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The Impact of Religiosity on Students' Experience at the University of South Dakota

by

Emmalee Bosma

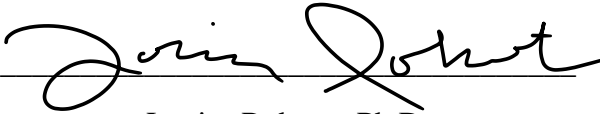
A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the
University Honors Program

Department of Anthropology and Sociology

The University of South Dakota

April 2024

The members of the Honors Thesis Committee appointed
to examine the thesis of Emmalee Bosma
find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Louisa Roberts", written over a horizontal line.

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Jake Thurston

Adjunct Professor of Religious Studies

Lead Pastor at Resilient Church

ABSTRACT

The Impact of Religiosity on Students' Experience at the University of South Dakota

Emmalee Bosma

Director: Louisa Roberts, Ph.D.

College can be a shocking and exciting experience for many young people, but at times can lead to crisis or hardship when they must choose what to believe. Some students may seek out a religious belief in something greater than themselves to quell their longing for meaning while in college, and others may continue the beliefs they have known. This research surveyed students to examine how college students' level of religiosity influences their academic performance, mental health, sense of purpose and identity, and feelings of belonging and connection at the University of South Dakota (USD). Secondly, through interviewing members of campus religious groups this study explored how students involved in campus religious groups described the influence of religiosity on those dimensions of the college student experience. Prior research suggested that religiosity plays a primarily positive role in these aspects of the college experience as well as life in general. Members of campus religious groups felt their religious group positively impacted each aspect of interest, and often to a greater extent than that of the survey respondents. The findings of this research suggest each of the four dimensions of the college experiences researched is impacted in at least a small way by religiosity, especially mental health and purpose and identity.

KEYWORDS: religion, influence, college experience, campus groups, connection, belonging, purpose, identity, academic achievement, mental health, South Dakota

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I would also like to thank Dr. Louisa Roberts and Dr. Isaiah Cohen. They continuously gave me genuine encouragement, and scholarly guidance through this process. They never hesitated to answer questions or give up their time for me, going above and beyond their role as professors to make this project possible. I am beyond appreciative of all they have done to get me to this point in my academic career, as well as for instilling in me a passion for sociology.

I would next like to thank Pastor Jake Thurston and the Resilient Church community for inspiring my dedication to this topic and endlessly motivating me. They provided me with peace and prayers throughout this academic endeavor and were positive influences that sparked my dedication to researching this topic.

Finally, I want to thank my parents and family for making all of this possible. They have enabled me to pursue my passions and never cease to stand by me along the way, loving me through both my biggest struggles and successes. They instilled in me the values and religious background needed to pursue research such as this. I cannot show my gratitude enough for the investments and sacrifices they have all made and continue to make to help me thrive personally, academically, and spiritually.

INTRODUCTION

College can be a shocking experience for many young people based on personal and peer experience. It is often their first time away from home, living with someone they barely know, trying to navigate “adulting,” all while, oftentimes taking the most difficult courses of their lives (Arnett 2005; Bowers and Segrin 2017). But what is more pertinent to this research is the personal crisis that students can sometimes face at college. With no one to tell them who they are or what to believe in, students must take it upon themselves to seek out community and search for their purpose (Astin, Astin, and Lindholm N.d.). Students seem eager to explore the world around them with their newfound freedom and discover their identity, but they are often unaware of the difficulties they will face in this search (Arnett 2005). In some cases, this crisis of self can be jarring to a student’s entire worldview and cause them to face extreme psychological or physical hardship (Pedrelli, Nyer, Yeung, Zulauf, and Wilens 2015). When these young adults are exposed to all new ideas, opinions, and ways of life it can be overwhelming, and they face the complex task of choosing what to believe. It is therefore important that we explore what tools are available to help students find purpose, identity, and belonging at college.

Some students may seek out a religious belief in something greater than themselves to quell this longing for meaning while in college, and others may continue the beliefs they have known. Although some students become more religious in college, we know that others come to a public university and decrease or lose their religiosity because of the many new influences on their beliefs (Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007). Whichever way a student's religiosity leans, research suggests that it plays a role, positive or negative, in not only their college experience but also their life in general (Astin 2004; Astin et al. N.d.; Dalessandro 2016; Ekwonye and DeLauer 2019; Ekwonya et al. 2020; Emmons 2005; Frankel and Hewitt 1994; Fukofuka 2007; Itzvan et

al. 2013; Lim and Putnam 2010; Mooney 2010; Merrill et al. 2009; Phillips and Henderson 2006; Rennick et al. 2013; Schubmehl et al. 2009; Sherkat 2007). That idea is precisely what this study sets out to explore. This study investigated whether religiosity has an impact on college students' experience and to what extent. The thesis specifically concentrated on the student experience at the University of South Dakota (USD) and contained two components. Firstly, a survey examined how USD students' level of religiosity influences their academic performance, mental health, sense of purpose and identity, and feelings of belonging and connection. Secondly, interviews explored how students involved in campus religious groups describe the influence of religiosity on those dimensions of the college student experience. Using the survey, I was able to look broadly at the influence of religiosity on students of all types, and then through interviews, I was able to examine how students involved in campus religious groups feel religiosity impacts their student experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

IMPACTS OF RELIGIOSITY

I will begin my review of the existing literature by looking at the impacts of religiosity overall. The prior research suggests that religiosity tends to improve the well-being of both college students and people in general. In the multiple studies on college students and higher education I examined, the question of how religiosity impacts stress was evaluated, and it was found that higher levels of religiosity can prevent negative stress outcomes and help in stress response (Frankel and Hewitt 1994; Merrill, Read, and LeCheminant 2009; Sherkat 2007). Other sources on both students and people in general reported finding religiosity and/or faith group involvement to be connected to other types of well-being including happiness, social satisfaction, leadership and interpersonal skills, belonging, growth, and meaning in life (Astin et al. N.d.; Ekwonye, Sheikhomar, and Phung 2020; Frankel and Hewitt 1994; Itzvan, Chan, Gardner, and Prashar 2013; Lim and Putnam 2010; Mooney 2010; Phillips and Henderson 2006; Rennick, Smedley, Fisher, Wallace, and Kim 2013; Sherkat 2007). Religious engagement and spirituality were also found to help students through challenges and adversity and promote confidence in their ability to handle personal problems (Merrill et al. 2009; Dalessandro 2016). In addition to combating psychological stressors through healthy coping, spirituality was also found to be linked with physical well-being in college students (Astin et al. N.d.; Frankel and Hewitt 1994; Sherkat 2007). One study found that students experiencing religious struggle were more likely to participate in activities damaging to their physical health such as drinking or staying up late, compared to their religious peers who exhibited better physical health (Astin et al. N.d.).

In connection with psychological well-being, religiosity, and spirituality have also been found to be connected to feelings of purpose and meaning in life throughout previous studies on

students and the public (Astin et al. N.d.; Emmons 2005; Itzvan et al. 2013; Lim and Putnam 2010; Sherkat 2007). Individuals with higher levels of spirituality were found by one study to have higher levels of meaning in life, and for groups combining high levels of both spirituality and religion, there were higher levels of personal growth initiative, which is associated with greater psychological well-being and lower distress (Itzvan et al. 2013). One study suggests that religion provides its practitioners with life meaning through the establishment of goals and value systems, and states that, “Spiritual and religious goals, above all others, appear to provide people with significant meaning and purpose,” (Emmons 2005). Meaning, belonging, and overall life satisfaction have also been reported to be products of religious service attendance, in connection to the intimate social networks built in congregations (Lim and Putnam 2010).

Such social networks and social support have also been frequently researched in the context of students as well as in general (Astin 2004; Ekwonye and DeLauer 2019; Lim and Putnam 2010; Sherkat 2007). Groups of like-minded believers and religious activity can help to provide students with social support away from home, which combats harmful behavior and mental health issues stemming from isolation (Sherkat 2007). Religion and spirituality help to provide a sense of community, connectedness, and belonging for students and people as a whole according to multiple reports. (Astin 2004; Lim and Putnam 2010). The social support and connections provided by religious involvement have been shown not only to improve life satisfaction but also to change one’s social scene and improve academics (Dalessandro 2016; Ekwonye and DeLauer 2019; Mooney 2010).

