

The Faith Dimension: Results from the iFaith Study

The Connection to Identity
and Wellbeing



Content

- ▶ Introduction to The Psychology of Religion/Spirituality
- ▶ Definitions
- ▶ Identity
- ▶ Religion/spirituality and wellbeing
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- ▶ Future application and direction

A quick note about myself

- ▶ I am a student at the uni of Canterbury, completing my masters in child and family psychology. My thesis topic is **Spirituality and Religion in Mid-teens and Young Adults**
- ▶ Before this, I completed a Bachelor of Arts with Psychology as my major, and Philosophy as a minor.
- ▶ Why did I choose to study Religion and Spirituality in Psychology?

What am I talking about when I say Spirituality and Religion

- ▶ It is difficult to define these terms
- ▶ One researcher has written: “Psychologists of religion who have been in the field for awhile can agree on one thing: we have never agreed about anything.” (Pargament, 1999)
- ▶ **But what could we agree on?**
- ▶ At their core, spirituality and religion are about the search, encounter, and usually, belief in a higher power, or what the academic people term as the “sacred” (Pargament, 1999).
- ▶ Something is “Sacred” when it is set apart from everyday life. It is something extraordinary, and has a unique power.
 - ❖ God or a higher power
 - ❖ Supernatural
 - ❖ Nature
 - ❖ Relationships
 - ❖ Love, truth or beauty

Te Whare Tapa Wha

- ▶ This is a model of wellbeing that was devised by Mason Durie (1994).
- ▶ In this model there are four aspects (four walls of a house) that make up our wellbeing.
- ▶ Physical (Taha Tinana)
- ▶ Social (Taha Whanua)
- ▶ Emotional/Psychological (Taha Hinengaro)
- ▶ Spiritual (Taha Wairua)

Whare Tapa Wha (Durie, 1994)

- ▶ If you remove one of these walls, the house has a major structural problem.
- ▶ All four walls are important for wellbeing
- ▶ But it is difficult to define and understand this spiritual part.



What does it mean to study Spirituality and Religion in Psychology?

Why Religion?

- ▶ Religion and spirituality are very much related.
- ▶ Simplistic trend: Religion as Institutionalised and immature, Spirituality as individual and enlightened.
- ▶ Current writers on the topic acknowledge that:
 - ▶ Spirituality is often practiced within a religious framework
 - ▶ Many spiritual philosophies have their origins within religious traditions (Benson et al, 2012).
 - ▶ Many religions tend to encourage personal spiritual experiences.



ORIGINS OF RELIGION

What does it mean to study Spirituality and Religion in the Social Sciences?

- ▶ Remember the common core: The Sacred.

But you can't prove that a higher power exists

- ▶ This issue is inaccessible to scientific inquiry
- ▶ What is accessible to us then? The human aspect: the ways that we respond to, behave towards, feel, perceive and experience the sacred (Hodge, 1996, Stark & Finke, 2000).
- ▶ This is no different from studying any other phenomenon in Psychology



