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Elizabeth Wilcauskas
ejwilc2657@ung.edu

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Predictors of Happiness: Religion and Spirituality

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the University of North Georgia
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelors of Business Administration in Supply Chain Management
With Honors

Betsy J. Wilcauskas

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1. Introduction

People are always in search of what will make them happier. They are searching for something to purchase, and when they get what they want, they have already let something else capture their attention. An article in The Washington Post discussed the common finding that people who hold religious beliefs are generally happier. In the article, Catherine Sanderson, a psychology professor at a university in Massachusetts, says that “people who are believers have a certain mind-set; the power of prayer, the belief in an afterlife, the sense that someone is looking after you, that there is a higher power, that things happen for a reason. This mind-set, she says, helps people make sense of tragedy, struggles and loss” (Quinn, 2014).

Happiness-Religion research attempts to determine whether there is a significant correlation between participating in spiritual life and self-reported happiness. This project adds to the growing body of studies done on this topic by using the General Social Survey to measure degrees of happiness, religion, and related variables. It involves using an ordered probit regression and pairwise correlations to gauge the connection between the variables. Previous research has often shown a positive correlation between the variables using the standard measures of happiness and religiosity. When using lesser-known criteria, this research finds the correlation is less often positive, and sometimes negative. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: section 2 reviews the literature, section 3 discusses data, section 4 discusses methods and results, section 5 discusses the extended sample, section 6 discusses, and section 7 concludes.

2. Literature Review

College-aged students are often searching for their purpose in life. They are in the process of finding a way to participate in life that contributes to their satisfaction and happiness. One way students get involved in the pursuit of happiness is through involvement in religious activities (Anand et al., 2013, p. 160). Religious activities and involvement are multifaceted, including, but not limited to, one's belief in the afterlife, intrinsic religious practice, and personal experiences with religion. Studies done to gauge the relationship between one's spirituality, health, and life satisfaction, have been done more often in the adult population, but not as often in the college student adult population, which is of particular interest in this study.

Within happiness and religion studies, religion is typically assessed using “parameters like religiosity, religiousness, religious belief, attendance to place of worship, knowledge about their respective religious belief, intrinsic behavior and extrinsic behavior”, and all of these words tend to be used interchangeably throughout the literature (Rizvi & Hossain, 2016, p. 1563). Happiness is typically assessed using “parameters like satisfaction in life, love of life, well-being, quality of life, mental health and physical health” (Rizvi & Hossain, 2016, p. 1563). A study conducted on undergraduate students in the United Kingdom attending a diverse college defines more of the relevant terms in this paper. The definition of spirituality in this study came from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. It was defined as the “search for the existential or ultimate meaning in life that may not always be expressed in a religious way” (Anand et al., 2013, p. 162). The definition of life satisfaction in this study was “our subjective

evaluation of the degree to which our most important needs, goals and wishes have been fulfilled” (Anand et al., 2013, p. 162).

The study in the United Kingdom mentioned above investigated the relationship between spirituality and happiness. The study also examined how the relationship between the two variables might change when accounting for differences in age, involvement, and background (Anand et al., 2013, p. 161). Age, involvement, and background are mediating variables, which are those that interfere with the relationship of two or more other variables. This study was done through an online survey distributed to randomly-selected full-time students (Anand et al., 2013, p. 162). The survey included questions to assess three variables: the respondents’ spirituality, health, and life satisfaction (Anand et al., 2013, p. 162). The variables were then analyzed statistically to find the correlation coefficient between them (Anand et al., 2013, p. 163). An exciting correlation found through this study was that white participants had the lowest spirituality scores, and black participants had the highest spirituality scores. These results could be due to the size of each racial population within the study (Anand et al., 2013, p. 168). Overall, the study found a weak relationship between spirituality, health, and life satisfaction, even though many participants reported spirituality as an essential part of their lives (Anand et al., 2013, p. 169). One potential limitation of the study is that the spirituality survey was taken from a study done in the US and may not have been a good fit for UK University students. Also, the students themselves report the answers, which brings into question the reliability of their answers (Anand et al., 2013, p. 170).

