Young Men, Young Women, and Religion: How Young Adult Religiosity Differs by Gender

Many young people in the United States today are affiliated with religious youth groups and youth organizations. But how religious are young adult men and women in the United States as a whole? Is it possible that young adult females and males have different experiences with religion, even when belonging to the same denomination or congregation? One topic social scientists often examine is how religiosity differs by gender in the U.S. In this learning module, we will explore national patterns of religious beliefs and practices and how they vary by gender.

We can use data from the National Study of Youth and Religion (2007-2008) to explore the differences between the religious beliefs and practices of young adult men and women in the U.S.

Open your web browser and go to the homepage for the Association of Religion Data Archives (www.theARDA.com).

The ARDA’s database has surveys conducted by news agencies, religious organizations, governments, the United Nations, and even philanthropic organizations. The National Study of Youth and Religion was funded by an organization known as the Lilly Endowment, who conducted the study in order to “research the shape and influence of religion and spirituality in the lives of American youth.”

Locate the National Study of Youth and Religion, Wave 3 (2007-2008) on the ARDA website and select it. For assistance locating a data file on the ARDA, click here.

Once you have selected the data file, the first thing that you should see is a description of the survey. Read through the description and answer the following:

1. How many young people took part in this survey? (Hint: People are referred to as “cases.”)

You can look at the questions that were asked in the survey and the possible responses to them by clicking on the “Codebook” tab at the top of the page. For assistance navigating a dataset on the ARDA, click here.

2. Now, find the variable named GENDER. How many young adult respondents were female? How many were male?
Survey data on the ARDA can be used to examine how religious beliefs and practices can vary among different groups, such as males and females.

3. Locate the question named FAITH1. What question is asked in this variable?

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4. List the percent of survey respondents who feel that religion is extremely important in shaping their everyday lives.

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Next, click on the “Analyze results” link below the responses to this question and scroll down to the table titled “GENDER (I-GENDER).”

5. Complete the following table by entering the percent of respondents who fall into each category:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely important</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>_____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>_____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>_____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>_____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not important at all</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>_____</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Were males or females more likely to report that religion was “extremely important” and “very important” in shaping their everyday lives?

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___________________________________________________________________________
7. Who was more likely to report that religion was “not very important” and “not important at all” in shaping their lives?

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Next we will examine the religious views among males and females.

8. Locate the variable “VIEWREL”. What question is asked?

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9. Are males or females more likely to say that only one religion is true? Was this what you expected? Why or why not?

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Another way to measure the importance of religion in someone’s life is to observe how often he or she participates in public religious services. Therefore, we will examine how church attendance varies by gender among young adults.

10. Locate the variable ATTREG and complete the following table:

Do you attend religious services more than once or twice a year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. Are males or females more likely to attend religious services regularly? Does this contradict or correspond with our previous findings on the relationship between religion and gender?

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12. Next, locate the variable MIRACLES. Are males or females more likely to believe in the possibility of divine miracles from God?

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13. Finally, locate the variable COMITGOD. Which gender is most likely to have made a personal commitment to live their life for God?

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14. Sum up what you have learned in this learning module about the relationship between gender and religiosity. Were you surprised by anything you learned?

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