

InFo
Vol. 11, No. 2
October 2008
pp. 5-20

FEATURE

**The Influence of Selected Factors on Religious Knowledge,
Attitudes and Christian Practice**

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Abstract: *This study investigated the perceptions of grades 9 and 10 students (N=124) in a Seventh-day Adventist boarding Academy in the Philippines in relation to the degree of strength they perceived various socio-religious variables (Home, Church Program, Bible class, Mentor & Peers) to have towards their religious behaviors in the categories of Religious Knowledge, Attitudes and Lifestyle. Respondents indicated that home, church programs and Bible classes had a greater influence on religiosity behaviors than mentors and peers, which scored weaker by comparison. Students perceived Bible classes as having a stronger influence on religious knowledge, church programs scored higher for religious attitudes and home had the greatest impact on lifestyle.*

There is nothing religious parents want more for a child than to accept their faith and grow spiritually. Young people today are leaving the church at an alarming rate (Banks & Kellner, 2004). Considering that religion is not something that is automatically passed on from one generation to the next, it is helpful to know what factors help in this transmission and the role different individuals play in this process.

Measures of Religiosity

Religiosity is measured by the individual's behavior in matters relating to Christian traditions, practices, doctrines or moral codes. Like "spirituality," it is a construct generally difficult to objectively measure, but its existence is reflected in observable behaviors in one's outer life (Smart, 2000). An individual's religiosity is reflective of the behaviors demonstrated in practice in public worship, service to others, and the struggle for peace and justice (Thomas, 2000). As such, religiosity can be viewed in two aspects--the visible, public part, and the more subjective, private part.

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Studies in the area of religiosity have seen the development of validated, reliable measures of religiosity (Hill & Hood, 1990). Among the categorical variables used, religious belief, attitude and Christian practice, among others, have been used to measure religiosity (Hill & Hood, 1990; Cornwall, Albrecht, Cunningham, & Pitcher, 1986). Measures of religiosity have been defined alternatively as subjective (e.g. self perceived strength of religious affiliation), objective (e.g. Church attendance), and quasi-institutional (Alston, 1975).

To be religious is more than simply a construct of the mind. It involves a person's whole life, the acquisition of beliefs, attitudes and lifestyle deemed important in Christendom and which must be passed on to the next generation. In this sense, Christian education involves helping learners acquire and internalize religious knowledge, attitudes and behaviors with the learners. This transmission could be done through various media or institutions either in the form of direct instruction, modeling, or through various experiences an individual goes through. The *Valuegenesis* study, conducted among the youth of the Seventh-day church, is an example of a study that brought to surface the important role played by the home, church and school in the transmission of religious values among young people (Gillespie, 2002). It is, therefore, in the interest of Christian parents, educators and those seeking to help young people, to know existing socio-religious influencers and the degree of strength these exert in shaping the youth today towards Christian behaviors and practice.

Socio-religious bodies and significant individuals can play a role in the lives of young people today in increasing their understanding of God and reinforcing moral and ethical practices. This is particularly true in the religious realm where some of the most powerful influences on religiosity are the interactions and experience we share within the community of faith (Johnson, 1992). An understanding of these influences is important in consideration of the ongoing trend towards secularization among young people.

Interest in adolescent religiosity and spirituality has gained momentum in the last decade (Ebaugh, 2006). This is reflected in the ongoing effort to try to identify relationships surrounding the transmission of religiosity among teens (National Institutes of Health, n.d). The recognition that environment plays a significant role in religiosity has brought about increased interest in investigating the extent to which various socio-religious variables influence various aspects of religiosity (Borges, 1989). Studies have also been done that try to compare the impact of genetics and the social environment towards religiosity among teens (Eaves, et al., 2008). Research in the area of religiosity influencers can help provide useful insight as we seek to find ways to best young people today towards their religious and spiritual development.