A study conducted on college students at an American university investigated the relationship between having a life calling, which often stems from religion, and happiness (Duffy et al., 2011, p. 471). It used the Calling and Vocation Questionnaire to measure calling and the Satisfaction with Life Scale to measure happiness/life satisfaction. It measured a few other variables, including intrinsic religiousness by using the revised Intrinsic Religiousness Scale (Duffy et al., 2011, p. 472-473). Having a life calling did not correlate strongly with happiness and intrinsic religiousness was not a robust moderating variable in the relationship between life calling and happiness (Duffy et al., 2011, p. 474-477). Another study surveyed psychology students from an American college and asked them to record their idea of their most ideal future selves (Hill et al., 2014, p. 1618). The responses were filtered into groups, including spiritual/self-transcendence goals (Hill et al., 2014, p. 1619). Participants were also measured on spirituality using the Spiritual Well-Being Scale and the Revised Religious Orientation Scale, life satisfaction through the Satisfaction with Life Scale, and church attendance frequency (Hill et al., 2014, p. 1620-24). This study found that spiritual future goals were unrelated to well-being, and surprisingly, negatively related to life satisfaction (Hill et al., 2014, p. 1628).

A study conducted on German university students asked participants about their religious affiliation and assessed them on happiness using the Oxford Happiness Inventory (Francis et al., 2003, p. 276). The study also used The Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity to assess attitudes towards religion, and The Short Form Revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire to assess personality (Francis et al., 2003, p. 277). It was found that the positive correlation between happiness and religion was negated by personality

(Francis et al., 2003, p. 279). Another survey measured happiness, religion, and personality to determine the effect personality had on the relationship between religion and happiness (Francis et al., 2016, p. 1341). The study found a positive relationship between happiness and religion, even when factoring in differences of personality (Francis et al., 2016, p. 1342-43). The subsequent study conducted on Australian psychology students was limited because it pulled participants from only one school in one major. Still, it measured religious orientation, purpose in life, and happiness using a few lesser-known scales (Sillick & Cathcart, 2013, p. 497-498). They found that happiness was positively related to purpose in life and happiness was positively associated with religion. When observing the relationship between the three different variables, they determined that religion did not have a strong correlation with happiness because of an indirect effect of the purpose in life variable (Sillick & Cathcart, 2013, p. 500).

Many studies use the Oxford Happiness Inventory to measure reported happiness, and the Francis Scale of Attitude towards Christianity to measure religiosity. These scales have often been used in studies conducted in America and the United Kingdom (Lewis, 2002, p. 191). It is essential to consider that the application of the survey or the types of questions it asks play a role in the respondent's answers. Rather than using the same measures of religiosity and happiness that the studies mentioned above utilized, a study of Irish college students used the Depression-Happiness Scale to measure happiness and church attendance to measure religiosity. The purpose of this study was to see the difference in the relationship between religion and happiness when using less widely used scales (Lewis, 2002, p. 192). The relationship between happiness and religiosity was

insignificant when using the scales employed by this study (Lewis, 2002, p. 193). The main finding reported was that the different scales used to measure happiness and religiosity could create different correlations in the variables' relationship (Lewis, 2002, p. 194). An Australian study surveys church-going participants below the age of 18 on their views of Christianity and happiness (Francis & Penny, 2016, p. 225-226). This study resulted in findings that were not unlike other studies that used the Oxford Happiness Inventory, and showed a positive relationship between happiness and religiosity (Francis & Penny, 2016, p. 229). A study conducted on Indian college students across different colleges used the Love of Life Scale and The Arabic Scale of Happiness to measure happiness, and the Arabic Scale of Intrinsic Religiosity to measure religiousness (Abdel-Khalek & Singh, 2019, p. 772-773). A study conducted on American college students from two different universities also used multiple lesser-known scales to measure happiness and religion (Chesser et al., 2018, p. 421-422). They found a positive relationship between religiosity and happiness (Chesser et al., 2018, p. 424).

