College students’ views of teen pregnancy in relation to their religious devotion

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Abstract

Teen pregnancy rates in America are the highest among all developed nations. Although these rates have been decreasing since 1995, this nation is still concerned about young single mothers (McKay & Barrett 2010). However, there have been very few studies which have examined perceptions of teen pregnancy and even fewer which relate religious beliefs to this matter. As there are studies that provide evidence of the impact of Christian beliefs on sexual behavior, it stands to reason that these Christian beliefs can influence the perceptions of teen pregnancy as well (Meier 2003). An alternate approach is that the individualization of Christianity of the past 40 years has resulted in contemporary Christian perspectives that have become more secularized, hence indistinct from the views of modern American society (Petersen & Donnenwerth 1997). The present study found that college students have a generally positive view of teen pregnancy, but there is not a significant correlation between views of teen pregnancy and religious devotion.
College Students’ views of teen pregnancy in relation to their religious devotion

Teen pregnancy has been an American societal concern since the 1960s (Furstenberg 1991). Even with teen pregnancy rates decreasing since 1995, there is still concern for this cultural issue (US Census Bureau 2008). For instance, America still has the highest teen pregnancy rate when compared to other developed nations (McKay & Barrett 2010). Pregnant teens are considered to be a stigmatized group within society, illustrated by the prevailing notion that they are deviant individuals who have violated cherished norms (Eshbaugh 2011). However, there is limited research in understanding peoples’ perspectives on this societal concern. There are even fewer studies examining if there are connections between religious beliefs and perceptions of teen pregnancy. The goal of this study is to understand if the religious devotion of college students, specifically those of various denominations of Christianity, has an effect on their perceptions of teen pregnancy.

Teen pregnancy

Historical perspective

Looking at how the views concerning teen pregnancies have changed over the past 50 years can give insight to how this cultural concern has developed and why it has been a growing concern, even with the fact that there have been fewer teen pregnancies over the past 15 years. Public concerns surrounding the matter of teen pregnancy began to develop in the 1960s (Regnerus 2007). During this time period, girls in this situation were attempted to be kept secret. In general, American families were not supportive of pregnant teens. They would typically force the young mother to marry the father of the child in order to “hide” the fact that the teenage girl had become pregnant out of wedlock. With this era being the same time period of the baby boomers’ generation, not only was teen pregnancy on the rise but so were teen marriages. The
attempt to “hide” these premarital pregnancies was most prevalent in middle and upper class families of Caucasian descent. Therefore, even though teen pregnancy became more prevalent during this time, so did teen marriages. Thus, during this time period, teen mothers who carried a pregnancy full term most likely did not do so out of wedlock. This time period valued the silence of a teen pregnancy since many parents would force their daughters to marry the father of the unborn child (Furstenberg 1991).

The opinions which were prevalent during the 1960s began to change throughout the following decade. The era of the 1970s identified a change in American society. The increase of teen pregnancies began to be understood as a “social problem.” This was partially because the amount of teenagers who married due to a pregnancy decreased (Furstenberg 1991). The 1970s did not just change how teen pregnancy affected woman’s relationship status; it was the start of the rise in minority groups due to births and not immigration (Wilson 1998). Through the next decade, America experienced the women’s liberation movement, which helped encourage women to be single mothers, no matter their age. Consequently, this time period became subject to not only an increase in single teen mothers but single mothers in general (Furstenberg 1991).

Even though the increase of single motherhood changed in society, the prevailing norms still reflected a rejection of teen mothers. In 1978, teen birth accounted for 50% of all out-of-wedlock births (Wilson 1998). Also, people with a low socioeconomic status tend to have a higher rate of teen pregnancy than those from a more middle to upper class background (Wilson 1998). The American culture assumed that the pregnant girl would not finish high school and have little to no means to care for her child if she had a child out of wedlock. This left researchers with a desire to understand if being a teen mother was truly associated with negative ramifications. Consequently, in the 1980s, studies were conducted to examine the effects of teen
parenthood, specifically single teen motherhood. The label “teen mom” started to have more distinctive negative judgments associated with it. Thus, in this time period, there was a prevalent stigmatization of teen moms. Even though Furstenberg argues that having a child while still in ones’ teenage years may be beneficial for some groups of people, due to the ease of child bearing at a young age and parental support, “teen mom” is still a title which implies negative judgments on a young woman (Furstenberg 1991). It may also be the case, as argued by Wilson, that people who are in poverty do not strive for a better life and tend to rely more on the idea of luck and good fortune. This idea affects how they plan for the future. They tend to not plan for the future and set low aspirations for themselves (Wilson 1998). Furstenberg found that teenage girls of low socioeconomic status may benefit from having a child as a teenager, while Wilson claims childbearing at an early age does not affect their future success due to their already low aspirations about themselves (Furstenberg 1997, Wilson 1998). However, negative stereotypes concerning teen pregnancy still prevailed even as the changes in society became more accepting of teen and single mothers.

