

God Talk and Religious Gateways to Adolescent Volunteer Experiences

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ABSTRACT

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(Under the direction of Andrew Perrin)

What effect does the presence of religious terms in adolescent discourse and the availability of religious organizations that serve as entry points to community service opportunities have on the rate of adolescent volunteerism? 252 interviews from the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) data set were coded to analyze how religious orientations and religious affiliations influenced how adolescents talked about their volunteer and community experiences. Specifically, responses were coded and analyzed whenever teens used religious references or concepts (“God Talk”) or referred to religious organizations as being their entry points into volunteering (“Gateways”).

225 of the sample of 252 adolescents (89%) expressed “God Belief” or said they believed in God, a Higher Power, or some sort of Force. With the religious variable “God Talk” introduced the number of teenagers who volunteer increases. When God Talk and Religious Gateway are exhibited together more teens volunteer. The presence of these religious variables correlates with higher levels of volunteerism. Out of a total number of 254 Gateways (entry points to volunteerism), 151 (59%) Gateways were associated with God Talk and 103 (41%) were not associated with God Talk. Thus, volunteer rates were highest when God Talk and Religious Gateways were present.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines how religion influences adolescents' decisions to volunteer. Specifically, this paper considers the relationship between the presence of religiously-coded language, referred to as "God Talk", in the discourse of adolescents who volunteer, and religious-centered organizations that serve as "Gateways," or entry points for teens to volunteer. The paper seeks to explain how the interaction of "God Talk" and religious "Gateways" affects volunteerism among adolescents. My thesis is that there is a link between religion and volunteerism: as the religious components God Talk and Religious Gateway are introduced there is a higher volunteer rate for adolescents.

This examination draws upon interview data from the National Study of Youth and Religion. I investigate the relationship between God Talk and organizational resources as adolescents in the NSYR sample talk about their volunteering experiences. Leading points of consideration guide my paper. First, I examine the discourse offered by adolescents as they respond to questions concerning their religious beliefs and volunteer experiences. I look at whether or not youth who reference religious terms and concepts like "church" or "God" (God Talk) when they discuss their volunteer experiences volunteer more or less than youth who do not employ God Talk. Also, I discern whether or not affiliation with religious organizations which offer ways for adolescents to engage in community service, or serve as Gateways, lead these teenagers

to volunteer more than those teenagers who are not affiliated with pro-volunteer-centered religious organizations. Finally, I examine whether or not the interaction of God Talk and religious-oriented Gateways lead more teenagers to volunteer than those who either do not employ God Talk or those without access to religious-oriented Gateways.

God Talk

There is an expectation that religious youth employ more God Talk than non-religious youth. Adolescents with religious experiences affiliated with religious organizations are expected to have a vocabulary that incorporates the use of religious language. On the other hand, non-religious adolescents without much experience with religious organizations are not exposed to religious language regularly and are not expected to use it or reference it often. Thus, religious adolescents are expected to talk more about “God” and to use religious terms than non-religious adolescents when talking about their life experiences, including their volunteer service. The following quote illustrates the presence of God Talk:

I: Did you ever go to a religious service project or missions trip?

R: **Yeah, like going to hospitals and praying?** Like on the same summer camp? Yeah, I went, went to that.

I: How was that?

R: **It was cool, cause we got to like pray with people** and like show them a little encouragement because like they were looking sad, a lot of them were really sad cases and when we left the hospital it was like, they were like happy and smiling, cause they got a little encouragement because **they know that, number one, we love them, number two, God loves them,** they should just, and like, a lot of the cases in the hospitals are because like cases of violence, so they, they’re wounded and stuff and like people got shot, people got stabbed and stuff, so they, they basically thought that no one really loved them, but then we went and we showed them that at least they have someone that loved them and they don’t need to feel like they alone in the world, so.

However, the presence of widespread moral conceptualizations in the U.S. that draw upon the nation’s historic Judeo-Christian traditions may lead to a common

language being employed when people discuss their reasons or motivations for taking community actions, such as volunteering. Common moral conceptualizations that center on the idea that there is a God or moral dictates influencing our actions, which I term God Beliefs, may influence youth – non-religious and religious youth – to use God Talk. God Beliefs may cause teenagers to express God Talk, or articulate how faith or religious affiliations impact their lives, as they discuss their volunteer experiences.

If there are widespread God Beliefs, then God Talk may be present in all teenagers, regardless of whether they are religious or not. Many teenagers who are non-religious get involved in community service and many teenagers who are religious do not volunteer. Therefore, I extend my search for the presence of God Talk in the discourse of all the adolescents in the NSYR study. Also, I see if there are factors present that may encourage some religious teens to volunteer more than other religious teens or non-religious teens. Thus, searching the discourse of all teenagers, non-religious and religious, to search for God Talk is a key focus of this study.

Religious Gateways

Most teens who volunteer do so because people ask them to do service work. (Hodgkinson and Weitzman, Sundeen and Raskoff) Studies show that the top five Gateways that encourage teens to get involved with community service are religious institutions, schools, parents who volunteer, friends and peers who volunteer, and the presence of local community agencies. (Yates and Youniss, 1996; Sundeen and Raskoff). There are non-religious Gateways and religious Gateways. Non-religious Gateways may include schools, parents, peers, and community agencies that encourage teens to

volunteer. Churches and other religious institutions and religious-oriented groups and people may serve as religious Gateways by which teenagers participate in volunteerism.

Religious Gateways may play a major role in promoting volunteerism among adolescents. “Religious involvement is an especially strong predictor of volunteering and philanthropy” (Putnam, 2000, p.67). However, not all religious teenagers volunteer. So, I further examine the NSYR data to discern when religious organizations might be more effective in getting teens involved in community service.

Churches and other religious institutions (Religious Gateways) may be effective because they serve as arenas are perceived to foster moral development in adolescents. For example, biblical stories like the Good Samaritan instruct teenagers that helping others is a socially responsible action. I look at the data to see if attending religious services regularly – where teenagers would most likely receive moral instructions – induces teenagers to volunteer more than teenagers who do not regularly attend and receive such moral teachings. This study will hopefully elucidate some of what goes on in the minds of volunteering religious adolescents as they talk about how being affiliated with religious institutions that serve as religious Gateways, or encourage community service, motivates them to volunteer.

Chapter 2

THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Religion and Adolescent Volunteering – Literature Review

Sociological research is sparse on how religious factors, such as church attendance, impact adolescent volunteers and on the nature of community service done by adolescents. This study lends additional evidence to existing literature that shows religion plays a significant role in increasing the level of adolescent volunteerism.

Social institutions – peers, schools, parents, the media and courts due to legal obligations – act as Gateways to encourage adolescents to volunteer. Religious involvement and orientation also encourages volunteering. Studies support the idea that religious organizations in association with other known Gateways – peers, school requirements, and parental involvement and encouragement – work together to further promote teenage volunteer involvement.

The research clearly demonstrates that most teens volunteer because they are invited to do so or because they are encouraged by others. The literature points to five main social institutions – parents, peers, schools, court mandates and religion – that serve as the means or Gateways by which teenagers are invited or encouraged to volunteer. One of the main contributions of this study is that it will document what teens themselves have to say about why they volunteer. Their responses will provide an opportunity to see how well the actual experiences of teen volunteers match and validate current theories.

Religion has been shown to be a primary social agent that encourages pro-social behavior in adolescents. Jaynes (2001) demonstrates that religious commitments tend to be associated with pro-social adolescent behaviors, such as higher educational outcomes and lower rates of drug and alcohol abuse. Jaynes does not examine how religious commitments affect volunteerism. However, his research does suggest that religion might encourage adolescents to volunteer if they perceive it as a pro-social behavior.

A few studies have been conducted that demonstrate religion has a positive effect on the volunteer behaviors of adolescents. These studies directly link religious involvement of teenagers with their level of community service. They show that teenage involvement with churches and other religious institutions is correlated positively with increased levels of community service.

Hodgkinson and Weitzman (1990) present data that documents a connection between religious organizations and adolescent volunteerism. They make distinctions between religious and non-religious adolescents and volunteering and non-volunteering adolescents. They draw their data from a 1990 Gallup nationally representative sample of 301 teenagers, ages 14 to 17 in which adolescents were asked about their volunteer behaviors and about school-sponsored community service programs.

The authors find that the majority of teens volunteer through their schools (52 percent) or through their church or synagogue (50 percent). 47 percent of volunteering teens in the study first learn about volunteer opportunities through organizations, with 64 percent of them citing religious institutions. One of the most cited reasons teens offer for why they volunteer is for religious concerns (18.6 percent). This research is corroborated

by Smith (1999) who also finds that students who participate more in religious activities are more likely to volunteer and participate in community service.