The literature focuses on the mediating variables between religion and happiness, and the types of scales used to measure these variables. What is most significant about studies that utilize less widely used measures of happiness and religiosity is that they still result in finding a positive relationship between religion and happiness. The studies discussing mediating variables are less conclusive, many of which disagree with each other.

However, most of the studies consistently show that sex does not seem to significantly affect the relationship between religion and happiness. Some prior studies conducted on college students related to religiosity are biased because they analyzed samples from colleges with a religious affiliation. Other studies lacked in strength because religiosity

was measured by asking one question only, racial bias was present in the studies, and the focus on the Christian religion specifically when trying to make a statement about religion in general. A study designed to investigate the relationship between types of religions and subjective well-being showed that Christianity, one of the most common religions involved in many previous happiness studies, places higher value on individual well-being, explaining the lower subjective well-being as compared to many Eastern religions (Shiah et al., 2016, p. 1265- 1267). This is an important finding because it could explain discrepancies in research done between different cultures.

A review of this literature signifies a need for further research on the relationship between religion and happiness. Although these studies investigated the relationship between religion and happiness to further our understanding of the subject, they have left questions unanswered which are addressed by this project's research question: How does American student happiness relate to attending religious services and personal identification as a spiritual person?

3. Data

Data was obtained from The General Social Survey (GSS) which is an American survey run by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. The GSS is a 90-minute personal interview survey. This is advantageous because many people who could be randomly selected in the sample are likely technologically-challenged. The GSS, performed every two years since 1972, includes demographic, behavioral, and attitudinal questions, covering a variety of topics. The goal of the survey is to make high-quality data easily accessible to researchers with minimal associated costs. The GSS

asks questions in the form of a standard Likert Scale. A Likert Scale measures variables based on their intensity. For example, happiness is measured from 1 to 3, 1 being very happy, 2 being pretty happy, and 3 being not too happy. Other variables using a Likert scale are spirituality, religious service attendance, social class, and time spent with friends and relatives. Other demographic variables include sex, age, and race. The independent variables of interest include spirituality, religious service attendance, and religious affiliation.

Each variable was selected and placed into a folder within the GSS website. In order to limit the sample to traditional college aged students, the ages in the sample were restricted from 18-24, and the work status variable was narrowed to include only self-reported full-time students. The survey years were limited to 2006-2016, since the spiritual question was only asked during these years. The sample was also restricted to individuals that were asked about their social lives, which included only two-thirds of the respondents. After implementing these filters, the sample was reduced to 190 observations.

There was a preexisting “protestant” category, and only a few data points titled “Christian”, “Orthodox-Christian”¹, or “inter-nondenominational”, which were recategorized as “protestant”. There was a preexisting “other” category, but only a few data included “Jewish”, “Hinduism”, “Buddhist”, or “Moslem/Islam”, which were re-categorized as “other”. The data was then downloaded into an excel sheet and further formatted before being uploaded into Stata, the statistical software used for this project.

¹ Sorted into the “other” category in sample 1 and “Christian” category in sample 2 - fewer than 4 observations per sample.

Once imported into Stata, the data were further sorted and converted into numerical values. In Stata, multiple versions of summary statistics, Pearson's correlations, and ordered probit regressions were performed, and a few were chosen to be included in this paper.

Methods and Results

The summary statistics for the variables are shown in Table 1, and they show the mean, standard deviation, minimum value, median value, and maximum value for each variable. Some variables are measured on a numerical scale of increasing value or intensity, such as spirituality, time with friends, time with relatives, happiness, religious service attendance, social class, and age. For example, happiness is measured using a 0-2 scale, with 0 being “not too happy”, 1 being “pretty happy”, and 2 being “very happy”. Table 1 shows us that protestant was the most common religion (41.1%), white was the most common race (66.8%), 56.3% of the sample participants were female, and the median age was 20 years old. Table 2 shows us how to interpret the number values for the rest of the variables.

