survey participants that attended youth ministry at least twice a month, participated in occasional camps and retreats, practiced spiritual disciplines, and had a high level of comfort and connection to their youth ministry in high school. Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers in this study were those participants with a score of 28-39 on the Modified Youth Ministry Commitment Scale from the responses to the YMRQ survey. There was a total of 223 research participants that scored in the Enthusiastic Follower category. The statistical analysis revealed an astonishingly high retention rate of 94.6% for Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers. Only 12 (5.4%) of the participants in Level 3 dropped out of the church as emerging adults among the sample churches. Additionally, 11 of the 17 churches in the study did not have a single Enthusiastic Follower participant dropout. It is important to report that the six churches that did report

dropouts from this category had a larger number of respondents than most of the eleven reported zero dropouts. The data revealed a significant relationship between emerging adults with Level 3 youth ministry commitment and their current church involvement. The retention of Enthusiastic Followers from the sample churches presents more data falsifying the claim that 70% to 90% of emerging adults are leaving the church with youth ministry involvement. The 94.6% retention is astonishing and was unexpected for this researcher.

The data analysis of Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers shows that they are not leaving the church, but an alarming trend was uncovered. The participants in this category are not leaving the church, but the overall excitement, connection, and involvement have decreased. 34% of the Enthusiastic followers reported a decrease or a move from Level 3 to Level 2 or Level 1 involvement. 54.7% of participants stayed at the same level while only 11.2% reported increased involvement. There is an unknown variable or variables that are impacting current church involvement that is outside the scope of this research study. Do churches need to adjust ministry practice to increase engagement and discipleship of emerging adults? What role, if any, does stage of life transitions play on emerging adults' church involvement? These are questions for further research that could give insight to data that is not explicitly evident through the data in the current study.

Research Question Four Conclusion: Level 4 Commitment Retention

In response to the fourth research question, the researcher sought to obtain a retention statistic (from the YMRQ) for those research participants who were assigned to the Level 4 youth ministry commitment category "Engaged Disciples." Engaged Disciples were survey participants that attended youth ministry at 3 to 4 times a month, participated in most camps and mission trips, read their bible and prayed multiple times a week, had a high level of comfort and

connection to their youth ministry, and had close relationships with an adult leader in high school. Level 4 Engaged Disciples in this study were those participants with a score of 40-45 on the Modified Youth Ministry Commitment Scale from the responses to the YMRQ survey. The largest category of respondents was from the Engaged Disciple category with a total of 250 research participants. The statistical analysis revealed an astronomically high retention rate of 98% for Level 4 Engaged Disciples. Only 5 (2%) of the participants in the Level 4 category dropped out of the church as emerging adults among the sample churches. 14 of the 17 sample churches representing 195 participants in this level did not record a single church dropout from those that were Engaged Disciples. Also, 85.2% of Engaged Disciples were in the moderate to high involvement category. The percentage of retention is so high for Level 4 that it is almost a foregone conclusion that emerging adults with Level 4 youth ministry commitment will not leave the church. Also, the participants in this Level maintained a much higher overall church involvement level than Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers. Similar to Level 3, the Engaged disciple had a decrease in overall excitement and involvement as emerging adults, but only slightly. Additionally, the recommendation for further research in the research question three conclusions section applies here.

Research Question Five Conclusion: Demographic Correlations

In response to the fifth research question, the researcher sought to investigate the demographic data to determine if there were any significant statistical correlations from the sample as it relates to youth ministry commitment and current church involvement. There were several correlations that were investigated, but only one proved to be significant to this research study. The correlation involving the question from the YMRQ, "How long, if at all, did you stop attending church from ages 18-22?" and current church involvement. The results showed that as

the duration of time away from the church increased while the participants were 18-22 years old, there was a decrease in current church involvement. Additionally, an increase in the duration of time away from the church from 18-22 correlated to an increased likelihood of dropout. This YMRQ question has significance implications related to the previous statistical claims from LifeWay Research. For comparative purposes, LifeWay Research reported that 66% in 2017 and 70% in 2007 of the surveyed population said that they stopped attending church for at least a year between the ages of 18 to 22. The data in Shields's (2008) study contradicted this conclusion. The participants in this research study, with previous youth ministry commitment, more closely aligned with the findings of Shields with 52% of the sample reporting "I never stopped attending church," 10.6% stopped attending for 1-2 months, and only 14.9% stopped attending for more than one year (Table 7). The results of this study revealed that 85.1% of participants with previous youth ministry commitment did not stop attending for at least a year.

The Shields (2008) study discovered a positive correlation relationship between current levels of church involvement and higher education, and a negatively correlated relationship with levels of church involvement and types of high school attended. The data in this research study did not uncover significant correlations in these demographic categories.

Research Question Six Conclusion: Relationship Between Variables

In response to the sixth research question, the researcher sought to discover whether a significant relationship between the independent variable (youth ministry commitment) and the dependent variable (current church involvement) was present. While the depth and breadth of the relationship between the variables cannot be established, it is clear that there is a significant relationship between the variables. There was an overall decrease in involvement from youth ministry commitment to current church involvement from participants in the study. This was

expected since the researcher was targeting respondents with previous youth ministry involvement. 100% of the 502 useable survey respondents had at least a low level of youth ministry commitment in high school. The sample churches attended proved to have some measure of influence on the current church involvement of participants. Some churches did a better job than others at retention. However, more data is needed to determine any statistical relationship between external and internal factors that would explain the decrease of emerging adult involvement between churches. Also, the retention statistic was very high among all churches, especially when compared to the precedent literature. For further study, the data revealed through the Comfort and Connection subscales and Commitment Level subscales a decrease in connectivity and involvement as adults compared to the same measurements for participants in high school youth ministry. Interestingly, the decrease appears to be connected more towards current church discipleship and experience, than previous youth ministry commitment.

The data revealed an overall retention statistic of 95.4% for the 502 participants in the research study with 74.3% of the participants having a current level of involvement in the moderate to high-level category. Additionally, the data revealed that increased commitment to youth ministry leads to increased adult church involvement. Level 4 Engaged Disciples had higher retention than Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers. Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers had a higher retention than Level 2 Normative Attenders.

The retention statistics in this current study affirms the findings of Shields's study that adults who had previous involvement in youth ministry are not leaving the church. This study provides a second empirical study that falsifies this popular dropout statistical claim. Based on the current study, there is not a more significant variable presented in the literature assuring a

higher rate of faith commitment and continued local church involvement as an emerging adult than youth ministry commitment.

Research Question Seven Conclusion: Shields Data Comparison

In response to research question seven, the researcher sought to compare the data of the current study with the study being replicated. The Shields study presented the only claim in the literature for high levels of church retention for emerging adults with previous youth ministry commitment. This researcher sought to discover whether Shields's study was an outlier to the research data, unique data related to megachurches, or a significant finding that is indicative of multiple sample church populations. The current study targeted a different sample population and slightly adjusted the research methodology to strengthen the research data analysis. Also, it is crucial to note that the current study is 14 years removed from the study being replicated. Though there were minor adjustments in the approach to accommodate the present church reality, the conclusions from both studies are virtually identical.

The data in both studies revealed a correlation to youth ministry commitment and current church involvement. The data in both studies revealed that as the level of youth ministry commitment increased, the level of current church retention increased for emerging adults. Shields's research recorded high retention rates of 79% for Level 2 Normative Attenders), 80% for Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers, and 92.8% for Level 4 Engaged Disciples. The current research study confirmed Shields's findings with high retention rates of 79.3% for Level 2 Normative Attenders, 94.6% for Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers, and 98% for Engaged Disciples. Respondents across all youth ministry commitment levels had an overall adult church retention of 95.4% in the current study and 88% in the Shields study. The average retention rate across both studies is 91.7%. Both research studies falsify the claim that high school students connected

to youth ministries are leaving the church in droves. The call to reconceptualize or even reject youth ministry needs to be revisited.

Theoretical Implications

The precedent literature on youth ministry over the last two decades reveals a universally accepted phenomenon that emerging adults are dropping out of the church following high school graduation at an alarming rate (Barna, 1991; Dudley, 1999; Kinnaman, 2016; LifeWay 2007, 2017). The emerging adult dropout theory is rooted in statistical claims dating to the mid-1990s and repeated through sources from some of the most respected leaders in youth ministry, academic institutions, and church research organizations. Shields (2008) writes, “These statistics have been advocated as near-gospel truth for at least a decade now. Even the most cursory internet search revealed 194,000 references (blogs, articles, websites)” (p. 6). In the twelve years since Shields’s dissertation, a simple google search of youth ministry dropout statistics reveals that the number has blossomed to over 3,000,000 references in blogs, articles, and websites. It is rare to find a published work, conference, or cohort on youth ministry that does not only promote the theory but gives prescriptive solutions on how to solve the exodus.

The theory’s primary implication for acceptance has been an ultimate failure of youth ministry praxis. Proponents and opponents have virtually unanimously called for the reconceptualization of youth ministry, with some calling for its complete rejection. As an example, Baucham (2011) places the dropout rate responsibility directly on the youth ministry movement by rhetorically asking, “Could it be that the paradigm itself (i.e., modern youth ministry) is broken” (p. 176)? Murashko (2011) calls youth ministry a “50-year failed experiment” (p. 1). Brown (2011) argues that youth ministry is “a weed in the church” that must be uprooted. Meyer (2020) posits, “Youth ministry is failing because if they (youth ministries)

were training children the right way, they wouldn't be leaving the church in droves" (p. 2). Even Proponents of youth ministry have expressed their concern, Stetzer (2014) states, "If your student ministry is a four-year holding tank with pizza, don't expect young adults to stick around." McGarry (2018) reflects on the dropout statistics influence on youth ministry practice and the call for youth ministry reconceptualization:

An increased number of leaders has considered the 'dropout rate' and started asking difficult questions about the validity and practice of youth ministry... This has set the stage for a new era of youth ministry, where the entire church is being called to renew its commitment to the next generation and to family discipleship. (p. 2)

The reactions from proponents and opponents to youth ministry are certainly valid if the statistical data claims affirm a connection to youth ministry practice and emerging adult dropouts. However, if the statistical claims are not true and youth ministry is effectively responsible for retaining a high percentage of emerging adults, then the narrative in the literature needs to change.

This researcher through investigation affirmed the research by Shields (2008) study that the statistical claims on the high percentage of youth ministry dropouts were mostly anecdotal, included tainted samples, and did not include measures for previous youth ministry commitment. Therefore, the claims are weak, outdated, and have zero implications for youth ministry practice. Additionally, there is not a single empirical study that implicates youth ministry as the responsible party of a post-high school exodus. Black (2008) states, "there is a major problem with emerging adult attendance in the modern church" (p. 28). While this may be true, it is clear from the research data in Shields's (2008) study and this current study that youth ministry is not a contributing factor. On the contrary, emerging adults that had previous youth ministry commitment were retained in the church as adults at an overall rate of 88% (Shields study) and 95.4% (current study). Both studies revealed significant correlative relationships between youth

ministry commitment and current church involvement. The implication for this high retention rate should lead to a lauding and elevating of youth ministry into the primary discipleship strategy of the next generation in local churches. The data reveals that youth ministry is a major solution to the dropout rates, not the cause.

The current study was a replication study of Shields's 2008 falsification study of the emerging adult dropout claims. A falsification or verification research design tests existing hypotheses and theories through replication to bolster or challenge previous research. The idea of a falsification or verification study is to consistently replicate studies to determine if proposed theories are true (verified) or false (falsified). Popper argued that any scientific theory or hypothesis must be subjected to rigorous logical and empirical testing before it can be accepted or supported. Popper (1959) argued, "If the conclusions have been falsified, then their falsification also falsifies the theory from which they were logically deduced" (Popper, 1959, 33). Therefore, in Popper's assessment, if a single reliable and viable study falsifies a theory, the theory is flawed and must be revisited. Shields's study empirically falsified the theoretical claims that emerging adults with youth ministry commitment are leaving the church with an 88% overall retention rate for emerging adults with former youth ministry commitment in SBC megachurches. In other words, the Shields study put the dropout statistics to bed nearly 14 years ago. However, the literature and the universal belief that youth ministry graduates are leaving the church has not waned. This researcher wanted to determine if Shields's study was an outlier to the dropout claim. According to the Encyclopedia of Research Design, "An outlier is an observation in a set of data that is inconsistent with the majority of the data" (p. 1). The current research study determined that the Shields study was not an outlier.

This research verified the findings of Shields's study on the different sample population. The current study is a second study falsifying the claim that emerging adults are leaving the church at a high rate when they have previous youth ministry involvement. In the current study, 95.4% of the 502 survey respondents from the sample churches with some level of youth ministry commitment were retained in the church as emerging adults. Therefore, the theoretical claim of emerging adults leaving the church at a high rate must be reconceptualized and rejected. There are implications for further research and a change of the narrative in the literature. The theoretical implications suggest through the two falsification studies that there is not another factor more significant to emerging adult retention in church than previous youth ministry involvement.

Empirical Implications

The first empirical implication of the current study is that there needs to be more viable research studies pertaining to youth ministry commitment and current church involvement. The study needs to be replicated on churches that are smaller than 500 (the majority of churches). Also, a deeper dive into the variables of youth ministries that lead to emerging adult retention. Would the data change in youth ministries with limited budgeting and volunteer to part-time youth ministry staff leaders? The current study establishes a baseline by which other studies can be initiated.

Secondly, the empirical data demonstrates that emerging adults with levels of youth ministry involvement have an extremely high retention rate of 95.4% overall. The data is not a slight correction from the precedent literature, but the literal opposite. Two empirical studies separated by 14 years on two different sample populations of churches falsify the dropout narrative. There is a responsibility of leaders to present solid empirical data when weighing the

effectiveness of ministry practice. Literally, eternity is in the balance. Shields presented a quote that resonated with this researcher as it relates to this study. Researcher Christian Smith addressed this problem bluntly,

Now, anyone familiar with my own work knows that I am deeply concerned about the lives and faith of American teenagers—I agree there is cause for concern and that many churches need to do a much better job working with youth than they currently do. But I find the misuse of statistics described above appalling. If this were an isolated incident, it might be excusable. But, having been a watcher of evangelicalism for many years, I know that this is not an aberrant case. Evangelical leaders and organizations routinely use descriptive statistics in sloppy, unwarranted, misrepresenting, and sometimes absolutely preposterous ways, usually to get attention and sound alarms, at least some of which are false alarms. The widespread influence of much-cited evangelical pollsters, who do not actually come entirely clean on their methods, does not help matters either. It seems that one of two situations pertains. Either statistically reckless evangelicals are somewhat aware that they are playing fast and loose with numbers. Or they are not, they simply do not know better. Either is unacceptable. In the first case, we are talking about intellectual dishonesty and the distortion of what is true, in the name of promoting truth. In the second, we are dealing with elementary ineptitude, gullibility, and irresponsibility conducted in full public view. This is what orthodox Christianity - assuming that is what evangelicalism is - has to offer the culture? (p. 11)

There must be statistical credibility and integrity related to ministry practice, without bias. This researcher agrees with Shields (2008) sentiment,

The current research findings on dropout in SBC megachurches puts the burden of proof on those promoting unwarranted ideas to undertake their own research and back up their claims with real data. Anything less should be labeled what it is – a poor Christian testimony. (p. 176)

Practical Implications

The practical implications of this study are significant for the church, youth ministry, and the next generation. This researcher is a practitioner and understands the significance of what this means for the future of youth ministry. Youth ministry educators and researchers should use the data from this study to initiate further empirical studies that strengthen data on church retention and youth ministry practice. Additionally, youth ministry training institutions need to implement the data from the Shields study and current study into youth ministry praxis training.

The first practical implication drawn from this study is that youth ministry is viable, effective, and increases the connection and commitment of church involvement. The current research study confirmed retention rates of 79.3% for Level 2 Normative Attenders, 94.6% for Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers, and 98% for Engaged Disciple. Respondents across all youth ministry commitment levels had an overall adult church retention of 95.4%. The retention of emerging adults with youth ministry commitment is staggering. Therefore, denominations and churches need to see youth ministry as an integral part of their spiritual formation and missional strategy. Staffing, budgeting, and support of youth ministry should be a highly valued priority of the church and denominations.