Significantly, Hodgkinson and Weitzman also cite that teens are four times more likely to volunteer again when asked than when they were not. Thus, the authors find that teenagers' engagement in volunteer activities is highly dependent on their being asked to volunteer and that religious institutions have a high success rate when it comes to encouraging teenagers to volunteer.

Hodgkinson and Weitzman (1990) demonstrate that religion impacts the number of teenagers who volunteer. The majority of religious teens (62 percent) reported that they volunteer, whereas only 44 percent of non-religious teens did. Attendance at religious services has a great impact on volunteering behavior. "The proportion of respondents who volunteered increased with the regularity of attendance at religious services." (22-23) Seventy-three percent of those who attend religious services weekly volunteer compared with a thirty-four percent volunteer rate of those who do not attend at all. Their study helps to create a portrait of how religious organizations impact volunteering adolescents and draws distinctions between religious and non-religious adolescents. This portrait will be enhanced as any God Talk offered by teens in this study may illustrate how teens themselves see religion's role in their volunteer activities.

Trusty and Watts (1999) study how religious perceptions impact adolescent behaviors. Their data is gathered from a cross section of 12,992 high school seniors through the 1992 National Education Longitudinal Study. The authors find that positive perceptions of religion and frequent attendance at religious activities are related to more frequent volunteer work and more time spent on extracurricular activities.

Their study points to religion's probable role as a means to positively engage adolescents with social institutions. However, the authors express concern that religiosity "may only serve as a proxy for an underlying attachment or nonattachment to society-including parents, school, and religion-and to the norms fostered by those institutions." (38) The current study offers the possibility of addressing this question, since it directly tests the contributions of structural ("Gateways") and cultural ("God Talk") factors.

A major weakness of the Trusty and Watts study is that it does not discuss whether or not volunteer work was done due to religious views or obligations. The current study allows for adolescent to specify and discuss the various motivations, religious or not, the teens have for volunteering.

Youniss and McLellan and Yates (1999) offer further evidence of the link between religion and community service. They demonstrate that adolescents who take religion more seriously are also more likely to be actively involved in community service. They compare data drawn from three nationally representative surveys, including an annual survey of seniors called Monitoring the Future and a 1996 national Gallup survey (Nolin et al) that sampled 25, 726 teens.

Results across the surveys consistently show that one-half to two-thirds of religious teenagers claim to have done service per year with about a third claiming to have done service on a regular basis. "This is a strong and stable finding since about 74% of students who said that religion was important to them were doing service monthly or more frequently in each decade while only about 25% of their non-religious peers were doing so." (246) Further, the authors discover that involvement in church-sponsored service makes it more likely that youth will adopt the religious rationales of those

particular churches. Finally, adolescents cite that “church groups” stand as “a source of opportunity for service.” (247)

The study’s main weakness stems from the limitations inherent in using nationally representative samples. These include lack of uniformity between the national samples, resulting in differences “in the year of assessment, in the specific question asked, and in the age of the respondents.” (246) The current study will address these issues as it draws from a single sample within the same year and asks teenagers a set of uniform questions. The NSYR sample also created an arena in which teenagers were able to directly report what activities they engaged in and to tell what specific Gateways led them to volunteer.

Sundeen and Raskoff (2000) examine the “ports of entry” (what I term “Gateways”) and obstacles to volunteering encountered by teenagers using a 1995 national survey of 1,070 teenagers, ages 12-17. The greatest proportion (40 percent) of teens gain their “port of entry” into volunteering opportunities through being asked by someone. Significantly, 23 percent of these teenagers were asked to volunteer by someone at their church or synagogue. Among the main obstacles that prevent teens from volunteering are not being asked and lack of knowledge of how to volunteer.

Religion may positively affect the construction of a civic identity among adolescents who perform volunteer or community service. Teens may develop an orientation that encourages them to reference religious terms and concepts. “Members of supportive groups must know how to talk about themselves, about their deeply personal feelings and experiences. . . . these groups have norms for talking and listening, and their members have expectations about what a good group will be like . . . [participate] in a

culture, a learned, shared way of speaking and acting.” (Lichterman, p.9) Adolescents nurture a sense of self as they perform volunteer work or community service.

Youniss and Yates (1997) have done extensive research on how religious attendance and other religious factors influence adolescent participation in volunteer activities. Their research involves a year-long study of community service performed by a senior class of predominantly Black middle-class youth from Washington D.C.

The authors argue that youth turn to community service as a means to participate in their social worlds. Engaged in community service, adolescents are able to work with others as they try to resolve social problems. Community service enables adolescents to have a sense of agency, a sense that they are making a difference, and a sense of social responsibility and concern for society’s well-being.

Youniss and Yates find that students report that service opportunities are made available through institutional memberships (churches and schools) and interpersonal relationships (parents and friends who did service with them). Youth participation in voluntary work demonstrates their willingness to be involved in helping others when they “could otherwise act primarily for their own satisfaction.” (5)

This thesis examines the language and Gateways utilized by adolescents with respect to how religion influences volunteering or community service. I expect the vocabulary of teenagers to incorporate religious concepts and terms (“God Talk”) demonstrating how religion, directly or indirectly, promotes teenagers to volunteer. Teens may reference how religious institutions serve as Gateways, or avenues by which adolescents may be encouraged to perform community service. Or, their God Talk may allude to some general moral understanding of the positive benefits of volunteering.

Thus, it is important to assess how religious teenagers, in particular, discuss the relationship between their religious orientation and their community service. It is also important to assess how non-religious adolescents talk about their volunteer work to see if there are other factors at work determining which adolescents volunteer in general.

God Beliefs and God Talk

God Beliefs are defined as beliefs in and related to a “Force”, “God”, or “Higher Power.” God Beliefs may embody moral principles that serve as guides for human conduct. Many teenagers can readily identify their God Beliefs and see themselves as religious. They are able to reflect consciously on how religious ideas or concepts work in their lives. This may lead them to use God Talk as they discuss how their religious involvement and/or faith lead them to volunteer and take other social actions. However, some teens, including those who identify as non-religious, may draw upon God Beliefs or use God Talk without fully articulating or acknowledging how much God Beliefs may be present or how much they may influence social actions, such as volunteering. God Talk may emerge in an environment where moral principles might be discussed publicly but not necessarily attributed to God Beliefs. Ideas about God might resonate with adolescents on core levels but not be processed. Consequently, God Talk may be found in the discourse of both religious and non-religious adolescents.

The presence of common moral conceptions (God Beliefs) may lead to a common religious or moral discourse (God Talk) among adolescents as they discuss their volunteering experiences. Certainly, general moral beliefs being present does not mean that there will not be dissension or arguments about what moral principles humans should live by or how to prioritize them, especially in the U.S. where there is an abundance of

diverse perspectives and religions. “A common culture does not mean that we are all the same. Common cultures are normally riven with argument, controversy, and conflict.” (Bellah, p.620) Thus, common God Beliefs, acknowledged or not, interpreted in similar or diverse ways, may underlay God Talk exhibited in adolescent discourse. Many social theorists argue that it is a vital part of the human experience to contend with universal religious ideas (God Beliefs).

There are social theories that posit the existence of universal moral systems that may form a vital part of all human experiences. Emile Durkheim’s theory, one of the earliest scientific studies of religion, presents this perspective. Durkheim describes universal “elements” that form the core of all human religions. He argues that religion or its functional equivalent is at the core of society. He defines religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practice which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.” (1912, 62) Religion is a social creation not necessarily divinely inspired.

Religious beliefs, he asserts, all contain common elements or categories. These beliefs stem from collective representations that have their origins in social groups.

Religious presentations are collective representations which express collective realities; the rites are a manner of acting which take rise in the midst of assembled groups and which are destined to excite, maintain, or recreate certain mental states in these groups. So if the categories are of religious origin, they ought to participate in this nature common to all religious facts; they should be social affairs and the product of collective thought. (47)

For Durkheim, religion is a social formation that originates in collective human experiences, such as family and community. “Religion is a shared experience of the sacred – of, we might say, the presence of some other, more grand dimension in relation to which we humans, when conscious of ourselves as gathered in society, experience life as limited.” (Lemert, p.248)

Durkheim argues that every social group has a religious dimension and there are universal elements contained in each religion. He states

At the foundation of all systems of belief and all cults there ought to be a certain number of fundamental representations or conceptions and of ritual attitudes which, in spite of the diversity of forms which they have taken, have the same objective significance and fulfill the same functions everywhere. These are the permanent elements which constitute that which is permanent and human in religion; they form all the objective contents of the idea which is expressed when one speaks of *religion* in general. (17)

These elements or collective representations should be found in all human societies.

Society creates religious symbols. Religion is a human construct created to allow social order to be maintained and to provide meaning to individuals. It serves the purpose of uniting society, or what Durkheim referred to as the “moral community.” As formal religion and religious organizations would decline in importance, Durkheim argued that secular forms in society would continue to maintain the social order.