Religiosity Influencers

Parents and family have a significant influence on teens' religious experience. Studies have shown a strong evidence of value transmission from parents to children. One value attitude survey conducted in the Seventh-day Adventist church indicated a high correlation between youths' values and those of their parents' (Dudley & Dudley, 1986). Parents were found to influence church attendance habits of their children (Regnerus, Smith & Brad, 2004). Family has traditionally been seen as the primary agent for the religious socialization of children. (King, Furrow, & Roth as cited in Lippman et al., n.d). In fact, it was found that home had more influence towards religiosity than what one can get from public life (Tamney & Johnson, 1985). A study conducted among 11-12 year olds and 15 -16 year old pupils in secondary city schools (Scotland) revealed two interesting findings. First, parental influence increases with age and second, the mother's influence seemed greater than father's (Francis, 1993). This suggests that even while children attend school, parents can still have significant influence on their religiosity.

There are other factors that can influence the effectiveness in the transmission of religious values by the home. A study conducted by Kuusisto (2003) among SDA homes revealed that the relationship between parents and children, parental example, encouraging children to do their own thinking and positive experiences of both religion and the social dimensions of the religious community affect the effectiveness of home influence.

Past research has also identified both parents and peers as strong contributors to the development of religious faith (Schwartz, 2006). This complementary role as perceived by teens is vital to their religious development. However, in schools where influence from peers is common, negative peer influences can be counter productive to parental initial influence on religiosity (Caputo, 2004). This is generally a concern, considering that peer pressure tends to double when teens reach high school (Barrick, 2007).

The school can be a strong socializing agent that influences the religious beliefs and behaviors of students (Barret, et al., 2007). Within Christian schools, the religious instructional classes can play a strong part in reinforcing the religious views of the organizing body. Seventh-day Adventist schools, like other protestant schools, can fit into this model where the religious instruction offered tends to be "confessional"—a reinforcing of religious values, beliefs and practices handed down by the church (Sisson, 1907). Barret et al. found that the school's influence was stronger when students have a strong allegiance to the institution's philosophy, and when the school places consistent emphasis on religious norms and values.

The church, through its programs, can play an important part in the religiosity of young people. More than simply being an oracle of truth, the church generally expects a certain way of living among its followers. Its purpose is to move people beyond mere understanding to religious experience (Lawson & Choun, 1992, p.16). The involvement of teens in church related activities has proven to reduce the likelihood of teens' involvement in immoral behaviors (Doss et al., 2007).

Significant and respectable adults can also play an important role in the lives of teens and in their spiritual growth. One of the outstanding findings in the Value Genesis study conducted among Seventh-day Adventist young people was how youth were found to be heavily influenced by caring adults who give of themselves and share their Christian experience (Rice, 1994). While adults can play a mentorship role, however respected individuals among the same age group as the students can be also some of the best mentors among high school age children (Cooperation for National and Community Service, 2006).

Among the many variables in life that influence religiosity; the home, Bible classes, Church programs, peers and mentors, have the potential in influencing spiritual growth and maturity among young people. An identification of the level at which these factors influence teenagers in the area of Christian *knowledge, attitudes, and lifestyle* can serve as helpful guide in the ongoing endeavor to help the young people.

Method

The objective of this study was to investigate what young people perceived as the level of influence of various socio-religious variables towards religiosity behaviors. The researcher developed instrument, the *Religiosity Influencer Questionnaire* was used to accomplish this objective. The instrument consists of twenty one items, each describing a particular religiosity behavior. Using a Likert Scale (1 to 5), the respondents marked what they perceived to be the strength of influence each independent variable (Home, Bible class, Mentors, Peers and Church programs) had on their life in relation to each religiosity behavior described. The religiosity behaviors were grouped into three main categories: Religious Knowledge, Attitude and Lifestyle, representing selected dimensions generally used in measuring religiosity (Duke & Johnson, 1984; Hill & Hood, 1990).

Past studies on measures of religiosity support the relevancy of the religious categorical variables (knowledge, attitudes, and lifestyle) and the religious behaviors used in this study (Duke & Johnson, 1984). The reliability measures for the instrument (see Table 1) are well above the typical 0.7 acceptable score for Cronbach's Alpha (Santos, 1999).