The empirical data revealed that as youth ministry involvement increased, the retention rate in current church involvement among emerging adults increased. The second practical implication would be that youth ministry leaders need to consider the level of youth ministry commitment as a part of their ministry strategy and do whatever is necessary to increase commitment and engagement. This is not suggesting the youth ministries increase programming, but that there is a consideration and evaluation of program effectiveness related to deepening the commitment of students.

The data uncovered through the Comfort and Connection subscales and Commitment Level subscales a decrease in connectivity and involvement for adults compared to the same measurements for participants in high school youth ministry. Emerging adults with previous youth ministry commitment are not leaving the church, but there is a decrease in involvement. The decrease could be related to life stages, the Covid pandemic, or a myriad of other extenuating circumstances. The data does reveal the decrease has some connection to their current church discipleship and experience. The practical implication is that the church must do a

better job at connecting and discipling emerging adults. Many churches do not have the same strategic spiritual formation and programming intentionality for emerging adults that is present from birth through high school.

Youth ministry morale has taken major hits over the years with the consistent bombardment of the bogus dropout statistical claims. It is not uncommon to have youth ministry colleagues move to other ministry positions because they think their efforts are in vain. This research brings a measure of comfort and encouragement to the thousands of youth ministry leaders that are faithfully investing their lives into the next generation. Youth ministry leaders, you are doing an incredible job.

Modern youth ministry philosophy of age-graded ministry does not exclude the role of parents in the discipleship of children but provides supplemental support to believing parents and an evangelistic avenue for nonbelieving parents. The research in this study should encourage parents to take advantage of and support the youth ministries of the local churches that they attend. Today, parents are more inclined to give their high school students a choice on whether to be involved in youth ministry. High school students do not know what is best for their spiritual growth. Parents should commit to keeping their children involved in youth ministry.

The data in the current study had a small percentage of emerging adults' drop out of church for a year or more, but a negative correlation between those that took time away from the church and current church involvement was discovered. It is critical for youth ministry leaders to prepare students in high school for emerging adulthood. This preparation should include the importance of staying involved and connected to the local church.

Finally, there needs to be an aggressive push to edit the narrative on youth ministry. In some cases, repentance is required. Negative statistics sell books, but false statistics hinder the

mission. There has been a call to reconceptualize youth ministry for over 20 years in the precedent literature. It would be a shame to reconceptualize youth ministry in a way that hinders its effectiveness. The call to reconceptualize and reject youth ministry needs to stop.

Research Limitations

The data collection was completed in November 2021 towards the end of the second year of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is safe to assume that most of the respondents attended a church that pivoted to virtual church attendance for at least three to six months of the last two years. There may have been researching limitations in the study from participants answering questions related to serving in their church, taking at least some time off from 18 to 22, and small group attendance. It is not known what limitations each of the churches researched have currently adjusted programming. The churches are spread across the United States with different state laws governing what is permissible. These limitations only strengthen the case of the study as the numbers of retention would have potentially been even higher without this global interruption.

The researcher understood that a replication study would be limited to the research methodology and instrumentation of the study being replicated. The limitations were not significant, but a reality in the current study. Also, this replication study's primary focus was to verify or falsify the church retention rate findings of the Shields study. Therefore, an overall retention statistic for comparison was of primary concern, not the circumstances and factors that lead to retention or dropout outside of the dependent variable of youth ministry commitment. Also, correlative differences were determined between churches in the study, but more specific questioning and research needs to be done to determine causal relationships between the individual churches and retention. As an example, demographic questioning on social-economic, and regional differences among churches was not presented in the research instrument.

There were potential research limitations to the sampling of participants. Were respondents more likely to respond if they had a higher commitment in the church? The distribution was initiated through the youth ministry pastors of the sample churches. The researcher instructed the sample church youth pastors to send out the survey to a random sampling of former youth ministry participants. However, there were limitations to random sampling in this study. Also, the study has robust diversity in the data collection and there is a limitation on how much data could be reported in the study. More inferences could be made but would cause a stray from the focus of the current study. These inferences lead to questions for further research.

Further Research

This study raised questions in need of further research while analyzing the data of the relationship between youth ministry commitment and current church involvement.

1. The current study discovered that those with Level 3 and Level 4 youth ministry commitment are together retained in the church at a rate of over 96%. Also, the data revealed though these participants are not leaving the church, they are less connected and excited than in high school. For further research, a study could be done to determine the factors that are leading to lower connectedness and excitement in the church as emerging adults.
2. The current study contributed data analysis on churches sized between 500 to 2000 in weekly worship attendance. This research study has now been completed on Southern Baptist megachurches and self-identified Evangelical churches of 500 to 2000. Most churches in the United States are under 200 in weekly attendance. For further research, the study could be replicated in smaller churches.
3. The current study limited inclusion to full-time youth pastors. Further research could investigate if there is a change in youth ministry commitment levels and current church involvement among churches with part-time, volunteer, or bi-vocational student ministry leaders.
4. The current study revealed a slightly negative correlation between youth ministry tenure and retention. This was unexpected and there was not enough data to present any significant conclusions. Pastoral tenure at a church is always presented as a positive. For

further research, does youth pastor tenure impact current church involvement, and what are the factors that lead to higher or lower correlation?

5. For further research, a qualitative study could be initiated on the churches with the highest retention to determine what practices have contributed to higher retention. This could educators as they train future youth ministry leaders to increase future effectiveness.
6. The current study focused the research on the impact of youth ministry in self-identified Evangelical churches. For further research, the study could be replicated on churches that do not identify as Evangelical churches. Comparisons could be drawn to determine if the change is criteria affect the independent variable of current church involvement.

Summary

The retention statistics in this current study verified the findings of the Shields's study that emerging adults with previous youth ministry involvement are not leaving the church. The data revealed an overall retention statistic of 95.4% for the 502 participants in the current research study. Additionally, 74.3% of the participants have current levels of involvement in the moderate to high-level category. This means that the students are not only attending, but practicing spiritual disciplines, are relationally connected, and serving. Also, the data revealed that as commitment to youth ministry increased, the level of adult church involvement increased. Level 4 Engaged Disciples (98%) had higher retention than Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers (94.6%). Level 3 Enthusiastic Followers had a higher retention than Level 2 Normative Attenders (79%).

This study provides a second empirical study that falsifies the popular emerging adult church dropout claim. Based on the current study, there is not a factor presented in the literature assuring a high rate of faith commitment and continued local church involvement as an emerging adult than youth ministry commitment. Therefore, denominations and churches need to see youth ministry as an integral part of their spiritual formation and missional strategy. This would include intentional efforts to support youth ministry with staffing and budgeting. Also, youth

ministry educators and researchers should use this data to encourage the next generation of youth ministry leaders and build upon these research findings.

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APPENDIX A

EXPERT PANEL FOR YMRQ INSTRUMENT INSTRUCTIONS FROM 2008

Sample from Brandon Shields's dissertation.

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a contributor on this expert panel. Your time and commitment to my research will enable both practitioners and future researchers to better understand the phenomenon of youth ministry dropout. Please evaluate the Youth ministry Retention Questionnaire (YMRQ) in the following ways.

1. Read the instrument carefully, noting the following with regard to questions used to assess youth ministry commitment (questions 1 through 15):
 - a. Are these questions accurate measures of youth ministry commitment for high school students?
 - b. In general, do the responses listed below the questions represent varying degrees of youth ministry commitment for high school students?
2. Read the instrument carefully, noting the following with regard to questions used to assess current church involvement (questions 31-45):
 - a. Are these questions accurate measures of current church involvement for young adults?
 - b. In general, do the responses listed below the questions represent varying degrees of current church involvement?
3. Do the survey questions sufficiently address the issues of youth ministry commitment, demographics, and church involvement?
4. Upon completion of this review, please send your responses to the researcher via email to Brandon Shields's {email address}

APPENDIX B**YOUTH MINISTRY RETENTION QUESTIONNAIRE**

Part One – Please check the response which most accurately describes your commitment to your youth ministry during high school. Check only one answer for each question.

1. How often did you attend Sunday morning youth ministry activities during high school?
 3-4 times a month (4 pts)
 Twice a month (3)
 Once a month (2)
 Less than once a month (1)
2. How often did you attend youth ministry activities other than Sunday morning (ex: Sun. PM, Wed. PM, large group events)?
 At least once a week (4)
 2-3 times a month (3)
 Less than once a month (2)
 Never (1)
3. How often did you participate in camps, retreats, or mission trips with the youth ministry?
 I attended most of the offered events with my youth group (4)
 I attended some of the offered events with my youth group (3)
 I rarely attended the offered events with my youth group (2)
 I never attended the offered events with my youth group (1)
4. How often did you read your Bible during high school?
 At least once a week (4)
 2-3 times a month (3)
 Less than once a month (2)
 Never (1)
5. How often did you pray during high school?
 At least once a week (4)
 2-3 times a month (3)
 Less than once a month (2)
 Never (1)
6. How often did you share your religious faith with someone not of your faith during high school?
 Regularly (4)
 Sometimes (3)
 Rarely (2)
 never (1)

7. How often did you participate in a small group outside of Sunday morning (discipleship group, accountability group, meeting with an adult leader, etc)?
 Weekly (4)
 Monthly (3)
 Rarely (2)
 Never (1)
8. Did you participate in the youth ministry's student leadership team (ministry teams, service group, student council, etc)?
 Yes (4)
 No(1)
 There was not a student leadership team at my church (2)

Part Two – Please circle the number that most accurately describes your level of commitment during high school using the following scale:

1 = I was not at all committed 3=1 was fairly committed
 2 = I was somewhat committed 4 = I was very committed

9. Rate your level of commitment to your youth ministry during high school.
 1(1) 2(2) 3(3) 4(4)
10. Rate your level of commitment to your church during high school.
 1(1) 2(2) 3(3) 4(4)

Part Three – Please circle the number that most accurately represents your attitudes during high school using the following scale:

1=1 tend to strongly disagree 3=1 tend to agree
 2 = 1 tend to disagree 4 = 1 tend to strongly agree

11. I genuinely enjoyed my youth ministry experience during high school.
 1(1) 2(2) 3(3) 4(4)
12. My youth ministry helped me grow in my relationship with Christ.
 1(1) 2(2) 3(3) 4(4)
13. I had a relationship with at least one adult leader in my youth ministry.
 1(1) 2(2) 3(3) 4(4)
14. I had a strong relationship with my youth pastor during high school.
 1(1) 2(2) 3(3) 4(4)
15. I felt comfortable bringing my friends to youth ministry activities.
 1 (1) 2(2) 3(3) 4(4)

Part Four – Please fill in or check the appropriate blanks for each question. Check only one answer for each question.

16. What is your date of birth? Month _____ Day _____ Year _____

17. What is your sex? Male _____ Female _____

18. What is your current marital status?

- Single
- Married
- Divorced

19. Which of the following churches did you attend most frequently for youth ministry activities during your senior year of high school?

- Violet Baptist Church, OH
- Parkway Baptist Church, VA
- Kenmore Alliance Church, NY
- Mt. Zion Wesleyan Church, NC
- Sugar Hill Church, GA
- Abilene Baptist Church, GA
- Crosslink Community Church, VA
- Eastern Hills Church, NY
- Cypress Baptist Church, LA
- Hopewell Baptist Church, NC
- Living Hope Church, OH
- Impact Church, MI
- Mt. Airy Baptist Church, SC
- Generations Church, CO
- Indianola Community Church, IA
- Heritage Church, IA
- LifeSprings Church, IN

20. Were you a baptized member of the church from your response in question 18?

- Yes
- No

21. What is your current religious affiliation?

- Southern Baptist
- Other Protestant (ex: Presbyterian, Episcopal, Methodist)
- Roman Catholic
- Jewish
- Islam
- Agnostic (you can't know for sure if God exists or not)
- Atheist (God does not exist)
- Other

22. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- High school or equivalent GED

- Technical or trade school Associates (2-year undergraduate degree)
 Bachelors (4-year undergraduate degree)
 Masters
 Doctorate
23. Are you currently working on a degree? Yes No
24. If answer to question 24 is yes, then which degree are you currently pursuing?
 Technical or trade school
 Associates (2-year undergraduate degree)
 Bachelors (4-year undergraduate degree)
 Masters
 Doctorate
25. If you did attend college, did you live at home with your parents during this time?
 Yes, the entire time
 Yes, part of the time
 No
26. Which of the following types of high school did you graduate from?
 Public school
 Christian school
 Non-Christian private school
 Home school
 Parochial/Catholic school
 Other:
27. How many hours per week were you employed during your senior year of high school?
 0 hours
 1-9 hours
 10-20 hours
 More than 20 hours
28. Which of the following types of college did you attend?
 Public university
 Christian university
 Non-Christian private
 Parochial/Catholic university
 Other: I did not attend college
29. How long, if at all, did you stop attending church from ages 18 to 22?
 1-2 months
 3-5 months
 6-12 months
 More than 1 year
 I never stopped attending church

Part Five – Please check the response that most accurately describes your current involvement with church. Check only one answer for each question.

30. How often do you currently attend a church worship service?
 3-4 times a month (4 pts)
 Twice a month (3)
 Once a month (2)
 Less than once a month (1)
31. Are you a member of a church that is local to you?
 Yes (4)
 No (1)
32. How often do you participate in service projects, mission trips, or similar opportunities with your church?
 I attend most of the offered events (4)
 I attend some of the offered events (3)
 I rarely attend the offered events (2)
 I never attend the offered events (1)
33. How often do you attend a small group of any kind outside of Sunday morning (discipleship group, accountability group, small group)?
 Weekly (4)
 Monthly (3)
 Rarely (2)
 Never (1)
34. How often do you currently read your Bible?
 At least once a week (4)
 2-3 times a month (3)
 Less than once a month (2)
 Never (1)
35. How often do you currently pray?
 At least once a week (4)
 2-3 times a month (3)
 Less than once a month (2)
 Never (1)
36. Are you actively serving (at least once a month) as a volunteer or leader in any capacity in your church (small group leader, teacher, greeter, etc)?
 Yes (4)
 No(1)
37. Are you serving in a church in a paid position?
 Yes (4)

____ No (0)
 38. If answer to question 38 is yes, what is your official title? _____

Part Six – Please circle the number that most accurately describes your current level of involvement in church using the following scale:

1 = I am not at all involved 3 = I am fairly involved
 2 = I am somewhat involved 4 = I am very involved

39. Rate your current level of involvement with church.
 1(1 pt) 2(2) 3(3) 4(4)

Part Seven – Please circle the number that most accurately represents your current attitudes using the following scale:

1=1 tend to strongly disagree 3=1 tend to agree
 2 = 1 tend to disagree 4 = 1 tend to strongly agree

40. I genuinely enjoy going to my church.
 1(1 pt) 2(2) 3(3) 4(4)

41. My church helps me grow in my relationship with Christ.
 1(1) 2(2) 3(3) 4(4)

42. I have a relationship with at least one other person in my church who is not a pastor or church staff member.
 1(1) 2(2) 3(3) 4(4)

43. I have a strong relationship with a pastor or leader in my church.
 1(1) 2(2) 3(3) 4(4)

44. I feel comfortable inviting my friends to my church's activities.
 1(1) 2(2) 3(3) 4(4)

APPENDIX C

INITIAL SURVEY OF YOUTH PASTORS

Instructions: Please fill in or mark with an “X” the appropriate response for each question. This information will be used for comparison purposes only. When you have completed the survey, please save it, and email it to Derik Idol at (dwidol@liberty.edu).

29. How many years have you been the full-time youth pastor at your current church? _____
29. How many years have you been serving as a youth pastor? _____
29. Does your church follow an “age-graded” ministry philosophy (i.e., children’s ministry, middle school ministry, high school ministry, etc.)? Yes ___ No ___
29. Do you have an identifiable and separate high school ministry? Yes ___ No ___
29. What regular activities do you offer for high school students for evangelism and discipleship? Circle all that apply: Sunday School Wednesday PM Camps & retreats Evangelism training/visitation small groups Leadership training (formal or informal) Camps & retreats Mission trips Other: _____
29. How many paid (full-time & part-time) youth ministry staff do you have for the high school ministry? _____
29. How many volunteer leaders do you have for the high school ministry? _____
29. How many students do you have in your high school ministry? _____
29. Does your church identify as an Evangelical church and maintain the following theological beliefs: inerrancy of scriptures, the vicarious atonement, bodily resurrection of Jesus, the sufficiency of Jesus Christ for salvation, the Gospel, and the Trinity?
Yes ___ No ___
29. What was your total youth ministry operating budget for 2021? _____

APPENDIX D

THANK YOU EMAIL TO YOUTH PASTORS

Dear Youth Pastor,

THANK YOU!!! I wanted to send a sincere thank you for your participation in this dissertation research study. The data collected from your church was and is incredibly valuable, not only to this research project, but to youth ministry. The results are being analyzed and research conclusion are currently being drawn based on the data. I grateful for men like you that are serving the next generation so faithfully and are driving deep pillars of biblical theology and practical faith into your students. I am excited to get you the data from your individual church as well as letting you see the results of the entire study in the coming months. The goal for the publishing of the results is early spring.