“Durkheim’s theory of society . . . assumes that even the secularized social order must have the function the sacred had in traditional societies.” (Lemert, p.252) The current study may support Durkheim’s position on religion. If there common elements in society that point towards religious ideas exist, as Durkheim suggests, religious and non-religious teens might utilize similar religious language or God Talk even in secular social arenas.

Some social theories focus particularly on the possibility of common religious ideas within particular nations. These universal “God Beliefs” may be part of the human fabric of existence. Robert Bellah (1967), for instance, believes all countries have civil religions. He states, “I am convinced that every nation and every people come to some form of religious understanding.” (1) Current evidence supports Bellah’s argument:

The staying power of even traditional religious beliefs is remarkable. The United States (with 90 percent of those surveyed in 1989 believing in God) ranks with the Republic of Ireland at the top of so-called modern societies with astonishingly strong indices of religious adherence. Even those European nations known for their disregard of traditional doctrine (notably, Germany,

Norway, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and Denmark) turn out to be more strongly religious when belief in “God as a spirit or life force” is substituted for . . . God. (Lemert, p.241)

The presence of God Beliefs across the modern, secular world certainly gives weight to Durkheim’s notion of universal religious elements being part of human life.

Bellah focuses on the presence of religion in the U.S. and contends that there is an “American civil religion” operating across the nation. He asserts

. . . there actually exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion in America. . . this religion – or perhaps better, this religious dimension – has its own seriousness and integrity and requires the same care in understanding that any other religious does. (1)

Although this civil religion contains general principles borrowed from Christianity, it remains its own distinct entity. For example, Bellah offers, although presidents may refer to God in their inaugural speeches, none of them mentions Christ.

The general idea of God found in “American civil religion” relates to law and order. This God has a special interest in the U.S. and plays an active role in the nation’s public life. Bellah argues that “American civil religion” shapes how the nation sees itself and interprets events that happen in relation to the country as having divine purpose.

Bellah’s major contribution . . . was to reveal civil religion operating . . . above the plane of formal religious organizations. Bellah very insightfully showed how religious symbols and discourse, appropriated and abstracted from the Judeo-Christian tradition, are mobilized at a national civic level for purposes of national order, unity, and purpose. (Smith and Denton, pp.168-69)

“American civil religion” has its origins in religious beliefs that are commonly held by U.S. citizens. It is based on long-standing traditions of sectarian Protestants who became a dominant presence in the religious culture in the U.S. “What was so important about the Baptists, and other sectarians such as the Quakers, was the absolute centrality of religious freedom, of the sacredness of individual conscience in matters of religious belief.” (Bellah, 1998, p.617) Bellah states

Although matters of personal religious belief, worship, and association are considered to be strictly private affairs, there are, at the same time, certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share. These have played a crucial role in the development of American institutions and still provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, . . . expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals . . . (2)

The four basic tenets of civil religion are the existence of God, the existence of life after death, the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice, and intolerance towards religious intolerance. Religious freedom along with the other personal freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment was the foundation of our nation's identity. It formed the "deepest core of our tradition, the sacredness of the conscience." (Bellah, 1998, p.622)

Bellah claims that civil religion may face a crisis as it confronts the changing meanings of "God", which is the religion's central symbol. "The meaning of 'God' is by no means so clear or obvious. There is no formal creed in the civil religion." (1967, 13)

According to Bellah, civil religion inspires a sense of national unity and the common use of religious terms in social and political spheres. This study of the NSYR interviews may locate the presence of elements of "American civil religion" in the speech of U.S. teens.

Finally, a number of social theories focus on widespread religious norms or ideas that may be found within particular groups categorized by social demographics (e.g., race). In this vein, Denton and Smith, the primary investigators of the NSYR project, offer a general thesis about teenage religion and spirituality in the U.S. "We suggest that the de facto dominant religion among contemporary U.S. teenagers is what we might well call 'Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.'" (p.162)

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is a set of beliefs, largely influenced by Judeo-Christian traditions, that circulates among adolescents. It "exists, with God's aid, to help people succeed in life, to make them feel good, and to help them get along with others – who otherwise are different – in school, at work, on the team, and in other routine areas

of life.” (169) With echoes of Rousseau’s “civil religion” conception, Smith and Denton offer (162-63) what they think is the creed of this religion:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions
3. The central goal in life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

Smith and Denton find that teens might not be fully aware or conscious of how religion works in their lives. God Beliefs might be present but teens might not fully understand how they are shaping their choices and experiences.

Most teens seem simply to accept religion as a taken-for-granted aspect or presence that mostly *operates in the background* of their lives. Most exhibit real but definitely limited recognition of religion’s influence, importance, or distinction in their experiences. (129)

Not only is it a challenge to connect religion to their experiences and activities, but it is also a challenge for teens to be able to engage in religious discourse (God Talk) about them. They seem to be at a loss for words when it asked to describe their beliefs. “In our in-depth interviews with U.S. teenagers, we also found the vast majority of them to be incredibly inarticulate about their faith, their religious beliefs and practices, and its meaning or place in their lives.” (131) This apparent inability to express God Talk might have to do with how adolescents experience or approach religion in their lives.

Adolescents appear to compartmentalize religion as one of many things to do or to fit into their busy schedules. “Most teens seem content to live with a low-visibility religion that operates somewhere in the mental background of their lives.” (137) The authors offer that teens do not seem to be getting enough exposure to religious teachings that can instruct them or to role models who can show them how to articulate their faiths and how it works in their daily lives.

Religious language is like any other language: to learn how to speak it, one needs first to listen to native speakers using it a lot, and then one needs plenty of practice at speaking it oneself. Many U.S. teenagers, it appears, are not getting a significant amount of such exposure and practice and so are simply not learning the religious language of their faith traditions. (133)

God Talk might be found to be more present among those teens who have had more exposure and practice with religious organizations and religious culture.

According to the authors, Moral Therapeutic Deism might not simply be a teenage phenomenon. They assert that this is a faith widely practiced by the adults in our society. As such, teens seem to be adhering to and accommodating the adult religion, especially parental religion, they see being practiced around them. “Our religiously conventional adolescents seem to be merely absorbing and reflecting religiously what the adult world is routinely modeling for and inculcating in its youth.” (166) Thus, this inability to articulate how religion affects their daily lives might be a national phenomenon that adolescents are simply mirroring. Adults and teens may be unable to articulate their God Beliefs by expressing God Talk on a consistent, coherent basis.

Adolescents may be unable to articulate their God Beliefs partly as a result of a lack of adult role models to show them how to discuss their beliefs. Roth (1997) argues that Americans search for ways to express core values and beliefs. Religious discourse is mainly kept out of the public sphere and is largely confined to the private sphere. “We Americans are too often reluctant to share and evaluate our deepest feelings and experiences, thoughts and hopes, commitments and loyalties about what deserves to matter most, about what if anything, ought to be held sacred, and about our sense of the whole.” (51) Religious discourse needs to be examined and discussed to discern what systems of morality are present. This study draws from the NSYR interviews to see how prevalent God Beliefs and God Talk are among adolescents.

Commenting on the generality of moral beliefs and the borrowing of religious terms to shape their daily lives, Smith and Denton compare Moral Therapeutic Deism to Bellah's American civil religion. "Like American civil religion, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism appropriates, abstracts, and revises doctrinal elements from mostly Christianity and Judaism for its own purpose." (169) Moral Therapeutic Deism and American civil religion may both serve as national visions but they apparently do not serve the same purposes. Smith and Denton assert Moral Therapeutic Deism's

social function is not to unify and give purpose to the nation at the level of civic affairs. Rather, it functions to foster subjective well-being in its believers and to lubricate interpersonal relationships in the local public sphere.(169)

Bellah's American civil religion was widely critiqued as being dominated by Protestant culture and for being too chauvinistic to truly represent the country's diverse population and its array of beliefs. Moral Therapeutic Deism, on the other hand, may be a better "fit" for where the nation stands currently. "The cultural influence of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism may also be nudging American civil religion in a 'softer,' more inclusive, ecumenical, and multireligious direction." (170) The expression of God Beliefs through God Talk may serve as one means for teenagers to find common language to connect with each other across multiple worlds.

God Beliefs, or the ideas that there is a "God", a "Force", or a "Higher Power" at work, along with the moral principles associated with these beliefs may have multiple origins. Theories about the origins of these beliefs and how they become manifested in human endeavors has been and probably will continue to be debated among social scientists who study religion. Determining the origin of any God Beliefs held by the NSYR adolescents is beyond the scope of the present study. However, the presence of God Talk in teenage discourse about volunteering might be evidence that adolescents are

actively applying God Beliefs in their lives. “Religion really does matter in the lives of teenagers, . . . however indistinct and inconsiderable it may sometimes seem on the face of it – especially as teenagers themselves describe it.” (Smith and Denton, p.129) Even when teenagers are not able to articulate how God Beliefs lead to social actions, such as volunteering, any God Beliefs present should influence the level of God Talk in their discourse and might affect volunteering levels.