Many studies have also investigated the influence of religious involvement on academic achievement in college. One study found that attendance at religious services and religious observation increases the hours students spend studying and in extracurricular activities as well

as increases their academic achievement and decreases hours spent partying (Mooney 2010). Another study reiterated the point of religion providing an alternative social scene (Dalessandro 2016). The relation between the social connectedness in religion and academics was of significance in one study, reporting that, “social integration and peer connections were the primary predictors of academic resiliency,” (Ekwonye and DeLauer 2019). Students in some research took note of the supposed impact of their spirituality, with students who did well in their academics crediting their spirituality as the cause, and those who did poorly credited their lack of spirituality as the cause (Fukofuka 2007). The impact of spirituality on academic hardships and stressors was examined in depth in one source and was found to be an excellent resource for managing these aspects of academic and personal life (Ekwonye et al. 2020).

IMPACTS OF CAMPUS RELIGIOUS GROUPS

We will next look at the research on the effects campus religious groups have on their members. I must start by stating that there is a lack of prior research in this specific area, especially when comparing it to research on religiosity as a whole. Most of the prior research I found was also conducted using quantitative data rather than a qualitative research approach as I will be employing. My research will help to address the lacunae in this topic by commenting on the impact of campus religious group involvement on students in various areas of experience.

In contrast to overall religiosity’s seemingly positive impact on academics, one source on academics and religious campus groups did not find a correlation between GPA and campus ministry; but found a connection between high spirituality and high levels of involvement on campus (Schubmehl, Cubbellotti, and Van Ornum 2009). Another source did, however, find a minimal positive correlation between academic success and participation in religious groups,

although this was possibly believed to be due to the participants being high achievers already prior to college (Bryant 2007).

Multiple studies on campus religious group participation found that, like religion in general, campus religious groups were beneficial to students' social networks and belonging (Bryant 2007; Frankel and Hewitt 1994; Madsen and Vernon 1983; Mankowski and Thomas 2000). Compared to peers who did not participate in the groups, sources found feelings and reports of success in developing a network of new friends (Bryant 2007; Frankel and Hewitt 1994). Another study stated that religious campus groups were able to provide students with a "home away from home" and allowed them to achieve a sense of belonging to a family (Mankowski and Thomas 2000). One source noted that participants of religious groups tended to have friends who were also involved in that religious group, which speaks to the development of social ties within groups (Madsen and Vernon 1983).

The impact of campus religious groups on student well-being was also reported in prior research (Bryant 2007; Frankel and Hewitt 1994). It was found that compared to non-participants, religious group participants had higher levels of emotional health (Bryant 2007). Student participants were also found to be able to better handle stress, as well as being overall healthier and happier (Frankel and Hewitt 1994).

Other benefits that were reported by sources on campus religious groups included an increased level of religiosity and a decrease in behaviors such as alcohol consumption and substance abuse (Borynski 2003; Madsen and Vernon 1983; Sherkat 2007).

Although the prior research indicates that religiosity has a positive effect on various aspects of well-being, meaning in life, social connections and support, and academic achievement, most of this research is at least ten years old. Given the rapidly changing

environment around religion and religiosity in the United States today, it is worth examining the impact of these factors today, within the contemporary university context (Dingeman and Lim 2021). It is also worth noting that prior studies have not examined the influence of religiosity or participation in religious student groups on students in South Dakota, or for the most part, on students in the Midwest generally. This study addressed these lacunae in the research.

DATA AND METHODS

In conducting my research, I chose to use a mixed methods approach in collecting my data; interviewing students who are involved in a campus religious group and administering an online survey to general USD students. This approach was chosen primarily to diversify the information I was receiving and account for the limitations of each mode. The interviews were carried out to gain a better understanding of the more religious and religiously involved population of students at USD. The focus of the interviews and surveys were different, however they both addressed religiosity in USD students. This study predominantly focuses on Christian students at USD. The interview portion of the research was aimed at seeing the impact of being involved in a religious group, therefore only religiously involved students were interviewed. The survey was conducted to account for a wider section of USD students than that of the interviews and to see all sides of the religiosity and irreligiosity spectrum. The surveys thus targeted the general USD student body. Before I began data collection, the interview and survey plans were both processed through the university's Institutional Review Board and received approval.

SURVEY

The first element of this research was a survey of the USD student body. This survey was distributed in electronic format via Qualtrics. Invitations to complete the survey were disseminated in various ways such as verbal and online announcements, email, social media, word of mouth, and flyers. Announcements were made in various sociology classes both online and in person by professors, myself, and my peers. Flyers were put out in the USD Honors lounge, student residence halls, as well as sorority houses. The flyer was also posted on social media via Facebook and Instagram. Because of the method of distribution, there was no way to

identify how many students received an invitation to take the survey, and so the survey response rate cannot be calculated. However, a total of 102 survey responses were received.

To be eligible to take the survey, potential participants had to be over the age of 18 and a current student at USD. The survey took approximately five minutes to complete and consisted of 24 questions, although some questions were multipart scale questions. The questions were of various types including multiple choice, Likert scales, numeric rating scales, and ranking importance. Questions in the survey pertained to numerous areas of college student life. A majority of the questions were regarding religious beliefs and practices, but questions also included topics such as academic performance, mental health, purpose and identity, connection and belonging, and campus involvement, as well as demographic questions. The full text of the survey can be found in the appendix.

The survey data was then analyzed using the statistical software program Stata. In Stata, the data was coded and used to create indexes to measure the independent and dependent variables. The independent variable was religiosity, and the four dependent variables were: academic performance, mental health, belonging and connection, and purpose and identity. The dependent variable and independent variable indexes were created by first standardizing each variable that made up the scale. Then I averaged those standardized scores and once again standardized the final scale, so that each scale had a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one.

The religiosity index was made up of three questions: 1) “How often do you pray?” 2) “How often do you attend religious services?” and 3) “On a scale from 0 to 100 how religious would you consider yourself?”

The academic performance index was made up of four questions. The first three questions asked students to select one of six categories ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree for each of the following statements: 1) I am satisfied with my academic performance. 2) I would consider myself a high-achieving student. and 3) I am confident in my abilities as a student. The fourth question asked respondents, "What is your cumulative GPA?"

To measure respondents' mental health an index was created consisting of five questions. The first question asked students, "Over the past two weeks, how often have you felt anxious or depressed?" with five answer choices ranging from never to always. The second and third questions to rate on a scale from 0 to 100 their "Overall level of happiness," and their "Overall mental health." The fourth question asked, "Has your mental health gotten better or worse after the transition to college?" with four answer options ranging from significantly worse to significantly better. The final question put into the index asked students to select one of six categories ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree for the statement, "I have adequate support and or resources to cope with my mental issues at college."

The belonging and connection index was made up of three questions. Two of the questions asked, "How often do you struggle with feelings of belonging at USD?" and "How often do you feel a lack of connection to others at USD?" with five answer choices ranging from never to always. The third question asked respondents to rate on a scale from 0 to 100, "The overall quality of your relationships and connections with others at USD."

Lastly, the index for purpose and identity consisted of two questions that asked respondents to rate on a scale from 0 to 100 their "Sense of purpose and direction in life," and their "Sense of identity."

Once constructed, these indexes were used to find the correlations between religiosity and each dependent variable. Scatter plots with a line of best fit were created to better illustrate each correlation. And, to further explore these relationships, regressions were run to model the effect of religiosity on each dependent variable while controlling for some other factors. For each dependent variable, two regression models were carried out. Model one included only the dependent variable, and in model two the control variables were added in with the dependent variable to display their impact on the effects of religiosity.

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

The survey received 102 responses from USD students. Table 1 describes the respondents' demographic profile. Of the 102 students who took the survey, a majority were white, female, and Christian. Age ranged from 18 to 32 years old with an average respondent age of 19.980 years old. Respondents ranged in school year from freshman (coded as 1) to graduate student (coded as 5) with the largest category being freshman with 34 respondents. Most respondents identified as belonging to the Christian (Non-Catholic) religious family, making up 59.8% of respondents, and the second most popular religious family was Catholic with 27.5% of respondents. A large majority of respondents were white, making up 94.1% of respondents. Female respondents made up 84.3% of respondents. Although white females make up the overall majority of students at USD, my proportion was higher than that of the overall USD population which is 81.0% white and 64.0% female (University of South Dakota Fall 2022 Enrollment Data).