Teen pregnancy views in today’s society

Keeping the historical development of American culture in relation to teen pregnancy in mind, there are few studies examining perceptions of teen pregnancy, beyond examining stereotypes. Although there are studies which implicate the stigmatization of teen mothers, these studies focus on how teen mothers feel they are stigmatized or how to help them overcome the stigmatized label of “teen mom” (Kelly 1997). In addition, many studies tend to look at the differences in how people treat teen parents based on their race. These studies indicate that the bias toward teen parents is accentuated by their nonwhite status (Softas-Nall et al 1997). Beyond these findings, little is known about the current views concerning women of this status. When
looking at the few studies which have been done, the assumption is that women in these situations will not finish high school, and most likely will not attend or complete college because of the stressors of motherhood. It is also of concern that they will not be able to work nor find a profitable job due to the lack of education and the responsibilities associated with being a parent (Herman & Waterhouse 2011). The label of teen mom carries with it other negative associations such as poverty, abuse, welfare dependency, emotionally unbalanced behavior, and ignorance (Kelly 1997).

The research considering modern day perspectives about teen pregnancy is minimal. However, there are a few current studies which have generated a better understanding of the perspectives of high school and college students on teen pregnancy. One of these surveys was conducted with high school students as the participants. It did not consider other aspects of a students’ life which may have an impact on their views of teen pregnancy (Herrman & Waterhouse 2011). On the other hand, a survey conducted with college students compared their area of study to their views on teen pregnancy, and no relationship was found. However, this research did identify what a majority of college students believe about teen pregnancy (Eshbaugh 2011).

The previously mentioned survey conducted by Eshbaugh found that college students had some negative views which indicated that, although they endorse the some of stereotypes surrounding teen pregnancy, they did not have strong negative perceptions of teen mothers. They believe that these young women had become pregnant out of ignorance about contraception practices and without knowing the responsibility of parenthood. Also, they believe that American taxes are higher due to teen mothers receiving government support from programs such as Women Infants and Children (WIC) and Medicaid. However, despite these negative
views, they also believed that a teen mom could be a good mother and that teen moms should keep their children. In addition, they did not view teen mothers as being neglectful of their children (Eshbaugh 2011). Overall, it was found that college students perceived teen mothers as irresponsible for getting pregnant, but not necessarily as irresponsible parents and had generally positive views of teen pregnancy.

Herrman and Waterhouse’s study examined the views of high school students regarding teen mothers. Research determined high school students who were not parents believed that teen mothers had more of a perceived adult status and better government support. Students had the impression that since mothering was done at an earlier time in their life, this left more time for them to pursue a career later. Researchers defined these as positive views, but there were also negative perceptions as well. These detriments included loss of freedom, loss of a social life, sleep loss, increases in responsibilities, and loss of a “teen experience” (Herrman & Waterhouse 2011).

Studies have also indicated that being a teen parent is not necessarily judged by just that status, but also by other factors such as race and gender. There was a study where students who were in a graduate counseling program did mock interviews with actors pretending to be teen parents. It was found that these students were more likely to base their advice to teen parents on the race and gender of the teen parent, thus, not treating all the teen parents equally (Softas-Nall et al 1997). Views of teen pregnancy and parenting do differ and have a variety of judgments associated with them. However, none of these studies examined religious beliefs as a contributing factor to a person’s perceptions of teen pregnancy.

