

The Hypocrisy Factor:

Cognitive Dissonance, Religion, Sex, Drinking,
and Suicide Attempts Among Christian and
Public University Students

Jerome R. Koch
Alden E. Roberts
Myrna L. Armstrong
Texas Tech University

Presented at the Annual Meeting of the
Society for the Scientific Study of Religion
October 23, 2015, Newport Beach, CA

jerome.koch@ttu.edu

This research was supported by a generous
grant from the

E.A. Franklin Charitable Trust

(and from viewers like you).

Thank you!

drjkoch.org – Seeking the Moral Community

The Sample

- Southern Christian University n= 531
 - Southern Public University n= 556
-
- 88 % Ages 18-20 Total N = 1087
 - 69 % White Response Rate = 84 %
 - 63 % Female

The Research Question:

(How) Do Disparities in Religious Belief, Religious Practice, and Social Behavior Relate to Suicide Behavior?

(Cognitive Dissonance and Hypocrisy?)

Cognitive Dissonance

- ***Cognitive dissonance*** refers to a situation involving *conflicting attitudes*, beliefs or behaviors.
- This produces a *feeling of discomfort* leading to an alteration in one of the attitudes, beliefs or behaviors to reduce the discomfort and restore balance etc.

Hypocrisy

The behavior of people who do things that they tell other people not to do - behavior that does not agree with what someone claims to believe or feel. (Webster)

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” (Jesus)

Creeds and Deeds Conflict
Guilt, Secrecy, Suicide?

The “Moral Communities Hypothesis.”

I suggest that what counts is not only whether a particular person is religious, but whether this religiousness is, or is not, ratified by the social environment. The idea here is that religion is empowered to produce conformity to the norms only as it is sustained through interaction and is accepted by the majority as a valid basis for action. ... Religious individuals will be less likely than those who are not religious to commit delinquent acts, *but only in communities where the majority of the people are actively religious.*

Stark, Rodney. 1996. “Religion as Context: Hellfire and Delinquency One More Time.” *Sociology of Religion* 57(2): 163-173.

The Hypocrisy Factor

How do similarly religious college students
behave differently within, and away from

The Moral Community

Variables, Scales, and Results from Surveying Students

Religiosity

A Scale of Eleven Questions:

- Strength of Religious Faith
- Frequency of Prayer
- Saying Grace Before Meals
- Praying for Personal Needs
- Praying for Specific Others
- Praying for Others in General
- Closeness to God
- Beliefs about God
- Personal Beliefs About Jesus
- Belief in Religious Salvation
- Church Attendance

Range = 5 to 52

Cronbach's Alpha Measure of Reliability = .92

Davis, J.A., T.W. Smith, and P.V. Marsden. 2004. *General Social Surveys, 1972-2004: [CUMULATIVE FILE]*[Computer File]. ICPSR 04295-v. 2. Chicago, IL: National Opinion Research Center [producer], 2005. Storrs, CT: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut/Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributors], 2006-04-05.

Fundamentalism

A Scale of Three Questions:

I am sure that the Bible contains no errors or contradictions.

It is very important for true Christians to believe that the Bible is the infallible Word of God.

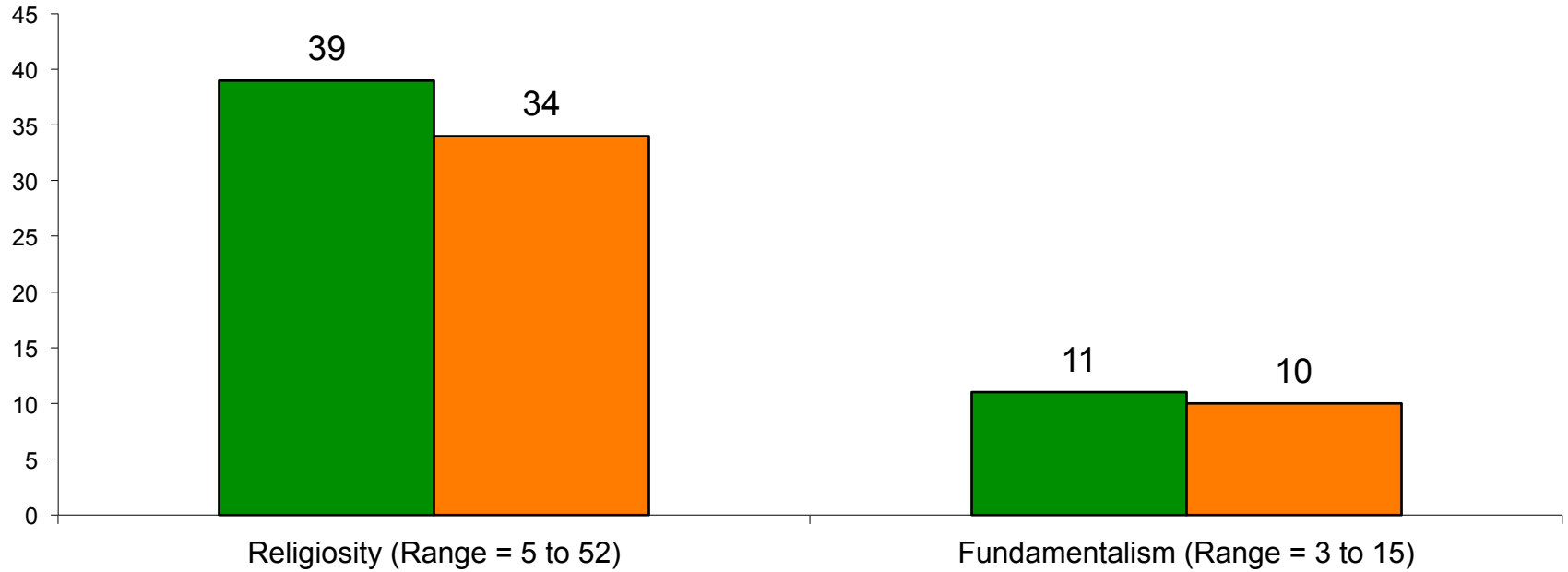
The Bible is the final and complete guide to morality; it contains God's answers to all important questions about right and wrong.