Key Topics for this Research

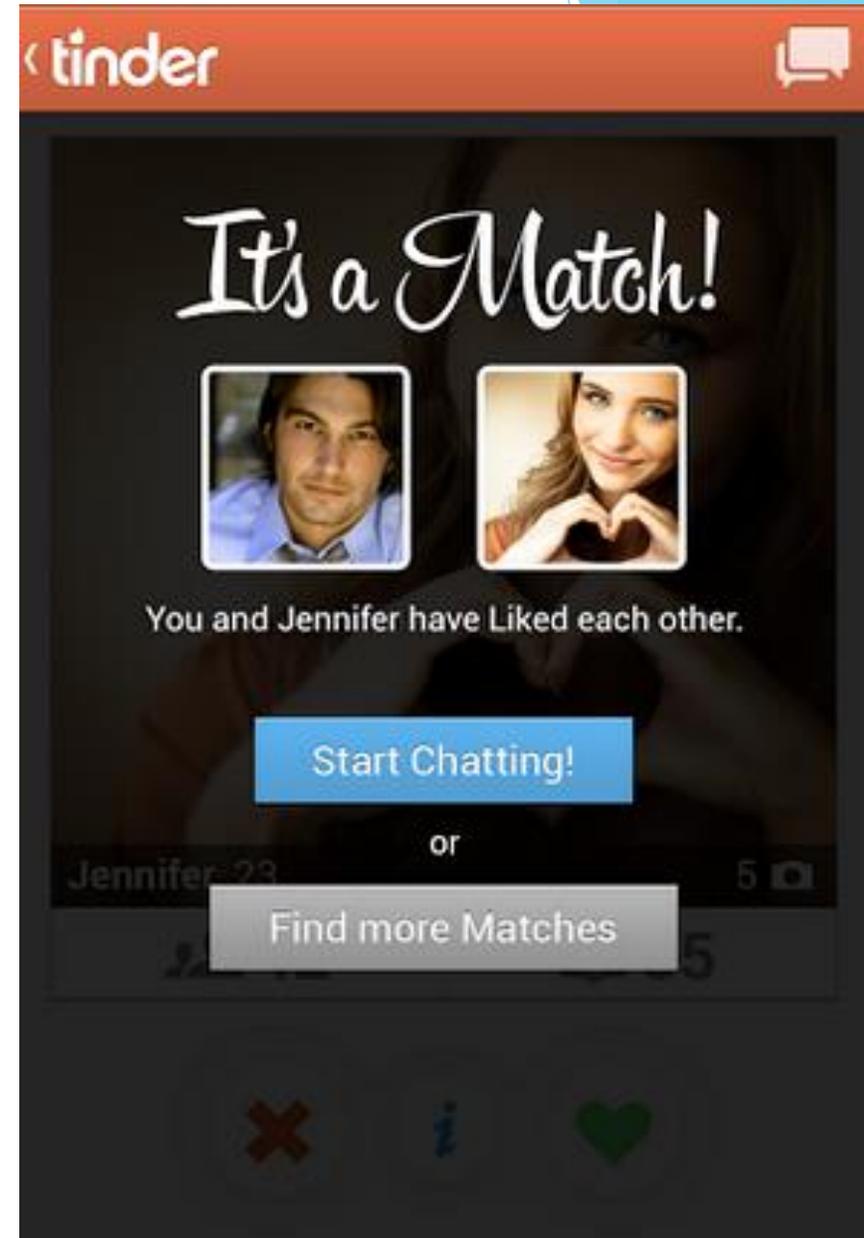
- ▶ Before getting to the results, we need to hone in on some of the topics that I was interested in.
- ▶ 1. I explored the relationship between religion/spirituality and IDENTITY within a spiritual and religious context, and also the relationship between these identities, and wellbeing.
- ▶ 2. I measured wellbeing in terms of anxiety, depression, and general Psychological wellbeing, and looked at how these were impacted by spirituality and religion.

Identity

- ▶ What is identity?
- ▶ Erik Erikson (a very well known Psychologist of the twentieth century) answered this question in terms of Commitment.
 - ▶ Relationships
 - ▶ Career
 - ▶ Core Values
 - ▶ Political orientation
 - ▶ Religious affiliation and/or Spirituality
- ▶ (Commitments are probably not the whole picture of identity)

Identity

- ▶ Identity Exploration - Considering and actively searching out your options
#itsamatch
- ▶ Identity Status - James Marcia (1967)



Diffusion

- ▶ No exploration, no commitment
- ▶ Often young teenagers are in this “don’t know, don’t care” state, before they start exploring their identity