Prior research has established that stereotypes of teen mothers exist, however many of these studies have considered how the moms feel they are being viewed, and not how others are
actually viewing them in the present day. This group is stigmatized since they are in a perceptively undesired situation for their current time in life. The key to this idea is that these judgments are assumed. Studies have found that 40% of teen mothers claim to feel stigmatized as a result of their pregnancy (Eshbaugh 2011). Yet, there are still minimal studies done on other perceptions of teen pregnancy. This leaves the questions, “How do people who are not pregnant teens view teen pregnancy? Do the perceptions of people remain consistent with the stereotypes previously described? And what are the factors that impact an individual’s views of teen pregnancy?"

**Religion and American culture**

Given that there are stereotypes about teen mothers, studies should start considering what factors influence the perception of teen pregnancy, and how the nature of stereotypes surrounding teen pregnancy have changed over time. Religion is the apparatus that many parents and families use to give and implement social experiences, moral standards, and values to their children (Simons et al 2009, Regnerus 2007). Though there are many different religions, the majority of Americans tend to affiliate themselves with denominations of Christianity. According to the data from the American census in 2012, about 76% of Americans claim to be Christian (including Catholic, Protestant and other denominations), while approximately 4% claim to embrace other religious belief systems such as Islam or Judaism, and 15% claim to associate with no organized religion (US Census Bureau 2012). These numbers show that the majority of Americans claimed to have a Christian religious affiliation. Therefore, comparing peoples’ devotion to their faith in relationship to their views may help give a better understanding of the perceptions of Americans on a variety of cultural concerns such as teen pregnancy.
Even though many Americans claim to follow a form of Christianity, there may be a difference in levels of devotion to their faith. One study found that 78% of college students claim that their religion has an impact on their daily lives (Small & Bowman 2011). However, when comparing Protestant, Catholic and secular institutions, studies found that those who attended a Protestant college were more strongly devoted to their faith (Small & Bowman 2011). This study also found that college students tend to be more skeptical about any religious institution, but the majority will claim to affiliate themselves with a denomination of Christianity even if they are not strongly devoted to their claim. Also, studies have found that although students may have increased skepticism about religion during their college years, they will most likely return to the religious beliefs with which they were raised (Small & Bowman 2011). Thus, the question is raised, “How do their religious affiliations and devotion relate to their views of societal issues?” More specifically, how does their level of religiosity relate to their views of teen pregnancy?”

*History of Christianity in America: post 1970*

In the 1970s, Christianity began to lose its influence as a public or community belief and became more individualized. Before the 1970s, the church had a strong impact on the public domain, but post 1970 church members started to have more individualized positions on a variety of cultural and Biblical concerns. With differences in viewpoints, people began to form their own opinions and hold to those opinions with greater fervor than the collective opinions of the church. This made the church seemingly more “secular,” since there was not the emphasis on rules that had once been in place in earlier times (Petersen & Donnenwerth 1997). Petersen and Donnenwerth suggest that the decade of 1970s was when a greater concern for teen pregnancy began, which was partially due to the secularization of religion (1997). Religion was
now seen as more personalized and less institutionalized; individuals were motivated to make the
Bible fit their life style instead of adhering to the “rules” of the church (Bellah et al 2007, Chaves

Though Petersen and Donnenwerth claim that the church still has the inherent belief that
premarital sex is immoral, the idea that Protestant and Catholic churches provide their members
autonomy allows for Christians and Catholics to interpret the church doctrine and Bible in a
manner that considers morals to be based on one’s own personal conscience and convictions
(1997). Although the church as a whole still holds to the belief that premarital sex is immoral, the
members of the church may not. Sexual behavior and choice is considered to many as a
“private matter” and due to the secularization, the church members are less inclined to desire
institutions to determine their decisions in private matters (Portmann & Plüss 2011, Regnerus
2007, Taylor 2009). Along with this idea, people, even Christians, do not want to feel like they
are coerced into believing something which leave for a greater amount of individualistic beliefs
in the church body (Bellah et al 2007, Portmann & Plüss 2011). This idea of the personalization
of moral decisions permits a more lenient attitude toward premarital sex.

*Religion and sex*

The changes in Christians’ beliefs still impact church members and those who claim to be
Christians in modern society. Not only are sexual decisions related to personal matters, but
family and religious matters as well. The more connected they are to family and church will
have a strong determination on their sexual experiences (Regnerus 2007). When considering
studies on sex and Christianity, research has found that Christian teens are more likely to develop
their views of sex from their community of friends and less from the church or authority figures,
such as parents and school officials. Therefore, there is a different type of conviction of teens
with respect to sexual behavior today, since there is not as great of an emphasis on following church doctrine or rules as there was in the past (Meier 2003). Decisions concerning sexual behavior are based on the social environment of a Christian teen. The majority did have the conviction that sex should only be with someone you were going to marry, such as a “serious relationship” or engagement, if sexual intercourse was outside of marriage (Simons et al 2009).