Thank you again!

Sincerely,

Derik Idol

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT CONSENT

Title of the Project: An Assessment of Dropout Rates of Former Student Ministry Participants in Self-Identified Evangelical Churches with 500-2000 in Weekly Attendance.

Principal Investigator: Derik Idol, Doctor of Education in Christian Leadership Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. Participants must be 18-29 years old, graduated high school in the years between 2011-2021, and have some previous level of youth ministry involvement in high school. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this quantitative replication research study will be to examine the claim that 70 to 90 percent of actively involved student attendees drop out of church after high school. To accomplish the stated objective, the research will investigate the relationship between different levels of youth ministry commitment during high school and current levels of church involvement at self-identified Evangelical churches that average 500 to 2000 in weekly attendance.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete an online survey. It should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher and a statistician will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your church. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting your survey without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Derik Idol. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at dwidol@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

[Date]

[Recipient]

[Title]

[Company]

[Address 1]

[Address 2]

[Address 3]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a doctoral student and faculty member in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate of Education. The purpose of my research is to determine if prior youth ministry commitment at Evangelical churches in high school impacts church involvement as emerging adults. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18-29 years old, graduated high school in the years between 2011-2021, and had some level of involvement in youth ministry while in high school. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete survey. It should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. Participation will be anonymous and no identifying information will be collected.

To participate, please click here (include hyperlink to online survey).

A consent document is provided as the first page of the survey. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please click the [button/link] to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Sincerely,

Derik Idol

Executive Director, Center for Youth Ministry

Rawlings School of Divinity

(434) 592-2355

LIBERTY
UNIVERSITY.

APPENDIX G

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT SOCIAL MEDIA POST

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate of Education in Christian Leadership degree at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to determine if youth ministry commitment at Evangelical churches in high school impacts church involvement as emerging adults. Participants must be 18-29 years old, graduated high school in the years between 2011-2021, and have some level of previous student ministry involvement in high school. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete survey. It should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. Participation will be anonymous and no identifying information will be collected. A consent document is provided as the first page of the survey. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please click the [button/link] to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

To take the survey, please click here [LINK](#).

APPENDIX H

PERMISSION FOR REPLICATION AND INSTRUMENTATION USE

7/15/2021

Dr. Brandon Shields
Lead Pastor/Elder
Soma Church



I, Brandon Shields, consent and give permission to Derik Idol to complete a replication study using a different population of the 2008 research study that I completed. I give Derik Idol permission to use and modify the research instrumentation (YMRQ) for the new study.

Sincerely,
Dr. Brandon Shields

APPENDIX I

IRB APPROVAL

August 23, 2021

Derik Idol
Gary Bredfeldt

Re: IRB Exemption – IRB-FY21-22-23 AN ASSESSMENT OF DROPOUT RATES OF FORMER STUDENT MINISTRY PARTICIPANTS IN SELF-IDENTIFIED EVANGELICAL CHURCHES WITH 500-2000 IN WEEKLY ATTENDANCE.

Dear Derik Idol, Gary Bredfeldt,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether

possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX J

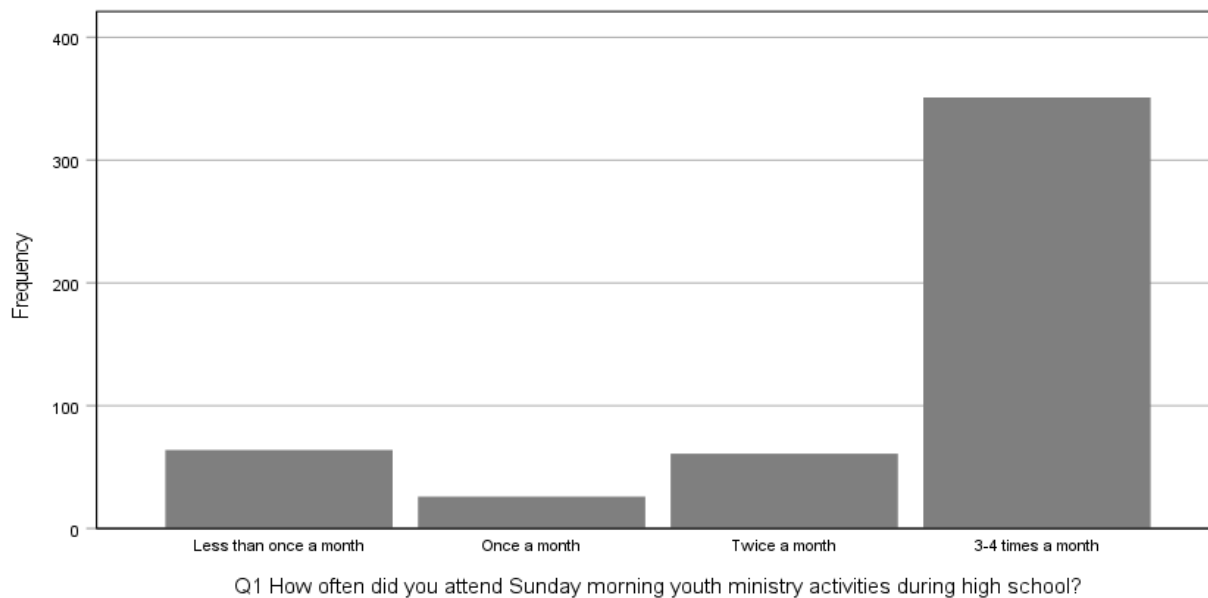
CITI PROGRAM COURSE COMPLETION

Name: Derik Idol (ID: 9213657)
Institution: Liberty University (ID: 2446)
Course: Social & Behavioral Researchers
Stage: 1 – Basic Course
Completion Date: 29 Jun 2020
Expiration Date: 29 Jun 2023
Completion Record ID: 37234610

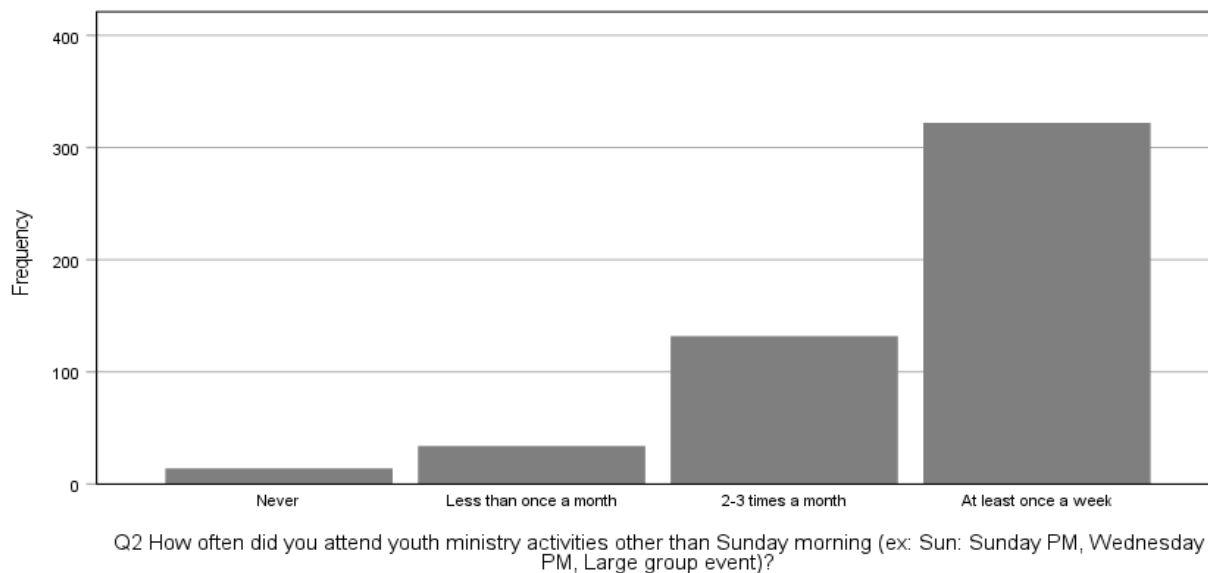
APPENDIX K

INDIVIDUAL QUESTION FREQUENCY OF PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

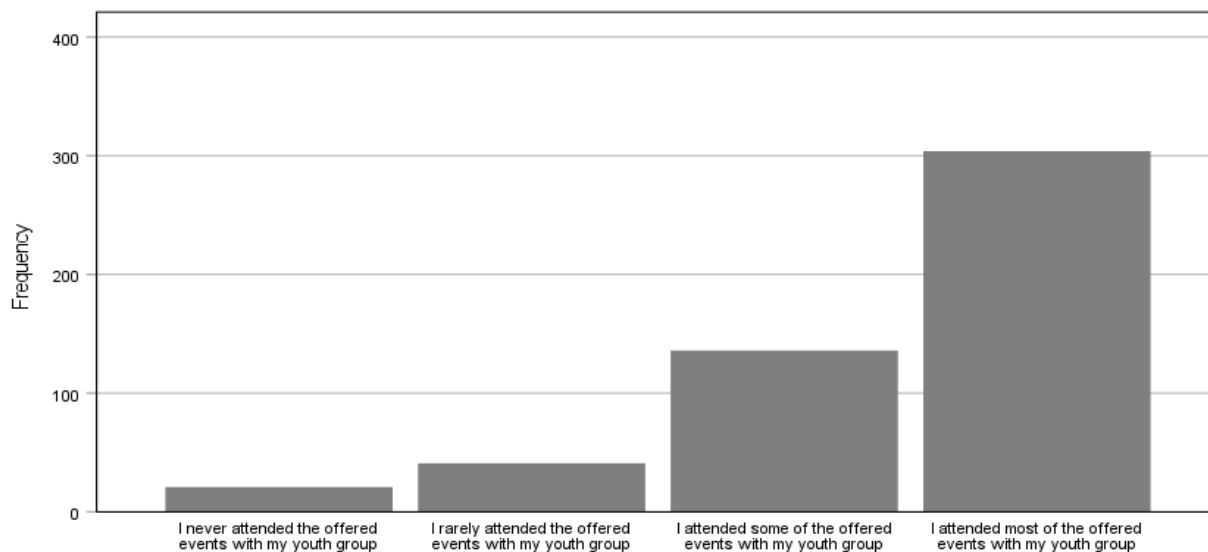
Q1 How often did you attend Sunday morning youth ministry activities during high school?



Q2 How often did you attend youth ministry activities other than Sunday morning (ex: Sun: Sunday PM, Wednesday PM, Large group event)?

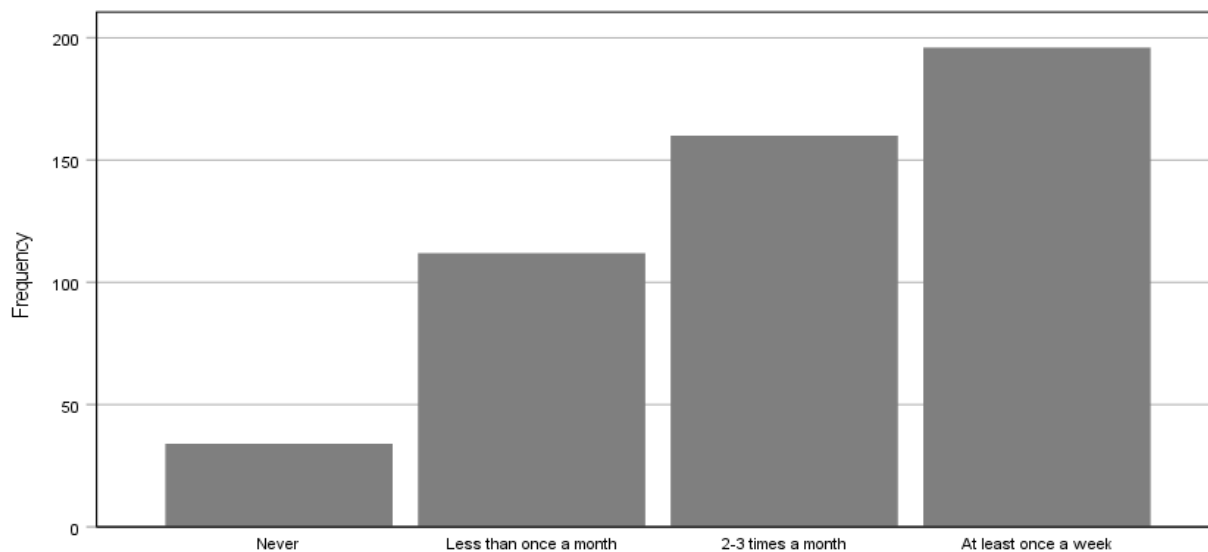


Q3 How often did you participate in camps, retreats, or mission trips with the youth ministry?

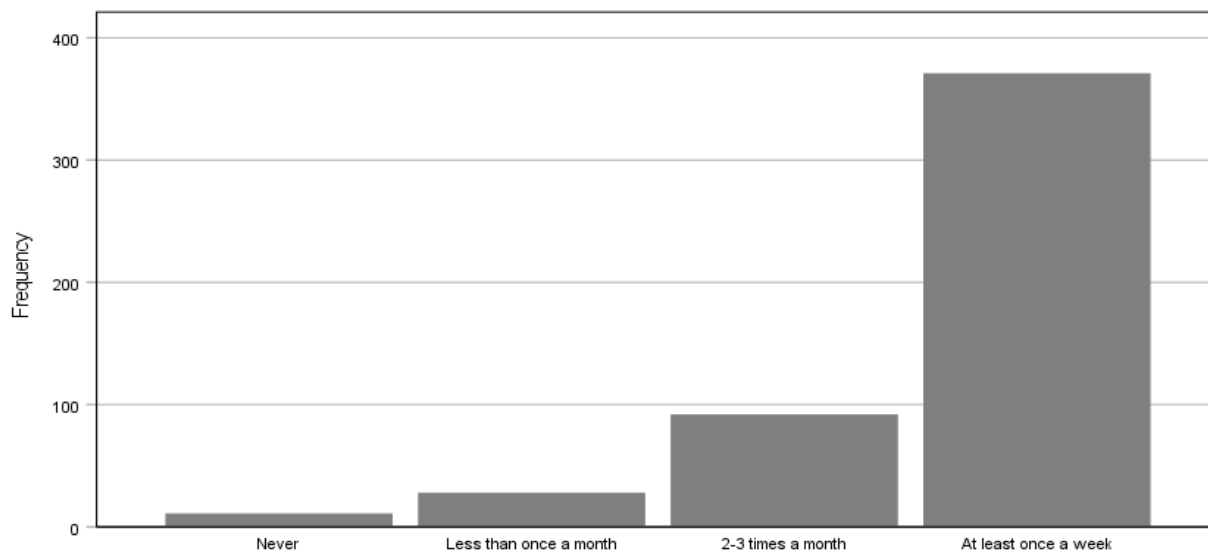


Q3 How often did you participate in camps, retreats, or mission trips with the youth ministry?