TABLE 1: Survey Demographics

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Age	19.980	1.694	18	32
School Year	2.333	1.229	1	5
Race				
White	0.941	0.236	0	1
Black or African American	0.012	0.139	0	1
Asian	0.029	0.170	0	1
Other Race	0.010	0.099	0	1
Gender				
Female	0.843	0.365	0	1
Male	0.137	0.346	0	1
Non-Binary/3 rd Gender	0.020	0.139	0	1
Religious Family				
Catholic	0.275	0.448	0	1
Christian (Non-Catholic)	0.598	0.493	0	1
Hinduism	0.010	0.099	0	1
Other Religion	0.010	0.099	0	1
Not Religious	0.108	0.312	0	1

Note: N=102.

INTERVIEWS

I conducted interviews with eight USD students who were involved in one or more religious groups on campus. I conducted these interviews specifically to examine the impact that being involved in a religious group had on students' experience. These interviews also allowed me to explore what it is like to be a (comparatively) highly religious student on campus. The religious groups these students were a part of were: Resilient Students, Chi Alpha, Coyote Catholics, and Campus Crusade for Christ (CRU). In seeking out participants, I first approached students I knew to be involved in a religious group on campus. I next made use of the "snowball" sampling method by asking these students for recommendations of other students to contact. To

include representation from a larger number of religious groups on campus, I directly reached out to two students who are involved in different religious organizations (Coyote Catholics and CRU) than the majority of the participants. I knew most of the participants on a surface level as we are all to an extent in the same social circle, due to my personal involvement in one of these campus religious groups.

The interviews took place remotely via Zoom and lasted anywhere from 15 to 35 minutes, depending on the responsiveness and answers of the participants. The eight participants came from a variety of majors and academic experience levels, and were primarily female, with only one being male. I used a semi-structured interview schedule and included questions geared toward answering my research question and assessing the impact of their involvement in a religious group. These questions were targeted at learning more about: the respondents' religious involvement at college and how it has changed since getting to college, their perception/identification of self, sense of purpose and direction in life, mental health, religious affiliation, feelings of belonging, feelings of discomfort and/or exclusion, overall academic performance, and connections at USD. I also asked a few quantitative questions, which required the participant to rate on a scale from 1-10 various things. I also included these quantitative questions in my survey, which allowed for a comparison of responses between interviewees and survey respondents. These Zoom interviews were recorded, saved, and then transcribed. To analyze the data I collected, I went through the transcripts from the interviews to identify any trends or patterns in their responses that were relevant to my research question.

RESULTS

I will begin by discussing the results of the survey of the general study body, followed by detailing the interview results. The results are to be discussed in this order so that a comparison can be drawn from the average survey respondents to the more specific sub-group within that population, of individuals involved in religious groups on campus.

SURVEY

Respondents could be described as moderately religious with the average self-reported level of religiosity being 60 on a scale from 0-100. Sixty-five percent of respondents reported praying weekly or more, with 24% reporting daily prayer. Of the 102 respondents 91 (89%) reported belonging to a religious family. A total of 69% of respondents reported attending religious services at least a few times a year if not more, with the largest category being “a few times a year” with 29%. When asked if they were involved in a religious group on campus, 64% reported “no” and 36% reported “yes”.

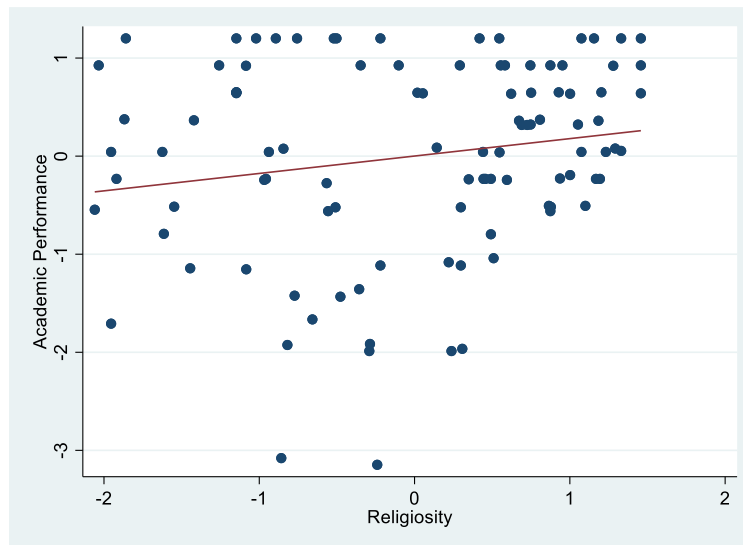
Respondents were asked a variety of questions to gauge the impact of religiosity on the four dependent variables. Please refer to the appendix for the full survey text. This section will display the quantitative results of the survey data analysis. The correlations, regressions, and graphs help to explain the relationship between religiosity and each dependent variable, as well as the relationship while controlling for other factors. Table 2 shows the correlations between religiosity and my four dependent variables of interest.

TABLE 2: Correlation between Religiosity and the Dependent Variables

Academic Performance	0.179+
Mental Health	0.293**
Belonging and Connection	0.162
Purpose and Identity	0.361***

Note: +p-value<0.1, *p-value< 0.05, **p-value< 0.01, ***p-value< 0.001. Two-tailed significance tests.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

FIGURE 1: Religiosity and Academic Performance Scatterplot

To begin with academic performance, I find religiosity and academic performance to be positively correlated; the correlation coefficient is a marginally significant 0.179 (Table 2). This indicates that a one standard deviation increase in religiosity is associated with a 0.179 standard deviation increase in academic performance. The relationships between religiosity and academic performance is depicted in Figure 1, which includes both a scatterplot and a line of best fit.

TABLE 3: Modeling the Influence of Religiosity on Academic Performance

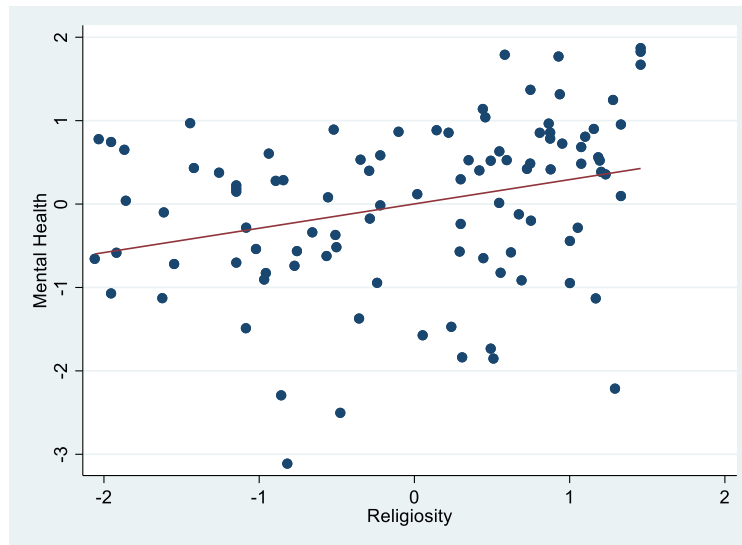
	Model 1	Model 2
Religiosity	0.178+ (0.099)	0.187+ (0.98)
School Year	--	0.016 (0.102)
Age	--	0.092 (0.077)
Male (reference group: Female)	--	-0.231 (0.298)
Non-Binary/3rd Gender (reference group: Female)	--	-1.778* (0.693)
R-Squared	0.032	0.115
Adjusted R-Squared	0.022	0.068

Note: +p-value<0.1, *p-value< 0.05, **p-value< 0.01, *p- value<0.001.**

Two-tailed significance tests.

N=100.

To further explore the relationship between religiosity and academic performance, I used regression to estimate the influence of religiosity on academic performance when controlling for other factors. Results of the regression are shown in Table 3. Model 1 in Table 3 includes only religiosity as an independent variable while Model 2 includes controls for school year, age, and gender. In model 1 we can see that a one standard deviation increase in religiosity predicts a 0.178 standard deviation increase in academic performance (consistent with the correlation coefficient shown in Table 2); this result is again marginally significant with a significance level of <0.1. Inclusion of the control variables does not diminish this estimated relationship, and, if anything, increases it. Model 2 finds that a one standard deviation increase in religiosity predicts a 0.187 standard deviation increase in academic performance, net of other factors.