There are no studies which compare religious devotion and perceptions on teen pregnancy, but having sex is an essential part to the pregnancy process. Understanding how sex is viewed by Christian teens may give insight to views about teen pregnancy. There are empirical studies which examine the relations between a teenagers’ likelihood to have premarital sex, and their religious beliefs. Studies have found a connection between an individuals’ first intercourse and religiosity. Researchers determined that teens with a religious background, and who are more religiously devout, tend to have their first intercourse later than those who do not claim to have any religious affiliation (Meier 2003). Not only is their first sexual intercourse delayed, but they are also more likely to have fewer sexual partners and be less sexual active (Regnerus 2007). It is unsurprising then, that the younger sexually active “Christian” teens admit to being involved with someone of either a more liberal view of their religion, or someone who did not affiliate themselves to a particular religious organization (Simons et al 2009). Since religious views have an effect on sexual behavior, they may have an effect on a person’s perception of teen pregnancy as well.

Religion and abortion

Abortion is considered to be an alternative option for a woman carrying a pregnancy full term. Research revealed that women who claim religion to be an important part of their lives are less likely to obtain an abortion. Due to the previous study finding that teens who have
premarital sex and claim to be religious usually have fewer partners and a delayed first intercourse experience, there is a smaller population of women who are in the situation of making the decisions to have an abortion. Many women who claim to be devoted to their religious beliefs are married before they become pregnant. This may a contributing factor toward why they are less likely to obtain an abortion (Adamczyk & Felson 2008).

According to Adamczyk and Felson’s study on religion and abortion, women who do become pregnant outside of marriage and are Catholic, mainline Protestant, or Jewish are more likely than conservative Protestants to have an abortion. The study suggests several possible explanations for these differences. For example, it is suggested that the Jewish affiliation strongly encourages women to have higher education, which motherhood can hinder. Thus, this may account for the greater amount of abortions obtained by Jewish women. However, conservative Protestants highly value motherhood and are less likely to over emphasize higher educational achievement (Adamczyk & Felson 2008). This study indicates that there are different cultural views about out-of-wedlock pregnancies amongst people with religious backgrounds. This study indicates that the perceptions of pre-marital sex are different amongst religious groups. As a result, Adamczyk and Felson’s study may give insight into how various Christian denominations feel regarding teen pregnancy.

**Current study**

Having examined closely related research and identified a significant knowledge gap, this study will examine what effect religious devotion, Christianity in particular, has on college students’ perceptions regarding teen pregnancy.

This study will also examine teen pregnancy as a broader cultural concern. The views of North Central College students will be analyzed to determine similarity to results found in
Eshbaugh’s study. Based on Eshbaugh’s results, this study hypothesizes that college students will have a generally positive view of teen pregnancy. Since religiosity has a strong influence on sexual experience before marriage, it is hypothesized that students who are more religiously devout will more likely have negative views of teen pregnancy when compared to others who do not share similar levels of religiosity. Therefore, this study looks to answer the following questions:

1. What are students’ perceptions about teen pregnancy?
2. How do college students who are more religiously devoted (based on their religious beliefs, attendance, and strength in their faith) view teen pregnancy differently than those who are not religiously devoted?

**Procedure**

Study sessions were conducted at North Central College in Naperville, Illinois. Each participant was informed in writing and verbally instructed on the subject matter of the study and gave written consent. The study’s primary focus on teen pregnancy was withheld from them in order to reduce biases and possible sensitivity to the topic. Students were told the study’s main intent was to examine a variety of cultural issues in comparison to college students’ religious devotion. Upon completion of a written survey session, students were debriefed and the exclusive nature of the study was revealed to them.

Every participant was given a three-part survey which addressed the areas of demographics, cultural views, and religious devotion. The first part assessed relevant demographics which included race, income, year in school, religion, major, and whether or not
there was a teen mother in their family. These questions were designed to provide a deeper understanding of not just religious devotion but each participant’s religious affiliation.