Gateways

"Gateways" are entry points to volunteering or community service activities. These Gateways are mentioned by those adolescents in the NSYR data who narrate how they got involved with volunteering. Thus, if the teenager volunteered there was always a Gateway mentioned. I separate these Gateways into two categories: non-religious and religious. Prior research conducted on adolescent volunteerism points to five main Gateways that are typically used by teens. These five Gateways are peers, parents, school, legal obligations, and religious institutions. (Yates and Youniss, 1996; Sundeen and Raskoff) The first four Gateways are typically non-religious entry points to volunteerism. However, the literature says these non-religious Gateways often work in conjunction with religious Gateways. Further, studies have demonstrated that the presence of peers, parents, or schools serving as non-religious Gateways combined with religious institutions serving as Gateways have been linked to an increase in volunteerism among adolescents.

Peer influence is an important Gateway to consider when looking at how adolescents' involvement in community service is correlated with religious affiliation. Studies explore the role of peer groups on the level of pro-social activities, such as

volunteering, done by adolescents. Campbell found that the influence of the peer group significantly affects an adolescent's level of political involvement. "The rewards of conformity with the peer group's position can therefore be had at low psychological cost." (342) For those adolescents who are highly involved in political activities, agreement with peer opinion is sought. Since "political questions are more central to the individual's identity, he is more likely to seek validation in this area, from peers as well as others." (342) Campbell's findings have significance because similar peer dynamics may be at work with adolescents who become involved in community service. Particularly, if religious affiliation correlates with volunteerism, peer influence among religious adolescents may impact their levels of involvement.

Sundeen and Raskoff find family and religious socialization are among the strongest predictors of whether a teenager volunteers. The parental effect on adolescents in terms of religious belief is significant. "Virtually all research has identified parents as the most important source of religious influence, even into adulthood." (Ozorak, 1989, 449) Adolescent volunteering has been shown to increase with parental involvement in volunteer activities. Teenagers who have parents who volunteer and who attend religious services are more likely to be connected to volunteer opportunities through organizational practices. The current study may support this research as teenagers discuss how the social institutions of family and religion inspire them to volunteer.

Volunteering by teenagers has increased as more schools require volunteer or community service. Yates and Youniss (1996) discuss adolescent volunteer experiences that originate within a school context. Using empirical data from a school-based community service program, Yates and Youniss analyzed essays written by 132 students

about their volunteer work experiences. The sample they studied came from a population of teenagers enrolled in a high school religion course on social justice.

While this study gathers specific responses from teenagers, the characteristics of their population bias the sample in terms of comparing non-religious and religious adolescents. The sample represents a self-selected pool of subjects exposed to teachers who introduced them to reflections on religious teachings on social justice. My research addresses this bias as it draws from a survey that features a general pool of adolescents who may or may not have been exposed to religious teachings.

This current study will further contribute to the literature on how religion interacts with adolescent volunteerism. I examine how teens discuss their volunteer experiences to see if there are any differences in the rates of volunteerism between those teens who use God Talk and/or talk about their involvement with religious Gateways than those teens who do not use religious terms and/or who are not members of religious organizations that serve as Gateways. My goal is to discern whether or not there is a qualitative or significant effect for those teens employing God Talk and participating in religious Gateways that may be linked with these teenagers volunteering more.

Overall, I expect to find that the basic way teens talk about their volunteering experiences is fairly similar. However, a major difference in the ways teens discuss their volunteering experiences may emerge in terms of the degree of religious language employed. The presence of God Beliefs and affiliation with pro-volunteer religious organizations may increase the amount of God Talk, or religious language, in the discourse of teens who volunteer. God Talk and exposure to religious organizations that encourage community service may affect the level of adolescent volunteerism.

Volunteerism among adolescents has been on the rise recently. “Volunteering for community activities among adolescents . . . seems to be at record high levels.” (McLeod, 2000, 47) This study may demonstrate the importance of religion as a factor linked to the increase in the rate of adolescent volunteers. The language of teens may indicate how religion works to increase volunteering. Thus, I examine how teenagers speak about their volunteering experiences to see if any religious terms or concepts are present.

Religion often serves as a major socializing agent. This study offers a way to see how religion influences adolescents. It allows a way to get an “inside look” into how teens interpret and discuss the role of religion in their volunteer experiences. I will examine how teens talk about how religious and/or moral beliefs may be related to their involvement (or lack thereof) in community service. The presence of God Talk and any discussions about religious Gateways may reveal interaction effects between the religious involvement of teens and their volunteerism.

Chapter 3

METHODS

NSYR – Interviews

This paper examines God Talk and Gateways, religious and non-religious, and how they affect adolescent volunteerism. For my research I code and analyze the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) interviews. Particularly, I focus on interview data from adolescents who respond to questions about community service and religious (or non-religious) orientations and involvement. From this study, a picture emerges of the level of God Talk and Gateways to volunteering utilized by the teenagers.

The NSYR interview data was gathered during in-depth personal interviews with 267 of the study's teens.¹ The interviews provide extended follow-up discussions to the NSYR's telephone survey of 3,370 adolescents. The telephone survey and the personal interviews asked teenagers about their religious, spiritual, family, and social lives.

The interviewees were selected from the telephone survey respondents using a stratified quota sample. It is not a nationally representative sample. Instead, the NSYR interviewed teens who represented a range of demographic and religious characteristics in order to draw substantive conclusions about the variety of teen experiences in the U.S. Therefore, the interview sample was drawn to achieve a balance of teenagers, taking into account the following demographic characteristics: region, urban/suburban/rural, age,

¹This section is adapted with permission from Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

sex, race, household income, religion, and school type. The personal interviews included teens between the ages of 13 and 18.

The majority of the 267 NSYR interviews conducted were matched on gender and race. For instance, all of the black teens in the sample were interviewed by black interviewers. Interviewers received instruction sheets to indicate the teens that were considered high priority contacts. High priority contacts were those with characteristics that were more difficult to complete, such as minority religions, lower incomes, minority races, etc. In this way, the cells of the quota sample were filled.

Using a standard call script provided by NSYR, interviewers made contact with potential interviewee households. Interviewers identified themselves as researchers with the “National Youth Study.” The full name of the research project was not used in order to prevent any bias by identifying religion as a key focus of the study. Also, to reduce bias in the answers of the teens, interviewers were instructed to avoid divulging revealing information about their personal beliefs and commitments.

Interviews were conducted in public settings that provided confidentiality for the teens. Interviews took place in study rooms at local libraries, restaurants, coffee shops, mall food courts, public parks and school cafeterias, classrooms or libraries. Interviewers did not attempt to “relate” to teens by dressing in “trendy” fashions. Instead, they built rapport by presenting themselves as professional researchers with a sincere interest in teenagers’ lives. At the close of the interview, teens were given a \$30 cash incentive for their participation and in appreciation of their time and effort.

There were some key Human Participant protection concerns with these interviews. One concern was about obtaining proper consent. Interviewers were required

to obtain verbal and written informed consent from both parent and teen before conducting interviews. Both parents and teens were also informed that the teens could skip any questions and terminate the interview at anytime for whatever reason.

An additional concern involved the issue of confidentiality. It was essential to protect the confidentiality of teens' answers with respect to their parents. To ensure that teens were able to speak openly and honestly, interviewers took a number of precautions. For example, interviewers made sure to be very clear with parents that they could not listen to the interviews or be in close proximity while interviews were taking place. Also, interviewers rearranged question orderings or postponed sensitive questions if and when there were other people nearby who could overhear them. Finally, interviewers were trained to treat all documentation and audio files as confidential and to handle them so as to minimize any risk of teens having their interview responses identified by others.

The demographic breakdown of the 267 NSYR personal interviews conducted is shown in Table 1. With the exception of age, the table reflects the demographic information that was collected at the time of the telephone survey. The age listed is the age of the teen at the time of the personal interview.

Coding Scheme

In this paper I examine and codify the "Volunteering and Organized Activities" section of the NSYR interviews. Initially, I acquire information from the NSYR interviews to code basic demographics (age, sex, race). Then, based on my reading and analyzing of a random sample of NSYR interviews from the "Volunteering and Organized Activities" section, I create a coding scheme based on the range of responses given by the teens as they were questioned about their volunteer experiences.