MENTAL HEALTH**FIGURE 2: Religiosity and Mental Health Scatterplot**

I found the relationship between religiosity and mental health to be positively correlated; the correlation coefficient is a significant 0.293 (Table 2). This indicated that a one standard deviation increase in religiosity is associated with a 0.293 standard deviation increase in mental health. The relationship between religiosity and mental health is depicted in Figure 2, which includes both a scatterplot and a line of best fit.

TABLE 4: Modeling the Influence of Religiosity on Mental Health

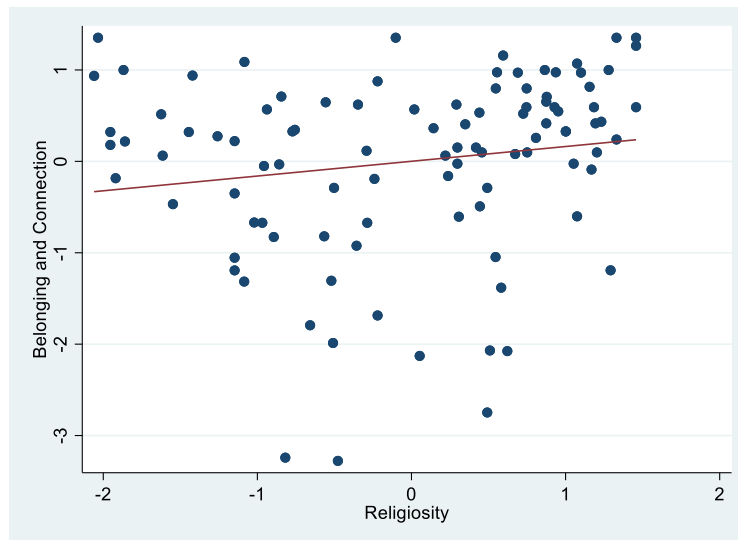
	Model 1	Model 2
Religiosity	0.292** (0.096)	0.206* (0.090)
School Year	--	-0.040 (0.090)
Age	--	0.035 (0.068)
Male (reference group: Female)	--	0.039 (0.271)
Non-Binary/3rd Gender (reference group: Female)	--	-1.655** (0.616)
Relationship Quality	--	0.020*** (0.004)
R-Squared	0.086	0.316
Adjusted R-Squared	0.077	0.272

Note: +p-value<0.1, *p-value< 0.05, **p-value< 0.01, *p-value< 0.001.**

Two-tailed significance tests.

N=100.

To further investigate the relationship between religiosity and mental health, I used regression to estimate the influence of religiosity on mental health when controlling for other factors. Results are shown in Table 4. Model 1 in Table 4 includes only religiosity as an independent variable while Model 2 includes controls for school year, age, gender, and relationship quality. In Model 1 we can see that a one standard deviation increase in religiosity predicts a 0.292 standard deviation increase in mental health (consistent with the correlation coefficient in Table 2); the result is once again significant with a significance level of <0.01. The inclusion of the control variables slightly diminishes this estimated relationship, but it maintains a positive correlation with a significance level of <0.05. Model 2 finds that a one standard deviation increase in religiosity predicts a 0.206 standard deviation increase in mental health while holding constant for various other factors.

BELONGING AND CONNECTION**FIGURE 3: Religiosity and Belonging and Connection Scatterplot**

For the dependent variable belonging and connection, I find religiosity and belonging and connection to be positively correlated with a correlation coefficient of 0.162 (Table 2). This indicates that a one standard deviation increase in religiosity is associated with a 0.162 standard deviation increase in belonging and connection. The relationship between religiosity and belonging and connection is depicted in Figure 3, which includes both a scatterplot and a line of best fit.

TABLE 5: Modeling the Influence of Religiosity on Belonging and Connection

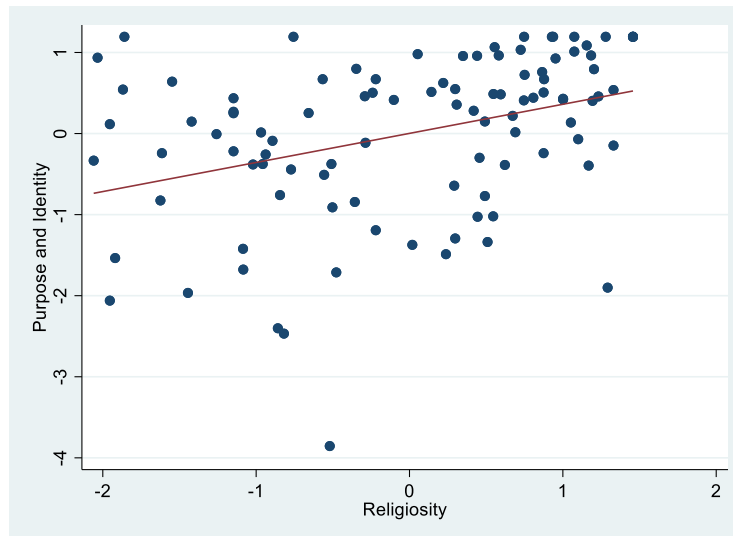
	Model 1	Model 2
Religiosity	0.162 (0.099)	0.193+ (0.100)
School Year	--	0.184+ (0.104)
Age	--	-0.116 (0.078)
Male (reference group: Female)	--	0.548+ (0.303)
Non-Binary/3rd Gender (reference group: Female)	--	1.51 (0.705)
R-Squared	0.026	0.084
Adjusted R-Squared	0.017	0.035

Note: +p-value<0.1, *p-value< 0.05, **p-value< 0.01, *p-value< 0.001.**

Two-tailed significance tests.

N=100.

To further study the relationship between religiosity and belonging and connection, I used regression to estimate the influence of religiosity on belonging and connection, when controlling for other factors. The results of the regression are shown in Table 5. Model 1 in Table 5 includes only religiosity as an independent variable while Model 2 includes controls for school year, age, and gender. In Model 1 we can see that a one standard deviation increase in religiosity predicts a 0.162 standard deviation increase in belonging and connection (consistent with Table 2); however, there was no indicated level of statistical significance. Inclusion of the control variables does not diminish this estimated relationship and appears to increase it if anything, making it marginally significant with a significance level of <0.1. Model 2 finds that a one standard deviation increase in religiosity predicts a 0.193 standard deviation increase in belonging and connection, net of other factors.

PURPOSE AND IDENTITY**FIGURE 4: Religiosity and Purpose and Identity Scatterplot**

Looking at purpose and identity, I found religiosity and purpose and identity to be positively correlated; the correlation coefficient is a significant 0.361 (Table 2). This indicates that a one standard deviation increase in religiosity is associated with a 0.361 standard deviation increase in purpose and identity. The relationship between religiosity and purpose and identity is depicted in Figure 4, which includes both a scatterplot and a line of best fit.

TABLE 6: Modeling the Influence of Religiosity on Purpose and Identity

	Model 1	Model 2
Religiosity	0.359*** (0.094)	0.359*** (0.092)
School Year	--	0.044 (0.096)
Age	--	0.123+ (0.072)
Male (reference group: Female)	--	-0.547+ (0.279)
Non-Binary/3rd Gender (reference group: Female)	--	-1.208 (0.651)
R-Squared	0.130	0.221
Adjusted R-Squared	0.121	0.180

Note: +p-value<0.1, *p-value< 0.05, **p-value< 0.01, *p-value< 0.001.**

Two-tailed significance tests.

N=100.

To further explore the relationship between religiosity and purpose and identity, I used regression to estimate the influence of religiosity on purpose and identity, when controlling for other factors. The results of this regression are shown in Table 6. Model 1 in Table 6 includes only religiosity as an independent variable while Model 2 includes controls for school year, age, and gender. In Model 1 we can see that a one standard deviation increase in religiosity predicts a 0.359 standard deviation increase in purpose and identity (consistent with the correlation coefficient shown in Table 2); this result is again significant with a significance level of <0.001. Inclusion of the control variables does not diminish this relationship, rather it appears to not affect the correlation or significance level. Model 2 also finds that a one standard deviation increase in religiosity predicts a 0.359 standard deviation increase in purpose and identity, net of other factors.

