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Teens and Texts: Exploring the Literary Practices of Church-Going Teens

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Teens and Texts: Exploring the Literary Practices of Church-Going Teens

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this Phase 1 study was to explore adolescents' faith-related literacy practices and thus build on a growing field of research on adolescents' religious experiences (Smith and Denton, 2003; Dean, 2010). To collect data, we designed an online survey consisting of both qualitative and quantitative questions. The 37 participants, two-thirds of them female, were recruited from youth groups in and around a small Midwestern town. 91% of the respondents reported that they attended youth group on a weekly basis. As a whole, we discovered that most adolescents seem to identify more with the relational aspect of their faith than they do with traditional religious literacy practices such as reading a Bible and devotionals on a regular basis. Faith-related literacy practices, for the teens we surveyed, seemed to be mostly social in purpose, function, and motivation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

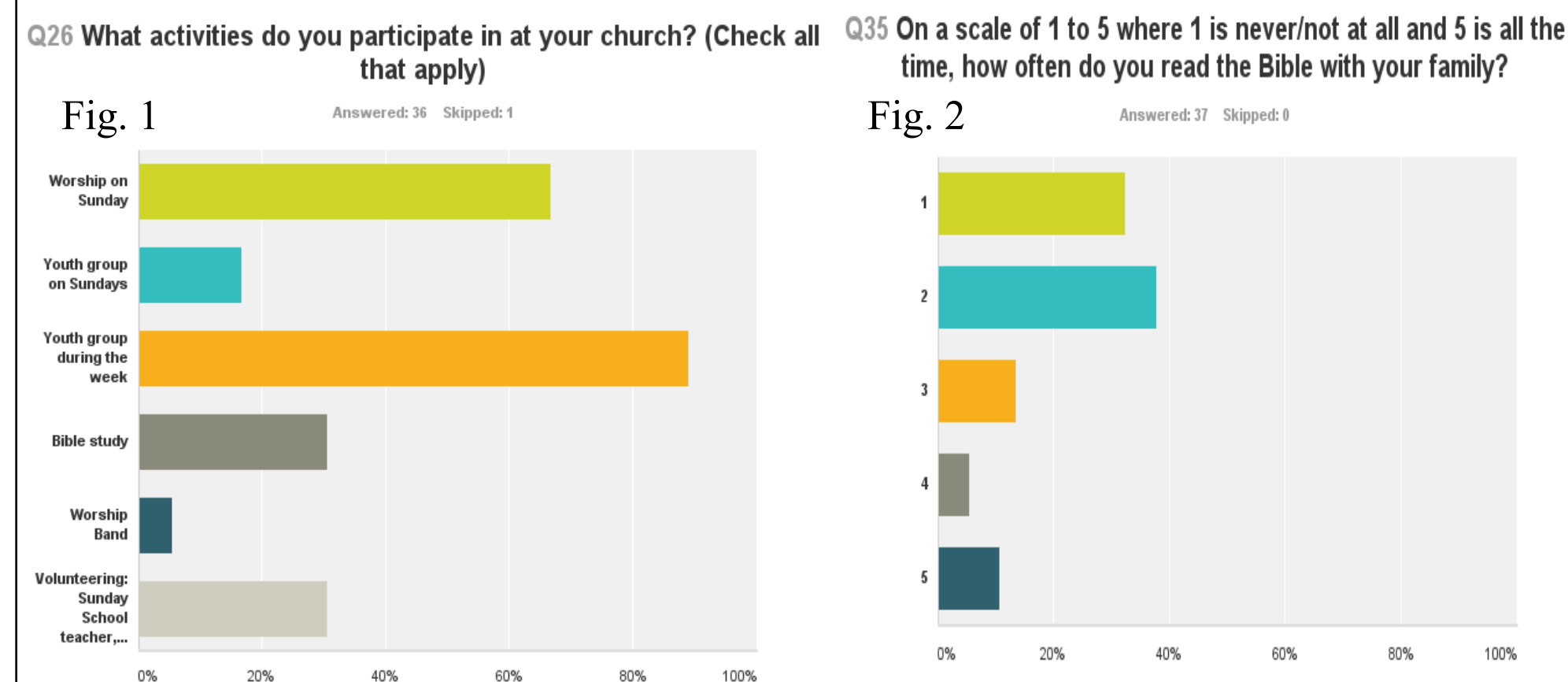
- *Soul Searching*: Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist, 2005 National survey
 - "Spiritual, but not religious"
- *Almost Christian*: Kenda Creasy Dean, 2010
 - Continues discussion of *Soul Searching*
 - Moralistic Therapeutic Deism
- *Sticky Faith*: Dr. Kara E. Powell and Dr. Chap Clark, 2011
 - Parents matter!
 - Needs to be all encompassing

