CHRISTIANITY AS EMPOWERMENT? 
THE IDENTITY OF CHRISTIAN GIRLS

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Introduction

This paper investigates the interface between Christianity and 13 to 15 year old girls affiliated with Christianity in the United Kingdom. It explores whether Christianity is a positive or negative part of the girls’ lives, and thus whether Christian affiliation can be seen as empowering for girls in the United Kingdom.

The interface between Christianity and girls is explored through a comparison of the values expressed by a sample of girls affiliated with Christianity, and the values expressed by a sample of girls of no religious affiliation. In this way, something of the identity of Christian affiliated girls as a group will be apparent, and whether Christianity can be seen as empowering for girls will be evident.

The word ‘empowerment’ is used in many different ways and thus the specific way in which it is used here will be clarified. The relation between religion and empowerment for women has been discussed in many differing ways. For example, Watling (2002) discussed the concept of religion as possibly empowering for women, with relation to the diversity and change in religion and the effect this has on empowerment or disempowerment. Watling (2002) did not, however, define what he meant by empowerment used in this way. In the present paper, therefore, the term empowerment is used loosely to refer to whether or not religion can be said to be a positive or negative factor in the girls’ lives as expressed through their values.

Before considering the girls’ values, three points need to be established. The first is the importance of considering Christian affiliation. The second is the importance of considering specifically girls. The third concerns previous data and findings regarding both girls’ values in general, and the values of specifically Christian affiliated girls, on which the present paper can build.

(i) The social significance of Christian affiliation

The potential importance of self-assigned religious affiliation as a socially significant indicator of values is an ongoing debate. Many studies investigating young people’s values over the past twenty years in the United Kingdom have ignored the potential importance of religious affiliation as a socially significant indicator of values (see, for example, Department of Education and Science, 1983; Furnham and Stacey, 1991; Balding, 1993, 1997, 1998, 1999; Hendry, Shucksmith, Love and Glendinning, 1993; Woodroffe, Glickman, Barker and Power, 1993; Roberts and Sachdev, 1996; Kremer, Trew and Ogle, 1997).

However, a new and growing body of research is demonstrating that religious affiliation is an important part of a person’s identity, and does need to be recognised as a socially significant indicator of values. This was in part acknowledged in the United Kingdom through the inclusion of the religious question in the 2001 census (Francis and Robbins, 2003).
The theoretical case for the social significance of religious affiliation has been established by Fane (1999), drawing on the work of both Bibby (1985) and Bouma (1992). Bibby (1985) developed a theory of ‘encasement’, based on his research in Canada. Bibby’s fundamental point was concerned with the prevalent potential of religious affiliation to remain a significant social determinant of both attitudes (values) and behaviour. The theory of encasement states that Christianity ‘encases’; that is, Christianity has a strong and influential hold, over both its active and latent members, and Christian affiliates find it difficult to separate themselves from this. Through encasement, even acceptance of private belief without public practice has an impact on the individual’s values.

Bouma (1992) similarly emphasised that religious affiliation is a significant part of a person’s identity, and thus their values. He defined religious affiliation as a “useful social category giving some indication of the cultural background and general orienting values of a person”. Bouma posited a sociological theory of religious identification based on ‘meaning systems’ and ‘plausibility structures’. The value of Bouma’s sociological theory of religious identification is that it allows self-assigned religious affiliation to be conceived, and thus analysed, as a key part of social identity, in the same way as, for example, age, gender, social class, and ethnicity.

Building on this, Fane argued that religious affiliation, practice, and belief have all been found to correlate with attitudes (values) and behaviours, and concludes that “there is evidence...to suggest that religious affiliation is, in its own right, socially significant” (1999, p.117).

It is, therefore, theoretically established that religious affiliation is a significant part of our social identity with relation to our values. This has also been demonstrated practically and empirically. Studies are beginning to establish that Christian affiliated people are different in their values and attitudes from people of both no religious affiliation and people of other religious affiliations (see, for example, Bibby, 1987; 1995; Francis and Kay, 1995; Greeley, 1992; Gill, 1999; Halsall, 2002). Within this context, the present paper examines specifically Christian affiliation and identity, as part of continuing research investigating the impact of Christianity overall (see, for example, Kay and Francis, 1996).