Table 1
NSYR Personal Interview Demographics

GENDER	N	RELIGION	
Male	142	Protestant	131
Female	125	Adventist	3
		Assemblies Of God	1
		Baptist	41
AGE		Bible Church	1
13	17	Brethren	1
14	53	Christian Or Just Christian	36
15	54	Church Of Christ	2
16	54	Church Of The Nazarene	1
17	58	Congregationalist	3
18	31	Episcopalian	1
		Evangelical	1
RACE		Lutheran	8
White	174	Methodist	14
Hispanic	39	Non-Denominational	6
Black	37	Pentecostal	3
Asian	8	Presbyterian	9
Native American	3	Catholic	41
Islander	1	Mormon	21
Mixed	2	Jewish	18
Other	3	Buddhist	3
		Muslim	2
SCHOOL TYPE		Jehovah's Witness	2
Public	196	Hindu	2
Private	47	Christian Science	1
Home Schooled	20		
Magnet Or Charter		Eastern Orthodox	1
School	2		
Not Going To		Native American	1
School/Dropped Out	2	Pagan Or Wiccan	1
		Don't Know	4
		Not Religious	39
		Total Interviews	267

39	Not Religious	27	Religious Not-Christian
4	Don't Know	197	Religious Christian-related

From the existing literature I expect to find that the teenagers will refer to a set of factors, such as parents who are active volunteers, which work to encourage them to volunteer. However, I remain open to what the adolescents themselves have to say about how they feel and think about volunteering. I code pertinent information to see if I can discern any patterns that could be applied as I construct a coding scheme.

The coding scheme I create allows me to determine how many adolescents volunteer and to generate patterns for non-religious and religious teens. It also helps me analyze the vocabulary and discourse of adolescents to locate God Talk and the presence of religious Gateways. Using the coding scheme I develop a picture of the “volunteering adolescent”, which although not generalizable or nationally representative, offers an idea of how teens – religious and non-religious – who volunteer conceive, perceive, and discuss how religious orientations and affiliations affect their volunteerism.

During the “Volunteering and Organized Activities” part of the NSYR interviews, adolescents were asked a series of questions to collect data about their feelings, perspectives, and level of involvement in volunteering and community service. The main question asked was “Are you involved in any volunteer work or community service?” This question allows me to sort out and code which teenagers volunteered, currently or in their past, from those who had never volunteered. I also catalogue what volunteer activities the teenagers performed.

If an affirmative response was offered to the main question, then follow-up questions were asked. One of these follow-up questions was “How did you get involved in that?” This question is instrumental to this study because it produced responses indicating what Gateways teens used to volunteer. Gateways indicate the means by

which adolescents were introduced to or encouraged to volunteer or do community service. Thus, if the teenager volunteered there was always a Gateway mentioned. I code all of the entry points mentioned by the adolescents as they narrated how they got involved with volunteering under the “Gateway” category.

I also code whether the Gateways exercised are religious or non-religious. For example, “church” and “youth groups” are counted as religious Gateways and “schools” and “peers” are counted as non-religious Gateways. For times when a response seems like it could fit into either or both categories, such as “Catholic school,” I sort the response into the religious Gateways category. Gateways that teenagers referred to include school requirements, parental encouragement, court or legal obligations, church or other faith-based organizations promoting activities, peer influence, and self-initiated activities. All religious Gateways are automatically counted as God Talk.

Two more follow-up questions also offer data that I sort through to filter out God Talk. These were “What motivated you [to volunteer]?” and “Do you think your [religious faith or] moral beliefs have anything to do with how you think or act when it comes to volunteering and community service?” Dimensions, such as motivation, which may demonstrate how teen volunteerism and religion interact, are captured by these questions. I code the religious terms like “faith” or concepts (God Talk) referred to during the teenagers’ responses.

The category “Motivations” proves valuable in that God Talk may be offered as teenagers discuss why they did or did not volunteer. Some of the reasons teenagers provide for why they volunteered are for their career (“to gain work experience”), for college (“looks good on transcripts”; “for scholarships”), to help someone (“those who

are less fortunate”), because people asked, because of their faith (to be a good person; to serve God), to “give back to the community,” and “because friends do it.” Other responses included for “self-improvement”, for “good karma”, to show “gratitude for the things they have”, “to feel good”, “to meet people” and to “not be bored.”

As I codify the “Volunteering and Organized Activities” sections, I encounter references to discussions that took place in earlier sections of the interview about volunteer experiences. When this occurs, I read the entire NSYR interview to locate these earlier conversations and codify this information as well. When there are multiple responses provided for any given category, all responses are coded.

There are strong justifications for drawing upon the personal interviews to address my research questions. First, the interviews offer a way to measure what volunteer activities teenagers engage in due to religious or non-religious factors. I sort and analyze the language used by adolescents into religious discourse (God Talk) and non-religious discourse. Also, during the interviews, teenagers discuss the “Gateways” or entry points that they utilized in order to volunteer. Coding the particular Gateways the teenagers report allows me to measure the effect of religious affiliation.

Through analyzing the data, I examine how teenagers, religious and non-religious, compare when it comes to referencing God Talk or citing religious Gateways. With respect to my research questions, I expect to find that a significant number of the religious teens who volunteered will offer that the Gateway they use is their religious organization or will offer God Talk in reference to how their faith or religious commitment moves them to volunteer. Also, I look at the interview data to see if any of the non-religious Gateways – school, peers, parents, etc. – considered in prior research to

affect teen volunteerism are also mentioned by the teenagers themselves. This information provides the context in which volunteering occurred or did not occur. Further, the data collected provides direct responses as to how much God Talk and how often religious Gateways were used by the adolescents. Thus, codifying the personal interviews produces data to address my research concerns.

To illustrate the process of coding an interview I offer some examples of the types of responses teenagers had to the questions asked about their volunteer experiences. I also give examples of God Talk in the discourse I code. The next two selections present discourse from both a religious teenager and a nonreligious teenager to show the variety of data available. Whereas I edit the interviewers' comments and questions, the adolescents' responses are not edited.

The first account is from an interview with a fifteen-year-old black male, a Baptist, who did not volunteer. However, when asked, "Do you think people have an obligation to help others or not?" his response clearly incorporated religious discourse:

They, well **it says in the Bible to help your fellow man**. Don't turn away. You know, bad, good, don't turn away your fellow, you know, don't turn away people who ask for things. You know if a person comes up to you and asks for a couple of change, I'll be like if I have it I'll probably give it to them. You know, **it depends on if the devil is trying to, if the devil's getting to me that day**. Cause then, I'm not in a sharing mood.

More God Talk was presented when he gave his opinion on whether or not teenagers should be involved in volunteer work, he said:

Well it depends; they're not obligated to be. No. They help in their own way. **God never said that you had to join a group** in order to go save some whales or something or just to give to the needy or something. **He says you know, give;** don't turn your fellow man away. And **just give and he'll bless you** twice as much.

The second example of discourse involves a sixteen-year-old, non-religious Asian male. Although this non-religious teenager did not volunteer, when asked what his motivation for volunteering would be, he answered:

I would do it because it just seems like a good thing to do and it helps people.

The Gateways for volunteering he cited were his school and the National Honor Society:

I: Is it required at your school?

R: No, well it's required for some things like the National Honor Society.

Finally, the interviewer asked him why it would be important to encourage teenagers to volunteer. He said:

“Um, perhaps because it would get people in the habit of caring and thinking about other people.”

This interview illustrates that some non-religious adolescents may articulate some clear moral principles around the issue of volunteering. Some of these teens may also draw upon religious discourse. Given the importance of religion with respect to the history and traditions of this nation, non-religious teenagers may use religious language or vocabulary as they discuss their morality and motivations with respect to volunteerism. Religious discourse might be pervasive enough in our culture as to have an indirect influence on non-religious teens and a direct influence on religious teens. As Roth notes, talk about religion in civil discourse is “unavoidable because religious issues so deeply penetrate our national life.” (46) As we try to attach meaning to or express how we feel about public events, we often draw upon the language of religion.

There are a few limitations when using the NSYR personal interviews to address research questions. This study will take shape as a quantitative analysis of a qualitative data set. It is not a nationally representative sample and this makes it difficult to generalize the responses of the adolescents who were interviewed. Consequently, a major weakness of this study is that its descriptive design prevents any causal conclusions about the link between religion and volunteerism.

Additionally, there are measurement concerns. There are three ways in which information about religious affiliation was collected and coded by the NSYR. One way is what was reported by the interviewer during the telephone survey. Another way is what was reported by the teenager during the follow-up personal interview process. Finally, there is the religious tradition in which the teenager was raised that was reported by the teenager and his or her parent during the telephone survey.

Adolescents are the most accurate source of what is going on in their own lives. Therefore, I rely upon what the teenagers said during the personal interviews about their religious or non-religious affiliations as the way that I sort the teenagers into religious and non-religious categories. This approach is preferable because some teenagers may have changed their religious affiliations during the interval between when the telephone surveys were conducted and when the personal interviews were done. Additionally, this method serves to alleviate interviewer errors made as data was collected via the telephone surveys. I code what teens say about religious affiliations and involvement as God Talk.