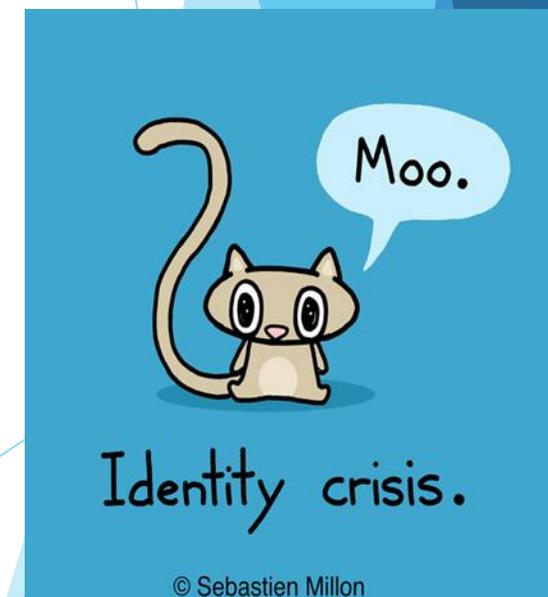
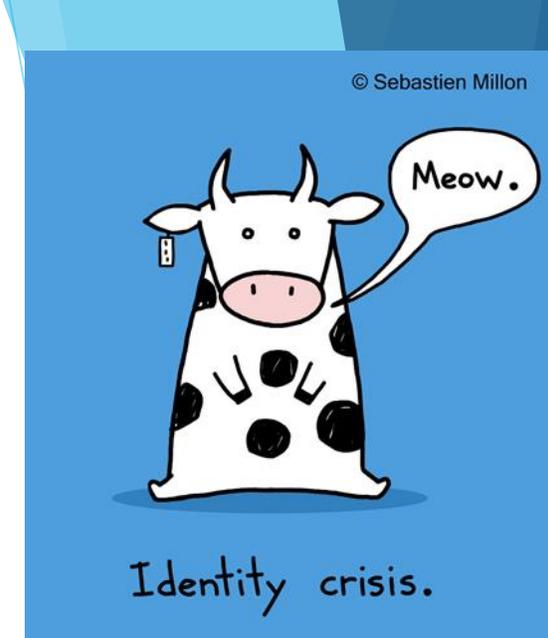
Foreclosure

- ▶ Commitment without exploration.
 - ▶ Parental Pressure?
- ▶ For example, a young person might chose a career based on what their parents do, or what their parents want them to do.



Moratorium

- ▶ Moratorium is known as a time of “identity crisis” (Erikson, 1968, Marcia, 1966).
- ▶ A disconnect between the current self, and possibilities in the future.
- ▶ It can be a very disorienting time.



Achievement

- ▶ Achievement is said to occur when a person has made commitments after a time of exploration. It is a healthy conclusion to the identity process.
- ▶ See inspiring, fictional examples...



Spirituality and Religion are Identity commitments

- ▶ Spirituality and Religion are identity commitments
- ▶ Diffusion: No engagement with religious/spiritual issues, unaware of where they stand and not bothered by this.
- ▶ Foreclosure: Following the religious or non-religious practices and beliefs as parents.
- ▶ Moratorium: Questioning/exploring their beliefs and where they stand.
- ▶ Achievement: Having committed to a religious/spiritual identity, after a period of questioning/exploring.



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The connection between Religion/Spirituality and Wellbeing

- ▶ This is a young area of study
- ▶ National Survey of Youth and Religion (America)
- ▶ The most devoted religious youth experienced the greatest wellbeing
- ▶ Communal aspect of religion and social support
- ▶ Lower depression (Good & Willoughby, 2006, Jansen, Motly & Hoven, 2010, Pearce, Little & Perez, 2003).
- ▶ Pearce, Little & Perez (2003) also found that considering oneself as spiritual was also associated with lower levels of depression.



The connection between Religion/Spirituality, Social Connectedness and Wellbeing

- ▶ Perception of God related to self-worth (Francis, Gibson & Robbins, 2001)
- ▶ Spirituality and anxiety in Males (Davis, Kurpus & Kerr, 2003).
- ▶ Spiritual experiences and values related to higher self-esteem in adolescents (Hall & Flanagan, 2013)
- ▶ Using Spirituality in the treatment of anxiety (Kozycki, 2013).

Research Questions

1. What do spirituality and religion mean to young adults? What are some thematic differences? **Qualitative**
2. How do religiosity and spirituality, as well as religious or spiritual identity, influence psychological wellbeing, anxiety and depression? **Quantitative**

Unfortunately, there's not enough time to talk about the entire scope of this study...

Methodology

- ▶ Mixed Methods
 - ▶ Quantitative = Numbers, Statistical analyses
 - ▶ Qualitative = Words, Thematic analyses
-
- ▶ My quantitative data is comprised of two groups.
 - ▶ 1. Those with a religious or spiritual affiliation
 - ▶ 2. Those without a spiritual/religious affiliation



Methodology

- ▶ ***Participants:***

- ▶ 120 young people aged between 16 and 21.