(ii) The importance of considering girls

The term ‘girls’ here is used to define the young women, aged between 13 and 15 years, who comprise the sample. The assignation ‘teenage’ is not used, as it is felt to be condescending and increasingly associated with negative stereotypes of young people in modern society. Coffield, Borrill and Marshall summarised well the problems of terminology with reference to young people: ‘kids’ is patronising, ‘teenagers’ is similarly dismissive, ‘adolescents’ is unattractive and never used by the people so described... ‘children’ is insulting (although used by many professionals), ‘youth’ rhymes with ‘uncouth’, and even ‘young adults’ appears grudging in its recognition of status. ‘Young people’ is less objectionable, but bland (1986, p.3).

The issue of terminology remains unresolved, and thus in the present paper the term ‘girls’ will be used, as defined above.

The importance of considering female values is emphasised in many areas of research. Clearly, Gilligan’s (1982) work cemented the concept of considering female values as an entity in themselves. Other recent empirical research has further emphasised this. For example, Oakley demonstrated that “the signal power of gender as a social differenitator remains” (1996, p. 23). Francis (2001) also demonstrated that gender is a socially significant indicator of values. In his analysis of the values of girls and boys over fifteen value areas, consistent differences were found between the values of girls and boys. Furthermore, differences were consistently found between the values of girls and boys in Halsall (2002).
The importance of considering female religious values was promoted by Slee (2000). The present paper builds on the work of Slee by accepting her basic premise and extending her argument to a different group.

Slee’s (2000) motivation for investigating the religious values of women came from a personal concern for the “developmental needs of girls and women within the church” and an increasing conviction that:

many of the existing theological, psychological and educational models of spiritual maturity which have shaped the church’s praxis are more or less androcentric in nature, predicated upon the experience of boys and men and, to greater or lesser extent, impervious of the particular struggles and gifts of women (2000, p.5).

From this foundation, Slee set out to examine any “patterns and processes of women’s spirituality and faith developed in a group of women who identified themselves as Christian or previously Christian” (2000, p.6). Slee investigated women’s spirituality and faith through a qualitative study employing open-ended, semi-structured interviews with 30 women aged between 30 and 67.

From the standpoint of accepting Slee’s basic premise of the neglect of the place and views of girls and women within the church, the present study builds on Slee’s research in three ways. First, the present study concentrates on a much larger group. Second, the present study moves on from an examination of female spirituality and faith, to an examination of wider female values. Third, the present study examines a much narrower, and younger age group than that focused on by Slee. The present study, therefore, embraces Slee’s (2000) argument of the need to focus specifically on the needs of girls and women in the Christian church, and applies her argument to the question of whether or not Christianity is empowering for girls, at a formative stage in their lives.

The way in which the present paper is based on, and expands upon, the work of Slee (2000) has, therefore, been demonstrated, as part of an explanation of the importance of considering only girls in the present study. Coupled with the contention that religious affiliation is also a socially significant indicator of values, the analysis here of the values of Christian affiliated girls can be said to be crucial.

(iii) Previous research

We turn to the consideration of previous research and findings on which the present paper can build. The exploration of previous research falls into two main categories. First, a consideration of research examining the values of girls in general, and second, a consideration of research examining the values of Christian affiliated girls.

Concerning the values of girls in general, a theoretical examination of girls’ values relating to economics and how this affects their life was reflected on by Lipsitz (1984). She argued that later marriage ages, longer life expectancy, higher divorce rates, and the feminisation of poverty will all be a part in the economic future of girls, and that girls must be educated to enable them to make clear and realistic decisions in this area.

Empirically, Davies and Meighan (1975) investigated the values of girls with relation to schooling and sex roles. They discovered that girls’ choices of school subjects had little future career pattern in mind, and most girls saw their future in traditionally female work areas. They also found discrepancies between the teachers’ concepts of the girls’ values, and the values of the girls themselves with relation to school and employment.