Participants

A total of 63 participants took part in this study. All were enrolled in a psychology course at North Central College. Each participant gave informed consent prior to taking the surveys and was debriefed after completed. They were given one research credit for participation in the study in order to fulfill academic requirements.

Methods

Cultural Issues Questionnaire

The second part of the survey, the Cultural Issues Questionnaire, was a mixture of questions about teen pregnancy and other cultural concerns relevant to the current time period. These issues include cohabitation, abortion, same sex marriage, and the legalization of marijuana. The questions on teen pregnancy come from a survey created by Dr. Eshbaugh designed for research on college students’ views of teen pregnancy (2011). Eshbaugh’s survey was created to be an opinion based questionnaire. The survey which will be used in this study will combine questions from the survey created by Eshbaugh as well as additional questions specifically created for the purpose of this study. The Cultural Issues Questionnaire is intended to make the purpose of this study less obvious to the participants. The statements are opinion based statements such as, “teen mothers are a burden to society”; “I believe the United States should legalize marijuana”; “cohabitation before marriage helps couples stay together after marriage”; “same sex marriage will destroy society”; and “teen mothers tend to depend on others to care for their children.” Participants were asked to rate these statements from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).
Religious Devotion Survey

The third part of the survey, Religious Devotion Survey, addresses a participant’s personal religious involvement and devotion to Christianity. This survey was created for this study in order to examine the devotion people have to their religion. The questions are based on those originating from the General Social Survey regarding religion (1972-2006). This questionnaire is designed to understand a participant’s personal involvement in religious activities and depth and sincerity of devotion. Statements include “my faith's texts are important to my daily choices,” “I would describe myself as a person of faith,” and “When someone comes to me with a problem, I tell them to seek God or scriptural texts.” Participants were asked to rate these statements from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). However, there were two questions which do not follow this format but instead are multiple choice questions. One is regarding attendance to church services, and the second asks about the validity of the Bible.

Results

Demographics

There were 63 participants, of which 21 were male and 42 were female. The average age was 21 years with a range of 18 to 30 years. When asked to indicate their classification in college, 32% were freshman, 29% sophomores, 16% juniors, and 24% seniors. The majority of the subjects were Caucasian descent (76%), while 5% were African-American, 13% Hispanic, and 6% other. The majority of the participants claimed to be either Christian (40%) or Catholic (36%); while 3% claimed to be Islamic, 8% subscribed to be atheist ideology, and 5% did not have any affiliation with a religion or belief system. The majority stated to have household incomes related to middle to upper class families: 25% had incomes of $100,000+, 32% claimed to be in the $55,000-75,000, 18% were in $35,000-55,000 range, 13% in the $25,000-35,000
range, and 13% claimed to be in the $10,000-25,000 range. Only 8% of the participants noted that they had a teen mother in their family.

Cultural Views Questionnaire and perceptions of teen pregnancy

The Cultural Views Questionnaire was measured by evaluating each topic separately and measuring their total scores using descriptive statistics, means, and standard deviations. The percentage of agreement was measured for comparison view with the Eshbaugh study. Higher scores were related to having more positive views of that topic in question. The participants assessed each statement on a four point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The survey addressed four topics, with a larger number of the questions concerning the topic of teen pregnancy. A breakdown of the survey follows: teen pregnancy (8 questions), legalization of marijuana (3 questions), cohabitation (2 questions), and same sex marriage (2 questions).

The assessment of teen pregnancy consisted of possible scores ranging from 8 to 32, with higher scores indicating more positive views of teen pregnancy. Participants rated the statements of agreement by the scale. The mean score was 23.14 (SD=3.28).

Table 1: Cultural Views Survey – Teen Pregnancy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>% agree, strong agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teen mothers are a burden to society.*</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion is a good option for a single woman.*</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen mothers can be successful in work environments.</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>92.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen mothers are generally irresponsible.*</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The government should financially assist teen mothers.</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen mothers tend to depend on others to take care of their children.*</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>63.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen mothers are neglectful of their child (children).*</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen mothers are motivated to be good parents.</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>79.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates reversed scored items, Note: Items in percentage column indicate agreement with original statement.
Religious Devotion Survey