- Affiliated Group:

- ▶ Total N = 87, F = 62, M = 25
 - ▶ Age = 16 - 21, 53% 18-19 years old
 - ▶ Ethnicity = 76% NZ/Euro, 3.4% Maori/Part Maori, 2.3% Pacifica, 2.4% Australian
 - ▶ City = 77.8% Chch, (Small numbers from Auckland, Wellington, Dunedin and Hamilton)

Methodology

Non-affiliated Group:

- ▶ Total N = 32, F = 17, M = 15
- ▶ Age = 16 - 21, sixteen were between 18 & 19 years old, and nine were 20 years old
- ▶ Ethnicity = NZ/Euro = 23, Maori/Part Maori = 3 (very small number of other ethnicities)
- ▶ City = Chch = 27, Auckland = 2
- ▶ No Religion = 15
- ▶ Atheist = 7
- ▶ Agnostic = 9

Measures (Continuous)

- ▶ All measures were part of an online questionnaire that the participants completed in their own time
- ▶ **Religiosity:**
- ▶ 3 items that measured Religious Commitment and importance, e.g. “I have made firm commitments regarding my faith”
- ▶ Reliability, $\alpha = 0.7$

- ▶ **Spirituality:**
- ▶ 7 items. 3 items measured the importance of spirituality, and the extent to which spirituality assisted them in coping with stress and experiencing peace.
- ▶ E.g. Importance: “My spirituality is an important part of my day to day life”
- ▶ E.g. Coping: “My spirituality helps me to experience peace even when I am going through a difficult time”
- ▶ Reliability, $\alpha = 0.93$

Other Dependent Variables

- ▶ Psychological Wellbeing is a measure of self-esteem, positivity about the future, a sense of purpose and hope. E.g. “I feel capable of achieving my goals”
- ▶ 8 items, Reliability, $\alpha = 0.73$

- ▶ Anxiety was measured using 3 items. E.g. “I notice that I have been feeling more anxious lately”
- ▶ Reliability, $\alpha = .75$

- ▶ Depression was measured using 5 items. E.g. “I cry more often than I used to”
- ▶ Reliability, $\alpha = 0.82$

Independent Variables/Covariates

- ▶ **Religious/Spiritual Identity variables** - 2 items each (Remember: Continuous)
 - ▶ Diffusion, $r = 0.84$
 - ▶ Foreclosure, $r = 0.82$
 - ▶ Moratorium, $r = 0.76$
 - ▶ Achievement, $r = 0.79$
- ▶ **Age & Gender**
- ▶ **Social Variables**
 - ▶ Sense of Community, $\alpha = 0.81$
 - ▶ Trust and support from parents and friends (IPPA), $\alpha = 0.92$
 - ▶ Religion/spirituality in immediate family members, $\alpha = 0.85$

Results: What do the terms Religion and Spirituality mean?

SPIRITUALITY

Religious Affiliated Group	Non-Religious Affiliated Group
<p><u>Connection</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ To God/Higher Being/Supernatural beings❖ To another realm/something beyond the physical❖ To the self - soul or spirit, or deep part of the self	<p><u>Connection</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Yourself - inner self, soul, self-transformation and awareness.❖ A higher being❖ The world, earth or universe

Results: What do the terms Religion and Spirituality mean?

SPIRITUALITY CONT...

Religious-Affiliated Group	Non-Religious-Affiliated Group
<p>Belief</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ In God/Higher Being/Supernatural Beings❖ In other realm - beyond the physical❖ Beliefs impact your life & the way you live <p>Purpose/Meaning</p>	<p>Belief</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Higher Being❖ Personal beliefs❖ One's religion <p>Purpose/Meaning</p>

Results: What do the terms Religion and Spirituality mean?