INTERVIEWS

Each interviewee was asked a series of questions targeted at learning about how each of the four dependent variables was impacted by their religiosity and their religious involvement on campus. As stated in the methods section interviewees were asked questions regarding their religious involvement at college and how it has changed since getting to college, their perception/identification of self, sense of purpose and direction in life, mental health, religious affiliation, feelings of belonging, feelings of discomfort and/or exclusion, overall academic performance, and connections at USD, as well as some quantitative scale questions. The interviewees were moderately to highly religious and religiously involved, typically participating in religious activities weekly or more.

BELONGING

To identify whether students involved in religious groups feel a sense of belonging I asked three main questions: 1) “On a scale from 1-10 how would you rank your feelings of belonging at USD?” 2) “Do you struggle with feelings of belonging at college?” and 3) “Does this group/your religion affect these feelings?” Two main themes emerged from the responses to these questions. The first theme was that respondents tended to possess a core group of close friends. The second theme involved how interviewees got social support from their campus religious group.

One commonality among a majority of participants’ answers was the description of what interviewees called their “core people”. Three people specifically used the phrase having “core people” when asked how their religious group affects their feelings of belonging, and two others mentioned similar feelings regarding the people that they have met through the group. This core group of people could be further described as being the person(s) they feel are indispensable,

reliable, and can be “counted on” as one participant added, in their college experience. The “core people” are often the closest friends with whom the participants have deep connections and shared values. For at least half of the interviewees, their core group of friends was also religious; for the other half of the interviewees their core group was seemingly not religious or their response made the religious level of their group unclear.

That leads to the next common answer from participants when asked about belonging, which was the importance of the support they received through their religious group, especially during times of hardship. One participant described facing a serious injury during their college experience leaving them currently disabled for an extended period of time. The participant went on to explain that although they feel isolated due to USD being largely not handicap accessible, they still feel a sense of belonging here. They went on to say that their religious group and beliefs, “help me cope”. Two participants had transferred to USD after attending previous universities and both commented on feeling fear that they would not belong or feeling left out but went on to remark that they have been able to find belonging through their religious group. It was apparent in multiple interviews that the support received from these groups and their beliefs is a key factor in feelings of belonging even through hardships of all kinds such as injuries or simply bad days.

Out of all eight participants, the average ranking of feeling of belonging was an 8/10, with all answers ranging from seven to nine. Participants were confident in their answers with a few defending their rank by saying their campus religious group made USD feel at home and it makes them feel like they have a place where they fully belong. One student went as far as to say that their religious group brings their feelings of belonging from a three or four to a seven, and another stated that without their group they, “would have transferred.” These responses from

participants indicate that there is an overall feeling of belonging in college among individuals in these religious groups on campus, and many feel that these feelings of belonging are strongly increased by their religious involvement.

CONNECTION

To gauge the impact these groups have on connections at USD, I asked participants three questions: 1) “How are your connections and relationships with others at USD?” 2) “Does your religious group help you form meaningful connections?” and 3) “Have you experienced stigma, stereotyping, or other adverse experiences because of your religious involvement?” Two overarching themes emerged through participants' answers the first being that they make most of their deep connections through their involvement in their religious group, and the second that the connections rooted in faith are stronger or more meaningful.

I want to first address one response that was somewhat of an outlier. Although this participant joined with many of the others in saying that most of their friendships have been made through their religious involvement, they went on to explain the difficulty they have in relationships with others at USD because of their religious beliefs and involvement. This participant described his or her involvement in other student organizations that have been associated with more liberal values (supporting things such as LGBTQ+ awareness and reproductive rights) and explained that it can be hard navigating the intersection of those groups. The participant relayed that it can be difficult to fit in with those groups and form connections there because people at times judge them or make assumptions about their beliefs because of their religion. I found this response to be interesting, but this feeling was not echoed by other participants when asked if they had experienced stigma or adverse experiences due to their religious involvement.

Most interviewees reported they find their closest connections and relationships through their campus religious group. All of the participants described their relationships and connections in college as “good” or “really good”, and many of them discussed how most of their friends have been made through their religious group. One reason a participant gave for this was that their religious group provided them with opportunities and events to be social and connect that were not the typical college party scene. Another reason for this could be that many of these students are highly involved in their religious group so naturally they would be surrounded by those people more. The less involved participants put less emphasis on how many of their friends were a part of the religious group. However, even the less involved participants quickly explained how their beliefs and religious groups impact the quality of their relationships with both those involved in the group and those outside of the group. The statements participants gave relating to the quality of their relationships were very clear. One person said, “Most of my meaningful connections are rooted in faith”, and another stated his or her connections are “really good. Especially if it is Christ-based friendship.” This was reiterated by yet another participant who asserted, “God is at the center of my closest relationships”. It was obvious that the participants felt very strongly that their most valued relationships had a connection to their beliefs or religious groups. The participants also had in common using the word, “deepen” when describing how religion affects their connections, with many of them saying that they have a multitude of surface-level connections with others, but they are close with a small number of people. One participant described finding true connections in a smaller more intimate group of people, while another told of how God brings meaning and significance to their relationships, deepening them. A participant revealed that a large amount of trust and support is needed for

their connections to be meaningful, and that level of trust and support could only be found through their religion.

Through these common responses to questions of connection, it can be concluded that religious involvement plays a significant role in the formation of meaningful connections for students involved in these groups.

PURPOSE

In an effort to learn about the impact of religious involvement on participants' feelings of purpose and direction in life, I asked four questions: 1) "Do you feel you know your purpose in life?" 2) "Do you feel you have a sense of direction in life?" 3) "How would you rate this sense of direction on a scale from 1-10?" and 4) "Does your religious involvement impact these feelings?" Most interviewees gave similar responses to these questions: describing feelings of hope/security and of being led.

Multiple participants mentioned a sense of hope and security in their purpose and direction in life through their beliefs and religious groups. One person stated that because they attend religious services and believe what is written in the Bible, they, "know there is stuff to come" and they "don't need to worry about the future." Another person spoke on this idea of hope by saying, "I trust God has a plan and there is a future for me." He or she also said, "God doesn't put dreams in your head for no reason," which made them feel reassured in their life direction. There were other comments on feelings of comfort and reasoning that supported the feeling of hope and security through religious involvement.

Likewise, self-reports of being led by their religious involvement and beliefs were a big response to these questions on direction and purpose. Half of the people used some form of the word "led" in their responses to discuss the impact their faith has on their sense of direction. In

addition to feeling “led by God,” one participant notes that their future feels guided by their faith, and when they are uncertain about a direction, they put trust in God’s plan. Notably, interviewees who reported a lower level of involvement in their religious group spoke less about feelings of being led by God or that their religious group made a significant impact on their feelings of direction but did not necessarily indicate an overall lack of purpose or direction. The less involved participants had responses that were more wavering and unsure, with one person answering, “Maybe a little—they seem like two different things,” when asked whether their religious involvement impacted their feelings of purpose. As with self-reports about connection, it appears that those who were more involved in a campus religious group benefited more from the sense of purpose that religion can provide.

The average ranking of all participants’ responses to ranking their sense of direction on a scale from 1-10 was 8.4 with answers ranging from seven to ten. This was greater than the survey respondents’ average ranking of a sense of direction which was 7.6. This is a prominent indicator of the strong feelings of purpose and direction experienced by people involved in these religious groups. And for many of them, these feelings are heavily influenced by their beliefs and trust in God.

MENTAL HEALTH

To evaluate any connections between mental health and religious involvement I asked four questions: 1) “Does your religious involvement affect your mental health at college and how?” 2) “ Does your religious involvement provide you with support for your mental health?” 3) “How would you rate your level of happiness on a scale from 1-10?” and 4) “How would you rate your overall mental health on a scale from 1-10?” Throughout the interviewees' responses, it

was apparent they felt their group improved their mental health by making them feel not alone, a lack of being judged, and a sense of peace.

