

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS INFLUENCING ADULT PARTICIPATION IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION PROGRAMS AMONG EPISCOPAL CHURCHES IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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ABSTRACT: *The capability of a free, mature faith response to the Gospel is more in Adult Christians than in the young Christians. It is thus imperative that the opportunities of Christian education are by extension made available to adults. This paper is an investigation into the reasons why adults participate in congregationally sponsored Christian education learning events in the church. Adult participation in Christian education is examined in relation to selected demographic variables and the religious motivation of adults. Understanding the motivational orientations of adults serves as a beginning point for church leaders and directors of Christian education to develop and organize educational programs that meet the needs of adult learners. Motivation to participate was measured using an adaptation of the Education Participation Scale (EPS) (Boshier, 1991). The factors include; Spiritual Growth, Cognitive Interest, Church and Community Service, Education Preparation, Social Contact, Family Togetherness and Social Stimulation. A sample size of 454 Episcopalian adults that constituted 63% females and 37% males, averaging 50 years participated in the study undertaken in Southern California. Statistical procedures used to analyze data in this study included Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). All hypotheses were tested at an alpha level of .05. In relation to demographic variables, intrinsically motivated respondents who had a higher level of education attended more programs. Singles tended to be extrinsically motivated in their participation of educational activities. Nonetheless, no correlations were found between age and the Religious Orientation*

KEY WORDS: Religion, Christian education, Adult education, Episcopal churches, South California

INTRODUCTION

Participation in educational activities has become a major concern among religious institutions. These institutions play a major role in providing adult Christian education some of which have proved successful. Selman (2013) states that “it is clear throughout the history of religious adult education that religious organizations create programs for adults” (p. 47). Many churches use transformational education, not explicitly but in practice. Transformational education theory

assumes “experience is central to an understanding of the adult learner. However, it is not the mere accumulation of experience that matters; instead, the way in which individuals make meaning of their experience facilitates growth and learning” (Merriam & Brockett, 2007, p. 140). Learning the Bible is not the only goal of religious adult education. Practically applying scripture to everyday life-events is also an important goal of religious adult education and churches achieve this goal by utilizing non-formal and informal educational settings (Selman, 2013). According to Beatty and Robbins (1990), part of the church’s educational role is being an agent of transformation. In order to meet this mandate, the church needs to provide a variety of educational opportunities to adult learners. This study focuses on the motivational orientations of adult participants of Christian education programs within Episcopal Churches in Southern California.

A review of the literature related to motivational orientations of adult participation in church based education and training programs have been conducted among adults within the Catholic and Evangelical churches as well as in other religious institutions. Utendorf (1985) investigated participants in Roman Catholic lay ministry training program, Atkinson (1994) investigated attendees of Christian Missionary Alliance (C & MA) churches, Fortosis (1990) studied single young adults, attendees of Evangelical Free Church, Wilson (1992) explored the reasons church volunteers attended the Greater Los Angeles Sunday School Convention (GLASS), Oladele (1989) studied participants of Evangelical Churches of West Africa (ECWA) in Nigeria, Garland (1990) concentrated on high school students of Conservative Baptist Association, Mareschal (2012) studied adult Jewish women and Cohn (2016) concentrated on Modern Orthodox adults. However, no studies were found in relation to motivational orientations of adults’ participation in nonformal Christian education programs within the Episcopal Church. An investigation of the motivational orientations of Episcopalian adults in church based programs could probably yield slightly different motivational factors as a result of their different doctrinal value systems and their cultural expressions of faith. Within the Episcopal Church, the emphasis on liturgy, and an individuals’ commitment to the church institution could have an effect on the motivating factors of adult learners. In relation to this aspect, this study investigated the motivational orientations of adult learners taking into consideration the Episcopal tradition. Hence, the lack of denominational literature, and the importance of the concept related to factors motivating adults to participate in Christian education learning events within the Episcopal churches, highlights the necessity for research. Additionally it is hoped that the aspects derived from this study will be of benefit to Christian educators, and leaders of adult education programs in assisting them to design and provide effective learning programs where adults would be motivated to participate.