Table 1 - Summary statistics

	Mean	Std. Dev.	min	Median	max
spirituality	2.468	1.052	1	3	4
social class	2.545	.656	1	3	4
time with friends	4.316	1.478	0	5	6
time with relatives	4.222	1.565	0	5	6
happiness	1.211	.58	0	1	2
attend religious service	3.184	2.649	0	3	8
age	20.547	1.824	18	20	24
female	.563	.497	0	1	1
male	.437	.497	0	0	1
black	.184	.389	0	0	1
other race	.147	.355	0	0	1
white	.668	.472	0	1	1
catholic	.242	.429	0	0	1
none	.258	.439	0	0	1
other religion	.089	.286	0	0	1
protestant	.411	.493	0	0	1

Table 2 - Interpreting Numerical Values

	Spirituality	Social Class	Time With Friends	Time With Relatives	Religious Service Attendance
0	--	--	Never	Never	Never
1	Not Spiritual	Lower Class	Once a Year	Once a Year	Less Than Once a Year
2	Slight Spiritual	Working Class	Several Times a Year	Several Times a Year	Once a Year
3	Moderate Spiritual	Middle Class	Once a Month	Once a Month	Several Times a Year
4	Very Spiritual	Upper Class	Several Times a Month	Several Times a Month	Once a Month
5	--	--	Several Times a Week	Several Times a Week	2-3 Times a Month
6	--	--	Almost Daily	Almost Daily	Nearly Every Week
7	--	--	--	--	More Than Once a Week
8	--	--	--	--	Every Day

Pearson's correlations are shown in Table 3. Pearson's Correlation is a measure of the strength and direction of association between two variables ("Statistics," 2006, p. 521).

Time spent with friends and time spent with relatives do not significantly correlate, and older people in the sample are happier than younger people. Social class and happiness have a strong positive relationship, a common finding in studies concerning happiness. Attending religious services and being a highly spiritual person was very strongly positively correlated. Spending time with relatives and higher spirituality also had a positive correlation, as did age and spirituality. Being white and having a higher social class correlate positively. Being protestant and spiritual or attending religious services both have a very strong positive correlation, but being protestant and happiness had a strong negative correlation. Identifying as black and protestant had a strong positive correlation.

An interesting finding in the sample is that social class negatively correlates with spending time with family and positively correlates with spending time with friends. Essentially, being able to rely on money allows you to rely less on your family, so people of a lower social class typically spend more time with their family just by nature of needing to ask for help more often. Persons of a higher social class with access to more money has less of an interest and reliance on family members and more of an interest in spending time with friends (Bianchi & Vohs, 2016, pp. 484-485).

Table 3 - Pearson's Correlations

Variables	(happiness)	(spirituality)	(attend religious service)	(social class)	(time with friends)	(time with relatives)	(age)	(female)	(black)	(white)	(catholic)	(other religion)	(protestant)
happiness	1.000												
spirituality	0.020	1.000											
attend religious service	-0.108	0.459***	1.000										
social class	0.170**	-0.111	-0.095	1.000									
time with friends	-0.041	-0.011	-0.035	0.128*	1.000								
time with relatives	-0.024	0.129*	0.116	-	0.109	1.000							
age	0.126*	0.141*	-0.070	0.187***	-0.053	-0.170***	1.000						
female	-0.065	0.070	-0.059	-0.103	-0.056	0.049	0.038	1.000					
black	-0.009	-0.057	0.034	-0.074	0.000	0.159***	-0.106	-0.019	1.000				
white	0.063	0.016	-0.023	0.134*	0.030	-0.122*	0.212***	0.056	-	1.000			
catholic	0.113	0.005	0.100	0.074	-0.029	-0.057	0.026	-0.097	-0.142*	-0.020	1.000		
other religion	0.045	0.088	0.020	-0.007	0.008	0.014	-0.064	0.127*	-0.101	-0.053	-0.177***	1.000	
protestant	-0.156**	0.249***	0.347***	0.001	-0.012	0.103	-0.010	0.023	0.155***	-0.003	0.472***	-	1.000