A further limitation of this study is there is missing data. Although 267 personal interviews were conducted, there are actually only 259 personal interviews available to be examined. Unfortunately, eight of the personal interviews were unable to be transcribed due to sound and recording complications. As I coded the interview data, I noticed that another seven interviews could not be used for my study because the “Volunteer and Organized Activities” were missing. These interviews were discarded because no volunteer information was collected either because the recording device froze or because the interviewer did not ask the teen this set of questions for various reasons, such as running out of time to do a complete interview.

Although there is data missing, the 252 remaining cases provide a large enough sample that may be used to discover how much the adolescents use God Talk and religious Gateways. Also, since the interviews are from a non-random sample no bias is introduced that was not already there. To document what teens say about how religion relates to their altruistic behavior will contribute to existing literature that shows religion has a positive effect on volunteering.

One more limitation of this study exists in the amount of questions contained in the NSYR questionnaire that center on how religion affects teenagers' lives. Adolescents may have been prompted by the interviewers to use God Talk or to think about how their religious beliefs influenced their volunteering. In these cases the teens may not be self-generating discourse about religion but may be prompted to consider the role of religion. The data in these cases still remains valuable in that it gives information about how teens see the role of their religious commitments when it comes to their volunteer experiences. It may prove even more valuable in some cases in that a lot of teenagers, religious or not, still claimed that religion played no role when it came to volunteering.

Despite these limitations, an analysis of the NSYR personal interviews to examine the link between religion and volunteerism proves valuable. Through discourse analysis I can determine how adolescents themselves view or interpret the role of religion in their volunteer experiences. Further, this study elucidates whether or not the presence of God Talk and religious Gateways increases volunteerism among adolescents.

Measuring Religiosity

I define "Religion" as "a belief in and acting upon beliefs associated with a 'connection,' a 'force,' 'God,' 'Higher Power,' 'Beings,' or 'concepts' that give one a

sense that mundane objective reality is impacted by supernatural elements.” To clarify further what I mean by “Religious” and how I identify which adolescents are “Religious”, I examine five different levels of teen responses represented in the data – Religious Association, God Belief, Spiritual or Religious Identification, Religious Attendance, and Change in Religious Beliefs Over Time. I examine these variables to assess the degree of religiosity present among the adolescents. I sort these teens into two categories: “religious,” representing Christians and non-Christians, and “non-religious”.

a. Religious Association:

I use and code the information gathered by the NSYR data set. At the top of every personal interview there are three categories given for religious identification purposes. The first category gives the religion of the teen in response to the survey question “What religion or denomination is the place where you go to religious services?” The second category offers the specific denomination of teens who are Protestant (e.g., “Baptist”). If the teen was Jewish or belonged to another religion that has no denominations, then the teen’s religion was specified again. If the teen’s Protestant religion has no denominations, then N/A or “Not Applicable” was marked. The third category lists the religion the teen said he or she belonged to during the interview. It answers the interview question “What religion, if any, do you consider yourself to be now?” I include all of this data in my coding scheme.

b. God Belief

Through an examination of the data in response to the question “Do you believe in God?” I note when teens claim to believe in “God”, a “Higher Power”, or a “Force”.

c. Spiritual or Religious Identification:

From the personal interviews I code the responses to the question “Do you think of yourself as a religious or spiritual person?” Whereas a response of “spiritual” may signal the absence of an affiliation with a particular religious group, the responses of the teens serve to signal whether or not the teen feels “spiritual” and/or is “religious” with regard to his or her belief structure. It is important to see if there are any religious language (God Talk) differentials offered by teens who felt “spiritual” but did not belong to a particular religion from those teens who are members of religious organizations.

d. Religious Attendance:

From the personal interviews I note the responses from the question “Do you go to religious services regularly?” Examining the answers to this question allows me to track discourse differentials between those teens who attended religious services regularly and those teens, religious or non-religious, who did not attend religious gatherings regularly.

e. Change in Religious Beliefs Over Time:

I code the responses from the question “Have your religious beliefs changed over time?” This let me determine if any non-religious teens were heavily influenced by religion because they were formally involved at some time in their past. This prior association might influence their vocabulary by introducing teens to religious concepts that might have surfaced when they talked about their volunteer experiences. This might affect the level of God Talk present in their discourse. Further, the God Talk present in the discourse of any religious teens who were converts might be distinct from the language of other teens, religious or non-religious, who were interviewed.

I code all the information related to these religious-oriented variables to develop a composite picture of religiosity for the teens in this study. I construct a table to indicate how this data relates to the presence of God Talk in adolescent discourse as a whole.

Chapter 4

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The research findings show a positive link between religion and volunteerism. As each religious variable – God Talk, Religious Gateway – becomes present there is a higher volunteer rate for adolescents. Most teens in the sample (225 or 89%) have a God Belief. However, not all of these teens volunteer. Only 153 or 61% of the teens in the NSYR data set volunteer. Adding “God Talk” the number of teenagers who volunteer is shown to increase. In other words, those teens with God Belief who use God Talk seem to volunteer more than teens with God Belief and no God Talk. Further, teens with God Talk volunteer more than teens with simply God Belief. Finally, when God Talk and Religious Gateways are both present, more teens volunteer.

Table 2 presents the basic demographics (sex, race, and religious affiliation) of the teens matched with levels of volunteerism and the presence of God Talk. The number of females with God Talk (58) was about equal to the amount of females (60) without it. There were more males (81) without God Talk than there were (53) using God Talk. Percentage-wise there were fairly equal rates of females and males using God Talk and females and males who did not use God Talk. More females and males in the data set volunteered than there were males and females who did not volunteer.

In terms of race demographics there appeared to be a fairly even distribution by race and ethnicity of teens using God Talk and teens not using God Talk. Overall, there

were slightly more teens from each racial and ethnic category who did not use God Talk than there were who did use God Talk. For most race and ethnic categories there was a fairly even amount of teens who volunteered and who did not volunteer with one exception. There were clearly more whites (108) who volunteered than there were whites (57) who did not volunteer.

With respect to the religious affiliation demographic there appeared to be a fairly equal amount of Christian teens using God Talk and Christian teens not using God Talk. One clear exception to this pattern was that a lot more Mormon teens (16) in the sample used God Talk than Mormon teens (2) who did not use God Talk. A lot more Mormon teens (13) in the sample used volunteered than Mormon teens (5) who did not volunteer. More Baptist teens did not volunteer than those who did volunteer. Interestingly, less Catholic teens used God Talk than those that did not use God Talk and more Catholic teens volunteered than Catholic teens who did not volunteer.

For most categories there were not enough adolescents from non-Christian religions in the sample to discern any noticeable patterns. For Jewish teens there was an even distribution of those who did use God Talk with those who did not use God Talk. A lot more Jewish teens (10) volunteered than Jewish teens (1) who did not volunteer.

As expected a lot more non-religious teens (39) – combining non-religious, non-affiliated, agnostic and atheist teens into one group – did not use God Talk than those non-religious teens (10) – again a combination of non-religious categories – who did use God Talk. However, it stands as significant that there was almost a 4-1 ratio of non-religious teens who did not express God Talk to those who did express God Talk. This may indicate that there are unarticulated God Beliefs present among these non-religious

Table 2: Demographics – Gender, Race and Religion of Adolescents – Matched with Presence of God Talk and Volunteer Activity Level

	God Talk	No God Talk	Volunteer	No Volunteer
Sex				
Female	58 (23%)	60 (24%)	75	43
Male	53 (21%)	81 (32%)	77	57
Race/Ethnicity				
Asian	3	3	2	4
Black	16	21	16	21
Hispanic	13	22	18	17
Native Am		3	3	
White	78	87	108	57
Other	1	5	5	1
Christian Religions				
Baptist	16	19	12	23
Brethren	1			1
Catholic	16	26	25	17
Christian/NonDenom	17	18	17	18
Church of Christ	2		2	
Church of God	1		1	
Church of Nazarene	1		1	
CMA	1		1	
Congregational	1		1	
Episcopalian		2	2	
Evangelical	2	2	3	1
Jehovah Witness	1	1	2	
Lutheran	6	4	5	5
Methodist	5	6	8	3
Mormon	16	2	13	5
Pentecostal	1	1	1	1
Pentecostal-Baptist		1		1
Presbyterian	3	2	4	1
7 th Day Adventist 2	2	1	2	1
Vineyard Fwship		1	1	
Non-Christian Religions				
Bahai/not rel	1			1
Buddhist	1	1		2
Hindu		1		1
Jewish	6	5	10	1
Muslim		1	1	
Path to Perfection		1		1
Personal Religion		1		1
Wiccan		1		1
Christian/Agnostic	1		1	
Jewish-Christian	1	2	2	1
Non-relig-Christian		1	1	
Agnostic	2	6	6	2
Not Rel/No Affltn	7	29	23	13
Athiest	1	4	5	
Don't Know		1	1	

teens that is manifesting itself through God Talk. At almost a 2-1 ratio, substantially more non-religious teens (34) volunteered than did not volunteer (15).