Relevant literature regarding motivation for participation in adult education provides a broad understanding that identifies key aspects of the problem being addressed in this study. Motivation theory explains why people think and behave as they do. In Ford’s (1992) Motivational System Theory (MTS) the personal goals are similar to factors of the Education Participation Scale (Boshier, 1991). People seek personal goals because they have felt needs. Cross, (1981), in the chain-of-response model, points out the important role that goals play in the individual’s decision to participate in education activity.

Religion is a multidimensional concept that can be defined in a variety of ways (Mockabee, Manson & Grant, 2001). Wald and Smidt (1993) cite two approaches that have been taken by researchers in seeking to understand religion. The first views religion as a set of beliefs. The second approach treats religion as something to which a person belongs. Kellstedt, Green, Guth and Smidt (1997) cite a third aspect of religion as behaving; that is, participating in public or private activities considered to have religious importance. James (1902) defined religion as “. . . the feelings, acts and experience of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine” (James, 1902, p. 31). Kauffman (1979) further defined religiosity as “the degree to which religious attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors permeate the life of the individual” (Kauffman, 1979, p. 53).

Wilson (1960) conducted a pioneering empirical study relating the extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions directly to ethnic prejudice. Wilson (1960) developed a 15 -item Extrinsic Religious Value Scale (ERV) which was intended to measure the individuals’ motivations to affiliating with religious institution. A questionnaire was administered to 205 respondents comprised of adults and college students from 10 religious groups within the Catholic and Protestant denominations from Boston and North Carolina in the United States. No demographic information of the respondents was reported in this study. Wilson (1992) conducted a study of reasons why church volunteers attended religious training programs at the Greater Los Angeles Sunday School Convention (GLASS) in Southern California. Over 300 participants responded to a two part questionnaire, consisting of 66 randomly placed items dealing with motivation for attending GLASS, and basic demographic information. In relation to the ethnicity, the sample consisted of Koreans, Hispanics, Japanese, Caucasians, Chinese, and African- Americans, who were 18 years and over. However, no demographic information was provided in regard to specific representation of age, gender, and ethnicity among the respondents. This paper thus sought to establish whether, demographic variables relate to adults’ motivation to participate in Christian education programs. In attaining this objective, various hypotheses were tested thus for:

Correlations between Participation and Demographic Variables

Hypothesis 1: there will be negative correlations between age and Education Participation Scale factor scores.

Hypothesis 2: there will be positive correlations between adults’ tenure as Christians and Education Participation Scale factor scores.

Hypothesis 3: there will be a relationship between the total number of Christian education programs attended and Education Participation Scale factor scores.

Hypothesis 4: there will be no significant differences between adults Education Participation Scale factor scores based on their marital status.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In a study undertaken to investigate the motivational orientations of adult participation in learning activities, the author's question on whether demographic variables relate to adults' motivation to participate in Christian education programs came up hence this paper. The study used cross-sectional descriptive research design to obtain information at one point in time, but from groups of different ages or at different stages of development (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). This allowed the author to select a sample of participants at different ages and stages of development and administered a questionnaire to all of them within a narrow period of time.

The author sought standard demographic information of participants ranging from age; those who were 18 years and over, gender; both male and female, and their ethnicity as well as their marital status. Second, participants' level of education ranging from elementary to graduate studies was measured. Third, information on the type of Christian education programs they attended which included adult Bible study, adult Sunday school classes, discovery classes, prayer, liturgy, growth, and support group and any other Christian education program carried out in the church. Fourth, the number of times that the participants attended these programs within the past year ranging between once a month to more than four times a month. Finally, the size of church that the participants attend namely small (under 75), medium (75-250) or large (over 250), and types of educational activities attended which included non-formal and non-church based programs like classes in computer, dance, cooking, music and others.

The study population was drawn from Episcopal churches in the Diocese of Los Angeles within the Southern California region. The Diocese of Los Angeles established in 1895, is a community of 85,000 Episcopalians in 147 congregations, and it spans all of Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Santa Barbara and Ventura counties, and part of Riverside County (Episcopal Church directory, May 2000-May 2001). The study utilized a convenient sample of Episcopalian adults who participated in local church based education programs.

Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were utilized for data analysis. The author utilized the SPSS statistical program to analyze the data. All the hypotheses were tested at an alpha level of .05.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The respondents provided demographic information regarding their age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, years of being a Christian, highest education level completed, size of church, types of Christian education programs attended, total number of times Christian education programs were attended per month, and attendance of non-church sponsored continuing education classes. The following section describes the demographic characteristics of the sample, which is displayed in Tables 1-5.