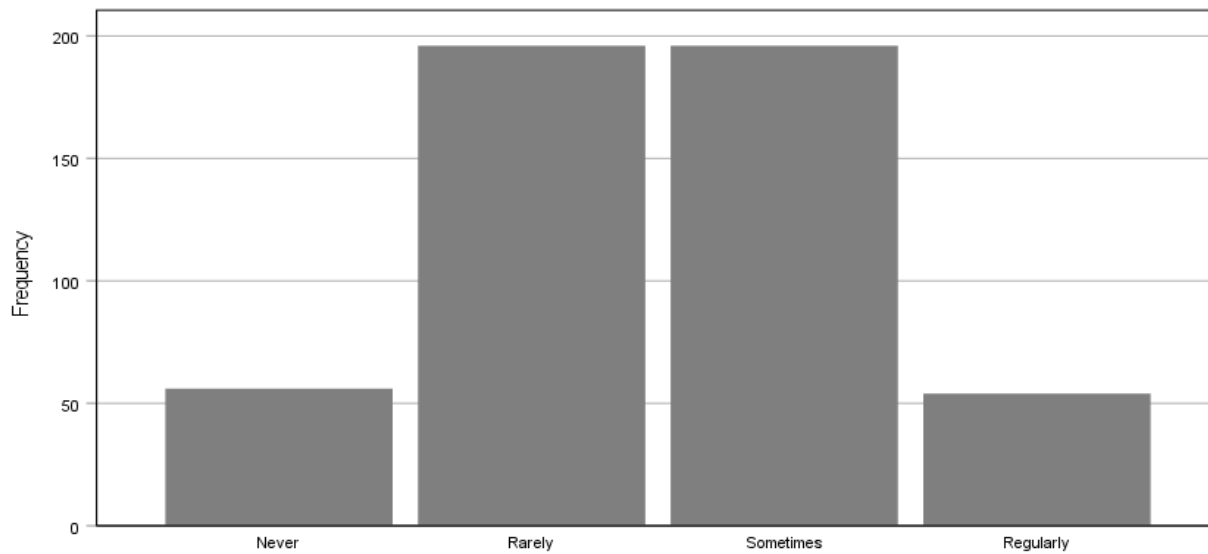
Q4 How often did you read your Bible during high school?



Q4 How often did you read your Bible during high school?

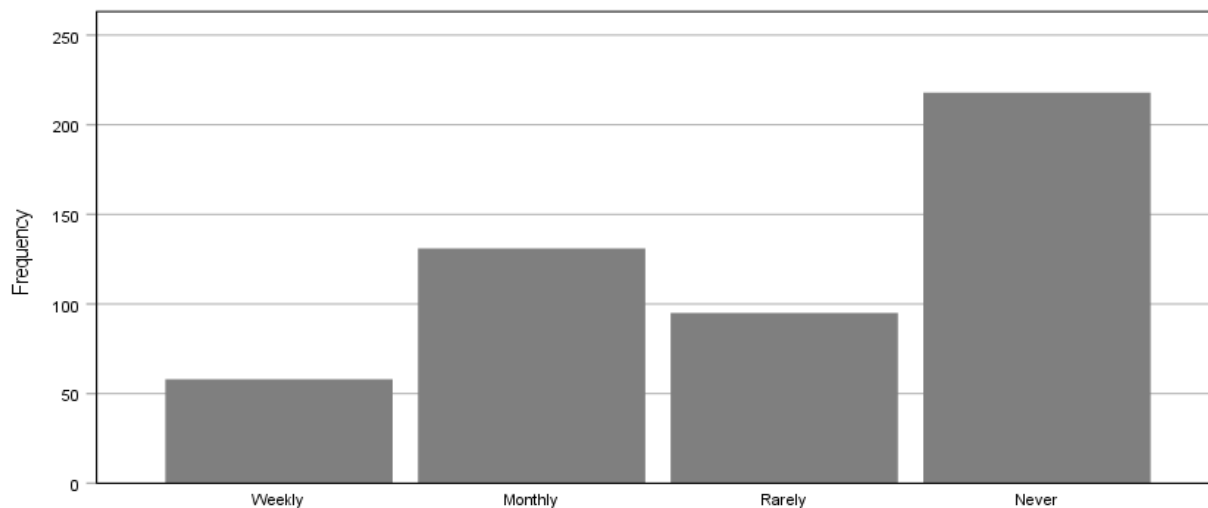
Q5 How often did you pray during high school?

Q5 How often did you pray during high school?

Q6 How often did you share your religious faith with someone not of your faith during high school?

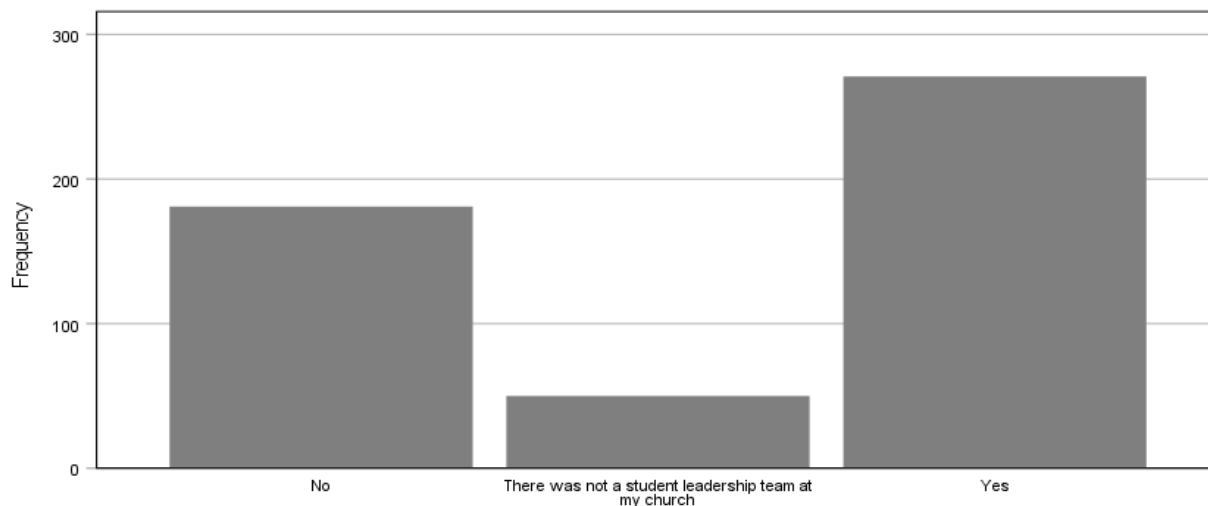
Q6 How often did you share your religious faith with someone not of your faith during high school?

Q7 How often did you participate in a small group outside of Sunday morning (example: discipleship group, accountability group, meeting with an adult leader, etc)?



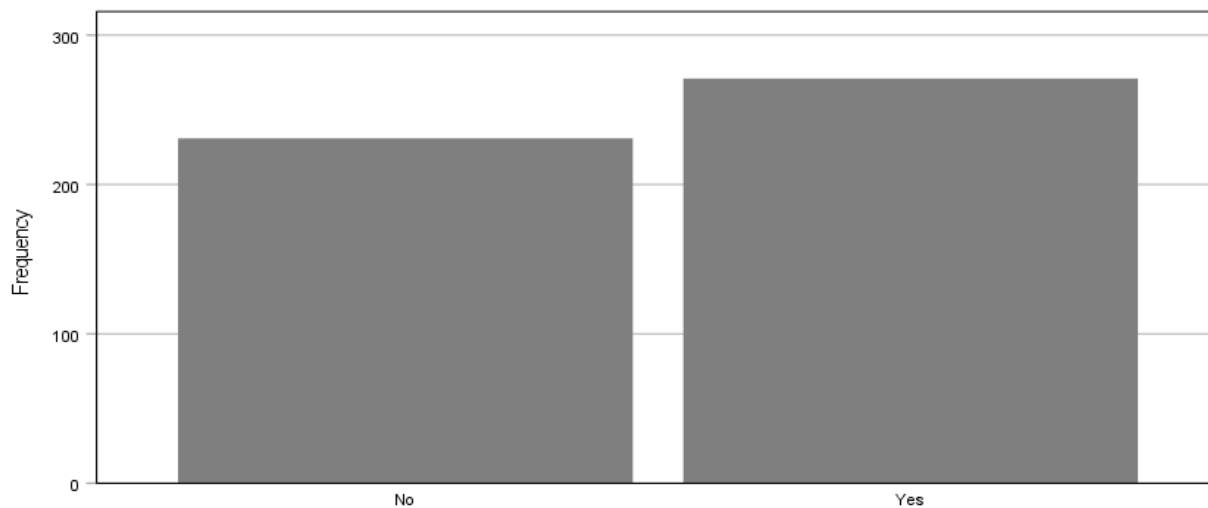
Q7 How often did you participate in a small group outside of Sunday morning (example: discipleship group, accountability group, meeting with an adult leader, etc)?

Q8 Did you participate in the youth ministries student leadership team (example: ministry teams, service groups, student council, etc)?



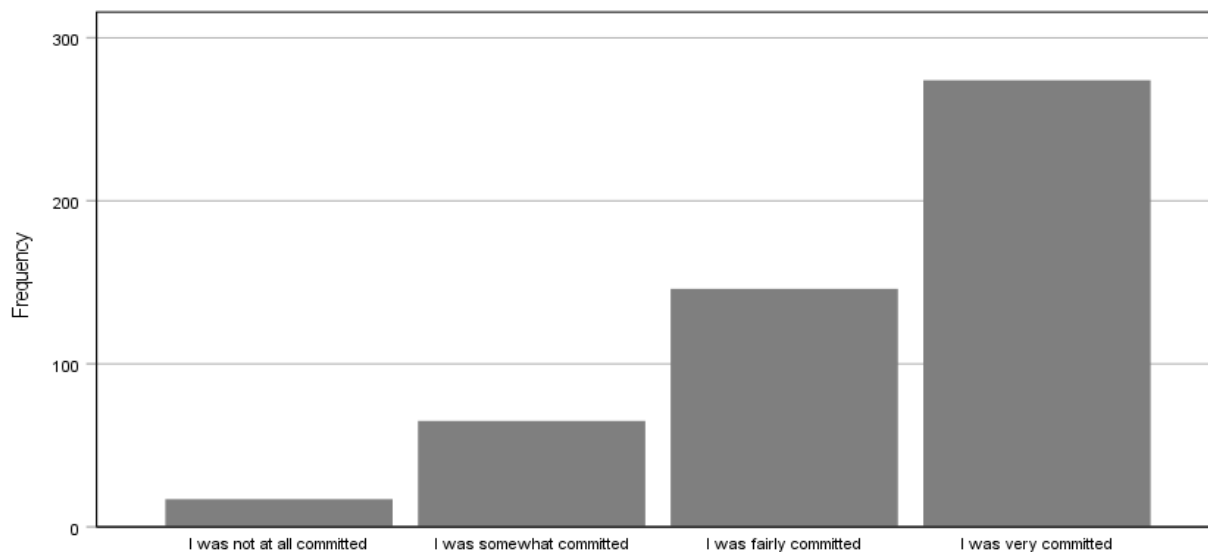
Q8 Did you participate in the youth ministries student leadership team (example: ministry teams, service groups, student council, etc)?

Q8b Did you participate in the youth ministries student leadership team (example: ministry teams, service groups, student council, etc)?



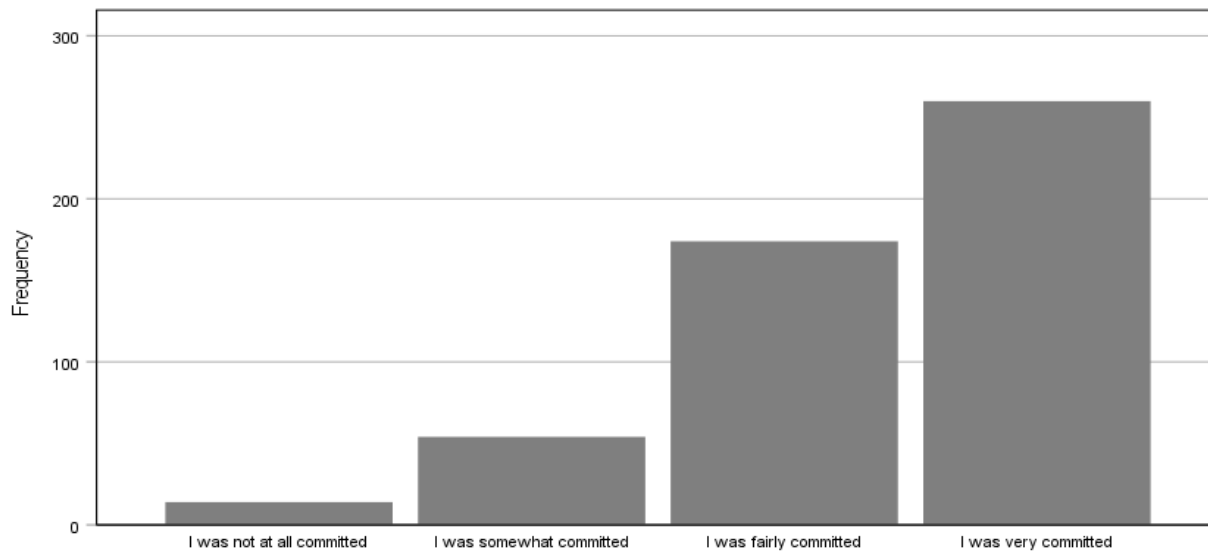
Q8b Did you participate in the youth ministries student leadership team (example: ministry teams, service groups, student council, etc)?

Q9 Rate your level of commitment to your youth ministry during high school.



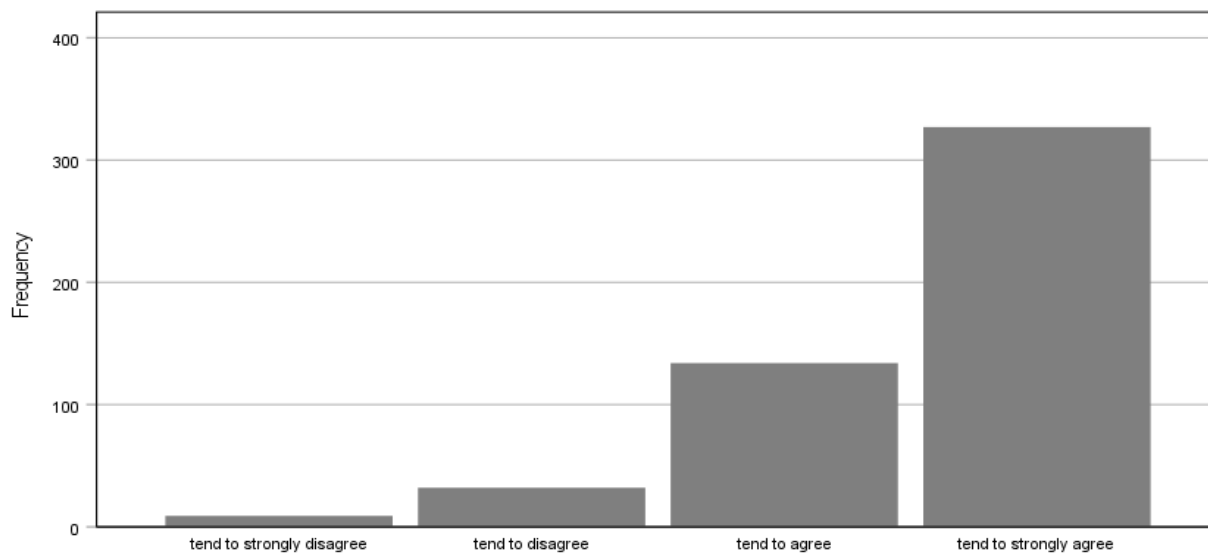
Q9 Rate your level of commitment to your youth ministry during high school.

Q10 Rate your level of commitment to your church during high school.



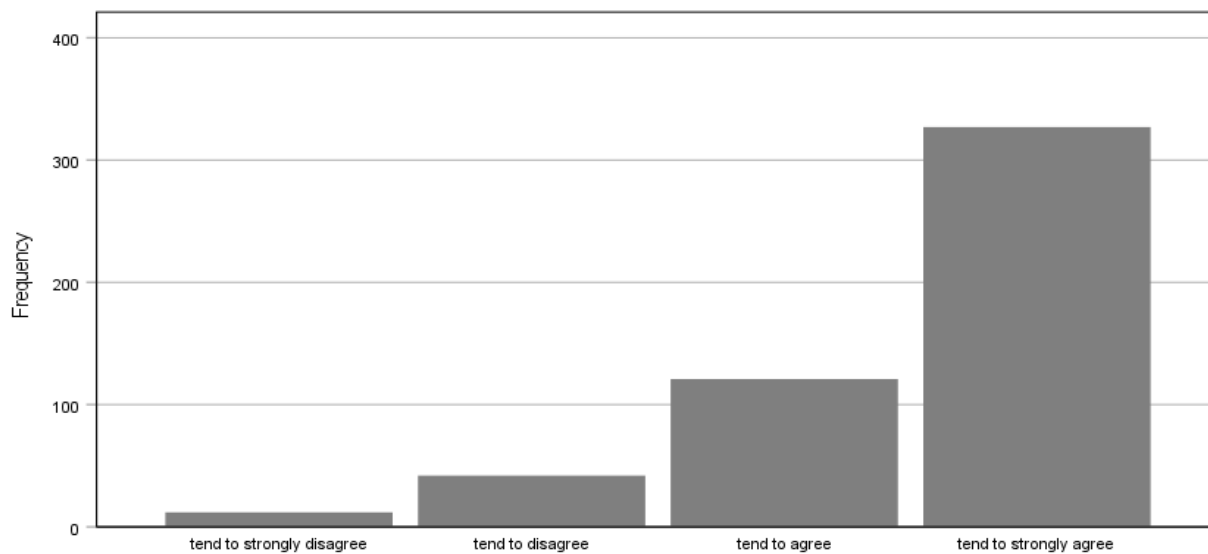
Q10 Rate your level of commitment to your church during high school.

