

Watching R-rated movies lessens importance of faith for young people, study finds

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Viewing R-rated movies leads to decreased church attendance and lessens importance of faith among young people, according to a study by a Baylor University researcher published online in the *Review of Religious Research*.

But watching R-rated [movies](#) did not have any effect on whether they have [doubts](#) about their beliefs—or whether they thought it was all right to "pick and choose" teachings without accepting the [faith](#) as a whole, said Phil Davignon, a doctoral candidate in sociology in Baylor's College of Arts & Sciences.

Previous research shows that when teens become young adults, they generally retain similar religious beliefs to those held by their parents. But young adults nevertheless are the least religiously active age group in the United States.

The Baylor study analyzed data from more than 2,000 adolescents, young adults and their parents who responded to the 2003, 2005 and 2007-2008 waves of the National Study of Youth and Religion. In the first wave, all respondents were adolescents between ages 13 and 17, but some entered young adulthood in the subsequent waves.

The survey included individuals with varying degrees of faith. Regardless of the degree of faith, most respondents viewed at least some R-rated movies.

Only 13.2 percent who indicated that their faith is "extremely important" to them claimed that none of the movies they watch are R-rated, while nearly 21 percent of those whose faith was "extremely important" said that most movies they view are rated R. Of those whose faith was "very important," 31 percent claimed that most of the movies they view are rated R.

While those percentages are lower than those whose faith is "not at all important," it still represents a sizable percentage of the respondents whose faith is important to them, Davignon said.

"Watching R-rated movies is prevalent among religious and non-

religious young people," he said. "Nearly everyone watches them."

While many people watch movies in their homes, children younger than 17 are not allowed to attend an R-rated movie at a theater without an accompanying parent or adult guardian because, in the view of the Motion Picture Association of America rating administration, it contains some adult material. That may include adult themes, adult activity, hard language, intense or persistent violence, sexually-oriented nudity, drug abuse or other elements.

Regarding movies seen by survey respondents, "we don't know whether the movies were rated 'R' because of sex, violence, language or all of the above. But in general, they contain themes contrary to Christian values—although there are some exceptions, such as 'The Passion of the Christ,'" Davignon said.

Having more non-religious friends had a negative effect on the importance of faith and worship attendance, the study showed. Meanwhile, the influence of parents who placed greater importance on faith had a positive effect on [church attendance](#), and [young people](#) were more likely to view faith as important if parents monitored media use.

"Adolescents and [young adults](#) base their movie choices on their personal preferences, but R-rated movies seem to influence them beyond their initial attitudes towards religion," Davignon said. "Viewing R-rated movies was damaging to religious faith even after accounting for the [importance](#) of religion in one's family, peer influence and parental monitoring of media, among other factors."

Provided by Baylor University

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