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Religion’s Influence on Adolescent’s Self-Esteem
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Introduction
Self-esteem, or mattering, is important as it has been found to be positively related to things like perceived social support and school performance for adolescents (Elliott, Kao & Grant 2004). We wonder if an adolescent’s self-esteem is specifically affected by his religiosity. Plante and Boccaccini (1997) used the SCSORF Questionnaire and found that stronger faith promoted lighter interpersonal sensitivity, greater belief in personal control and higher self-esteem. Likewise, Ellison (1991) asserts that those with strong religiosity report higher self-esteem; yet Bahr and Martin (1983) report that there was little relationship between religiosity and self-esteem. In our study we test to see if self-esteem is one area in which religion manifests itself positively in the lives of adolescents. We hypothesize that religion will be positively correlated with self-esteem.

Methods
The sample for this study consisted of 300 two-parent families from the Flourishing Families Project. The data were collected in Seattle during 2007. This sample is unique in that it includes multiple respondents within families: one child between the ages of 10-13 and both parents participated. Participants responded to detailed questionnaires with items measuring constructs such as parenting, family relationships, how things get done in the family, child development, and marital relationships. For this study, religiosity, faith, self-esteem, and family connectedness from the parents’ and childrens’ questionnaires were analyzed.

Measures
All constructs were assessed using a 4 or 5 point Likert scale.

To measure religiosity, participants were asked about the frequency of their family praying, reading scriptures, singing or playing religious music/instruments, attending religious events, using religious media, having religious conversations at home, and saying/singing a blessing/prayer at family meals.

To measure faith, participants were asked if they pray daily, if they look to their faith as providing meaning and purpose in their life, if their faith is an important part of who they are as a person, and if their faith impacts many of their decisions.

To measure self-esteem, participants were asked to rate 10 statements regarding their feelings about themselves as a person. Sample statements include: I feel useless at times. I wish I could have more respect for myself.

Results
A regression analysis of the data, comparing father and child religiosity and faith with child self-esteem, yielded no significant correlations. When tested with other family variables, the regression model showed that emotional cut-off had the most significant impact of self-esteem.

Discussion
Although other research shows that religion is important for adolescents and families our results show that religion did not influence self-esteem. These results do not mean that religion does not matter, but that perhaps religion positively impacts adolescents in other ways.

Other factors such as emotional cut-off did impact self-esteem significantly. This may imply that although religion can have positive effects on adolescents (based on the results of other research), religion cannot and does not counter-act the negative effects of other family processes such as emotional cut-off. In other words, religion is not a cure-all; in order to be emotionally strong and stable, adolescents need a feeling of emotional connection with their parents.

References