The first theme that was apparent in the responses of six of the participants was saying they felt their mental health was improved by their religious groups because they had a sense of being “not alone”. This can relate to the feelings of connection that were expressed in earlier responses. One participant said that their mental health is improved because they experience, “feelings of support and not being alone no matter how you’re doing,” which relates to the idea of support which was important to many for connections. When discussing the support they receive from their religious group, another person commented, “I can be my best self with good people around.” Another participant also reported on the support they receive, stating, “There are so many people there that can help you out.”

Another commonality that emerged from participants was a feeling of not being judged by their group, which helped them to feel a sense of improvement in their mental health. Two participants described a sermon series that was given at their church on mental health, and both indicated they felt support through the sermons and their groups. Another participant noted, “This group helps me cope and understand my struggles, it isn’t as stigmatized here as other groups”. This freedom from stigma and judgment was important to the three participants who mentioned it, often alluding to having previous bad experiences. One participant relayed that it was more comfortable knowing that they could be completely honest without being judged.

The average response from participants for the level of happiness was 8.2, and for mental health, it was 7.5. Survey respondents had comparably lower average responses in these regards with happiness at a 7.6 and mental health at a 6.9. All interviewees felt that their mental health was improved because of their religious involvement, describing the impact as being a high level

of peace and increased happiness. Providing mental stability and a positive place to go were also descriptions of how involvement in religious groups improved participants' mental health. A participant stated that it helps them a lot to, "take the time to sit down and be with God," when they were discussing coping with previous feelings of depression. Another participant expressed, "If I didn't have my faith or religion, I would not be the person I am mentally or physically." The religious involvement and beliefs of these participants appeared to play a large role in improving their mental health.

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

To interpret the effects of religious group involvement on academic performance I asked a series of five questions: 1) "Would you consider yourself a high-achieving student?" 2) "What is your GPA?" 3) "How focused are you on your academics?" 4) "Are you confident in your abilities as a student?" and 5) "Are you motivated by your faith and religious group?" Interviewees seemed to feel a sense of academic relief through their religious involvement as well as a desire to strive for their best in their academic efforts.

There were common responses from four participants that indicated they felt a sense of relief academically from their religious involvement. A participant described their religion and beliefs as relieving some pressure because they knew they did not have to obtain perfection. Two participants described what I would say was a feeling of security and relief, with one saying, "Without my religion, I would have a lot more doubts in my academics" and the other stating, "My faith assures me I am on the right path." This relief of pressure or stress appeared significant to the participants as many of them revealed they can be overly focused on their academics, perfectionists, or overachievers.

Another impact of religious involvement on academics shared by participants was a sense of striving in their efforts because of their faith. This was explicitly reported by two participants. One participant told me, "My faith pushes me to do better." Another stated, "I have to put the work in in order to live out His will for my future." These statements could be used to explain the high level of academic achievement that was indicated by the other questions asked. The average GPA of these participants was 3.75, with only one participant being under 3.6 and three participants having a GPA of 4.0. This could of course be affected by their level in school as a majority of the participants were first or second-year students, and the difficulty of their major. However, all participants indicated that they would consider themselves high achieving and stressed the importance of academics in their lives. Further research would need to be conducted to definitively state that religious involvement improves academic achievement, but based on the responses of these participants, it is suggested there is a strong correlation between religiosity and academic performance.

DISCUSSION

This study has explored the possible influence of religiosity on students' experience at the University of South Dakota, specifically their academic performance, mental health, feelings of belonging and connection, and feelings of purpose and identity. The survey data allowed for a statistical analysis of the influence religiosity has on these factors, while the interviews can help us interpret the survey results. The interviewed students reported the impact of religiosity similar to that of the survey respondents, however; they seemed to perceive the impact of religiosity as far greater than what the survey data suggests.

In all aspects of interest, it seemed that the interviewees felt more impacted by religiosity than did the survey respondents. The interviewees were different from the survey respondents in some ways. For example, they were all involved in religious groups and would be considered highly religious, whereas the survey respondents were mostly not involved in a campus religious group and tended to the middle of the religiosity scale.

When looking at the dependent variable mental health, it appears that it is increased by religiosity. It is evident that the interviewees reported better mental health than survey respondents, with all of the interviewees stating they felt their mental health was improved because of their religion. Interviewees rated their level of happiness at 8.2, and for mental health, it was 7.5. Survey respondents had lower average ratings with happiness at 7.6 and mental health at 6.9. Additionally, mental health did show a notable positive correlation with religiosity based on the survey data which is in line with the feelings expressed by the interviewees.

Regarding effects on academic achievement, results are somewhat mixed. The interviewees also appeared to be slightly higher performing than the survey respondents. With 59% of survey respondents reporting a GPA of 3.75 or higher, they were generally highly

academically successful. The interviewees, likely due to the small sample size, had an average GPA of 3.75 with 100% of them having a GPA of 3.6 or greater. Both the survey participants and interviewees were academically successful, but the survey data does not fully back up the interviewees' reports of religion being a large factor in their academic success. The survey data found academic achievement to be positively correlated with religiosity but not to a large degree.

The results for belonging and connection were also mixed. The dependent variable belonging and connection was heavily emphasized by interviewees as being influenced by their religiosity and religious involvement. But the survey results did not seem to correlate religiosity with belonging and connection to the extent that the interviewees did. Belonging and connection had a positive correlation, but it was the least significant of all dependent variables. The interviewees discussed their closest and most meaningful connections as stemming from their religious group or founded in their religion and felt that their connections founded in religion were stronger than others. The survey respondents were primarily not involved in religious groups, so they would not find meaningful connections there; instead, they reported making most of their meaningful connections through Greek life or other organizations. Interviewees also felt a large aspect of their feelings of belonging was the social support they received from their religious group. The survey respondents were not asked about perceived social support so a comparison cannot be drawn for that feature of belonging and connection.

Purpose and identity was correlated with religiosity for both survey respondents and interviewees. Purpose and identity had the strongest correlation of all the dependent variables for survey respondents and was the most significant. When comparing the survey respondents' feelings of purpose and identity to that of the interviewees, it would seem that the interviewees yet again accentuated religiosity's influence more. The interviewees had higher ratings of

purpose/sense of direction than survey respondents, rating it 8.4 on a scale from 1-10, compared to survey respondents average of 7.6. A higher rating of purpose for interviewees would be in line with the significant positive correlation found between religiosity and purpose and identity in the survey. Since the interviewees were more religious than the general survey participants, a higher rating of purpose would be expected for interviewees.

Overall, the interviewees and survey respondents differed in the apparent level of religion's impact on their college experience, with the impact described by interviewees being seemingly far greater. There are a few possible explanations for the variation in results between the survey respondents and interviewees. The interviewees were all on the high end of the religiosity spectrum as most of them self-identified as highly religious and they were all involved in campus religious groups. Their high religiosity and involvement could help to explain their responses indicating a higher level of influence from religion compared to survey respondents who had more moderate religious levels. Although their claims seemed well reasoned and generally creditable, it is also possible that the interviewees felt the need to over-emphasize or exaggerate the impact of religion in all dimensions of their lives because they were in a way acting as representatives of the religious population and their campus group. It is also difficult to be completely certain of the interviewees' reported level of influence as their language is left up to the interpretation of the researcher. Another explanation would be that they felt more influenced by religion simply because of the people they are surrounded by in their religious groups rather than the religion itself. This is different from the other explanations as the cause of the variation would be the people in the religious groups rather than the group itself and its beliefs. An observation I made was that interviewees put a greater emphasis on the support and relationships with people in these groups than they did on the core beliefs and practices. That

could be said to show that it is more about the quality of people in these religious groups that improves these areas of the college experience than it is the religious nature of the group, however, that explanation would most likely not be in line with prior research. It could also be indicative of the importance of the presence of deep connections, support, and acceptance experienced by participants, causing them to emphasize the people in the group more in their responses than the beliefs they are built around. If that is true, there is a possibility that involvement in non-religious campus groups where people feel connected and supported could have a similar effect on the college experience. This would mean that the social and belonging element of the religious group matters more to the college experience than does the set of beliefs associated with it. However, there is the possibility that the shared religious commitment makes the group stronger and therefore more greatly impacts the college experience.