Q11 I genuinely enjoyed my youth ministry experience during high school.



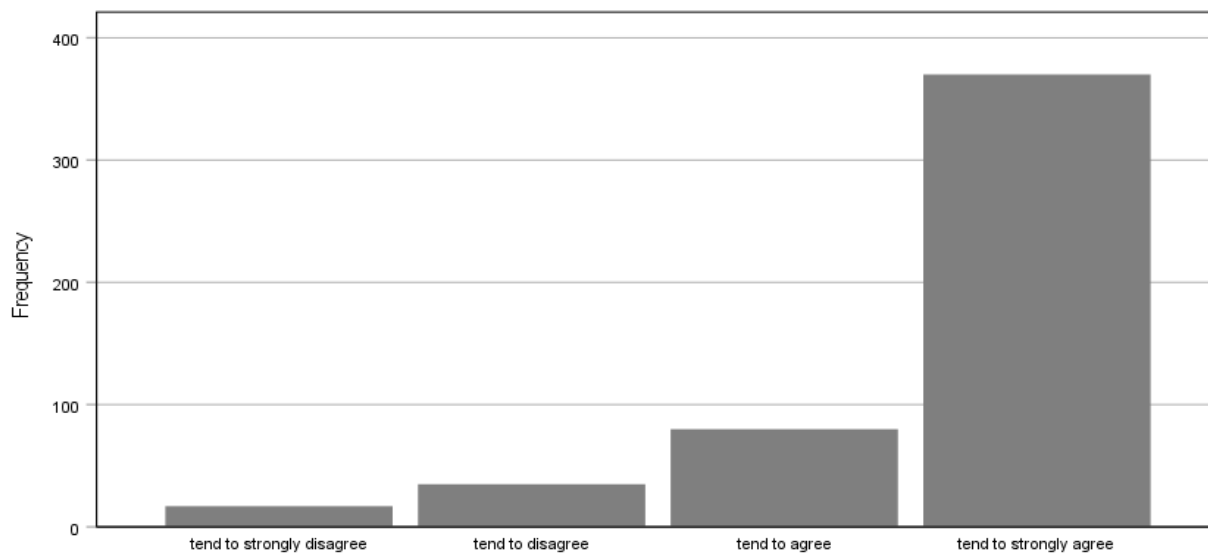
Q11 I genuinely enjoyed my youth ministry experience during high school.

Q12 My youth ministry helped me grow in my relationship with Jesus.



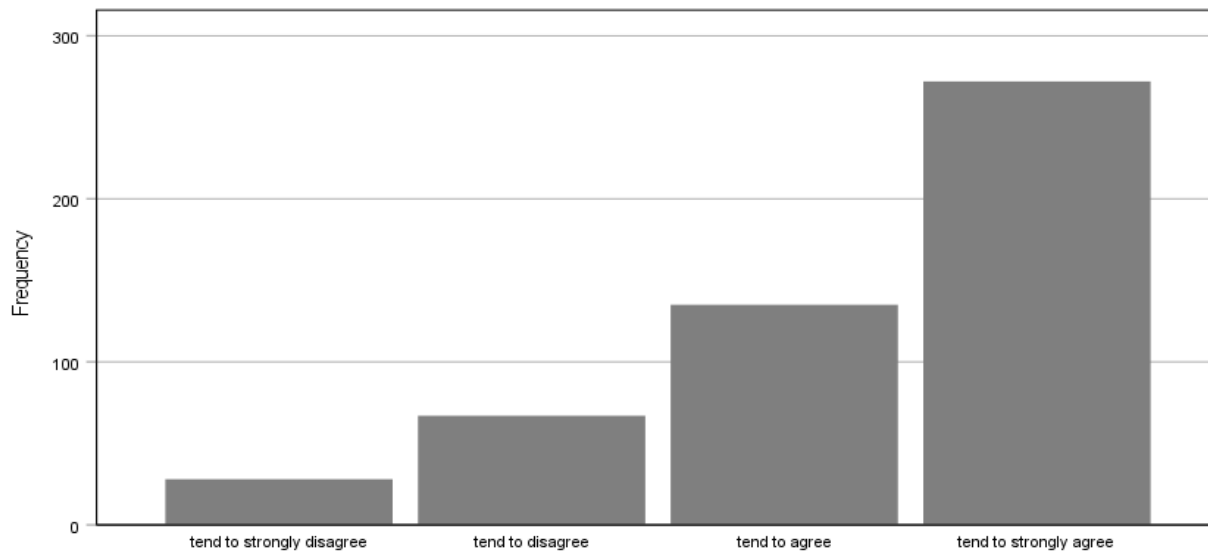
Q12 My youth ministry helped me grow in my relationship with Jesus.

Q13 I had a relationship with at least one adult leader in my youth ministry.



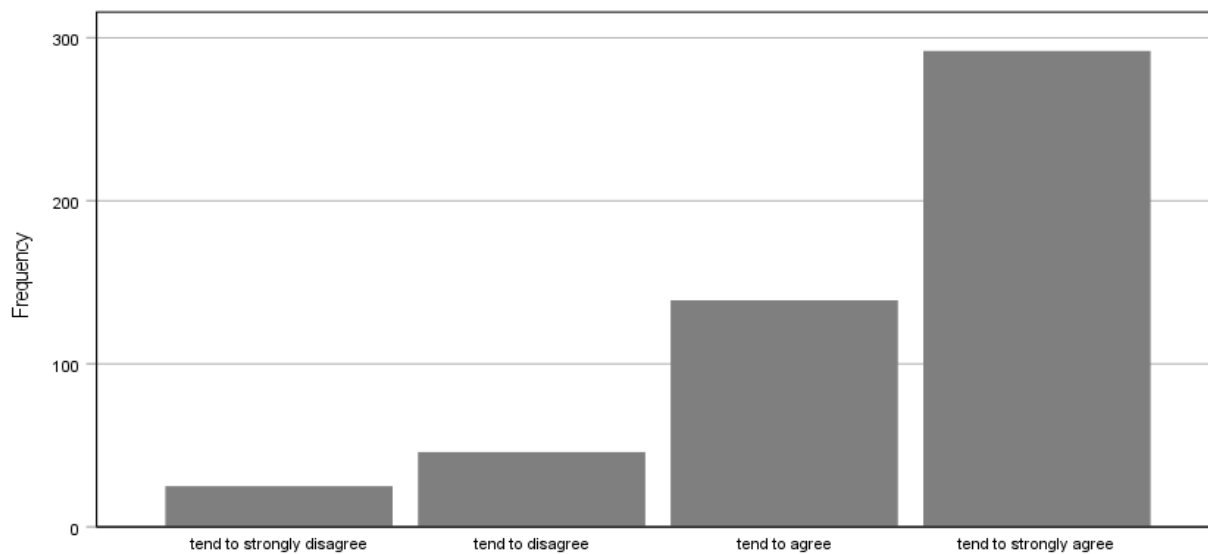
Q13 I had a relationship with at least one adult leader in my youth ministry.

Q14 I had a strong relationship with my youth pastor during high school.



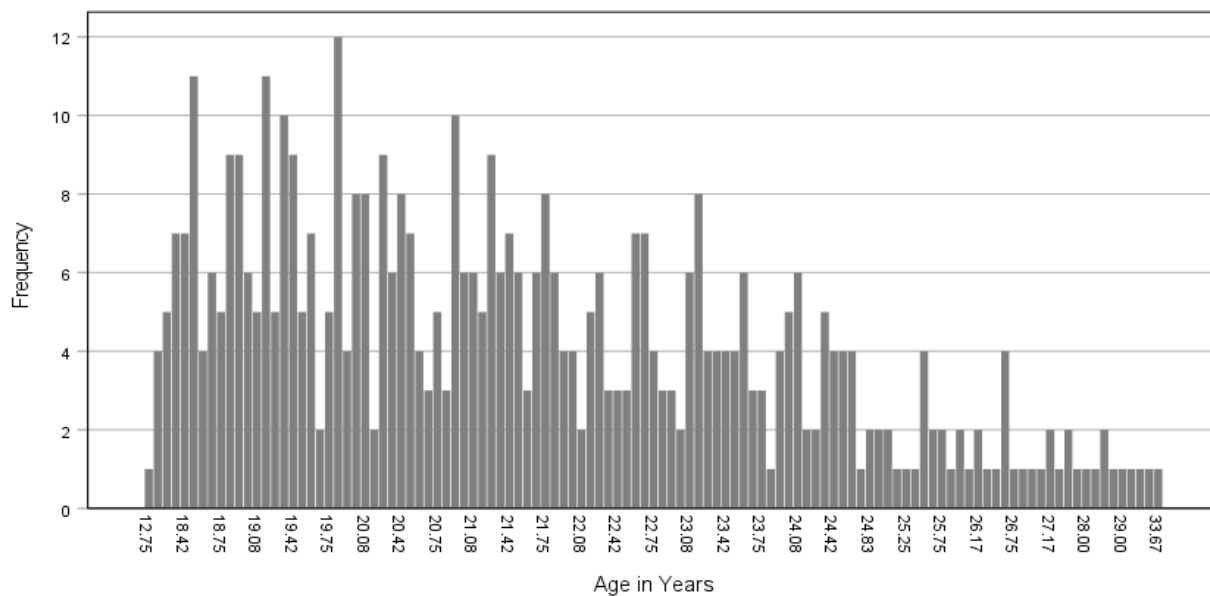
Q14 I had a strong relationship with my youth pastor during high school.

Q15 I felt comfortable bringing my friends to youth ministry activities.

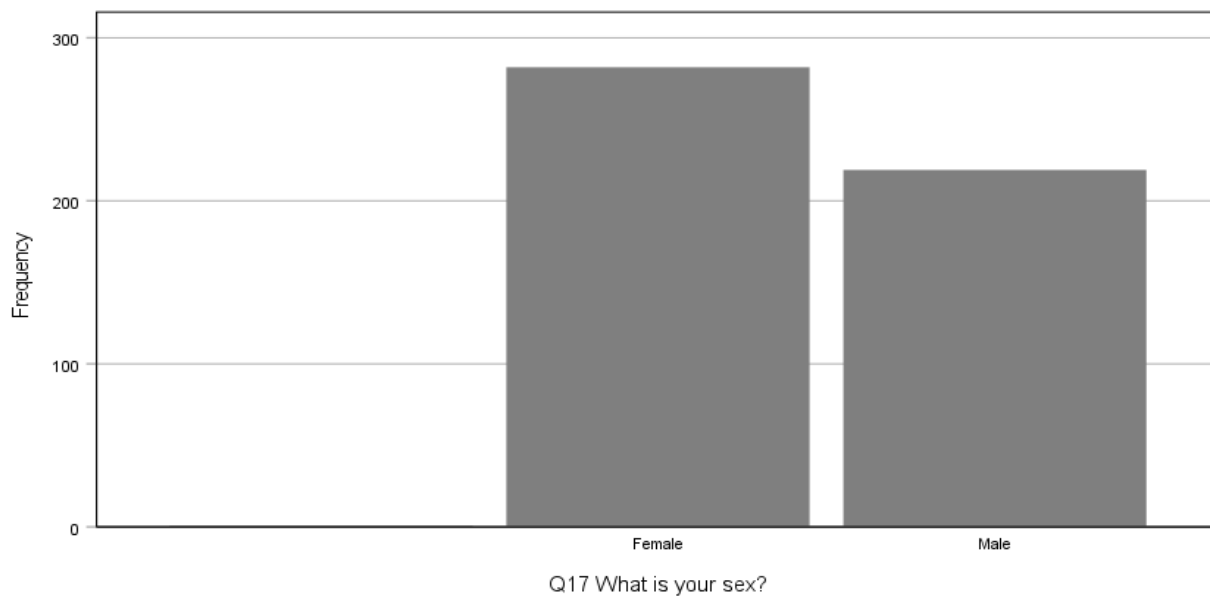


Q15 I felt comfortable bringing my friends to youth ministry activities.

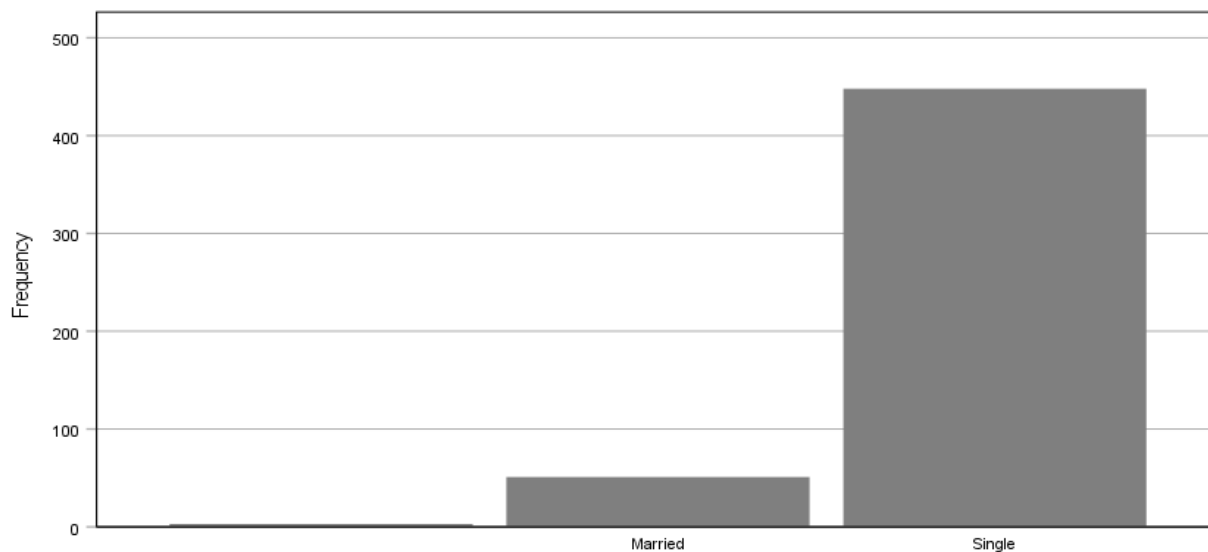
Age in Years



Q17 What is your sex?

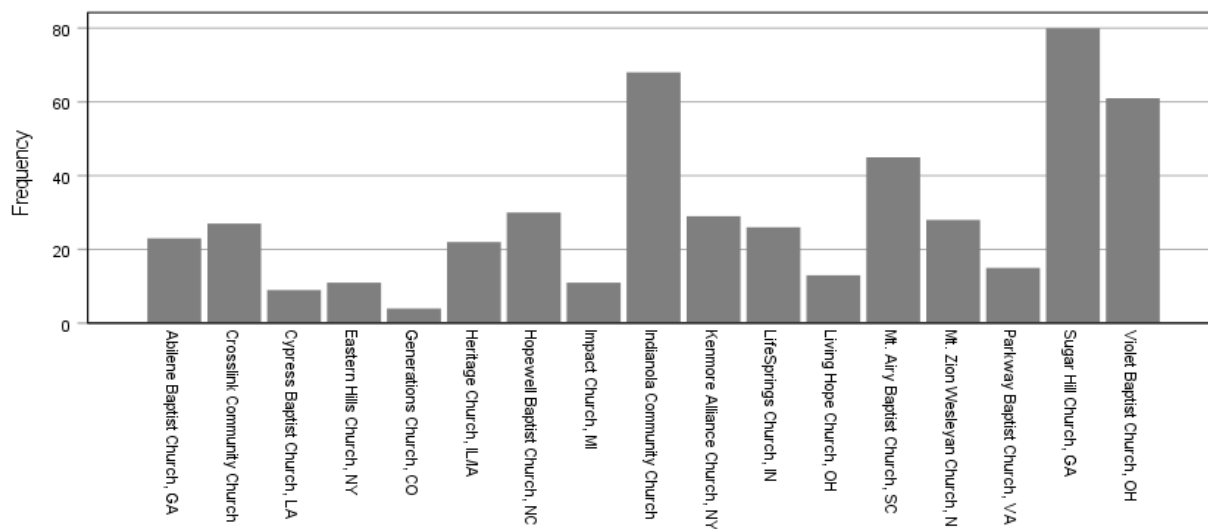


Q18 What is your current marital status?