Religious devotion was measured by finding the composite score of participants’ answers to the two parts of the survey. Descriptive statistics, the mean, and standard deviation were found to better measure what extent students are devoted to their religious beliefs. The first five statements were scored by agreement, with a higher number indicating stronger religious devotion. The last two questions had multiple answers, when considering the questions “How often do you attend services?,” participants were given six options, 1 (more than once a week), 2 (once a week), 3 (every couple of weeks), 4 (once a month), 5 (special events and holidays), and 6 (never). This item was reversed scored, in order to make a higher score indicate stronger religious devotion. The second item in the set was “What statement comes closest to your understanding of the Bible?” with answers ranging 1 to 3, 1 (The Bible is a book of good stories to inspire morality, but is make-believe), 2 (The Bible is inspired by God, but not His direct words), and 3 (The Bible is the direct word of God). The composite possible scores could range from 7 to 32, with higher scores indicating stronger religious devotion. The mean score was 15.77 (SD=5.39).

Religious devotion and views of teen pregnancy

A significant correlation was not apparent when comparing religious devotion to perceptions of teen pregnancy (r=.11, p>.05). However, when comparing religious devotion to each question individually, there was a significant finding between religious devotion and the statement regarding abortion. The greater someone was devoted to their religion, the more likely they were to disagree with the statement “abortion is a good option for a single woman” the correlation being r= -.31, p<.05. With all other statements there were no significant relationships found between religious devotion and perceptions of teen pregnancy.
Religious denomination and views of teen pregnancy

Though there were not significant findings in consideration of any of the pregnancy questions and religious devotion questions, taking a demographical look using cross tabulation tables can give insight into =Christians and Catholics views of each statement. The percentages of agreement are described in the following tables (Table 2 through Table 5).

**Table 2: Percentages of agreement Teen mothers are a burden to society, Catholic and Christianity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Catholic N=22</th>
<th>Christian N=25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>59.1%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: Percentages of agreement Abortion is a good option for teen mothers, Catholic and Christianity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Catholic N=22</th>
<th>Christian N=25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4: Percentages of agreement Teen mothers are generally irresponsible, Catholic and Christianity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Catholic N=22</th>
<th>Christian N=25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5: Percentages of agreement The government should financially assist teen mothers, Catholic and Christianity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Catholic N=22</th>
<th>Christian N=25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographic factors and views of teen pregnancy
In the consideration of all demographical information, there were no significant correlations between views of teen pregnancy and any of the possible factors.

**Other topics**

The statements regarding the legalization of marijuana had a possible total score ranging from 3 to 12. The mean score was 7.62 (SD 2.43). This indicates that these college students seem to have a positive view of the legalization of marijuana. There was no significant correlation ($r = .07, p > .05$) with considering the relationship between a participants’ religious devotion and views on the legalization of marijuana.

When considering the statements with relation to the topic of cohabitation, the possible scores ranged from 2 to 8. The mean score was 5.81 (SD 1.12). This indicates that these college students seem to have more of a positive than negative view of cohabitation. Even with this, there was significant negative correlation of $r = -.32, p < .05$ when regarding the relationship between religious devotion and views of cohabitation. Therefore, this indicates that students who are more devoted to their religion are less likely to have positive views of cohabitation.

The category of statements concerning same sex marriage has a possible total score ranging from 2 to 8. Of the variety of scores, 67% of participants had an agreement of 8 out of 8, which implies greater positive views of same sex marriage. However, though there were about two thirds of the participants who agreed with the statements regarding same sex marriage, a significant negative correlation of $r = -.41, p < .01$ was found when comparing positive views of same sex marriage and a participants’ religious devotion. Therefore, even though many of the participants seem to indicate having strong positive views of same sex marriage, those who are more religiously devout are more likely to have negative views of same sex marriage.

**Discussion**
The present study of North Central College students did not support the hypothesis that those with high religious devotion will have more negative views regarding teen pregnancy. None the less, religious devotion does seem to be related to other cultural concerns such as same sex marriage, abortion, and cohabitation. This may be related to the subset of students surveyed, considering that the majority of them come from upper middle class and upper class households. These areas tend to have fewer occurrences of teen pregnancy than areas with low socioeconomic statuses (Furstenberg 2001).

On the other hand, the hypothesis concerning college students’ views of teen pregnancy was supported by this study. In general, college students are likely to have a positive view of the topic being considered. Therefore, the findings are similar to the Eshbaugh study in this matter.