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

A simplified definition of the purpose of an ordered probit model is to measure variables on a scale of least to highest intensity, or lowest to highest, when the highest or the lowest value is unknown. For the happiness variable, we have 0, 1, and 2. Going from 0 to 1 degrees of happiness signifies an upwards change in the degree of happiness, but we cannot be sure that it is the same change in degree as going from 1 to 2 degrees of happiness. Because of this, I use ordered probit regressions. I do not use Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions because OLS assumes a linear relationship between value changes in the dependent variable.

Table 4 shows ordered probit regressions, and the dependent variable for all is happiness.

The equations for regressions 1, 2, and 3 are

$$happiness_i = \beta_1 spirituality + \beta_2 attendance + \varepsilon_i,$$

$$happiness_i = \beta_1 catholic + \beta_2 otherreligion + \beta_3 protestant + \varepsilon_i \text{ and}$$

$$happiness_i = \beta_1 spirituality + \beta_2 attendance + \beta_3 catholic + \beta_4 otherreligion \\ + \beta_5 protestant + \beta_6 control + \varepsilon$$

respectively.

In Regression1, spirituality and religious service attendance were accounted for. These variables were chosen because they are most related to religion, which is what this study is focusing on. Spirituality did not have a statistically significant relationship with happiness in this regression. Attending religious services and happiness had a significant negative correlation at the 10% level. In other words, people who attended religious services tended to be less happy.

In Regression2, the following independent indicator variables were included: catholic, other religion, and protestant. None is the reference group for religious denominations. None of the religious denominations' coefficients were statistically significant. In other words, these variables were not strongly related to a person's happiness.

In Regression3, all variables included in the study were used. When accounting for all of the variables, the correlation seen in Regression1 between religious service attendance and happiness loses significance. In this regression, social class and happiness have a strong positive relationship at the 5 percent level. None of the other variables included had any significant association with happiness.

Table 4 - Ordered Probit Regressions: Dependent Variable is Happiness

VARIABLES	Regression1	Regression2	Regression3
spirituality	0.0981 (0.0903)		0.0973 (0.0985)
social class			0.313** (0.142)
time with friends			-0.0718 (0.0599)
time with relatives			0.0346 (0.0597)
attend religious service	-0.0663* (0.0360)		-0.0455 (0.0418)
age			0.0722 (0.0513)
female			-0.221 (0.180)
black			0.417 (0.324)
white			0.322 (0.265)
catholic		0.171 (0.240)	0.234 (0.275)
other religion		0.102 (0.328)	0.277 (0.363)
protestant		-0.288 (0.212)	-0.246 (0.258)
Observations	190	190	188

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

4. Data and Analysis: Expanded Sample

Not a lot of significance was found using the previous sample. Thus, the sample was expanded to include more observations, making it possible for there to be more significant relationships. The sample was expanded to include all full-time students, regardless of age (so the expanded sample includes non-traditional students). The sample was also expanded by dropping the social variables (since the social variables were only included in two-thirds of original responses). Leaving out the social variables (time spent with friends and time spent with relatives) and expanding the age variable added 299 observations to our existing sample. The expanded sample has a total 489 observations.

The summary statistics for the second sample are shown in Table 5. The table shows us that protestant was again the most common religion, white was the most common race, 58.9% of the sample participants were female, and the median age was 23 years old. The sample 2 age range extended to 80 years old rather than to 24 years old in sample 1.

