

Bryant, A.N., (2007) Gender Differences in Spiritual Development in the College Years. *Sex Roles*, published online: Springer Science + Business Media.

Bryant examines student spiritual development in gender differences. The general question of the article was: are college students seeking out spirituality in their lives and to what extent are they experiencing it. Bryant begins by making two distinctions between genders and their spiritual development based on a number of social, intellectual and spiritual development theorists. The first note is women, being more relational beings, define their experience with God and religion in connectedness with community. Secondly, men are more inclined to see religious practices as a form of social structure rather than a fulfillment of life purpose. These observations, as Bryant suggests, have been based on assumed theory rather than actual evidence. As a result there is little examination of the predictors, correlations and influences on spirituality in college students. The article asks the question to what extent does the college environment and experience influence the college student's commitment to spiritual practices.

The research study used data collected from CIRP (2000) freshmen data and CSBV (2003) data and her discussion of findings were based on Astin's Project on Spirituality in Higher Education. ANOVA was used to assess gender differences across 13 factor scales. Intercorrelations were used to examine the validity of these factors and to find statistically significant meaning in the relationships. The second analysis was a series of regression used to compare the effects. The two dependent variables were 1) the

importance of integrating spirituality into their lives and 2) self rated spirituality compared to peers. There were 7 blocks of independent variables used as predictors.

The result of the ANOVA statistic was there was a statistically significant difference between genders in the 13 dimensions. Women scored higher in all 13 dimensions. A few dimensions were spiritual quest, spiritual growth, social activism, and religious engagement. For the regression results, Bryant made the note that positive direction in correlation in the first variable indicated a positive change. On the other hand positive correlation direction in self rated spirituality indicated predictors that brought the scale down farther in poor self assessment. Religious affiliation was a strong predictor for men integrating spirituality into their life, significantly more than females.  $R(\text{male protestants}) = .50$ , a strong positive effect. On the other hand,  $R(\text{male Islamic}) = -.93$ , a very strong negative effect on integrating spirituality. The strongest influence on women was discussing meaning of life with friends,  $R = .28$ . Among the predictors of self rated spirituality there were only two statically significant different among genders, the variables being: “major as Science” ( males:  $R = .21$ , females  $R = .09$ ,  $p = -3.68$ ) and “had many religious friends” (male  $R = .08$ , female  $r = .16$ ,  $p = -3.84$ ) This regression equation accounted for %53 of the variance.

For student affair professional there were major findings that are significant for the work we do with students in their spiritual development. There is a strong positive relationship for both males and females between community and spirituality and charity work and spirituality. As we read this finding, it would suggest that it is important to foster conversation and discussion around spirituality. CSA professionals should plan spiritual development programs that include these elements.

Secondly encourage charitable work; exposing students to different perspectives positively influences their spirituality. Additionally, men tested a strong affiliation with a religious group and their spirituality more so than women. When working with male students respect their religious identity. Likewise for women, peer groups and mentors are important in fostering spirituality. An interesting finding was that study hours, class work, and science major had a strong negative influence on male students. This would require further study on the correlation between intellect and spirituality.

Overall this study had some interesting findings that support many developmental theories. But as in all research, there is more work to be done, many variable to be redefined and gaps to be filled. An overall discussion of the results show that women are more spiritually and religiously inclined than males. The question is posed at the end of what does “spirituality” mean for women and for men? We may be able to identify the independent factors that contribute to seeking out spirituality, but the meaning that they have for young college students based on gender may be different. The ways spirituality is manifested can be examined further. Bryant even suggests that the language used in spiritual assessment may be feminine, and thus do not represent male perspective.