Table 1
Reliability Statistics (Cronbach's Alpha)

Religiosity Categories	Socio-religious Influencers	Cronbach's Alpha
KNOWLEDGE		.888
	Home	.961
	Church Programs	.785
	Bible Class	.736
	Mentor	.831
	Peers	.830
ATTITUDE		.899
	Home	.842
	Church Programs	.788
	Bible Class	.780
	Mentor	.819
	Peers	.847
LIFESTYLE		.861
	Home	.828
	Church Programs	.719
	Bible Class	.712
	Mentor	.816
	Peers	.794
OVERALL RELIABILITY		.961

N= 124

Findings

A total of 124 students from grades 9 and 10 classes in a Seventh-day Adventist boarding school in the Philippines participated in this study. The breakdown of the demographic variables is summarized in Table 2. There were more dormitory students from grade 10 than from grade 9 (in the Philippines, high school is grades 7-10). One possible reason could be the academic demands placed on students as they reach the final year in high school. This may require them to live in a more structured environment that would assist them in focusing on their study (TABS, n.d). It is also possible that time for commuting played a role, or the desire to spend more time with friends.

Table 2
Demographic profile

	Male	Female	Boarder	Day
Grade 9	34	32	28	39
Grade 10	31	27	38	19
Total	65	59	66	58

N=124

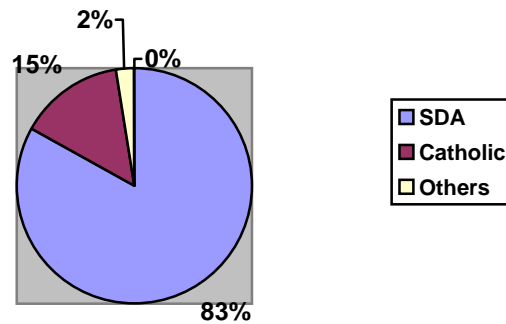


Figure 1. Religion demographics

The majority (83%) of the participants were Adventist (SDA) students with the remaining representing mainly the Catholic Church (15%) and only a few from other denominations (see Figure 1). Thus findings or conclusions drawn should be interpreted as primarily reflecting perceptions of Adventist students in the context and setting where this study was conducted.

Variance within Demographic Variables

No significant differences in perception were found by gender, religion, or grade levels regarding the influence of the selected socio-religious variables on religiosity behaviors in the areas of *knowledge*, *attitude* and *lifestyle*. The only significant difference was seen in the *age* category (see Table 3). This seems to suggest a change in perception as students mature.

Although both age groups agreed that Church programs had a strong influence on their religious attitude and knowledge, with Likert scale greater than four points, the younger students (age 15 and less) assigned significantly higher scores to the influence of the Church than did older students (age 16 or more). The younger teenagers believed their religious *attitudes* and *knowledge* were being influenced to a greater degree by Church programs than did the older teenage group. This increasing independence in thinking is normal as adolescents mature. This could be a reflection of advances in moral reasoning as suggested by Kohlberg in his stages of moral development (Clouse, 1985).

The Influence of Socio-religious Variables

The overall level of influence that the Socio-religious variables (Home, Church programs, Bible class, Mentors & Peers) had on students' religious *knowledge*, *attitudes*, and *lifestyle* was compared by looking at the raw means for each variable (see Table 4). According to the respondents, Church programs (M = 4.22) had the strongest influence on overall religious behavior. This was followed by Bible class, home, mentors and finally, peers, with the lowest mean (M= 3.22).

Table 3
Mean Variance Between Age Categories

Variable	Age-category	Mean	S.D	T	df	Sig 2 tail
Church Influence towards Attitude:	≤ 15 yrs (N=94)	4.47	.41	4.20	122.0	.000
	≥ 16 yrs (N=30)	4.03	.70	3.24	35.6	.003
Church Influence towards Knowledge:	≤ 15 yrs (N=94)	4.34	.45	3.19	122.0	.002
	≥ 16 yrs (N=30)	4.00	.63	2.70	38.9	.011

Note: ≤ 15 yrs (13, 14, 15)
≥ 16 yrs (16, 17, 18, 22)

Based on the mean figures in Table 4, a ranking was made of the socio-religious influencers in this study (see Table 5). The result showed Bible class as being perceived by respondents as having the strongest influence towards religious *knowledge* (M= 4.28). This probably indicates the emphasis generally placed in the teaching of doctrines by Bible teachers in SDA schools and which at times could be done at the expense of a faith development approach (Reid, 1990). The Church (programs) is shown to have the strongest influence towards religious *attitudes* while home was being rated as having the strongest influence towards religious *lifestyle*. This is logical, since home has the most opportunity of all to help a child form habits and values which can be transmitted from one generation to the next (Nelson, 1980).