Table 3 represents the amount of God Talk cross-tabbed with the levels of volunteerism among the adolescents in the NSYR data set.

Table 3: Presence of God Talk Compared with Adolescent Volunteer Level

	God Talk Used	No God Talk Used	Total
Did/Does Volunteer	85 (77%)	67 (48%)	153 (61%)
Never Volunteered	26 (23%)	74 (52%)	99 (39%)
Total	111 (44%)	141 (56%)	252

A total of 153 adolescents in the sample said that they had volunteered or were engaging in volunteer activities at the time of the study. God Talk is associated with 85 of the teens who volunteered. 61% of the 252 teens in the sample volunteered. Out of the adolescents who do not use God Talk approximately 50 percent volunteer and approximately 50 percent do not volunteer. 77% of the teens who used God Talk also volunteered and 23% of the teens who used God Talk never volunteered. This means a total of 111 out of 252 teens, or 44%, used God Talk whether they volunteered or did not volunteer. Thus, there is a higher percentage of teens who use God Talk who volunteer than any other category.

It is possible that more community service and volunteering is being done than reported because some teens may not have seen their activities as volunteering. For example, one teen said he did not volunteer while relating that he performed community service as one of his church activities. Teen interpretations of their activities may have affected the amount of volunteer work reported.

A Chi Square Test of difference was done to determine significance. There is a significant link between the amount of God Talk present and teens volunteering.

Table 4 represents four of the measures – God Belief, Spiritual or Religious Identification, Religious Attendance, and Change in Religious Beliefs Over Time – that were used to indicate religiosity levels among the teens.

Table 4 – Measurements of Religiosity and Presence of God Talk

Religiosity Measure	God Talk Present	No God Talk Present
God Belief	103 (41%)	122 (48%)
No God Belief	6 (2%)	17 (7%)
Not Sure	2	2
Spiritual/Religious	88 (35%)	54 (21%)
Not Spiritual/Rel	22 (8%)	83 (33%)
Not Sure	0	2
No Answer	1	2
Attend Regularly	91 (36%)	67 (27%)
Not Attending Reg.	20 (8%)	74 (29%)
Beliefs Change	52 (21%)	48 (19%)
No Change	52 (21%)	80 (32%)
Not Asked	7	13

Religiosity and the presence of God Talk seemed to be measured well by three of these religious variables – God Belief, Spiritual/Religious Identification, and Regular Attendance at a Religious Institution. . Whether or not the beliefs of adolescents had changed over time did not seem to play a significant role in how religious they were or whether or not they used God Talk.

Religiosity Variables

A.) “Do You Believe in God?” category

89% of the teens had God Beliefs and 41% of those adolescents had God Talk in their discourse. Significantly, 48% of adolescents with God Belief did not engage in God

Talk. This result may indicate those teens Smith and Denton found who were not able to articulate their God Beliefs through God Talk. A lot less able to articulate how their faith may be a factor in their volunteer experiences. Significantly, there are 6 teens with no God Belief whose discourse contained God Talk. With no God Beliefs these teens still have to contend with a culture where God Beliefs and God Talk are omnipresent factors in their lives. For example, one non-religious Asian teen with God Talk offered:

I: Were you involved in any volunteer work or community service?

R: Ah, yes I was . . . I've been volunteering for the Red Cross for . . . three summers now . . .

R: . . . because my Dad ah, made me do it, that's when I first started but then . . . I was with the, the doctor service, ah, branch of the Red Cross so . . . there's stuff to do, for example, if there's like a apartment fire somebody will go and you know, help out the victims . . . and hand out drinks for the firefighters . . . and then we'd go around to different counties and do surveys of um, hurricane shelters . . .

I: Anything you liked about it in particular?

R: Um, it's, it's just to be able to help people and, and like I said, **I'm not a really religious person and I feel that the Red Cross is an organization that, that's not religious affiliated you know, it's not like some sort of church group that would still help people but then at the same time they're trying to spread their message of, of Christianity and, and I didn't, I didn't like that too much, so that's why, that's why I like the Red Cross, they're just, they're just purely there to help people.**

Thus, God Talk was not always used in a pro-religious way and non-religious teens often have to make choices to circumvent religious Gateways like church where they would most likely encounter God Beliefs and God Talk.

Significantly, many teenagers who responded that they were not religious or spiritual, claimed to have a belief in a God, a Higher Power, or a Force. 142 said they were spiritual or religious while 225 said they had God Beliefs. This result may indicate that a lot of teens with God Beliefs are choosing to remain unaffiliated with formal organized religion. This might be evidence that concurs with the research findings of Smith and Denton and Bellah who assert that there are religious/quasi-religious ideas

operating in U.S. society that are detached from formal religious traditions. The following quotes are examples of this dynamic:

"I am not religious or spiritual but I believe in God."

"I'm not highly religious but I have faith."

one teen said he has a 70% belief in God (I counted this response as a "yes".)

another teen identified as spiritual, not into organized religion, and believed in "a force at work"

The following 2 interviews illustrate how some adolescents seemed confused or unable to articulate their beliefs or felt they did not match the image of a God-believing teen. Documenting responses like these proved challenging.

Interview 1 – teen identifies as an atheist and claims to believe in a Higher Power

I: Okay. So do you consider yourself to be any religion?

R: Well, **I guess I'm atheist cause I don't really have a belief.**

I: Okay, do you think, do you consider yourself an atheist, or do you just consider yourself as not having any religion?

R: I consider myself as not really having any religion cause **I do believe there's a higher power**, but I don't believe that it's one, you know, one thing.

Interview 2 – teen does not feel she acts like someone who believes in God

I: Do you believe in God?

R: **I do, but I kind of don't. I mean, maybe I do**, but like if I do something, like, like if I, not honoring my mother, I'm not thinking oh God is gonna punish me, but and . . . **I don't do things that would reflect somebody who believed in God.**

I: Like what kinds of things wouldn't you—

R: Like praying. Going to church. Like my friend, she believes in God, she prays and she goes to church and I mean other people believe in God you know and they have to go to church and pray.

I: Are those the two things that make somebody, that distinguishes a religious person from a non-religious person?

R: No, I think, my brother believes in God but like I don't know, I think maybe people believe in God cause that's just the thing to do.

I counted both of these responses as affirmative ones because they claimed to believe in God or a Higher Power to some extent.

B.) "Are you Religious or Spiritual?" category

56% of the adolescents expressed that they were either spiritual or religious. 88 of the 142 teens (35%) who expressed that they were spiritual or religious used God Talk.

Significantly, 22 of the 105 teens (8%) who said they were neither spiritual nor religious used God Talk.

If adolescents answered “yes”, “spiritual”, “religious” or “both” I code their answers as an affirmative responses. I also incorporate responses such as "I'm just a Christian" and "kind of" as affirmative replies. If they answer “not really” or another form of negative response, I code their answer as a “no” to this question. A few teens appeared confused by the question. For example, one teen said “no” to the direct question and then said “yes” a few minutes later. She also said she believed in God and that she felt more religious than spiritual. Regardless of her initial “no”, I code this response as a “yes”.

Examples of the responses offered by teenagers who answered affirmatively include:

- “yes; I don’t really call it religious, . . . mine is more of a relationship with like my God . . .”
- “yes, because I try to live by the Bible . . . a Christian life”
- "I believe in God"
- “Yeah cause I go to church.”
- “I try to be.”
- "I believe in God and Jesus, but I’m not like a holy rolling Christian type person."
- "Maybe spiritual, but not really religious"
- both “I’m more spiritual than I am religious, but I’m still pretty much even with both."

“Not really” was the most popular way teens expressed that they were neither religious nor spiritual. A few teens were not sure what they believed as in the following example:

I: Um, we talked some about your family’s religious background, do you yourself, think of yourself as a religious person or spiritual person or both or neither?

R: I don’t know what I think about myself, I just think.

I: You’re not sure.

R: No.

I: What, um, do you believe in a God of any kind?

R: I guess, I don’t really know.

I: You’re not sure.

R: No.

I: Do you ever think about that, is that not really a subject that—

R: It’s not really a subject.

This teen was clearly not sure about what he believed or did not believe. Similarly, another teen said he did not know if he was religious or spiritual. He claimed that he did not understand what was meant by the terms. He said he had only been attending church for two years. He said, "I don't understand what religion is actually."

C.) “Do you attend religious services regularly?” category

There was 36% God Talk present in the discourse of teens who attended a religious service on a regular basis, which represented 63% of all teens. Again, 20 of those adolescents who did not attend regularly drew upon God Talk as they discussed their community service work.

Some questionable responses in terms of what “regularly” meant emerged from the data. However, if the teen responded “yes” for whatever amount of time (from “5 times a week” to “only on holidays or on occasions”), I counted their answer as an affirmative response. Some teens expressed they would attend more regularly if their parent would attend with them. For example, one teen said, “I would attend more if Mom went.” Other teens said they go regularly because their parents force them. Some admitted that they attend mainly for social reasons. One Jewish female said she attends but “doesn’t get much out of going.”