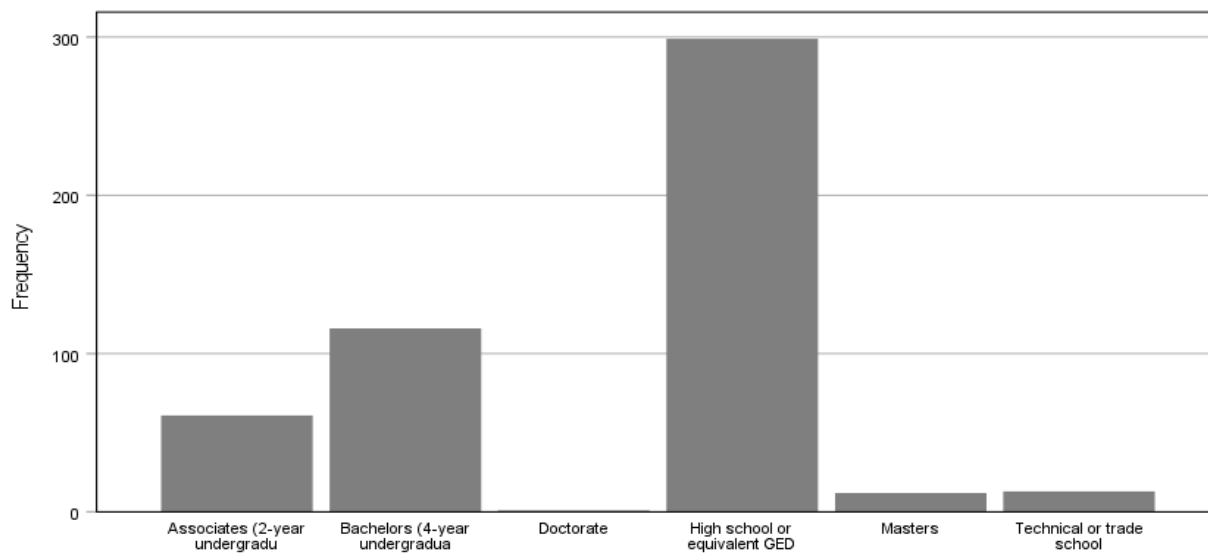
Q18 What is your current marital status?

Q19 Which of the following churches did you attend most frequently for youth ministry activities during your senior year of high school?



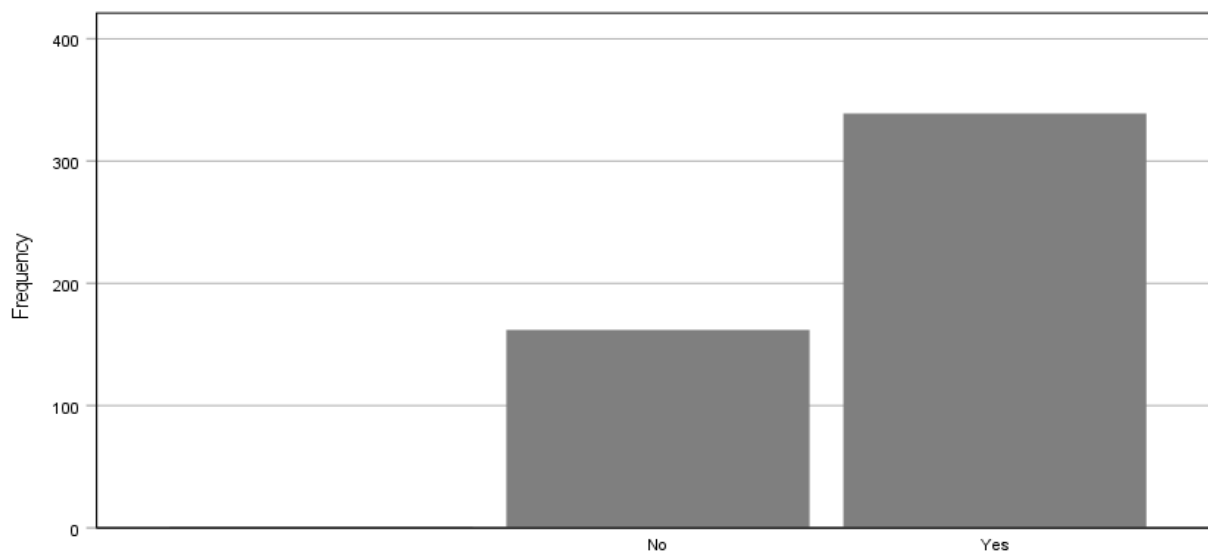
Q19 Which of the following churches did you attend most frequently for youth ministry activities during your senior ...

Q22 What is the highest level of education that you have completed?



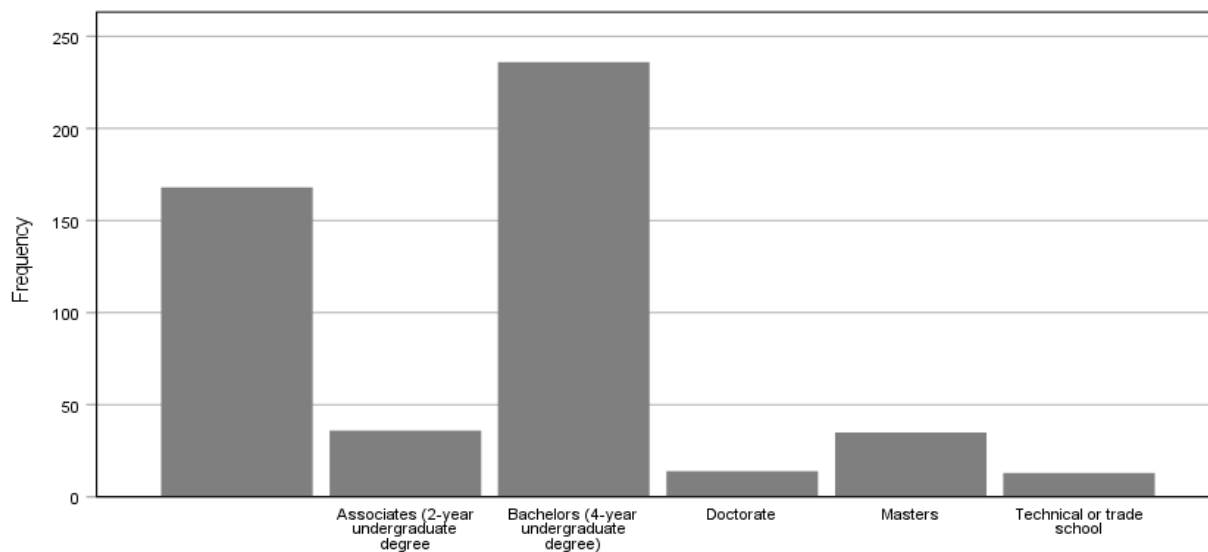
Q22 What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

Q23 Are you currently working on a degree?



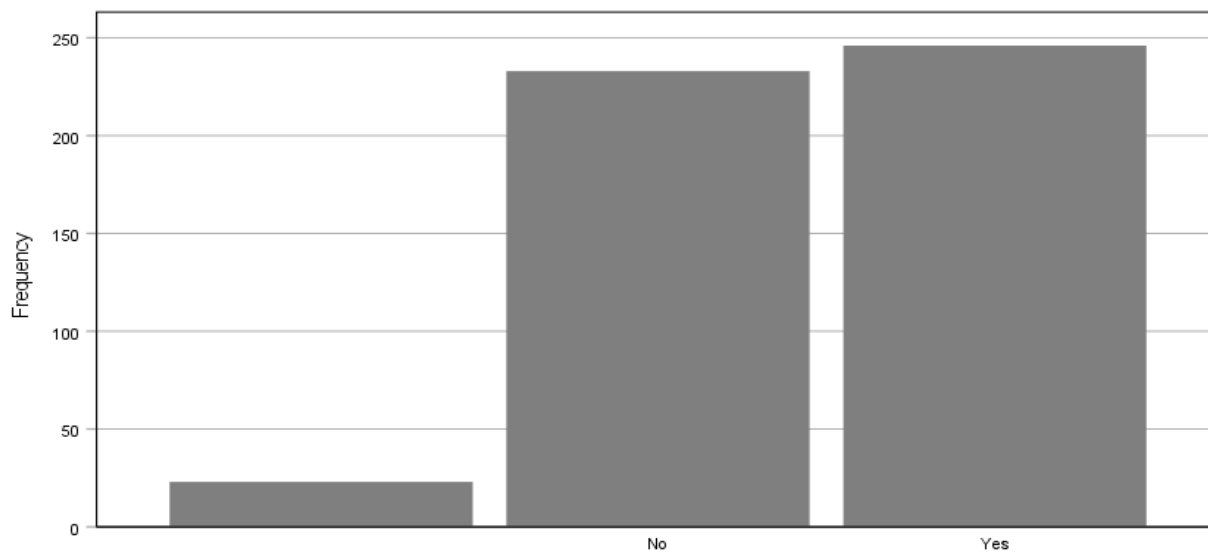
Q23 Are you currently working on a degree?

Q24 If the answer to question 24 is yes, then which degree are you currently pursuing?



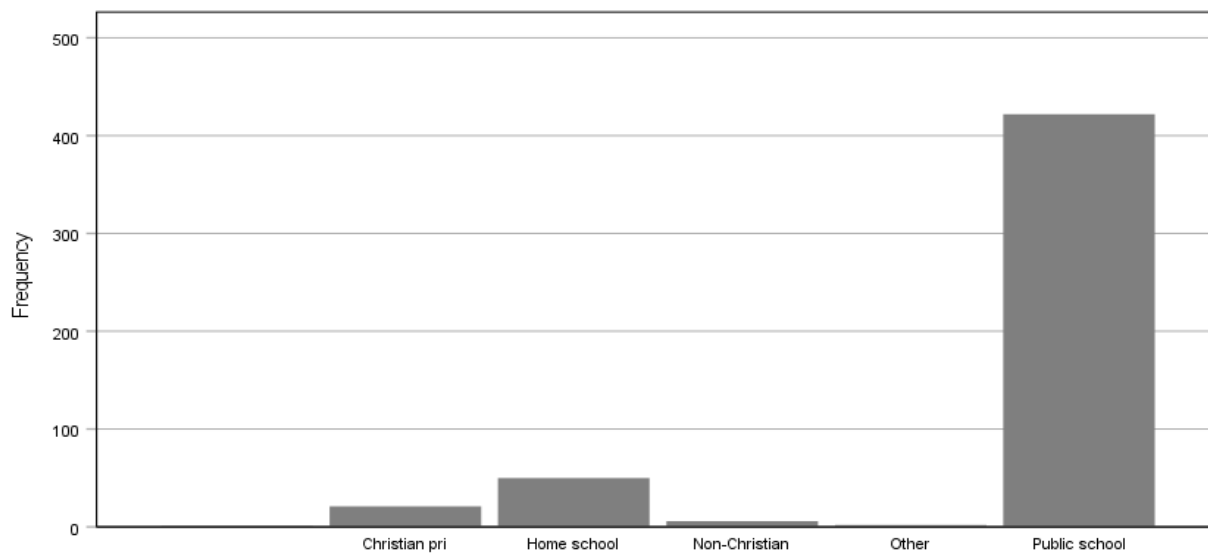
Q24 If the answer to question 24 is yes, then which degree are you currently pursuing?

Q25 If you did attend college, did you live at home with your parents during this time?



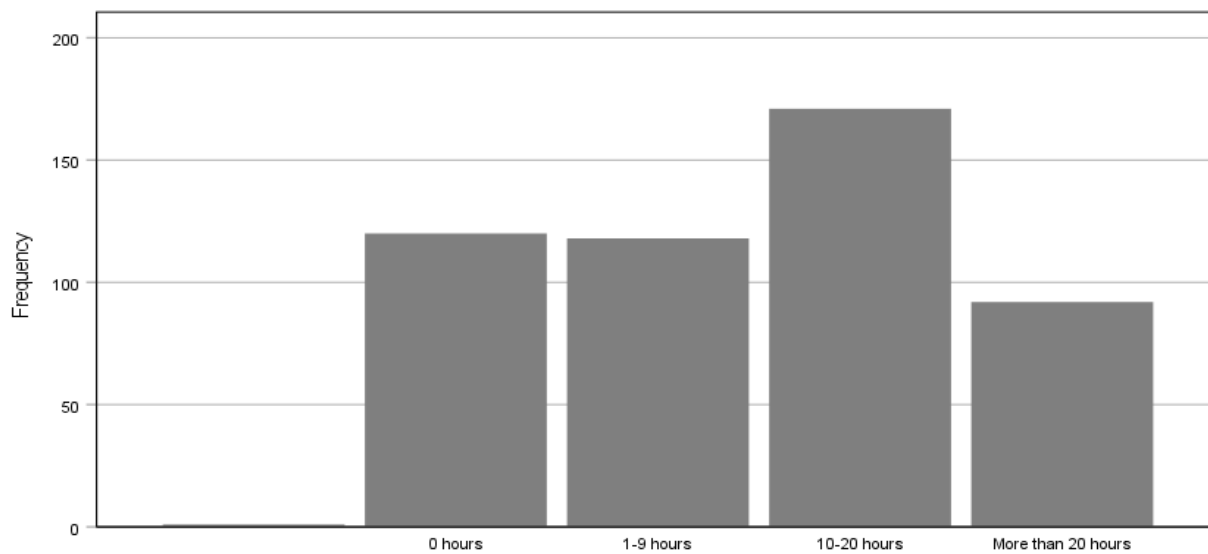
Q25 If you did attend college, did you live at home with your parents during this time?

Q26 Which of the following types of high school did you graduate from?



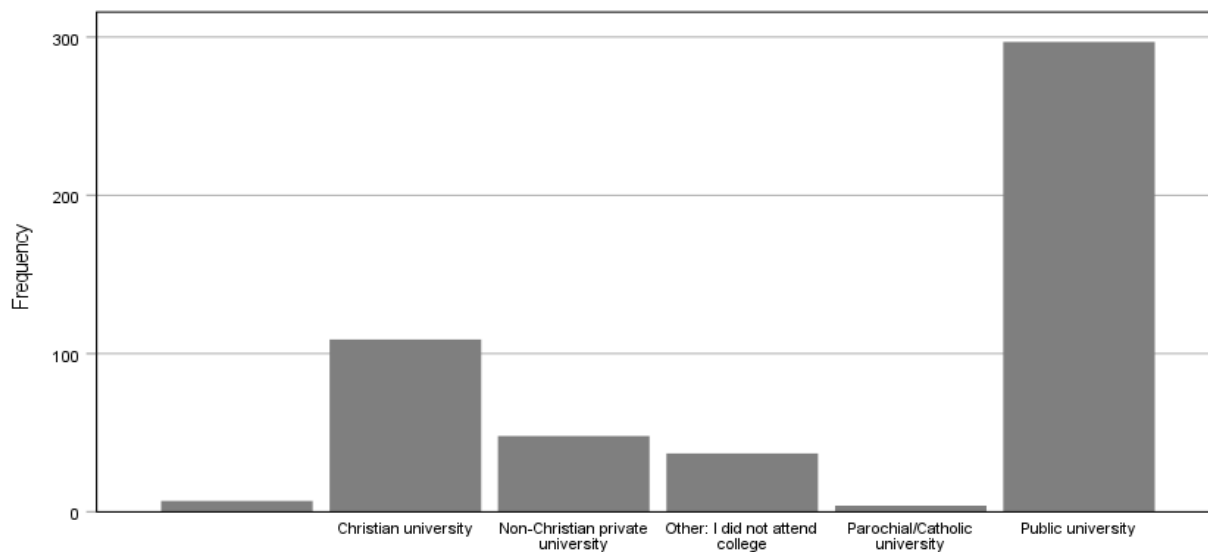
Q26 Which of the following types of high school did you graduate from?