Response Choices: "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree"

Range = 3 to 15

Cronbach's Alpha Measure of Reliability = .91

Religiosity and Fundamentalism by School



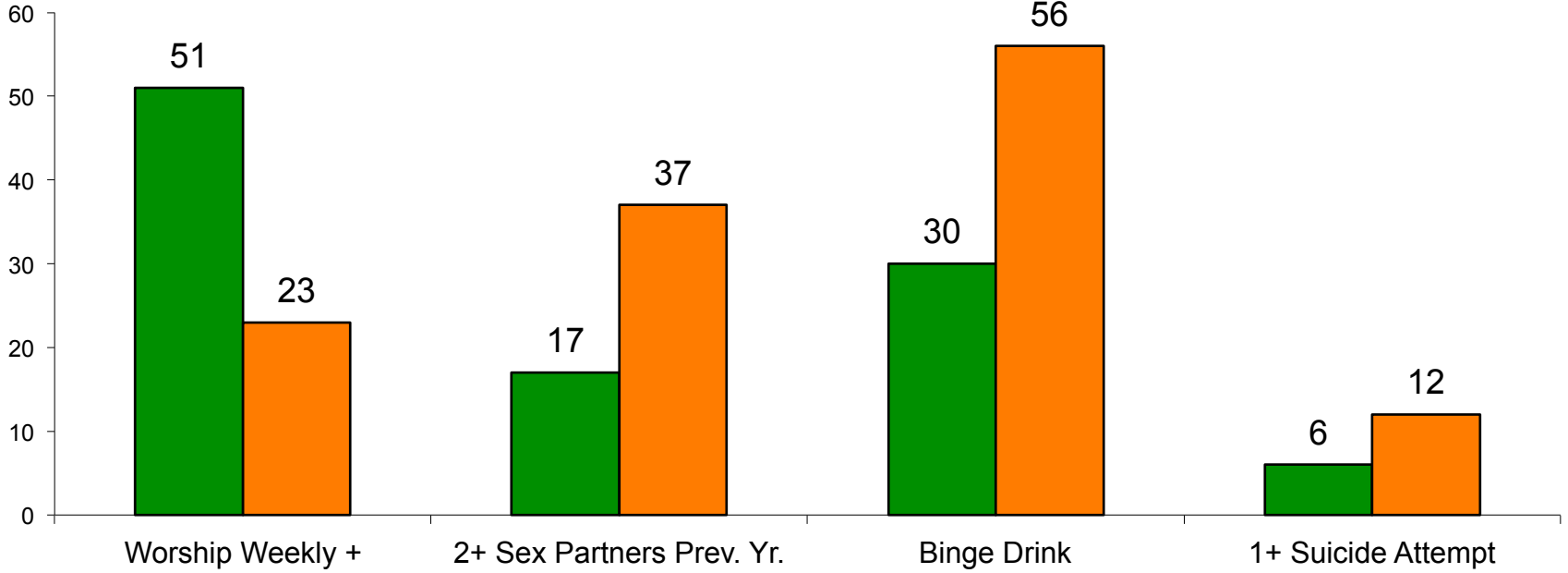
■ Southern Christian

■ Southern Public

Behavioral Variables

- Worship Attendance: Worship Weekly or More Often – Yes/No.
- Binge drink: 5 or more drinks on one occasion in the previous month – Yes/No.
- 2+ Sex partners, previous year – Yes/No.
- Past Suicide Attempts(s): 0/1+

Behavior by School



■ Southern Christian

■ Southern State

Summary –

How do similarly religious college students behave differently within, and away from

The Moral Community

- Within: They worship twice as often, much less likely to have multiple sex partners, drink half as much, and are half as likely to report a suicide attempt.
- Vice versa.

Implication

Resolve cognitive dissonance:

- I'm not as bad as non-Christians
- I don't do this at home
- I actually behave better at home as a result

Or in the alternative:

Escape hypocrisy through suicide.