Oakley (1996) investigated young people’s attitudes to the social division of labour by gender, both in and out of the home, as well as related issues for young people. She demonstrated that society remains characterised by gender discrimination, and this is reflected in the values of young people. For example, 18% of the males questioned, and just 10% of the females agreed that ‘It is not good if the man stays at home and cares for the children and the woman goes out to work’.
Mann (1998) examined the impact of working-class mothers on the educational success of their daughters, and demonstrated that the mother-daughter relationship benefits educational achievement by emphasising independence, providing emotional support, and influencing values.

Francis (2001) explored the values of girls, in comparison with the values of boys, over the fifteen value areas of: personal well-being; worries; counselling; school; work; religious beliefs; church and society; the supernatural; politics; social concerns; sexual morality; substance use; right and wrong; leisure; and my area. Francis (2001) demonstrated that in the area of personal well-being, 65% of girls and 73% of boys found life really worth living; and 30% of girls and 24% of boys had sometimes considered taking their own life. Overall, therefore, girls had a lower level of personal well-being than boys. Furthermore, for example, in the area of social concerns, 67% of girls and 55% of boys were concerned about the poverty of the Third World; and 41% of girls and 26% of boys agreed that pornography is too readily available. Thus, Francis concluded that girls had higher levels of concern about both domestic and world issues than boys.

The above studies, therefore, have explored different aspects of girls’ values, mainly focusing on specific areas rather than giving an overall view. Thus, from this review a definite need is evident for an up-to-date survey of the overall values of girls, not least as part of the feminist commitment to exploring the values of girls and women in their own right, and not in comparison to male norms.

We turn to research examining the values of Christian affiliated girls. Theoretically, and as part of research into the influences on the values of Christian affiliated girls, Christopherson (1999) offered a content analysis of Christian formulaic fiction for girls. The analysis compared gender roles and family structures in religious and secular novels, and concluded that in Christian formulaic fiction for girls there is some evidence of the depiction of more ‘progressive’ gender roles, although most depictions of family structures and gender roles tended to support traditional notions.

Empirically, Francis and Greer (1992) examined the moral values of pupils in Northern Ireland in Catholic and Protestant schools. They concluded that girls held more strongly to traditional Christian moral values than boys. Furthermore, Levitt (1995) investigated religious socialisation in specific families, and their schools and churches, to examine the roots of gender differentiation in beliefs, attitudes, and practice. Levitt demonstrated that girls held more positive attitudes toward religion and higher levels of religious beliefs than boys, although mothers’ central values of individualism, autonomy, and freedom fought against specific commitment to any Christian denomination.

These studies, therefore, have portrayed the values of girls affiliated with Christianity in different ways. Often, the specific values of Christian affiliated girls are only portrayed as a subscript while a separate issue is being explored. Or if Christian affiliated girls’ values are explored in their own right, it is often only concerning one specific issue. Thus, from this review of studies investigating Christian affiliated girls’ values, it appears that the values of Christian affiliated girls and girls of no religious affiliation have not yet been compared over a wide values area, and thus there is a definite need for an up-to-date survey focused specifically on the values of Christian affiliated girls, but over a variety of areas.

Against this background, we move on to consider the values of Christian affiliated girls, in comparison with girls of no religious affiliation, to shed some light on the question of whether Christianity can be seen as empowering for girls.

It should be noted that while, with Slee, it is recognised that there are not “discrete methods which are intrinsically feminist against others which are not” (2000, p.6), the present paper grounds itself within a feminist tradition of research through adhering to two key principles. First, this research is explicitly grounded in the values, attitudes, and experiences of girls, in their own right, and not only in relation to male norms. Second, this research is grounded in a commitment to liberating and empowering girls and women, through the exploration of the relation between girls and Christianity.
Method

Sample
The sample which forms the focus for the present study is taken from a database of 33,982 young people. Data were collected in schools, throughout England and Wales, including a proper mix of urban and rural, and independent and state-maintained schools. Within the state-maintained sector, a correct balance between non-denominational, Anglican voluntary, and Roman Catholic voluntary schools was included. Young people aged between 13 and 15 years old were included in the overall database.