Q27 How many hours per week week you employed during youth senior year of high school?



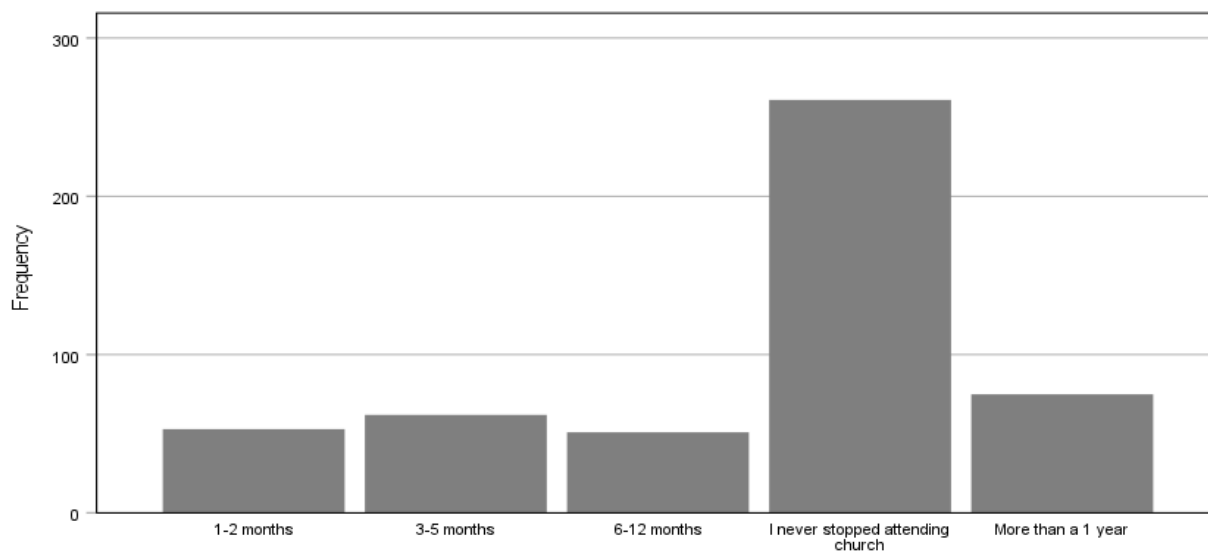
Q27 How many hours per week week you employed during youth senior year of high school?

Q28 Which of the follow types of college did you attend?



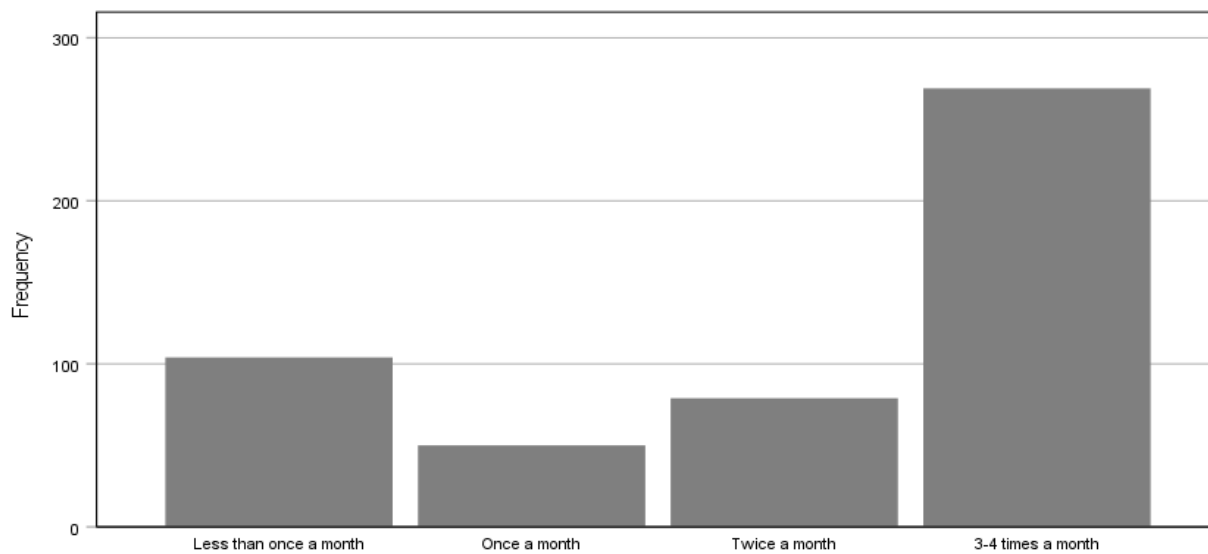
Q28 Which of the follow types of college did you attend?

Q29 How long, if at all, did you stop attending church from ages 18-22?



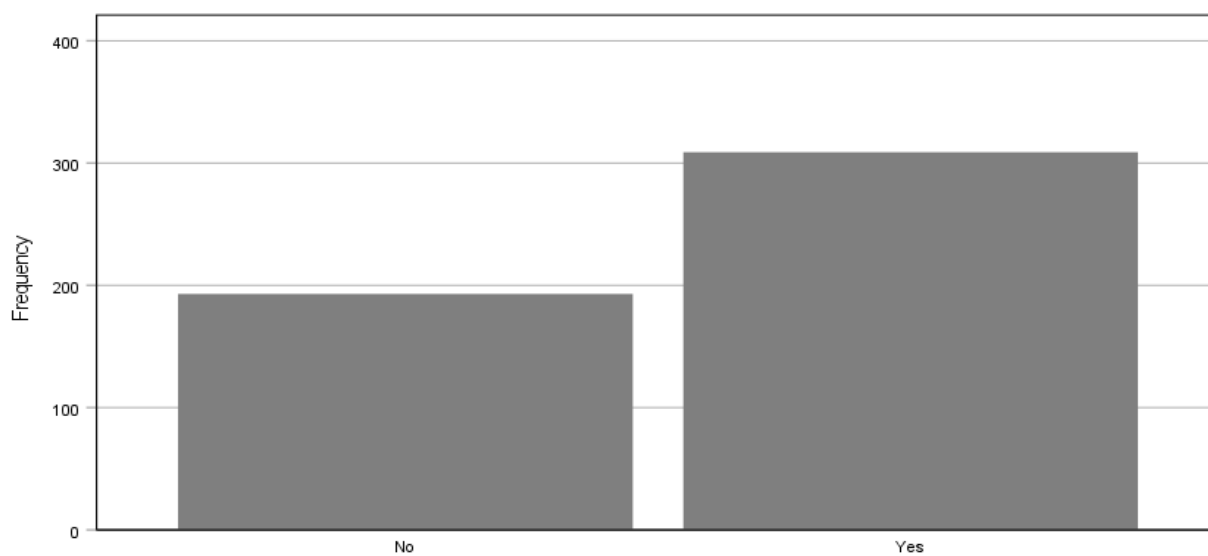
Q29 How long, if at all, did you stop attending church from ages 18-22?

Q30 How often do you currently attend a church worship service?



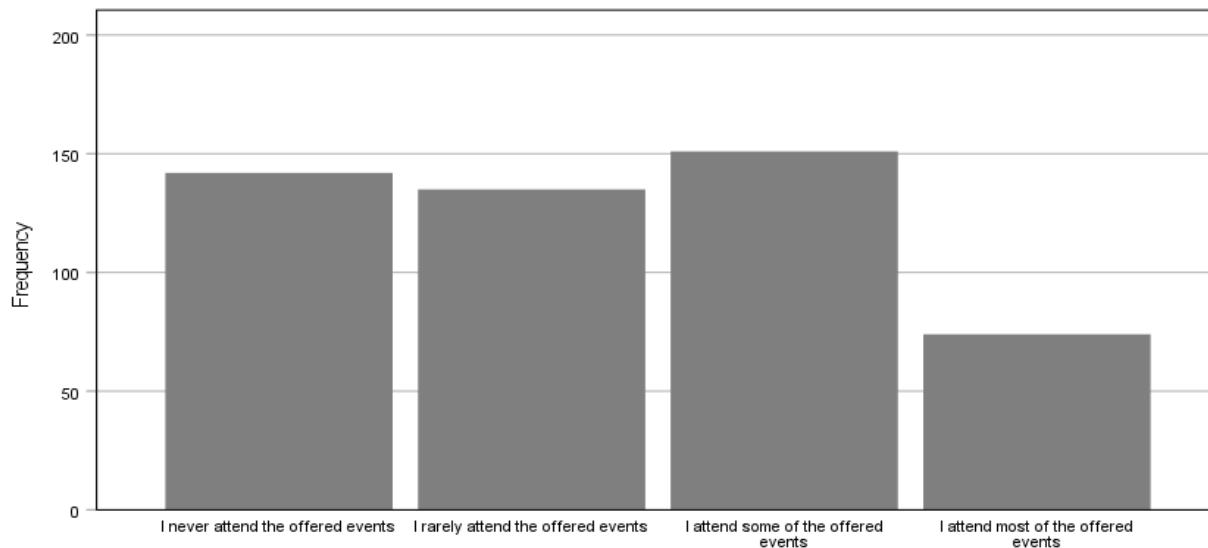
Q30 How often do you currently attend a church worship service?

Q31 Are you a member of a church that is local to you?



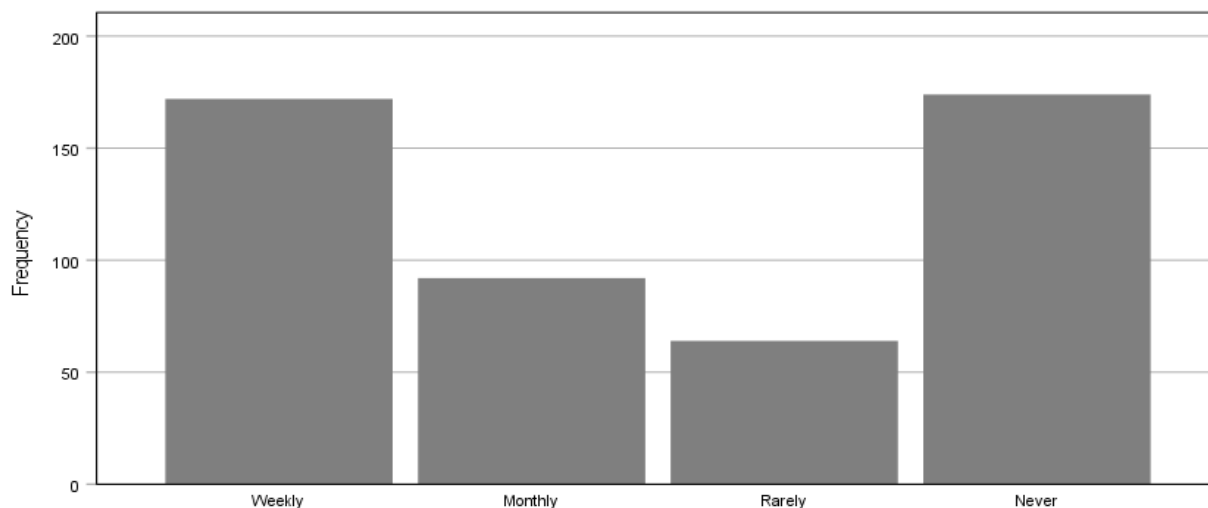
Q31 Are you a member of a church that is local to you?

Q32 How often do you participate in service projects, mission trips, or similar opportunities with you church?

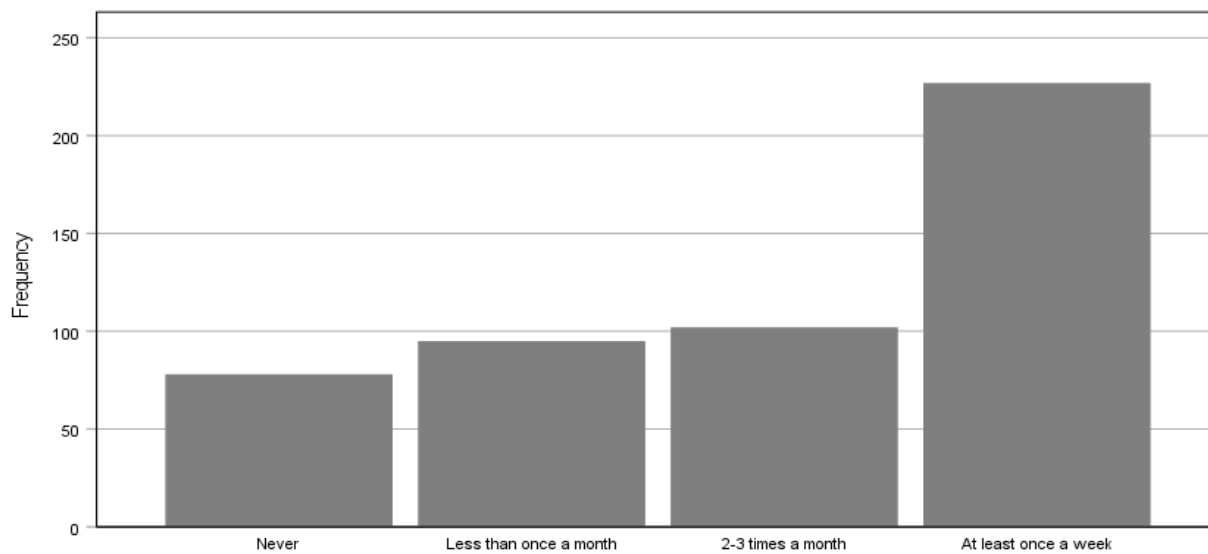


Q32 How often do you participate in service projects, mission trips, or similar opportunities with you church?

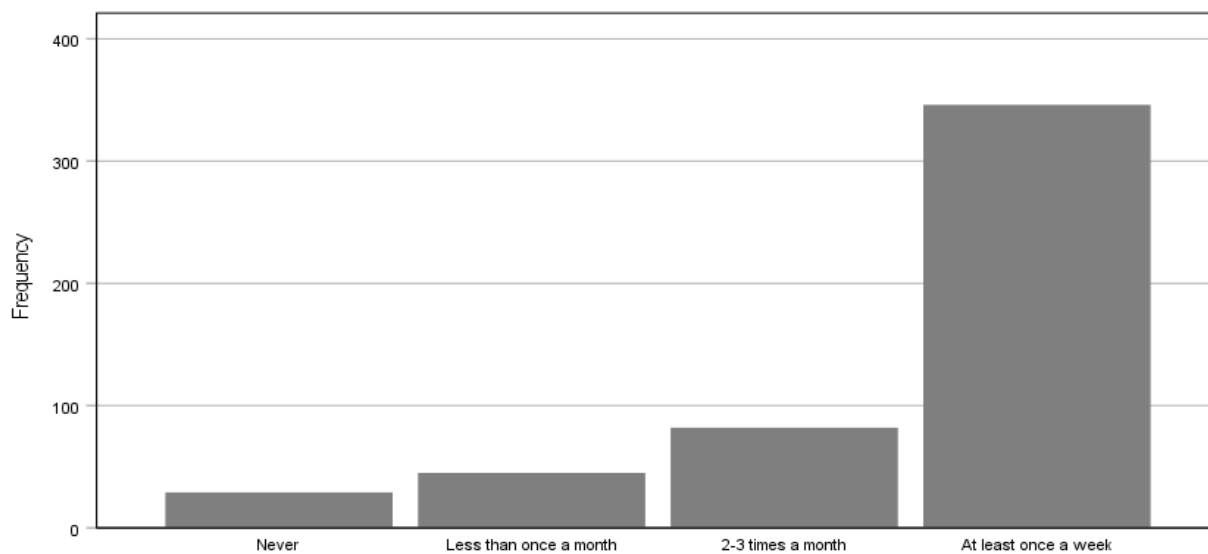
Q33 How often do you attend a small group of any kind outside of Sunday morning when offered (ex. discipleship group, accountability group, small group)?



Q33 How often do you attend a small group of any kind outside of Sunday morning when offered (ex. discipleship group, accountability group, small group)?