In summary of the independent variables, when examining the survey data along with the interviews the results suggest that religiosity was most influential in the categories of mental health and purpose and identity. The survey correlation between mental health and religiosity was lower than that of religiosity and purpose and identity. However, the interviewees seemed to place a greater emphasis on the impact of religiosity on their mental health compared to purpose. Interviewees reported their mental health was improved by their religiosity due to the support and peace that was provided to them by their campus group and beliefs. This could also be a factor that helps to explain the survey correlation between religiosity and mental health. The survey correlation between religiosity and purpose and identity was also evident in the interview responses, but potentially to a lesser extent than mental health. This could be due to the nature of the questions potentially; interviewees may have had a more difficult time answering questions about purpose and identity than they did the questions on mental health, as mental health could

be considered more personal and sensitive. The strong positive correlation between religiosity and purpose and identity is still supported by interviewees who accredited the direction and guidance they receive from their faith as important in their sense of purpose. The introspective nature and sureness of the future within a religion can help to support the correlation with both mental health and purpose and identity.

To further summarize, the dependent variables academic performance and belonging and connection were slightly positively correlated with religiosity but not to a notable degree like the other variables. The results provided mixed evidence for the influence of religiosity on these two factors as the interviews greatly supported the influence, but the survey data did not suggest a significant influence. The interviewees once again answered that these dimensions were highly influenced by their religion and group, but there are reasons I believe that academic performance and belonging were less influenced in terms of the survey. For belonging and connection, it is a seemingly more physical life dimension than mental health or purpose which could be described as more mental or spiritual, possibly being part of the reason mental health and purpose had higher correlations with religiosity in the survey data. Interviewees may have felt a stronger sense of connection because they were all involved in a campus religious group which provided them with a social circle influenced by religion, whereas most of the survey respondents were not involved in a campus religious group, so they may not have the same number of connections. It is possible that survey respondents might get connections from other campus involvement, but it likely would not be as tied to religion as the connections from a religious group, meaning the influence of religiosity on belonging and connection would be lower. In terms of academic performance, the slight positive correlation could be from the sense of direction and emotional stability said to be provided by religion as indicated by interviewees. There is also the possibility

that highly religious individuals spend less time engaging in activities such as partying which could affect academic performance. Interviewees reported a high influence of religiosity on their academics, and they were all rather successful academically. Because there were so few people interviewed it is possible their high level of academic performance with religiosity was a coincidence since they were all academically successful, whereas, in a larger sample size such as the survey, there was a more diverse range of people accounting for a seemingly less strong correlation.

CONCLUSION

We are now better able to understand the impact that religiosity has on the experience of college students at the University of South Dakota, which was previously unknown. This research allows us to better comprehend the influence of religiosity in this region of the country, which was lacking representation in prior studies. With much of the prior research being ten-plus years old, these findings also provide us with a more up-to-date knowledge of religiosity's many influences on college students' experience. There was little research on the influence of campus religious groups, therefore this research helps to fill that gap while also providing a qualitative interview-based study on the topic. With much of the previous research being quantitative data, it is important to add an interview-based study as it provides first-hand accounts of group members' thoughts, allows us to better interpret the meaning behind the data, and garner a new perspective.

The results of this research are only meant to be suggestive, not conclusive, of the impact of religiosity because the sample is unable to represent the entire population of students at USD fully and accurately. This study focused predominately on Christianity so it cannot give conclusive results for the entire religious sector at USD. Each dimension of the college student experience that was researched seemed to be impacted in at least a small way by religiosity, although some were more highly impacted than others. This finding is in line with the conclusions of previous research which found correlations between religion or spirituality and improving these aspects of life (Astin 2004; Astin et al. N.d.; Dalessandro 2016; Ekwonye and DeLauer 2019; Ekwonya et al. 2020; Emmons 2005; Frankel and Hewitt 1994; Fukofuka 2007; Itzvan et al. 2013; Lim and Putnam 2010; Mooney 2010; Merrill et al. 2009; Phillips and Henderson 2006; Rennick et al. 2013; Schubmehl et al. 2009; Sherkat 2007). When looking at

interviewees' descriptions of the impact of campus religious group involvement on their college experience, I found that they felt their religious group positively impacted each aspect of interest, and often to a greater extent than that of the survey respondents. My findings on the impact of campus religious groups are for the most part consistent with that of previous research (Borynski 2003; Bryant 2007; Frankel and Hewitt 1994; Madsen and Vernon 1983; Mankowski and Thomas 2000; Sherkat 2007). However, these findings would suggest a positive relationship between interviewees' academics and their campus religious group, contrary to the research of Schubmehl, Cubbellotti, and Van Ornum (2009). In summary, this research suggests that aspects of the college experience, especially mental health as well as purpose and identity, can be influenced by a student's religiosity.

LIMITATIONS

There are a few limitations to this study that should be noted for the benefit of future research. First of all, the sample size cannot be representative of the whole population at USD. The sample size was relatively small in comparison to the number of students, which may have affected the findings; therefore, future research should aim to have a larger sample size. The second limitation would be the limited diversity within the sample as a large majority was white Christian females. The sample was not representative of all the religions, races, campus organizations, etc. that should be examined when looking at the impact of religion. To better research religiosity, students from other religions as well as non-religious students should be interviewed to get their perspective on the impact of religiosity, rather than just those involved in Christian/Catholic campus groups. There is also the factor that there are several ways to measure each of the variables in this research as many of them such as religiosity and mental health are ambiguous which means the questions and results could be taken multiple ways. Further research

should also aim to have additional regression controls to get more accurate and exhaustive data.

It is also important to recognize the possibility of social desirability bias in the research as participants may have felt inclined to answer questions based on what they felt was favorable to others. I must also acknowledge that the research may have been limited due to my potential personal biases and preconceived assumptions. Being that I am a white Christian female involved in a campus religious group it is possible that my thoughts and opinions influenced how I constructed the study or interpreted the findings of the research.

APPENDIX

Q1

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

The University of South Dakota

TITLE: The Impact of Religiosity and Irreligiosity on College Students

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be 18 or older and a current student at the University of South Dakota. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why are we doing it?

The purpose of the study is to explore how participation in religion-based groups on campus affects college students' experience, especially regarding students' feelings of belonging, connection, purpose, mental health, and academic performance. About 150 people will take part in this research.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to answer a variety of questions about your life and your college experience including: your religion and/or lack of religion, feelings of belonging and connection, purpose, your mental health, and your academic performance. This survey will take approximately 10 minutes.

What risks might result from being in this study?

Personal or sensitive information could be collected during the survey. The information is fully anonymous as there will be no identifiable information collected. There will be a few questions regarding mental health possibly including the presence of depression. This information is private and fully anonymous. If you find these questions to be upsetting or uncomfortable for you there are mental health resources readily available to you. Students can contact The Counseling Center at 605-658-3580, Coyote Care at 833-569-1686, or the Crisis Lifeline at 988.

What are the potential benefits from this study?

Although you may not directly benefit from being in this study, others might benefit because this research may provide a better understanding of how religion or irreligion affects the experience of college students. This information could help students to make informed decisions about their college experience and religious involvement.

How will we protect your information?

We will protect the confidentiality of your research records by not collecting any identifying data. All results from the survey will be securely stored. The records of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Any report published with the results of this study will not include any information that could identify you. We will protect the confidentiality of the research data by securely storing the responses of the survey and only releasing the overall analyzed results. It is possible that other people may need to see the information we collect. These people work for the University of South Dakota and other agencies as required by law or allowed by federal regulations.

How will my information be used after the study?

After this study is complete, your deidentified data may be stored indefinitely in secure cloud storage and shared with other researchers through an open access repository without asking for additional consent from you. Your deidentified data will NOT include your name or other personal information that could directly identify you.

Your Participation in this Study is Voluntary

It is up to you to decide whether to be in this research study. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty physically, emotionally, or academically for choosing not to participate.

Contact Information for the Study Team and Questions about the Research

The researcher conducting this study is Emmalee Bosma under the direction of Dr. Louisa Roberts (USD Department of Sociology). You may ask any questions you have now. If you later have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact Emmalee Bosma at emmalee.bosma@coyotes.usd.edu or Dr. Louisa Roberts at louisa.roberts@usd.edu. If you have problems, complaints, or concerns about the research, questions regarding your rights as a research subject, or if you want to talk with someone independent of the research team, you may contact The University of South Dakota Office of Human Subjects Protection at irb@usd.edu or (605) 658-3743.