Instrument
The young people were given a twenty-four page questionnaire which they were asked to complete in school time under examination conditions. They were assured of complete confidentiality and anonymity. In addition to a number of background questions, the questionnaire included a range of easily understood statements, to which the young people were asked to respond on a five point Likert-type scale (Likert, 1932): agree strongly, agree, not certain, disagree, and disagree strongly. The questionnaire covered fifteen value areas.

Analysis
For the purposes of the present study, two sub groups were selected from the overall database. The first group comprises girls who checked a box affiliating themselves with a Christian denomination, and the second group comprises girls who checked a box stating that they have no religious affiliation. The present sample therefore includes 16,632 girls, of whom 56.8% are of Christian affiliation, and 43.2% are of no religious affiliation. The girls’ values are investigated over the six key value areas of: myself; my worries; school; religion and society; moral issues; and societal and world concerns.

For the purposes of the present study, the agree strongly and agree categories have been collapsed into one, and the tables present these proportions; that is, comparisons of the Christian affiliated girls and girls of no religious affiliation who agree or agree strongly with each statement.

The data were analysed using SPSS (SPSS, Inc., 1988) using the Chi-square analysis.

Results

Myself

Table 1: Myself

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Christian (%)</th>
<th>No religion (%)</th>
<th>X²</th>
<th>P&lt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel my life has a sense of purpose</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>140.13</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find my life really worth living</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>29.97</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have sometimes considered taking my own life</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31.55</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table one examines the responses of girls affiliated with Christianity, and girls of no religious affiliation, to issues regarding themselves. As can be seen from table one, the Christian affiliated girls are more positive regarding issues concerning themselves than are the girls of no religious affiliation. Thus, 60% of the Christian affiliated girls feel that their life has a sense of purpose, in comparison
with 50% of the girls of no religious affiliation; and 67% of the Christian affiliated girls, in comparison with 63% of the girls of no religious affiliation, find their life really worth living. Furthermore, less of the Christian affiliated girls (28%) than of the girls of no religious affiliation (32%) state that they have sometimes considered taking their own life. All of the statements in table one generate differences of high statistical significance.

A disturbing trend may be seen in these figures, as demonstrated in the large proportions of girls portraying negative sentiments about themselves and their lives. For example, two fifths of the Christian affiliated girls, and half of the girls of no religious affiliation do not feel a sense of purpose in their life, and sizeable proportions of both groups of girls have considered taking their own life.

**My worries**

Table 2: My worries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Christian (%)</th>
<th>No religion (%)</th>
<th>X²</th>
<th>P&lt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am worried about my attractiveness to the opposite sex</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>14.50</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am worried about going out alone at night in my area</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>46.38</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am worried about how I get on with other people</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>19.14</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table two examines the possible worries of girls affiliated with Christianity and girls of no religious affiliation. As can be seen from table two, more of the Christian affiliated girls than the girls of no religious affiliation are worried about all of the issues presented. Thus, 42% of the Christian affiliated girls, and 39% of the girls of no religious affiliation are worried about their attractiveness to the opposite sex; and 58% of the Christian affiliated girls and 54% of the girls of no religious affiliation are worried about how they get on with other people. Additionally, 47% of the Christian affiliated girls and 42% of the girls of no religious affiliation are worried about going out alone at night in their area. All of the statements in table two generate differences of high statistical significance.