RELIGION/RELIGIOSITY

Religious Affiliated Group	Non-Religious Affiliated Group
<p><u>Belief</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ System of beliefs/set of beliefs❖ In God/Higher being <p><u>Practice</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ God's expectations - rules❖ Rules/regulations/morals❖ Traditions/rituals❖ Way of living <p><u>Communal</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ A group affiliation or particular religion❖ Sense of community and belonging	<p><u>Belief</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Higher Being/God❖ Set/system of beliefs❖ How the universe began/creation <p><u>Communal</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Organisation❖ Group with common beliefs❖ Community

Results: What do the terms Religion and Spirituality mean?

RELIGION/RELIGIOSITY

Religious Affiliation Group	Non-Religious Affiliation Group
<p><u>Negative Perception</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Manmade❖ Human attempts to be in God's good books❖ Can be judgemental	<p><u>Negative Perception</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Ignorance❖ Blind belief❖ Misinformed about the origins of the universe

Similar Concepts?

- ▶ Differences within commonalities
- ▶ The Sacred



Now for the quantitative results - For the Religious Affiliated Group, starting with correlations...

Wellbeing Correlations

How do religiosity and spirituality, as well as religious or spiritual identity, influence psychosocial wellbeing, anxiety and depression?

- ▶ Psychological Wellbeing is significantly associated with **Spirituality** ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$), **Moratorium** ($r = -0.52$, $p < 0.01$), **Community** ($r = 0.27$, $p < 0.05$) and **IPPA** ($r = 0.46$, $p < 0.01$) (Relationship with Parents and Friends).
- ▶ Anxiety is also significantly associated with **Spirituality** ($r = -0.22$, $p < 0.05$), **Moratorium** ($r = 0.37$, $p < 0.01$), **Community** ($r = -0.26$, $p < 0.05$) and **IPPA** (-0.35 , $p < 0.01$).
- ▶ Depression is not significantly associated with religiosity, spirituality or any of the identity status's. It is significantly associated with **Community** ($r = -0.35$, $p < 0.01$) and **IPPA** ($r = -0.30$, $p < 0.01$).

Regression Analyses for Psychological Wellbeing

- ▶ “Hierarchical Regression” - Adding variables step by step.
- ▶ In each step you create a “model” that is said to predict a certain proportion of change in the dependent variable. This is usually expressed as R^2 , but today we can just talk about it like a percentage.

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression for predicting Psychological Wellbeing

- The important numbers here are the Betas, the p values and change in R² for steps 2 and 3.
- Model1 (Spirituality) = 21% (R² = .21)
- Model 2 (Spirituality + Moratorium) = 30% (R² = .30)
- Model 3 (Spirituality + Moratorium + IPPA) = 37% (R² = .37)
- According to this analysis, 3 variables are significant in predicting Psychological wellbeing:
Spirituality, Moratorium & IPPA

Psychological Wellbeing (N = 86)				
Predictors	B	S.E.	Beta	p
Step 1 Spirituality	.31	.06	.47	.000
Step 2 Spirituality	.19	.07	.29	.008
Moratorium Identity	-.23	.07	-.36	.001
R ² Change: F = 11.77 (1, 84), p = .001				
Step 3 Spirituality	.15	.07	.23	.026
Moratorium Identity	-.19	.06	-.30	.005
IPPA	.23	.07	.29	.002
R ² Change: F = 10.12 (1, 83), p = .002				

What does this tell us?

- ▶ Scoring highly on spirituality is a factor that positively predicts higher Psychological wellbeing.
- ▶ Being in Spiritual or Religious Moratorium is a factor that is detrimental to Psychological wellbeing.
- ▶ Having positive, trusting relationships with parents and friends predicts higher psychological wellbeing.

Table 4: Hierarchical Regression Predicting Anxiety

Two variables remain significant in the third model: Moratorium and IPPA.