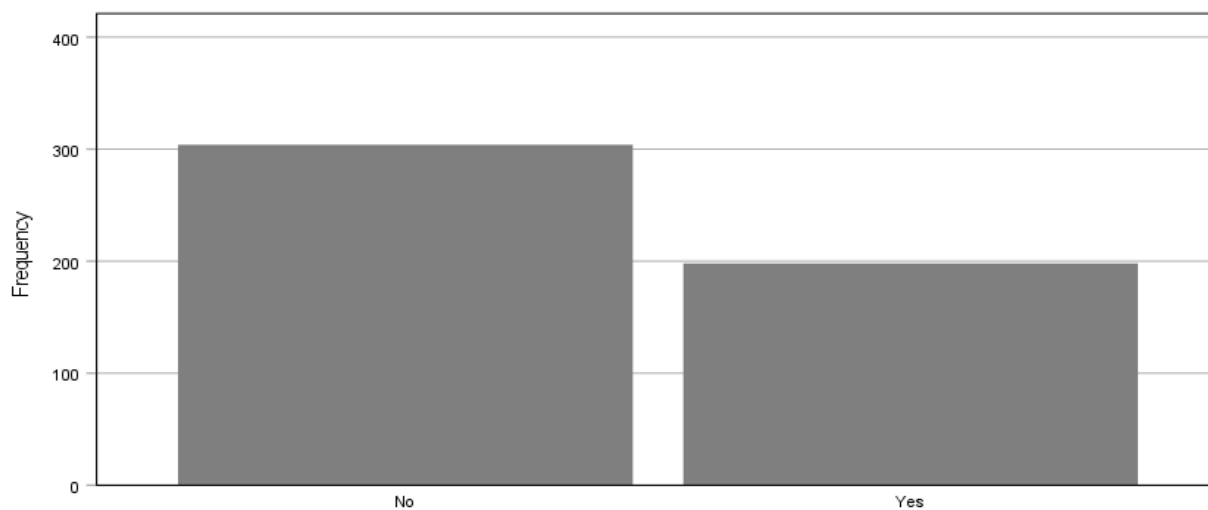
Q34 How often do you currently read your Bible?

Q34 How often do you currently read your Bible?

Q35 How often do you currently pray?

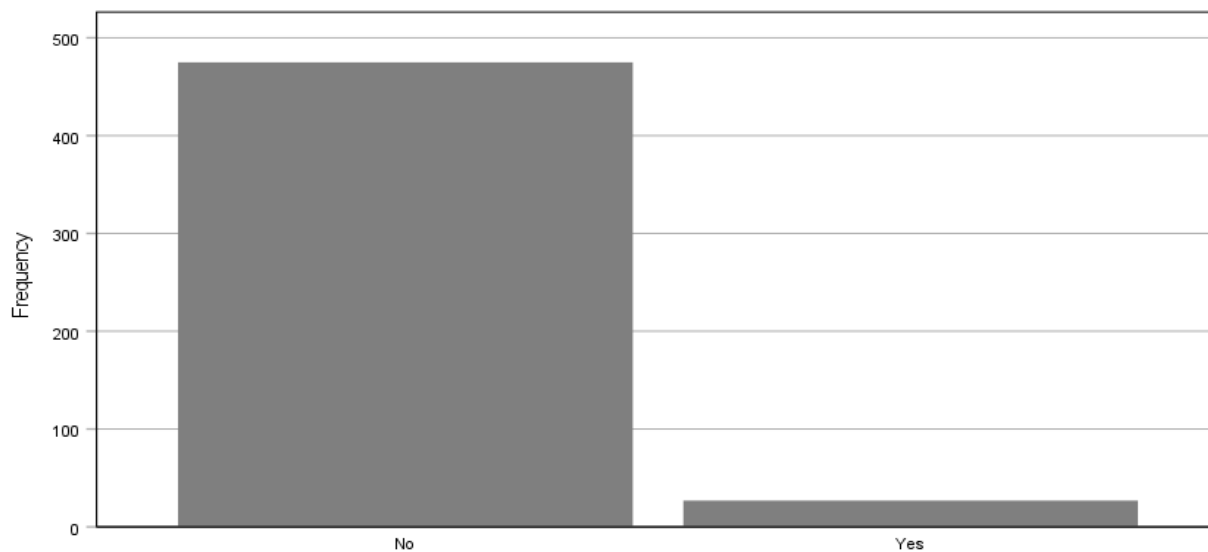
Q35 How often do you currently pray?

Q36 Are you actively serving (at least once a month) as a volunteer or leader in any capacity in your church (ex. small group leader, teacher, greeter, parking team, children's ministry, etc.)



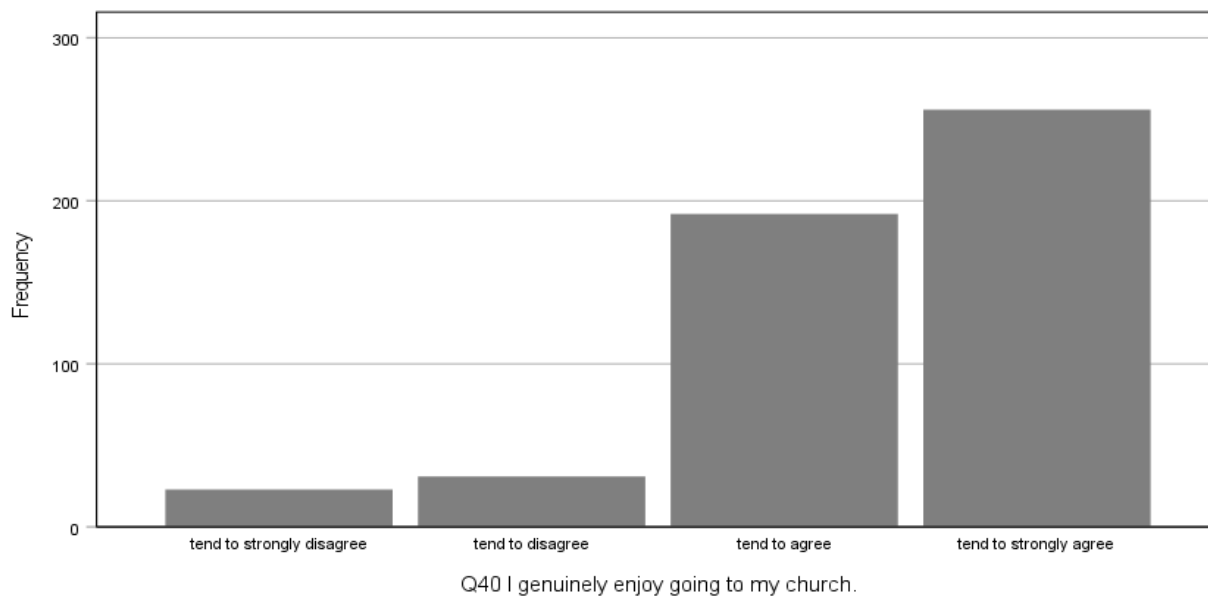
Q36 Are you actively serving (at least once a month) as a volunteer or leader in any capacity in your church (ex. small group leader, teacher, greeter, parking team, children's ministry, etc.)

Q37 Are you serving in a church in a paid position?

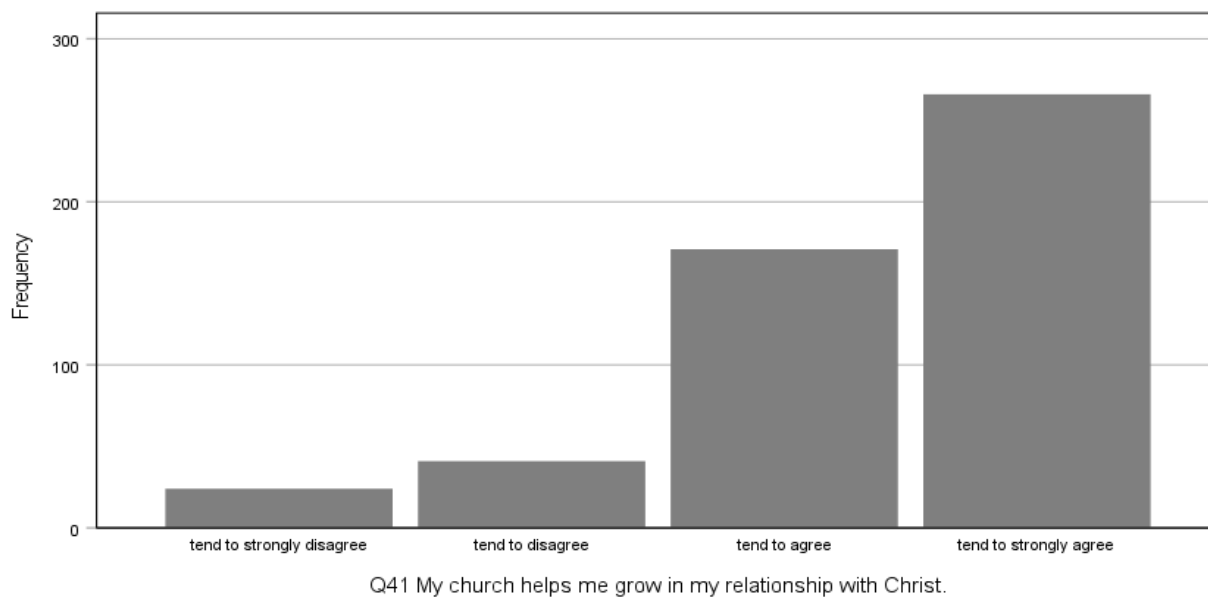


Q37 Are you serving in a church in a paid position?

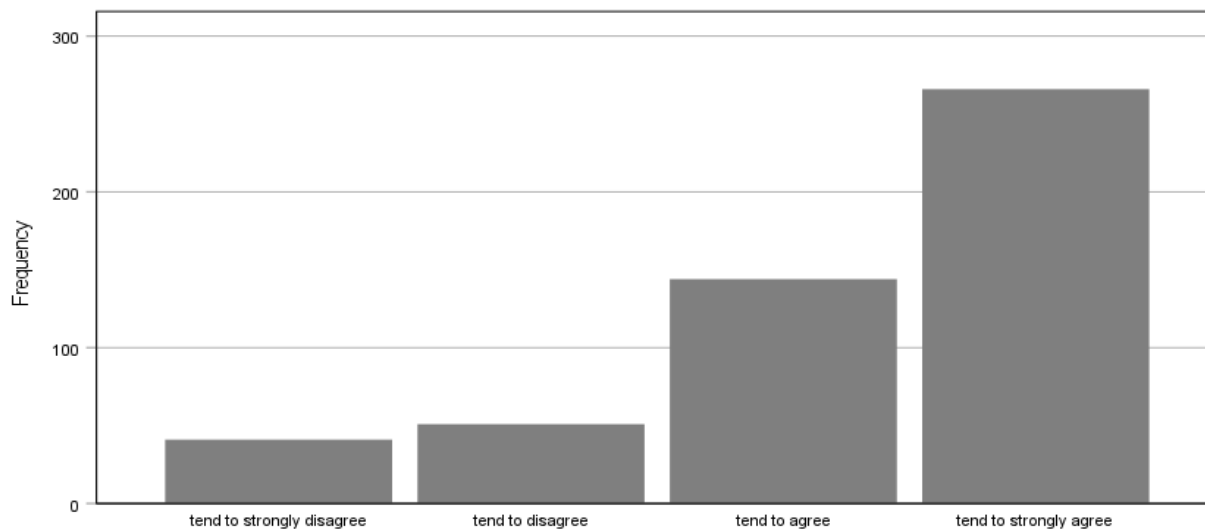
Q40 I genuinely enjoy going to my church.



Q41 My church helps me grow in my relationship with Christ.

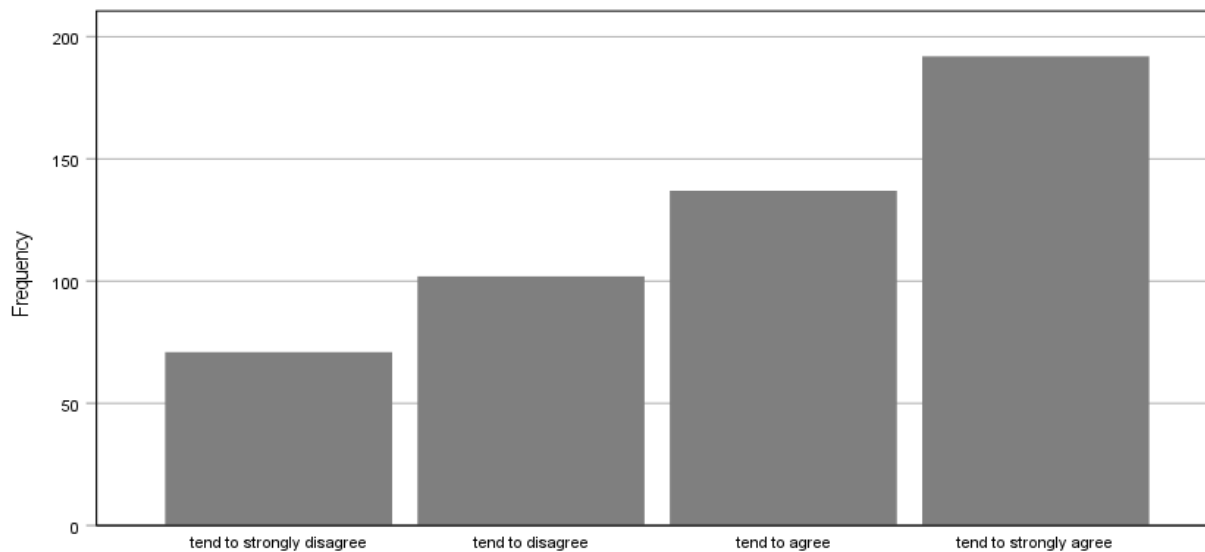


Q42 I have a relationship with at least one other person in my church who is not a pastor or church staff member.



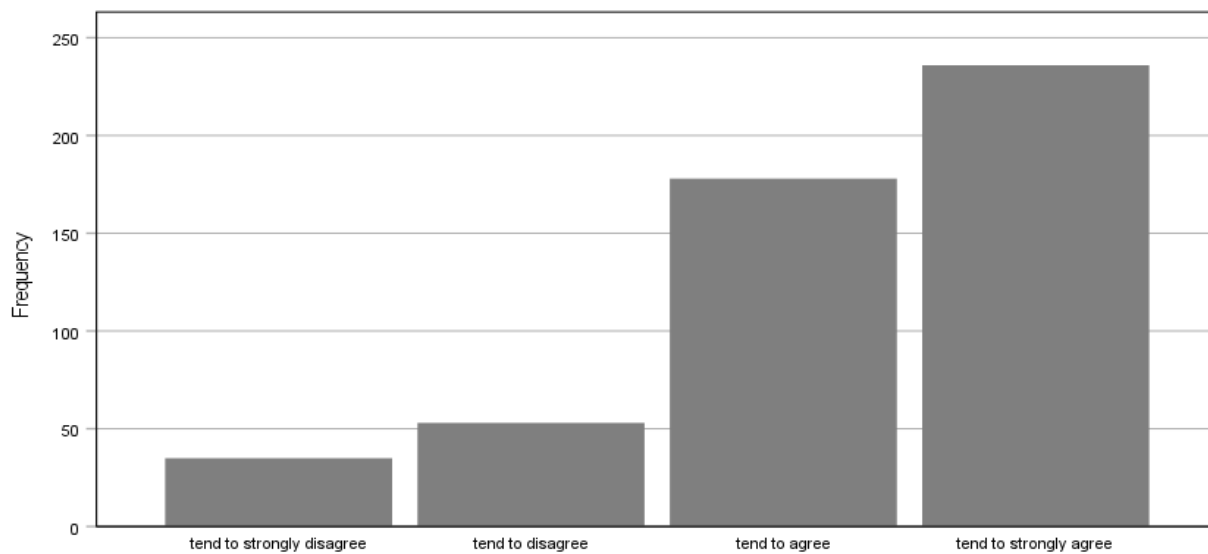
Q42 I have a relationship with at least one other person in my church who is not a pastor or church staff member.

Q43 I have a strong relationship with a pastor or leader in my church.



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Q44 I feel comfortable inviting my friends to my church's activities.



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