Most teens who attend religious services regularly attend on a weekly basis. Other examples of teens who said they attended regularly include: one Catholic male who attends 5 times a week, one Jewish teen who attends synagogue with family members two times a month, and one teen who goes once a week to church and twice a week to meet with a youth group.

There were a variety of responses for why teens did not attend regularly. For instance, one adolescent said he does not attend church but “observes a day of rest on Sunday to respect God and goes weekly to bible study.” Another example is that one teen said, “I’m not that active . . . I go to Jewish school but I don’t really go to synagogue or anything or do anything from my temple.”

D.) “Have Your Religious Beliefs Changed Over Time?” category

This religious variable did not seem to correlate significantly with God Talk. However, several interesting responses were given by teens who addressed this question. Examples of responses offered by teenagers who said their beliefs had changed include one teen who said he had no beliefs until his Barmitzvah, one teen who converted from being “not religious” to becoming Wiccan during the 8th grade, and one teen who converted from being a Mormon to being non-religious. Another teen said, “I just started getting close to God when I turned about like 15.” Finally, exposure to religious instruction from attending church over time or by taking classes on religion played a role in changing the beliefs of some teens. For example, one teen said, “Every time you go to church you always grow religiously. You learn more.”

Teens also varied in other ways. Some said they attended more often and were participated more in church. One teen was more religious “since Mom died.” There were also teens whose faith decreased over time. Some of these types of responses included one teen who said “in the third grade [I] stopped believing in God,” one teen who stopped attending regularly at a very young age, and one teen who had been a Jehovah’s Witness and now had no religion. There was also one teen who was questioning the church over questions about lack of affirming homosexuality.

From the teens who reported that they had had no change in their beliefs over time, thirty-two percent expressed no God Talk and twenty-one percent expressed God

Talk. A couple of adolescents who had not experienced any changes in their beliefs had not been raised religiously and stated that they were still not religious. Some of the teens who claimed their beliefs had not changed did appear to have gone through significant changes with respect to their religious affiliations and practices. These teens included one adolescent who had changed from being Catholic to having no religious affiliation, one teen who stopped attending “at age eleven when Mom and stepfather broke up,” and a teen who was Catholic who had switched to a non-denominational church because of having “strong opinions about the Catholic church and what they do wrong.”

Gateways

"Gateways" are those entry points to volunteerism mentioned by the adolescents during their interviews. If the teenager volunteered there was always a Gateway mentioned. Table 5 shows how these Gateways were linked with God Talk. The Gateways were divided into two main categories: non-religious Gateways and religious Gateways. Multiple responses were counted if the adolescents identified more than one Gateway or entry point into volunteerism. So, for example, if a teenager had volunteered with his/her mom, actively sought ways to volunteer, and had to volunteer in order to fulfill a graduation requirement then there were 3 responses counted (school, family member, and self-initiated).

This table produced some significant results. 30% or almost 1/3 of teens who volunteer and use God Talk volunteer solely thru Religious Organizations (46/151). 18% (46/254) of all teens who volunteer do so thru Religious Organizations. Schools comprise 27% of the Gateways reported by teens not using God Talk. 20% of the Gateways used by all teens in the sample were school-based.

Out of a total number of 254 Gateways or entry points to volunteerism, 151 Gateways were associated with God Talk and 103 were not associated with God Talk. In other words, 59% of the Gateways were associated with God Talk compared with 41% of the Gateways that were not associated with God Talk. Thus, a substantial amount of Gateways were associated with God Talk.

With the exception of the Self-Initiated category, the types of Non-Religious Gateways are fairly evenly distributed among teens using God Talk and teens not using God Talk. Without the religious variables introduced, adolescents seem to have similar patterns or exposure to Gateways to volunteer experiences. A significant percentage of teens using non-religious Gateways still maintain God Beliefs.

A larger percentage of teens (29/103 or 28%) do Self-Initiated Volunteer work and do not use God Talk than there are teens (10%) who use God Talk and perform Self-Initiated Volunteer work. This data strongly contradicts some popular notions that teens are only interested in themselves. From the data a larger number of teens are self-motivated to perform community service. It is quite possible that there are God Beliefs among these teens that are simply not being expressed through God Talk but are motivating them to engage in pro-social actions like volunteering. After all, actions do speak louder than words. It is also possible that for these self-motivated teens that there may be some other equivalent factor, such as a need to be connected or grounded in community, or alternative moral system at work that is causing these teens to contribute actively to their communities.

Table 5 – Type of Gateway Utilized Matched with Presence of God Talk

<u>Gateways to Volunteerism</u>		<u>Presence of God Talk</u>	
<u>Religious Gateways</u>	<u>God Talk Used</u>	<u>No God Talk Used</u>	
Religious-based School (Catholic, Christian, Hebrew)	6	exempt – rel org as gateway = God Talk by definition	
Religious Organization (e.g., Church, Temple)	46		
Church Camp	1		
Church youth group	11		
Religious Leader (Priest, Youth Pastor)	2		
Total	66		
<u>Non-Religious Gateways</u>	<u>God Talk Used</u>	<u>No God Talk Used</u>	
Adult Encouragement (e.g., advisor, teacher)		3	
Community Project	1	1	
Court/Probation Requirement		3	
Family Member(s)	17	15	
Friends/Peers	11	11	
National Honors Society	3		
Non-Religious Organization (e.g.s, 4H, Boy/Girl Scouts, Health Clinic)	10	9	
ROTC		2	
School Requirement	23	28	
Self-Initiated (note – supports idea that teens are self-motivated to help others)	15	29	
Sports Team activity	3		
Miscellaneous (work, women’s group, cultural youth movement)	2	2	
Total	151	103	

Religious Organizations were the second most effective Gateway (n = 46) for teen involvement in volunteer activities and community service. Schools (n = 51) are the most effective in promoting teens to volunteer by requiring community service hours as a prerequisite for graduation. Thus, a lot of this involvement is mandatory. Although adolescent affiliation with religious organizations largely reflects family socialization effects, it is also largely correlated with individual, voluntary choices made by teenagers to be active and participate in these religious organizations. So, the high number of Gateways contributed by religious organizations (n = 46) is mainly due to voluntary actions on the part of the adolescents who choose to be part of these organizations and to volunteer. Further, the large number (n = 44) of self-initiated activities (with a third of these teens using God Talk) also reflects voluntary choices made by adolescents.

These findings strongly suggest a high correlation between religion or spirituality and the level of adolescent volunteerism. This is construed from the significant association of teens using God Talk and/or being affiliated with religious organizations or personnel that act as Gateways with higher rates of volunteerism.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

There is not much literature on how religion impacts the community service done by adolescents. In general, “the topic of religion has not been part of the mainstream study of adolescent development.” (Youniss and McLellan and Yates, 1999; 252) This study contributes to the literature by exploring the religious discourse (God Talk) and religious Gateways utilized by teenagers as they volunteer. The fact that God Talk and religious Gateways impact volunteering teens is clearly demonstrated by the data, which draws its strength because it is based on the direct voices of adolescents as represented in the NSYR interviews.

The present study may lead to other research projects. Future explorations could investigate whether or not adolescents who use God Talk have more religious Gateways because they have direct exposure to religious outlets that encourage them to volunteer. Teens who do not use God Talk may have less access to religious Gateways.

Looking at the motivations of teens who use God Talk is another arena that could be explored. What benefits does religion offer teens who volunteer. Bellah asserts that there is a feeling of “connection” that comes with volunteering.

Every church and synagogue that reminds us that it is through love of God and neighbor that we will find ourselves helps to mitigate our isolation. Every time we engage in activities that help to feed the hungry, cloth the naked, give shelter to the homeless, we are becoming more connected to the world.” (pp.623-24)

This feeling of connecting to others through community service was clearly voiced by the teens in this study as they talked about wanting to help others and to give back to their communities as key motivating factors.

Future research directions might also include looking at how demographic differences affect language use among teen volunteers, especially if drawn from a random sample. For instance, the God Talk of adolescents of different races and ethnicities could be analyzed to determine if there are any differences in terms of how much God Talk is utilized by these groups. Also, a gender analysis might reveal that either teenage girls or boys use God Talk more.

On average those adolescents who had God Talk in their speech had an average of more Gateways per person. People who use God Talk have more Gateways to volunteering. Other questions that involve looking at God Talk or religious Gateways to examine the interaction of volunteerism and religion may arise. Are those teens who use God Talk more motivated to volunteer? Or, does volunteering expose teenagers to more arena or religious Gateways where God Talk can be appropriated? To what extent is volunteering a part of religious practices? The presence of God Talk may indicate that teens have a need to articulate their God Beliefs socially.

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