Demographic Characteristics

Gender and Age

All the 454 participants reported their gender. The sample included 286 females (63.1%) and 168 males (37.1%) as presented in Table 1. With regard to the age, the participants ranged in age from 18 to 87 years with a mean Age of 50 years old (Table 1). The 50 to 59 years old category had the highest number of participants (122) which comprised 26.8% of the sample. The second highest was 40-49 years old category (97) which comprised of 21.3% of the sample. This was followed by the 60-69 years old category (76) which comprised of 16.7% of the sample. The 18-29 years old (52) and the 30-39 years old (51) category closely followed each other 11.4% and 11.2% of the sample. The 70-79 years old category (44) had 9.6% of the sample, while there were only 9 participants in the 80-89 years old category (1.9%). Three participants 1 male and 2 females (.6%) did not report their age.

Table 1. Gender and Age

Characteristic	Gender		n	Percent of Sample
	Male	Female		
Age at time of survey (years)				
18 to 29	31	21	52	11.4
30 to 39	17	34	51	11.2
40 to 49	36	61	97	21.3
50 to 59	34	88	122	26.8
60 to 69	25	51	76	16.7
70 to 79	18	26	44	9.6
80 to 89	6	3	9	1.9
No Response	1	2	3	0.6
Total	168	286	454	
Percent of Sample	37.1	63.1		100%

Marital Status

The marital status of the sample is presented in Table 2. The majority of the participants were married. A total of 265 participants indicated that they were married making up 58.3% of the sample. The second highest category was single with 87 participants making up 19.1% of the sample. Seventy-six participants indicated that they were divorced (16.7%), while 25 were widowed (5.5%). One female participant did not indicate her marital status (.2%).

Table 2. Marital Status

Characteristic	Male	Female	n	Percent of Sample
Marital Status:				
Single	40	47	87	19.1
Married	111	154	265	58.3
Divorced	10	66	76	16.7
Widowed	7	18	25	5.5
No Response	0	1	1	.2
Total	168	286	454	
Percent of Sample	37.1	63.1		100%

Ethnicity

The ethnic background of the participants was predominantly Caucasian. The results presented in Table 3 show that three hundred and forty-two participants indicated that they were Caucasian (75.8%). The second largest group constituted Black/African American with a total of 59 participants (13.0%). Twenty-four participants indicated that they were Hispanic (5.3%), 5 participants were Asian (1.1%), 2 were Native American (.4%) and 19 indicated other (4.2%). Three male participants did not indicate their ethnicity (.6%).

Table 3. Ethnicity

Characteristic	Male	Female	n	Percent of Sample
Ethnicity:				
Asian	3	2	5	1.1
Caucasian	109	233	342	75.8
Black/African-American	36	23	59	13.0
Hispanic	6	18	24	5.3
Native American	2	0	2	.4
Other	9	10	19	4.2
No Response	3	0	3	.6
Total	168	286	454	
Percent of Sample	37.1	63.1		100%

Education Level

In regard to education level, 241 participants reported that they had completed college education (53.2%), 83 participants indicated that they had earned a masters degree (18.3%), and 27 participants reported having completed a doctorate degree (5.9%). Twelve participants had completed junior high (2.6%), 3 had completed elementary (.6%), and one female participant did not indicate her level of education (.2%). Table 4 presents the education level of the sample.

Table 4. Education Level

Characteristic	Male	Female	n	Percent of Sample
Highest Education Level Completed:				
Elementary	2	1	3	0.6
Junior High	6	6	12	2.6
High School	33	54	87	19.2
College/University	80	161	241	53.2
Graduate: Masters	29	54	83	18.3
Graduate: Doctorate	18	9	27	5.9
No Response	0	1	1	0.2
Total	168	286	454	
Percent of Sample	37.1	63.1		100%

Church Size

Table 5 presents information on the church size of the sample. In relation to the size of the church those which had attendance of under 75 members were considered as small, those with 75 to 250 members were considered as medium, and those with over 250 members were considered as large (Barna, 2000; McIntosh, 1999). Two hundred and three participants attended medium sized churches (44.8%), 145 participants attended large churches (32.0%) and 105 participants attended small churches (23.1%). One female respondent did not report her church size (.2%).