**School**

Table 3: School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Christian (%)</th>
<th>No religion (%)</th>
<th>X²</th>
<th>P&lt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am happy in my school</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>63.39</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am worried about my exams at school</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>47.87</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers do a good job</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>117.25</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table three examines the responses of girls affiliated with Christianity, and girls of no religious affiliation, to issues regarding school. As can be seen from table three, the Christian affiliated girls are more positive, yet at the same time more worried, about issues regarding school, than are the girls
of no religious affiliation. Thus, nearly half (49%) of the Christian affiliated girls, and two fifths (40%) of the girls of no religious affiliation agree that teachers do a good job; and three quarters (75%) of the Christian affiliated girls and 70% of the girls of no religious affiliation agree that they are happy in their school. However, 82% of the Christian affiliated girls, and 78% of the girls of no religious affiliation agree that they are worried about their exams at school. All of the statements in table three generate differences of high statistical significance.

The figures in table three again depict a somewhat disturbing trend in the lives of girls in the United Kingdom. The pressure of school is such that around four fifths of both Christian affiliated girls and girls of no religious affiliation are worried about their exams, with Christian affiliated girls being significantly more worried as a group than girls of no religious affiliation. Furthermore, while 75% of the Christian affiliated girls and 70% of the girls of no religious affiliation are happy at school, this leaves 25% and 30% of each group respectively who cannot agree that they are happy. These are groups of reasonable proportions to not be happy with such a crucial part of their lives.

**Religion and society**

*Table 4: Religion and society*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Christian (%)</th>
<th>No religion (%)</th>
<th>X²</th>
<th>P&lt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The church seems irrelevant to life today</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>147.02</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to get married in church</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>537.30</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools should hold a religious assembly every day</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>193.17</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table four examines the responses of girls affiliated with Christianity, and girls of no religious affiliation, to issues regarding religion and society. As can be seen from table four, unsurprisingly, the Christian affiliated girls are more positive regarding the role of religion in society than are the girls of no religious affiliation. Thus, only 18% of the Christian affiliated girls, in comparison with 26% of the girls of no religious affiliation agree that the church is irrelevant to life today. High proportions of both groups; 88% of the Christian affiliated girls in comparison with 73% of the girls of no religious affiliation agree that they want to get married in church. Much smaller proportions of both groups, although still more of the Christian affiliated girls (10%) than the girls of no religious affiliation (4%), agree that schools should hold a religious assembly every day. All of the statements in table four generate differences of high statistical significance.

**Moral issues**

*Table 5: Moral issues*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Christian (%)</th>
<th>No religion (%)</th>
<th>X²</th>
<th>P&lt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is wrong to have sexual intercourse outside marriage</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>115.21</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce is wrong</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>49.62</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is wrong to use marijuana (hash/pot)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>89.66</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table five examines the responses of girls affiliated with Christianity, and girls of no religious affiliation, to moral issues. As can be seen from table five, the Christian affiliated girls are more conservative on moral issues than are the girls of no religious affiliation. Thus, 15% of the Christian affiliated girls and 9% of the girls of no religious affiliation agree that it is wrong to have sexual intercourse outside marriage; and 17% of the Christian affiliated girls and 13% of the girls of no religious affiliation agree that divorce is wrong. Moreover, in considering substance use, 57% of the Christian affiliated girls and 49% of the girls of no religious affiliation agree that it is wrong to use marijuana. All of the statements in table five generate differences of high statistical significance.

From table five, it is clear that large proportions of girls, even those affiliated with the Christian churches, are disagreeing with the churches’ official position on moral issues. Although more of the Christian affiliated girls agree that the statements are wrong, comparatively low proportions of both groups agree with the statements, particularly the statements concerning sex and divorce.

Societal and world concerns

Table 6: Societal and world concerns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Christian (%)</th>
<th>No religion (%)</th>
<th>X²</th>
<th>P&lt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am concerned about the risk of pollution to the environment</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>79.91</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am concerned about the poverty of the Third World</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>255.83</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is nothing I can do to solve the world’s problems</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>50.28</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table six examines the responses of girls affiliated with Christianity, and girls of no religious affiliation, to societal and world concerns. As can be seen from table six, the Christian affiliated girls are more concerned about societal and world issues than are the girls of no religious affiliation. Thus, 70% of the Christian affiliated girls and 63% of the girls of no religious affiliation are concerned about the risk of pollution to the environment; and 72% of the Christian affiliated girls and 60% of the girls of no religious affiliation are concerned about the poverty of the Third World. This higher level of concern regarding societal and world issues translates itself into lower levels of apathy among the Christian affiliated girls than among the girls of no religious affiliation; 18% of the Christian affiliated girls and 22% of the girls of no religious affiliation agree that there is nothing they can do to help solve the world’s problems. All of the statements in table six generate differences of high statistical significance.