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is

about. Keep this copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I agree (1)

I disagree (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY The University of South Dakota TITLE: The Impact... = I disagree

Q2 What year of school are you currently in?

- Freshman (1)
- Sophomore (2)
- Junior (3)
- Senior (4)
- Graduate Student (Please specify degree [e.g. Master's Degree] and year in your program below [e.g. 3rd year]) (5)
-

Q3 How old are you?

Q4 What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-Binary/Third-Gender (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

Q5 What is your race? Select all that apply.

- White (1)
- Black or African American (2)
- American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
- Asian (4)
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)
- Other (Please specify below) (6)
-

Q6 What is your ethnicity? Select all that apply and please specify for each selection.

- Black (Any peoples with origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.) (1)
-
- African (Any peoples with African ancestral origins who self identify or are identified by others as African.) (2)
-
- Caribbean (Any peoples born in or inhabitants of the Caribbean region or people of Caribbean descent living outside the Caribbean, For example: The Dominican Republic and Jamaica.) (3)
-
- Latin American (Any peoples with ancestry in Latin America, including Brazil and Haiti.) (4)
-
- Hispanic (Any peoples in the Americas and Spain who speak Spanish or are descended from Spanish-speaking communities.) (5)
-

- Other Spanish Descent (Any peoples from countries previously colonized by Spain outside of the Americas. For example: the Philippines.) (6)

- White (Any peoples with origins in any of the White racial groups of Europe.) (7)

- European (Any peoples with European ancestral origins who self identify or are identified by others as European.) (8)

- East Asian (Any peoples from the East Asian region of Asia. For example: China, Japan, and Mongolia.) (9) _____
- South Asian (Any peoples from the South Asian region of Asia. For example: Afghanistan, India, and Sri Lanka.) (10)

- Southeast Asian (Any peoples from the Southeast Asian region of Asia. For example: Indonesia, Hmong, and Laos.) (11)

- Arab (Any peoples with Semitic ancestry from the Middle East or North Africa. For example: Iraq, Jordan, and Oman.) (12)

- Middle Eastern (Any peoples from the "Middle East" region of Eurasia. For example: Iran and Turkey.) (13)

- Please specify your tribal affiliation (For example: Diné, Lakota, and Qawalangin). (14) _____
- Melanesian (Any peoples from the Melanesia region of Oceania. For example: Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands.) (15)

- Micronesian (Any peoples from the Micronesia region of Oceania. For example: the Northern Mariana Islands, Marshall Islands, and Palau.) (16)

- Polynesian (Any peoples from the Polynesia region of Oceania. For example: Hawaii, New Zealand, and Samoa.) (17)

- Jewish (Any peoples of Jewish descent. For example: Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, and Sephardic.) (18) _____
- Other (Please specify below) (19) _____

Q7 What religious family do you belong to or identify yourself most closely with?

Please specify your specific denomination/sect along with your selection.

- Buddhism (1) _____
- Catholic (2) _____
- Christianity (Non-Catholic) (3) _____
- Islam (4) _____
- Hinduism (5) _____
- Judaism (6) _____
- Other religion. (7) _____
- Other, I am not religious. Please specify below (e.g. Agnostic, Atheist, etc.). (8) _____

Q8 How often do you pray?

- Several times a day. (1)
- Daily. (2)
- A few times a week. (3)
- Weekly. (4)
- A few times a month. (5)
- Monthly. (6)
- A few times a year. (7)
- Yearly. (8)
- Other. Please specify below. (9)
-
- I do not engage in prayer. (10)
-

Q9 How often do you attend religious services?

- Several times a day. (1)
- Daily. (2)
- A few times a week. (3)
- Weekly. (4)
- A few times a month. (5)
- Monthly. (6)
- A few times a year. (7)
- Yearly. (8)
- Other. Please specify below. (9)
-
- I do not attend religious services. (10)
-

Q10 Are you involved in a religious group at USD?

- No (1)
- Yes (2)
-

Display This Question:

If Are you involved in a religious group at USD? = Yes

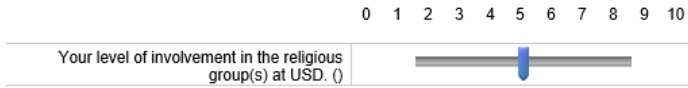
Q11 What religious group(s) at USD are you involved with? Please select all that apply.

- Resilient Students (1)
- CRU (2)
- The Newman Center (3)
- The Luther Center (4)
- Chi Alpha (5)
- Other. Please specify below. (6)
-

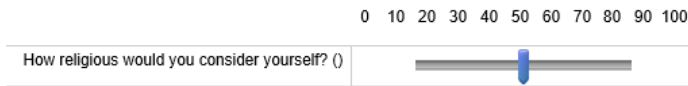
Display This Question:

If Are you involved in a religious group at USD? = Yes

Q12 Please rate the following on a scale from 0 - 10 with 0 being the least and 10 being the most.



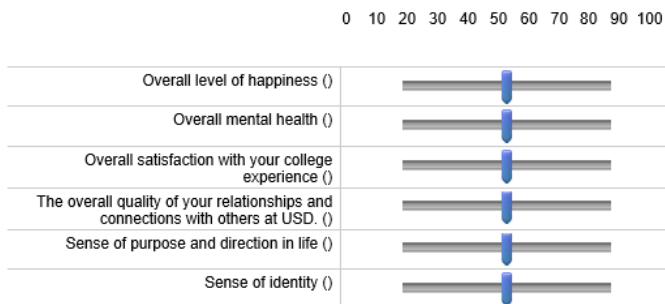
Q13 Please rate your level of religiosity on a scale from 0 - 100 with 0 being the least and 100 being the most.



Q14 Please rate the following statements regarding your mental health at USD:

	Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	About half the time (3)	Most of the time (4)	Always (5)
Over the past two weeks, how often have you felt anxious or depressed? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How often do you struggle with feelings of belonging at USD? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How often do you feel a lack of connection to others at USD? (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q15 Please rate the following questions with 0 being the least and 100 being the most.



Q16 Has your mental health gotten better or worse after the transition to college?

- Significantly Better (1)
- Slightly Better (2)
- Slightly Worse (3)
- Significantly Worse (4)

Q17 Please rate the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly Agree (6)
My religiosity improves my mental health. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have adequate support and or resources to cope with mental health issues at college. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My religious beliefs affect how I live my life. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q18 Please select all the types of activities you are currently involved in from the following list.

- Academic Clubs (1)
- Athletics/Sports Clubs (2)
- Cultural Groups (3)
- Political Clubs (4)
- Religious Groups (5)
- Sorority or Fraternity (6)
- Student Government (7)
- Theater/The Arts (8)
- Volunteer Organization (9)

Q19 Of the following where do you feel you make most of your meaningful friendships or connections at USD?

- Academic Clubs (1)
 - Athletics/Sports Clubs (2)
 - Cultural Groups (3)
 - Political Clubs (4)
 - Religious Groups (5)
 - Sorority or Fraternity (6)
 - Student Government (7)
 - Theater/The Arts (8)
 - Volunteer Organization (9)
 - Other. Please specify below. (10)
-

Q20 Please rate the following statements regarding academics at college:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly Agree (6)
I am satisfied with my academic performance. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would consider myself a high achieving student. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am confident in my abilities as a student. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I set goals for myself at college. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q21 What is your cumulative GPA?

- 4.0 (1)
- 3.75-3.99 (2)
- 3.5-3.74 (3)
- 3.0-3.49 (4)
- 2.0-3.0 (5)
- 1.99 or below (6)

Q22 How has your level of religiosity changed since getting to USD?

- Increased (1)
- Somewhat increased (2)
- No change (3)
- Somewhat decreased (4)
- Decreased (5)

Q23 How much has your level of religion changed since getting to USD?

- Extremely (1)
- Quite a bit (2)
- Moderately (3)
- Little (4)
- None (5)

Q24 Please rank the importance of the following with 1 being most important and 4 being the least:

- _____ Personal Values (1)
- _____ Religious Beliefs (2)
- _____ Social Life (3)
- _____ Academics (4)

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