Religious devotion

This study is only representative of North Central College students, but is not necessarily similar to the findings which may be found at a different college or university. In general, the students surveyed did not have a numerically strong devotion to their claimed faith. However, this may indicate the type of student who is attracted to North Central College. Since, North Central College is a private college, but does not directly encourage its students to follow a specific denomination, faith, or require attendance to religious services, there is a specific variety of students, different from those who would attend a traditional private institution. Based on other studies, it is possible that if this study were conducted at a school with a salient Christian identity, there may have been a more significantly correlative result. Small & Bowman’s research credits Protestant higher education facilities with attracting persons with a higher value assigned to religious devotion (2011). If a similar study were conducted at one of these institutions, the sample might include a more devout group.
Even though many students did not score high on the Religious Devotion Survey, religious devotion did negatively correlate with other cultural topics. Thus, it must be considered why the more religiously devout did not understand teen pregnancy negatively. A possible explanation is the secularization of Christianity in relationship to the personalization of beliefs (Petersen & Donnenwerth 1997, Portmann & Plüss 2011, Taylor 2009). Since the church has become more personalized it may be the case that Christians are becoming more accepting of this topic rather than matters which are still culturally disconcerting such as same sex marriage.

Religion and views of teen pregnancy

Another possible explanation is related to the idea of abortion and the value Christianity puts on the idea of pro-life. The present study found one statement in relation to teen pregnancy to be negatively correlated with religious devotion, the one pertaining to abortion. Therefore, those who do hold to religious beliefs may see supporting teen pregnancy and motherhood as the better option. Since the church has become more personalized it may be the case that Christians are becoming more accepting of this topic rather than matters which are still culturally disconcerting such as same sex marriage. In Table 3, it is shown the percentage of agreement among Christians and Catholics on this topic. The majority of Christians (72%) and Catholics (63.6%) disagree or strongly disagreed with the statement “abortion is a good option for a single woman” (Table 3). Therefore, the idea of supporting teen pregnancy and motherhood is considered to be an alternate option to the termination of an unwanted pregnancy. Since abortion is typically seen as negative to Christians and Catholics, the idea could be presented that these religious sectors would rather support a pregnant teen than see her abort her child.

Christians and Catholics have some differences when looking at their agreement to the statements. In consideration of the statement “teen mothers are generally irresponsible”, only
8% of Christians agree with this statement while 27.3% of Catholics agreed (table 3). Another statement which was inconsistent amongst these religious groups was in the statement “teen mothers are motivated to be good parents”. Christians (84%) were more likely than Catholics (72.2%) to agree with this statement (Table 4). Christians (44%) were also more likely to agree to the statement “the government should financially assist teen mothers” than Catholics (27.3%) (Table 5). Another discrepancy surrounded the agreement of the statement “teen mothers are a burden to society.” Participants who claimed to be Christians (24%) were more likely to agree with this statement than those who claimed to be Catholics (4%) (Table 2). Due to the small sample size, an understanding of mainline or conservative Protestant denominations was unable to be evaluated. From these agreements, it seems that those who qualify themselves as Christians rather than Catholics have more positive views of teen pregnancy, but there was no significant difference in the present study.

Perceptions of teen pregnancy

The hypothesis about college students’ views of teen pregnancy was supported by the data. According to Eshbaugh’s study, college students tend to have positive views of teens who are pregnant. Eshbaugh’s survey contained a 21-item questionnaire and consisted of a larger sample size than the current study with 316 participants. Certain statements elicited different results. Eshbaugh’s study found that 76% felt that the government should assist teen mothers, while the present study found that only 38.1% endorse this statement. When comparing the statement “teen mothers can be successful in work environments”, Eshbaugh’s study found that only 36.1% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement while the present study found that 92.1% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Another divergent finding, was “teen mothers are generally irresponsible.” Only 20.7% of college students in the present study
agreed or strongly agreed with this statement while in Eshbaugh’s study 40.2% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Even with the difference of agreement of statements, both studies found that college students have a positive view of teen pregnancy.