Table 4
Comparison of Means of Socio-religious Factors (influencers)

	Home	Church Programs	Bible Class	Mentors	Peers & Friends
Knowledge	4.05	4.26	4.28	3.73	3.11
Attitude	4.26	4.36	4.26	3.78	3.29
Lifestyle	4.10	4.04	3.90	3.62	3.23
<i>Mean Total</i>	4.13	4.22	4.15	3.7	3.23

Note: Strongest Influence = 5 Strong Influence = 4 Some Influence = 3
Weak Influence = 2 Hardly any influence= 1

Table 5
Ranking of Socio-religious Factors by Influence

	Knowledge	Attitude	Lifestyle
Rank Order			
1 st	Bible Class	Church Programs	Home
2 nd	Church Programs	Home	Church Programs
3 rd	Home	Bible Class	Bible Class
4 th	Mentor	Mentor	Mentor
5 th	Peer /Friends	Peer/Friends	Peer/Friends

Religious Knowledge and Influencers

The influence of Bible class and Church programs on religious *knowledge* was significantly higher than that of home, mentors, or peers as perceived by respondents (see Table 6). Bible class and Church programs revealed no significant difference between their means ($P= 0.562$). We can hereby conclude from the data that respondents considered these two Socio-religious variables as contributing more strongly towards their religious *knowledge* than other influencer variables. Except for Church programs, Bible class has a stronger influence on knowledge than the rest of the variables. However, from the data we can also conclude that the strength of Bible class as an influencer over Home ($r=.149$) and over peer/friends ($r=.167$) is weak. Church programs have a stronger influence than home, mentors and peers. Home shows a stronger influence than mentor and peers while mentors have a stronger influence than peers.

Table 6
Mean Significant Difference for Religious Knowledge among Paired Variables

Paired Variables	Means	Std Dev	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Pearson's r
B/Class — Church Program	4.28 — 4.26	.50	0.58	123	.562	.505 **
B/Class — Home	4.28 — 4.05	.77	3.32	123	.001	.149
B/Class — Mentor	4.28 — 3.73	.62	9.96	123	.000	.468 **
B/Class — Peers	4.28 — 3.11	.64	15.62	123	.000	.167
Church Program — Home	4.26 — 4.05	.70	3.24	123	.002	.325 **
Church Program — Mentor	4.26 — 3.73	.67	8.70	123	.000	.379 **
Church Program — Peers	4.26 — 3.11	.81	15.75	123	.000	.244 **
Home — Mentor	4.05 — 3.73	.82	4.36	123	.000	.250 **
Home — Peers	4.05 — 3.11	.91	11.50	123	.000	.194 *
Mentor — Peers	3.73 — 3.11	.78	8.90	123	.000	.414 **

N= 124

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Religious Attitudes and Influencers

Church programs and home had significantly more influence on religious *attitudes* than Bible class, mentors or peer friends as perceived by respondents (see Table 7). Considering religious *attitudes*, Church programs and home had no significant difference between their means (P= 0.096). Respondents consider Church programs and home, as contributing more strongly towards religious *attitudes* than other variables mentioned. In the same line, Home and Bible class had a significant higher influence on religious *attitude* than mentors or peer friends. Both home and Bible class revealed no significance difference between their means (P= 0.959). Bible class has a stronger influence towards *attitudes* than mentors or peers, while mentors have a stronger influence than peers.

Religious Lifestyle and Influencers

Home and Church programs were perceived as having a significantly higher influence on religious *lifestyle* than Bible class, mentors, or peer friends (see Table 8). Home and church programs revealed no significant difference between their means (P= 0.289). This is quite logical when one considers that in principle, the *lifestyle* encouraged by the church is generally deemed important by the Christian home. Church programs have a stronger influence on religious *lifestyle* than Bible class, mentor or peers. Bible class has a stronger influence than mentors or peers while mentor has a stronger influence than peers.

