

The Role of Religion in Solidifying the Individual and Group Identity of Women

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Introduction

Title:

The Role of Religion in Solidifying the Individual and Group Identity of Women

Research Question:

What role does religion play in shaping the identity, social behaviors, and individual choices of female UWG students?

Purpose:

To understand how religion shapes the identity and social interactions of female college students

Background and Hypothesis:

I was interested in what motivates women to be socially active in both religious organizations and/or informal social events on the UWG campus and if these motivations pertain to a religious set of values that encourages their participation. This research involved three on-campus religious organizations: Delight Ministries, Baptist Campus Ministries, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Delight Ministries, with its female-only membership and a strong sense of community identity/ *communitas*, has led me to hypothesize that religion acts as a foundational set of values and beliefs which weaves the individual woman to the group and allows her to develop a deeper understanding of her individual and group role as a post-adolescent woman. It also supports and affirms her in self-empowerment, establishment of enduring interpersonal relationships, and her chosen career path.

"Being a transfer student, each of my organizations better me socially, educationally, and spiritually; they help every part of me."
- Fabia, 19

Methods & Data

Methodology:

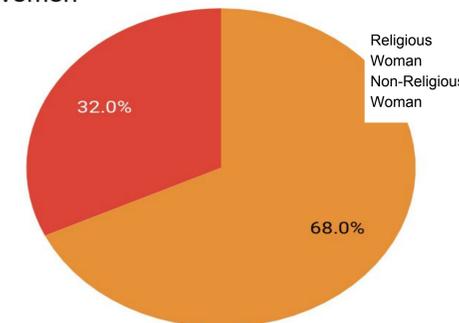
For this study, I constructed multiple surveys that were then given out to willing participants of Delight Ministries, Baptist Campus Ministries, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. These surveys centered covered participant demographics and social activity in both religious organizations and/or informal social events and nonreligious organizations at UWG.

I administered 30 surveys: 15 to undergraduate female students at UWG between the ages of 18-21, who identify with a religion and a religious organization on-campus and 15 to undergraduate females at UWG who are not affiliated with any religious organization on campus (as a control group). Through these surveys, I determined which participants were willing to do a follow-up interview to describe in further detail their religious background (if applicable).

The interview questions focused on the life of the female participant as a self-sufficient individual and how her identity has been molded by past experiences. The questions asked were broad, holistic, and heavily pertained to getting to know who the participant was apart from her religious identity.



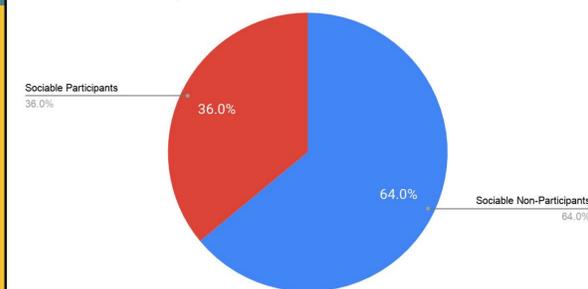
Non-Participation in Formal Organizations at UWG by Religious versus Non-Religious Women



More individuals consider themselves religious yet do not attend any formal organizations on-campus than individuals who do not consider themselves religious yet do attend formal organizations.

This suggests that attending/participating in formal organizations on the UWG campus is not always influenced by religious motives.

Participants of Formal Organizations Who View Themselves as Social Versus Non-Participants



There are more non-participants of formal organizations who view themselves as sociable than there are active participants of formal organizations who view themselves as sociable.

It is possible that being religious and highly involved on-campus in formal and religious organizations does not always result in outgoingness.

References:

Turner, Victor (1967). "Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure." AldineTransaction, pp. 96-97.

Results

Conclusions:

My original hypothesis was that UWG collegiate women who identify with a particular religion and participate in religious organizations on-campus develop specific qualities which allow the woman to have a deeper understanding of who she is as an individual and as a religious practitioner. I also believed that religion played a role in not only constructing female identity but also in motivating these women to be more socially involved in general. Conversely, my data has revealed that religion is not always the sole motivator for a woman's social activity and that identifying as religious does not definitively result in high social activity in religious nor non-religious organizations.

In relation to religion constructing identity, my data shows that religious values are not independent elements that create female identity. Instead, these values act to influence a female's daily performance of identity and behavior. Amazingly, I have found that these women heavily connect with the idea of constructing their identity day-to-day in response to their social, personal, and spiritual needs. These women have taught me the fluidity and nuances of identity; the idea of identity being a performance shows that religion has the role of providing a foundational core of values which manifest themselves in spiritual as well as non-spiritual ways in order to create and solidify a sense of community and teaches these women what it means to be human regardless of what they identify or are labeled as.

"I'm finding myself everyday. I mean, sometimes you have to risk losing what's comfortable in order to get comfortable; sometimes you have to lose yourself in order to find yourself."
- Francis, 20