The mean score of views of teen pregnancy was 23.14 which indicates, when compared to the range of scores between 8 and 32, that college students have generally positive perceptions regarding the subject of teen pregnancy. This is similar to findings in the Eshbaugh study. The mean score of 42 out of a possible 60 indicates the same conclusion. Both of these studies have indicated that, in general, college students do not have strong negative views of teen pregnancy (2011). More research should be done in order to fully understand if college students endorse the stereotypes of teen pregnancy.

Abortion

This study considered the issue of abortion to be concerned with teen pregnancy since it is an option for a teenage girl who is pregnant and does not want to carry the pregnancy full term. This was the only statement which was determined to be correlated with religious devotion. The present study found that the more religiously devout an individual is the more likely they are to disagree with the statement, “abortion is a good option for a single woman.” This is similar to findings in the study done by Adamczyk and Felson. The study considered the likelihood of a single woman obtaining an abortion if they found themselves pregnant outside of marriage in comparison to their religious devotion. The research found that women who claimed to be Christians were less likely to have an abortion (Adamczyk & Felson 2008). The present study only addressed this subject as agreed with by college students. In general, college students’ results were spread out over the range of possibilities concerning this subject, but those who claimed to be more religiously devout were less likely to agree with this statement. When
in consideration of the differences between Catholics and Christians, Catholics (36.4) had more agreement than those who defined themselves as Christian (28%) with this statement. These findings are also similar to data involving the likelihood of a woman having an abortion. Since, Catholics are more likely than conservative Protestants to obtain an abortion. Therefore, although teen pregnancy is not necessarily viewed as positive or negative in comparison with religious devotion, high religious devotion was related to negative views of abortion.

Other Topics

Though the other topics from the Cultural Views Questionnaire do not pertain to the purposes of this study, those findings were reported since they can give insight into what moral subjects high religious devotion may be related to a persons’ viewpoints. Examining these findings may reveal significance among other cultural matters. These findings may be useful for future research, and for indicating how religious devotion affects a college students’ perception of cultural concerns. A study done at Baylor University found similar findings to those from the present study when comparing religions and beliefs about same sex marriage. Whitehead measured religious variables by attendance of religious services, Biblical literalism, and affiliation. Results exemplified that Protestants and Catholics were less likely to agree with same sex marriage than persons not religiously affiliated (Whitehead 2010). When considering the topic of cohabitation, the present study’s findings are consistent with behavior found in other studies. These have shown that those who attended church regularly were 3.2 times less likely to cohabitate pre-marriage than nonreligious affiliates. Even Christians who were not regular church attendants were still 1.2 times less likely to cohabitate pre-marriage (Village et al 2010, Henze & Hudson 1974). Taking into consideration the results of these studies, it is not surprising
to find a negative correlation between views of cohabitation and same sex marriage when related to religious devotion, such as was found in the present study.

**Limitations**

There were some limitations to this study. First, there was a small sample size. Due to limited time and students, a greater subject pool could not be acquired. Second, there may not have been enough questions regarding teen pregnancy in the survey to get a deeper understanding of college students’ views. Eshbaugh’s survey was a 21-item questionnaire which found a significant relationship between year in school and positive views of teen pregnancy (2011). However, in this study, there was no such finding.

Also, the *Religious Devotion Survey* was created specifically for Protestant and Catholic point of views. Therefore, other religions, such as Islam, Judaism, or Buddhist did not measure as highly devoted because the survey was aimed at denominations of Christianity and Catholicism. Unique questionnaires to better measure other religions’ devotion can help indicate if other religions may have indicated different views of teen pregnancy.

**Future research**

Future studies considering similar subjects may want to expand questions on teen pregnancy by developing a longer survey and create unique surveys to measure other religions. Though this study may not have found many significant relationships between perceptions of teen pregnancy and religious devotion, future research may want to only consider participants following exclusive religions and specifically look at their devotion through expanding the *Religious Devotion Survey*.

**Conclusion**
Though this study found no significant correlation between perceptions of teen pregnancy and religious devotion, the findings indicate similar results to the Eshbaugh study. Both the present study and the Eshbaugh study concluded that the college students surveyed have a generally positive view of teen pregnancy (2011). In order for this matter to be better understood, a greater number of college students from different regional areas and of diverse backgrounds must be surveyed. The limitations of this study do not allow for broader conclusions concerning this topic. In conclusion, there is recent research which supports that college students have positive views of teen pregnancy, but more studies must be done in order to arrive at a full understanding of these findings.
References