Model 1 (Spirituality) = 4% ($R^2 = .04$)

Model 2 (Spirituality + Moratorium) = 12% ($R^2 = .12$)

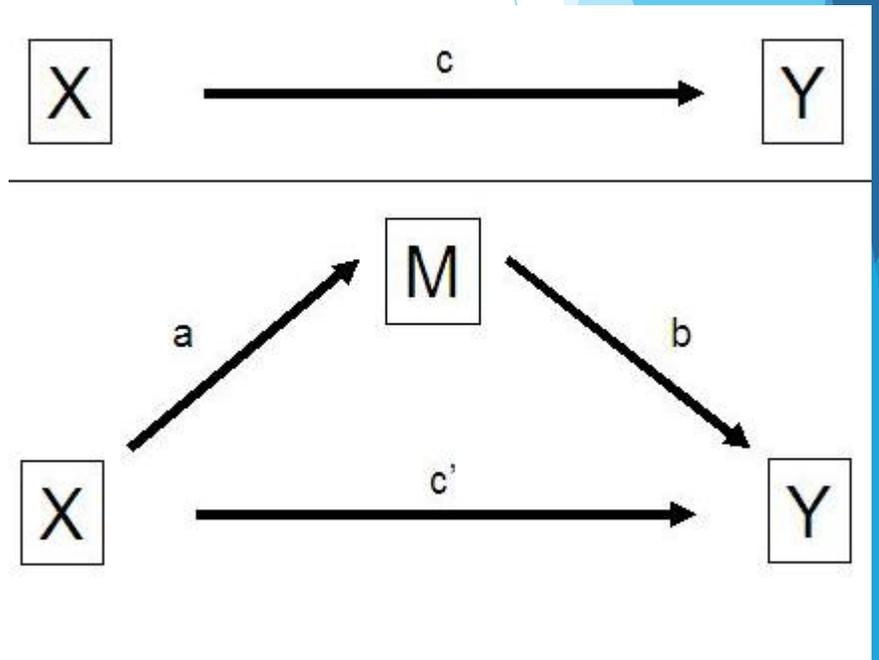
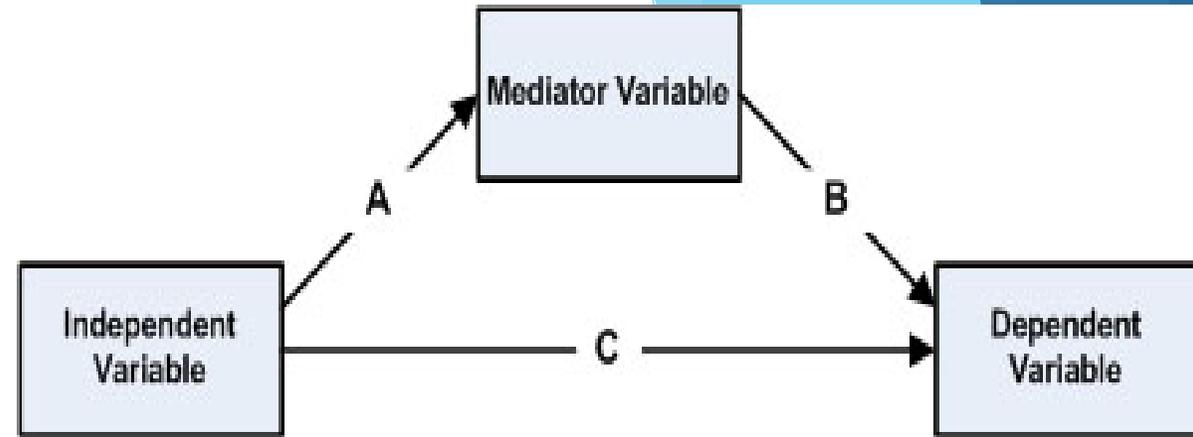
Model 3 (Spirituality + Moratorium + IPPA) = 17% ($R^2 = .17$)

What happened to Spirituality?

Anxiety (N = 86)				
Predictors	B	S.E.	Beta	p
Step 1 Spirituality	-.22	.11	-.22	.041
Step 2 Spirituality	-.04	.12	-.04	.756
Moratorium Identity	.34	.11	.35	.004
R ² Change: F = 8.00 (1, 84), p = .004				
Step 3 Spirituality	.01	.12	.01	.918
Moratorium Identity	.28	.11	.30	.013
IPPA	-.31	.13	-.26	.015
R ² Change: F = 6.11 (1, 83), p = .015				

Moratorium: Mediator

- ▶ So what happened to Spirituality in the regression analysis?
- ▶ Mediation: the relationship between the predicting variable (Spirituality) and the dependent variable (Anxiety) isn't linear.
- ▶ Spirituality influences Anxiety through the Mediating variable (Moratorium).