Table 7
Mean Significant Difference for Religious Attitude among Paired Variables

Paired Variables	Means	Std Dev	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Pearson's r
Church Prog – Home	4.36 – 4.26	.69	1.68	123	.096	.313 **
Church Prog – B/Class	4.36 – 4.26	.48	2.49	123	.014	.600 **
Church Prog – Mentor	4.36 – 3.78	.67	9.58	123	.000	.371 **
Church Prog – Peers	4.36 – 3.29	.83	14.33	123	.000	.230 *
Home – Bible Class	4.26 – 4.26	.76	.05	123	.959	.175
Home – Mentor	4.26 – 3.78	.79	6.71	123	.000	.251 **
Home – Peers	4.26 – 3.29	.89	12.11	123	.000	.215 *
Bible Class – Mentor	4.26 – 3.78	.60	8.89	123	.000	.526 **
Bible Class – Peers	4.26 – 3.30	.79	13.55	123	.000	.317 **
Mentor – Peers	3.78 – 3.30	.74	7.44	123	.000	.484 **

N= 124 *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Table 8
 Mean Significant Difference for Religious Lifestyle among Paired Variables

Paired Variables	Means	Std Dev	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Pearson's r
Home – Church Prog	4.10–4.04	.66	1.07	123	.289	.359 **
Home – B/Class	4.10–3.90	.89	3.31	123	.001	.320 **
Home – Mentor	4.10–3.62	.71	7.50	123	.000	.385 **
Home – Peers	4.10–3.23	.82	11.59	123	.000	.260 **
Church Prog – B/Class	4.04–3.90	.50	3.18	123	.002	.585 **
Church Prog – Mentor	4.04–3.62	.65	7.12	123	.000	.394 **
Church Prog – Peers	4.04–3.23	.70	12.67	123	.000	.397 **
Bible Class – Mentor	3.90–3.62	.58	5.29	123	.000	.538 **
B/Class – Peers	3.90–3.23	.70	10.30	123	.000	.395 **
Mentor – Peers	3.62–3.23	.71	6.94	123	.000	.457 **

N= 124 *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

It is of interest to note how the home, church programs and Bible class remained the top three influencers towards religiosity behaviors as perceived by high school students in this study (see Table 5). The other two variables--mentors, and especially peers, which are often seen by adults as being a strong influence on teens' lives (Cohen, 2006), were perceived as having a lesser degree of influence towards religiosity.

Based on the Likert scale, peers overall had only *some influence* towards religiosity behaviors. One possible reason for the low scores in peer influence ($M = 3.2174$) is that young people may feel peer influence tends to be more "negative" in terms of encouragement towards religiosity. So when students think of religious influence, they exclude their peers, since that is an influence that draws them away from spirituality. This is an interesting observation and it suggests the need to verify this finding, as well as to somehow harness the power of peer influence into bringing about positive outcomes among our youths today. This does not mean peers do not have any influence at all. Studies have shown peers to have influence in other areas like self concept or group participation which may indirectly relate to religiosity (Spilka, et al., 2003, p.116).

Conclusions

With the ever increasing concern for values and character development in education and the level of spirituality among the youth, it is important to assess the kinds of religious influence generally assumed are taking place among young people. This study brings to our attention several important things. It confirms the significant role the *triad* of the Church, home and school, play in the religious development of the children today especially in the context of Seventh-day Adventist schools. It also highlights the need for dialogue between various socio-religious bodies discussed in the ongoing endeavor to reinforce religious knowledge, attitudes, and lifestyle deemed important for the children in this generation. In particular this study suggests the need to find ways how mentors and peers can also play a positive and stronger influence towards religiosity. Finally, this study provides an insight into what Adventist young people perceived to be the level of influence various socio-religious factors have had on them in matters relating to religiosity. Their perception can help provide additional insight as we, through the home, Church and school and through other avenues seek to help them grow and mature spiritually as they seek to know more about God and His will for their lives.

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