Table 5 - Summary statistics

	Mean	Std. Dev.	min	Median	max
happiness	1.177	.633	0	1	2
spirituality	2.604	1.055	1	3	4
social class	2.403	.7	1	2	4
attend religious service	2.996	2.652	0	2	8
age	26.35	9.537	18	23	80
female	.589	.492	0	1	1
male	.411	.492	0	0	1
black	.197	.398	0	0	1
other	.189	.392	0	0	1
white	.614	.487	0	1	1
catholic	.211	.409	0	0	1
none	.287	.453	0	0	1
other religion	.078	.268	0	0	1
protestant	.415	.493	0	0	1

Pearson's correlations are shown in Table 6. Social class and happiness had a highly significant positive relationship, and social class had a highly significant negative relationship with spirituality. Attending religious services and spirituality had a very substantial positive relationship, and being older and female both had a strong positive relationship with spirituality. Older people, females, and black people all had a very significant negative relationship with social class. Black people had a significant positive relationship with spirituality which was also found in the study conducted on undergraduate students from the United Kingdom and discussed in the literature review (Anand et al., 2013, p. 168). White people had an important positive relationship with social class. Both being black and protestant had a very substantial relationship with attending religious services. Age and being black had a significant positive relationship with being protestant. Being catholic and being black had a significant negative relationship.

Table 6 – Pearson's Correlations

Variables	(happiness)	(spirituality)	(social class)	(attend religious service)	(age)	(female)	(black)	(white)	(catholic)	(other religion)	(protestant)
happiness	1.000										
spirituality	0.064	1.000									
social class	0.139***	-0.151***	1.000								
attend religious service	-0.046	0.461***	-0.056	1.000							
age	0.018	0.259***	-0.177***	0.064	1.000						
female	0.015	0.133***	-0.128***	0.029	0.154***	1.000					
black	-0.032	0.096**	-0.126***	0.152***	0.081*	0.067	1.000				
white	0.155***	-0.012	0.143***	-0.054	-0.024	-0.036	-0.625***	1.000			
catholic	0.054	0.028	0.083*	0.067	-0.101**	-0.038	-0.156***	-0.013	1.000		
other religion	-0.033	0.039	0.023	-0.014	-0.011	0.041	-0.067	-0.052	-0.151***	1.000	
protestant	-0.083*	0.239***	-0.045	0.420***	0.132***	0.059	0.190***	0.043	-0.436***	-0.245***	1.000

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 7 shows ordered probit regressions, and the dependent variable for all is happiness.

The equations for regressions 1, 2, and 3 are

$$happiness_i = \beta_1 spirituality + \beta_2 attendance + \varepsilon_i,$$

$$happiness_i = \beta_1 catholic + \beta_2 otherreligion + \beta_3 protestant + \varepsilon_i, \text{ and}$$

$$happiness_i = \beta_1 spirituality + \beta_2 attendance + \beta_3 catholic + \beta_4 otherreligion$$

$$+ \beta_5 protestant + \beta_6 control + \varepsilon$$

respectively.

In Regression1, spirituality and religious service attendance both had significance.

Attending religious services and happiness had a significant negative correlation at the 10 percent level. Spirituality and happiness had a significant positive relationship at the 5 percent level.

In Regression2, the following independent indicator variables were included: catholic, other religion, and protestant. None is the reference group for religious denominations. Being protestant had a significant negative relationship with happiness at the 10% level.

In Regression3, all variables included in sample 2 were used (excluding social variables from sample 1). When accounting for all of the variables, the correlation seen in Regression1 between religious service attendance and happiness loses significance. In this regression, social class and spirituality have statistically significant (and positive) relationships with happiness at the 5 percent level. Being black had a significant positive relationship with happiness at the 5 percent level, and being white had a significant positive relationship with happiness at the 1 percent level. In Regression 3, being

protestant had an even more negative relationship (statistically significant at the 5 percent level) compared to Regression 2.