Discussion

In light of the above results, four key points emerge regarding the interface between Christianity and girls in the United Kingdom.

First, the present paper has found support for the thesis, advanced by Fane (1999) that religious affiliation is a socially significant indicator of values. This can be specifically seen through the finding that the values expressed by the Christian affiliated girls are significantly different from the values expressed by the girls of no religious affiliation. This finding also supports Bibby’s (1985) theory of encasement, that Christian affiliation has a strong and influential hold over its affiliates.
Second, something can thus be said concerning the identity of Christian affiliated girls as a group. The identity of girls affiliated with Christianity demonstrates that they have both greater positive and negative aspects to their values than girls of no religious affiliation. The positive aspects are that the Christian affiliated girls are more positive in their outlook on life. The negative aspects are arguably that the Christian affiliated girls are more anxious. However, this negative aspect of the Christian affiliated girls’ much greater anxiety could counteract their positive outlook.

Third, the identity of Christian girls also indicates that Christian affiliated girls are significantly more likely to hold a conservative stance, in particular with regard to moral values.

Fourth, these findings can be related to the question of whether Christianity can be said to be empowering, or not, for girls, at this formative stage in their lives. It is helpful to explore this with reference to the theory of encasement. It can be argued that Christian affiliated girls are ‘encased’ by Christianity, as demonstrated in the present paper. The question is whether or not this encasement can be seen as empowering for Christian affiliated girls. The definition of encasement, as stated by Bibby (1985), is that Christianity has a ‘strong and influential hold over’ its affiliates. This can be seen as ‘insulating’ Christian affiliates. The effects of this insulation for Christian affiliated girls, as has been seen, are that they are more positive in their outlook on life, yet also generally more anxious, and also more conservative in their values. Thus, encasement could be seen as empowering for Christian affiliated girls, through the argument that ‘insulation’ facilitates their positive outlook on life, and empowers them to ‘hold out’ against the tide of society in maintaining their conservative values. Alternatively, encasement could be seen as disempowering for Christian affiliated girls, through the argument that ‘insulation’ may separate and marginalise them from society, through a dissonance between the Christian affiliated girls and the rest of society. This marginalisation may increase anxiety, and effectively disempower them from fighting against the tradition in which they are ‘encased’, in order to express their own values, rather than the conservative values of the church.

With reference to the findings presented here, this question remains open for discussion.

**Conclusion**

The present paper has explored the values of Christian affiliated girls, in comparison with the values of girls of no religious affiliation, in the light of the need expressed by Slee (2000) to explore female religious values, and Bibby’s (1985) theory of encasement. It has found that Christian affiliated girls differ significantly in their values from girls of no religious affiliation, further supporting the theory of encasement, and the idea that girls affiliated to Christianity have specific needs.

The fact that Christian affiliated girls continue to be distinct from girls of no religious affiliation is good news for the churches, in demonstrating the churches’ continuing influence despite declining church attendance in modern society (Davie, 1994).

The present paper asks whether Christian affiliation, through encasement, is empowering or disempowering for self-assigned affiliated girls. While the data presented here do not facilitate a clear answer to this question, they do illuminate the particular way in which encasement manifests itself, from which an individual can draw her own conclusions regarding Christianity and empowerment.

Further research is needed to examine the detailed nature of encasement for Christian affiliated girls. Qualitative research is now needed to elucidate the quantitative data provided here. Interviews, perhaps along the lines suggested by Slee (2000), but over a larger group of 13 to 15 year old girls, and with a more structured approach, are needed. This would enable more generalisable findings. Such interviews are suggested as the next step in this crucial area, which so greatly affects the lives of girls as they grow and develop.
References


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