Table 5. Church Size

Characteristics	Male	Female	n	Percent of Sample
Church Size:				
Small (Less than 75)	32	73	105	23.1
Medium (75 to 250)	76	127	203	44.8
Large (More than 250)	60	85	145	32.0
No Response	0	1	1	0.2
Total	168	286	454	
Percent of Sample	37.1	63.1		100%

Correlations between Participation and Demographic Variables

Hypothesis 1 stated that there would be negative correlations between age and Education Participation Scale factor scores. The null hypothesis was rejected for Education Preparation, Family Togetherness, Social Stimulation, Spiritual Growth, and Church and Community Service subscales. The null hypothesis was retained for Social Contact subscale. The results indicate that for most of the subscales, the correlations of age with Education Participation Scale factor scores were negative, as predicted. There were significant, but weak negative correlations with age and Educational Preparation ($r = -.17, p < .05, r^2 = .03$), age and Family

Togetherness ($r = -.25, p < .05, r^2 = .06$), age and Social Stimulation ($r = -.18, p < .05, r^2 = .03$), age and Spiritual Growth ($r = -.11, p < .05, r^2 = .01$), and age and Church and Community Service ($r = -.27, p < .05, r^2 = .08$). The strength of the relationship between the age variable and Education Preparation, Family Togetherness, Social Stimulation, Spiritual Growth and Church and Community Service was small all ranging below .11 ($r^2 = .01-.08$).

There was one significant, but weak positive correlation of age with Cognitive Interest ($r = .16, p < .05, r^2 = .03$). This suggests that the older the participants, the more likely they were to attend the adult Christian education programs for Cognitive Interest, that is, to learn for the sake of learning, yet the effect size was weak $r^2 = .03$. The results from the correlations are presented in Table 6.

Hypothesis 2 stated that there would be positive correlations between adults' tenure as Christians and Education Participation Scale factor scores. The data collected in relation to adults' tenure as Christians in this study was not sufficient to test this hypothesis. Eighty-two participants (18%) did not indicate the number of years they have been Christians. Secondly, a number of participants indicated that they had been Christians since birth or all their life. Future research is necessary to verify how adults' tenure as Christians influences their scores in the Education Participation Scale.

Table 6. Correlations between Demographic Variables and Education Participation Scale Scores

Subscale	Demographics			
	Age	r^2	Number of Christian Ed Programs Attended	r^2
Social Contact	-.087	.01	.005	.002
Education Preparation	-.171*	.03	.095*	.01
Family Togetherness	-.248*	.06	.056	.03
Social Stimulation	-.177*	.03	.018	.003
Cognitive Interest	.155*	.03	.188*	.03
Spiritual Growth	-.110*	.01	.235*	.04
Church & Community Service	-.266*	.08	.246*	.06

$p < .05$. $n = 451$ due to missing data (3 subjects did not indicate their age). For Number of Christian Education Program Attended $n = 454$.

Hypothesis 3 stated that there would be a relationship between the total number of Christian education programs attended and Education Participation Scale factor scores. The null hypothesis was rejected for Education Participation, Cognitive Interest, Spiritual Growth, and Church and Community Service, but retained for Social Contact, Family Togetherness, and Social Stimulation. Table 6 presents the results of the correlations. The strength of the relationship was small, with coefficients of determinations (r^2) in the range of .01 to .06.

Single Adults Participation in Christian Education Programs

Another important finding in this study was in relation to the participation of single adults in Christian education programs in the church. Hypothesis 4 stated that there would be no significant differences between adults Education Participation Scale factor scores based on their marital status. The null hypothesis was rejected for three of the seven scales (Table 7). There was a statistically significant difference in Social Stimulation ($F = 3.83$, $p < .05$), and Church and Community Service ($F = 5.05$, $p < .05$). The differences had small effect size ($\eta^2 = .02$, $\eta^2 = .03$, and $\eta^2 = .03$, respectively).