What does this tell us?

- ▶ Scoring highly on Spirituality reduces the likelihood of scoring highly on anxiety. But this effect is mediated by Moratorium
- ▶ Scoring highly on Moratorium increases the likelihood that a young person will experience anxiety.
- ▶ Scoring highly on having good quality relationships with parents and peers decreases the likelihood of anxiety.

Regression Analysis Predicting Depression

- Model 1 (IPPA): predicts 8% ($R^2 = 0.08$) of the variance in Depression.
- Model 2 (IPPA + Community): accounts for 14% ($R^2 = 0.14$) of the variance in Depression.
- Community as a mediator

Depression (N = 74)				
Predictors	B	S.E.	Beta	p
Step 1				
IPPA	-.157	.058	-.302	.008
Step 2				
IPPA	-.111	.059	-.213	.06
Community	-.181	.071	-.287	.013
R² Change: F = 6.45 (1, 72), p = .013				

Discussion: Depression

- ▶ Correlations with Depression: IPPA and Community
- ▶ Consistent with other findings - importance of social support (Jansen, Motly & Hovey, 2010, Pearce, Little & Perez, 2003).
- ▶ Community = church (For many of the participants)
- ▶ The importance of 'Connectedness' to wellbeing in youth (Jose & Pyor, 2010, Jose & Pyor, 2012)

Discussion: Psychological Wellbeing and Anxiety

- ▶ Spirituality: Predicts higher psychological wellbeing and lower anxiety
- ▶ Not religiosity?
- ▶ Spiritual coping and existential wellbeing
 - ▶ The focus of my measure
 - ▶ Associated with positive psychological outcomes (Briggs & Shoffner, 2006, Davis, Kurpus & Kerr, 2003, Dowling et al, 2003)
- ▶ Can we conclude that it is spirituality and not religion that contributes to wellbeing?
- ▶ Remember that most young adults in the sample have a religious orientation...

Discussion: The Effects of Moratorium on Psychological Wellbeing and Anxiety

- ▶ Being in Moratorium has been named “identity crisis” (Erickson, 1968, Adams & Marshall, 1996).
- ▶ Someone in Moratorium is asking questions and exploring alternative answers without the anchor of secure commitments (Adams & Marshall, 1996).
- ▶ Considering that Moratorium may accompany feelings of disorientation, uncertainty and doubt, it doesn't seem surprising that it could have such an impact on wellbeing.
- ▶ In the literature, theorists of identity acknowledge a connection between Moratorium and anxiety (Kroger, 2003, Marcia, 1967).
- ▶ Moratorium as more problematic for the religiously affiliated?
- ▶ A Canadian study: impact of religious doubts on self-esteem and wellbeing (Hunsberger, Pratt & Prancer, 2001)

Other Ideas...

- ▶ To what extent do young adults feel like they are able to consider and explore different identities? Do they feel that they have the freedom to question their religious ideas and spiritual beliefs?
- ▶ Identity development is a social process
- ▶ To what extent are young adults in a state of spiritual exploration? Is this exploration supported by those they are closest to?

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH:

- ▶ Greater sample size in order to see if the patterns that have emerged can be applied to a wider population.
- ▶ Greater religious and ethnic diversity
- ▶ Using different ways to conceptualise identity, and find out the extent to which exploration is considered a valid expression of faith.
- ▶ Improve the measurements for spirituality specifically for non-religious young adults, and further explore how this might relate to wellbeing.
- ▶ Understand the factor structure of the terms, and how they differ between individuals and religious groups.



Limitations of the Study

- ▶ Small sample size for the amount of research questions and variables
- ▶ Lack of Diversity - Religious/Spiritual, Ethnic, and city
- ▶ Correlational study - Cannot attribute causes
- ▶ Single Cohort
- ▶ Definitions and measures



Strengths of the Study

- ▶ Inclusion of qualitative data
- ▶ Extensive variety of religiosity/spirituality measures - based on the literature
- ▶ I asked questions but did not make hypotheses
- ▶ This is fairly new research for New Zealand.



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