Table 7 - Ordered Probit Regressions: Dependent Variable is Happiness

VARIABLES	Regression1	Regression2	Regression3
spirituality	0.118** (0.0557)		0.145** (0.0595)
social class			0.248*** (0.0808)
attend religious service	-0.0421* (0.0222)		-0.0252 (0.0256)
age			0.00243 (0.00608)
female			0.0616 (0.109)
black			0.374** (0.180)
white			0.529*** (0.144)
catholic		0.0115 (0.147)	0.0302 (0.164)
protestant		-0.220* (0.124)	-0.300** (0.152)
other religion		-0.236 (0.206)	-0.281 (0.221)
Observations	480	487	477

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

5. Discussion

One of the surprising findings in Table 3 Regression1 was that church attendance and happiness negatively correlated. Again in Table 7 Regression1, church attendance and happiness also had a significant negative relationship. A possible explanation for these results is that less happy people tend to attend church services more. In Table 3 Regression3, the significance disappears.

Expanding the sample revealed additional statistically significant relationships. Spirituality had a strong positive relationship with happiness in Table 7 Regression3. Expanding the sample also revealed stronger significance between several of the variables (social class, black, white, and protestant) and happiness. Surprisingly, happiness and protestant were significantly negatively correlated in Table 7 Regression2, and even more so in Table 7 Regression3. A possible explanation for this result pertains to the denominational differences within the protestant religion. The different types of protestant vary in “religious style, language, and climate” (Cohen, 2002, p. 305). The relationship between happiness and religion can be affected by the different aspects of religious belief, even within protestants (Cohen, 2002, p. 305). Within the protestant category in the GSS, there is no clarification as to which sects are considered protestant. This means a survey participant could choose protestant and mean Baptist, Adventist, Methodist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, or a number of other sects. While an explanation of the negative relationship between protestant and happiness is not clear, the differences in protestant sects could result in a relationship that is not easily interpretable because the sects have been grouped together.

6. Conclusion

Using the literature, typical beliefs for underlying causation of a relationship between happiness and a religious variable are how religious people view life differently from non-religious people. For example, prayer as a coping mechanism for stress and trauma is seen to be very effective. Having a religious belief can give a sense of purpose and meaning and a sense of comfort that might not be found as often outside of religious circles. A common argument is that the social networks found through religion play a large part in helping religious people cope with stressors, and facilitate the attainment of many close friends. Having people you trust and can rely on can contribute significantly to personal happiness. The study I conducted on sample 1 did not find support for this argument since religious service attendance was not positive and because the social variables were not positive. It is also possible that a mediating variable, like purpose in life, lies between happiness and religion, and could explain any potential correlation (Sillick & Cathcart, 2013, p. 500).

In the extended sample 2, full-time college students who reported to be spiritual also reported to be happier. This was an expected finding, not only because spirituality contributes to a feeling of purpose, but because of all of the variables that interplay with spirituality. For example, people who were very spiritual attended religious services more often, and with that comes social interaction with like-minded individuals and people who share similar behaviors. This research paper contributes to the existing research on happiness and religious factors using the GSS, which was not a survey seen to be used in any studies reviewed for this project. It also falls in line with the other data showing that

smaller surveys with happiness and religion questions still find a positive association between religion and happiness.

The limitations related to this study deal with the GSS. The General Social Survey data explorer tool allows you to sort through and find specific variables to measure, but I could not always find the exact variable I wanted to analyze. For example, there was not a “college student” variable. To approximate that variable, it was possible to search for “full-time student” within the traditional college age range. The General Social Survey is only conducted within the United States, which limits the sample size and inclusivity of participants. Another thing that could be seen as a scope limitation is the timeframe in which this survey was distributed. The survey began in 1972, but the data related question on spirituality goes back only 12 years. The survey also only selects individuals who speak English or Spanish at home.

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