Table 7. A Comparison between Marital Status and Education Participation Subscales

Variable	Single (n=87)		Divorce (n=76)		Widowed (n=25)		Married (n=265)		ANOVA	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F(3,314)	η^2
Social Contact	2.37	.79	2.18	.76	2.16	.63	2.23	.70	1.16	.01
Education Preparation	2.42	.74	2.30	.60	2.14	.66	2.29	.74	1.19	.01
Family Togetherness	2.14	.83	1.85	.72	1.78	.77	2.07	.70	3.32	.02
Social Stimulation	2.05	.84	1.80	.58	1.73	.67	1.77	.67	3.83*	.03
Cognitive Interest	2.97	.58	3.04	.62	3.10	.60	2.99	.60	.42	.00
Spiritual Growth	3.71	.46	3.56	.62	3.60	.58	3.59	.51	1.19	.01
Church & Community Service	3.05	.72	2.71	.9	2.52	.73	2.77	.75	5.05*	.03

* $p < .05$. n=453 due to missing data (1 subject did not indicate marital status).

The fact that the single respondents differed with the married, widowed and divorced in the Social Stimulation subscale is not surprising. Single people have a lot of potential and it is assumed that they tend to seek out educational activities that help them to get relief from boredom, get away from loneliness, or get a break from a routine schedule. Singles who participate for reasons related to Church and Community Service do so because they want to be productive and helpful members in the church as well as in the community. This enables them to be involved and to be active and it is a way of giving back to the church and community what they have learned.

IMPLICATION TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

This study has significant implications for ministry and education practice in the local church. Adult educators who work with adults in the church such as adult pastors/ministers, directors of Christian education of adults, adult small group leaders, and adult Sunday school teachers should understand what motivates adult learners to participate in educational programs. As Fortosis (1992) points out, "It is suggested that if the reasons for adult educational participation are understood, classes can be designed which will legitimately motivate more widespread and consistent involvement" (p. 91). This study has shown that in adult education programs clusters of reasons for participation varies across different age-gender groupings of adult learners.

The fact that the findings of this study are consistent with findings in past studies (Utendorf, 1985, Fortosis, 1990; Wilson, 1992; Atkinson, 1994 and Isaac, Guy & Valentine, 2001) concerning factors that motivate adults to participate in church based education activities is in itself important. This also signifies the important role of the church as an educational institution where people turn to meet their learning needs. Directors of Christian education therefore, should continuously offer learning opportunities for adults within the church through groups that focus on Bible study, growth, prayer, liturgy and support. In addition, discovery classes and Sunday school classes with the objective of meeting learning needs need to address both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated adults. Thus, gaining a better understanding of characteristics and attitudes of adult learners has important implications for program development in adult education. This aspect ties into the purpose of the current study.

CONCLUSION

Single (never married) respondents were more highly involved in Christian education programs than the married, widowed or divorced. Single adult ministry is one of the fastest growing ministry in the church today. Single adults have basic needs. They want to belong, there is a hunger to be connected, and they may have questions of their self-worth and wrestle with issues of rejection, identity and acceptance of the single status. Additionally, they may build friendships and relationships to take the place of family relationships. Many a times they often have to face and learn to deal with prejudices.

Ministry directed toward the single adult requires a thorough understanding of just who the single adult is and what his or her needs are. There is need to provide an ideal opportunity for the church to minister to single adults. The directors of Christian education in charge of single ministries should organize and provide different educational programs which offer singles an opportunity to recognize their internal growth and enable them meet their needs and desires. These programs would include small groups where they can develop interpersonal relationships that get beyond superficial issues in their lives. Anthony (2001) states that, "the groups should be structured in such a way as to provide them with opportunities to serve in the church. The church leadership should also get singles involved in a variety of committees (e.g., social, special events, service projects and sports), as this can help establish a sense of connection and community for them. It will give them a sense of ownership in the group, which is also healthy" (Anthony, 2001, p. 259). The other programs would include Bible studies and seminars dealing with special topics of interest to singles. Secondly, outreach ministry with an emphases on evangelism which incorporates group activities, and recreation, would enable the single adults to experience the concept of community and involvement.

Finally, this study indicated that adult's level of education plays a role in one's religious motivation as well as in factors which influence one to participate in educational activities. The findings showed that adults with a lower level of education tend to be extrinsically motivated, and are highly influenced to participate in Christian education programs for reasons related to Social Contact and Social Stimulation factors. The focus of adult education in the church should be to provide learning opportunities which meet adults' needs at their various educational level. This not only encourages participation, but also enables the adults to develop in their faith.

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