METHODOLOGY

Data Source

- Created a survey, tested it, and modified it
 - Survey with 53 questions
 - Targeting both qualitative and quantitative aspects of the issue
 - Demographic
 - Multiple choice
 - Rating
 - Open-ended questions

RESULTS



Analysis

Figure 1

- 91% of teens attend youth group weekly
- Youth group over worship on Sunday
- 30% attend a Bible study

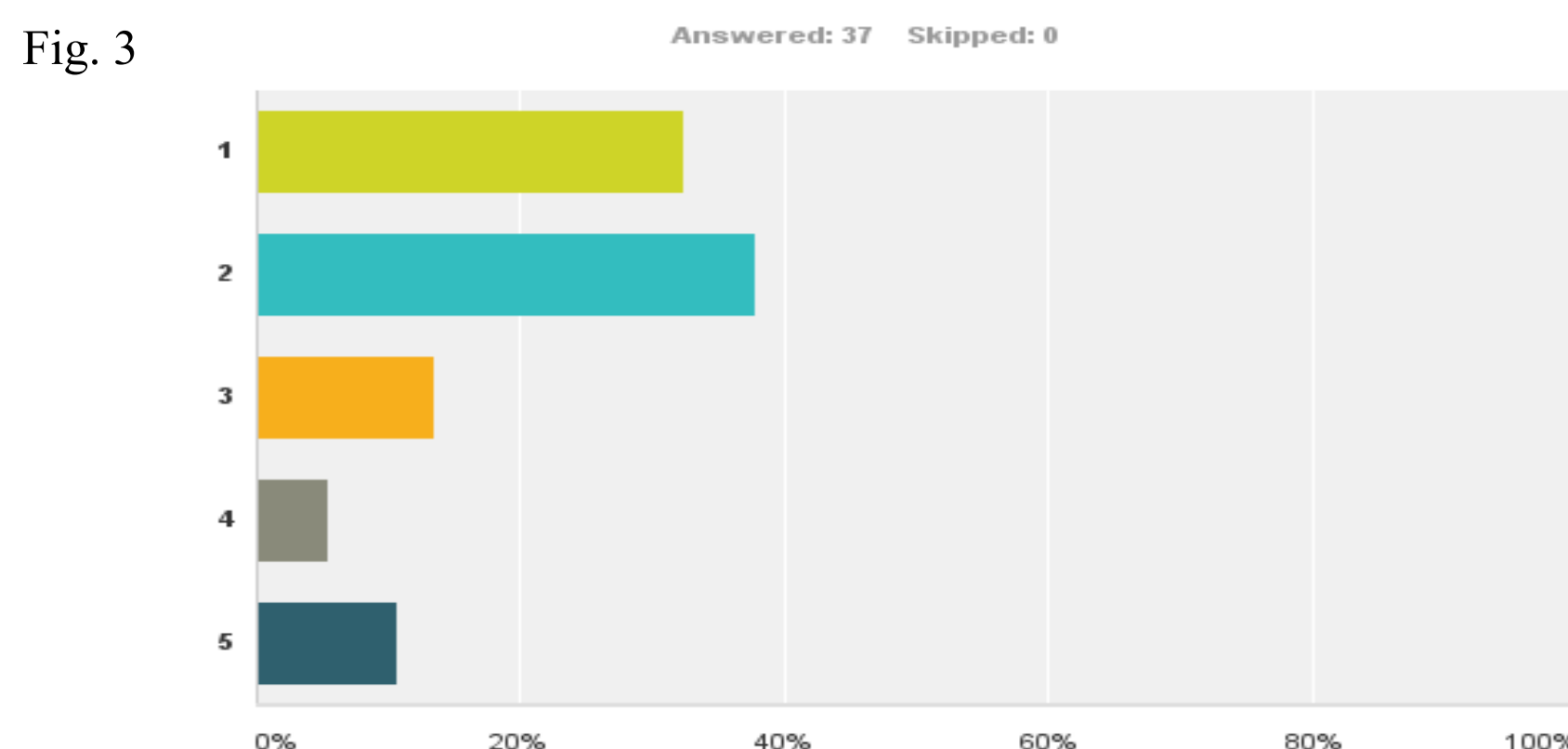
Figure 2

- Most parents rarely encourage their teenagers to read the Bible
- 67% say being with other people makes them feel close to God
- 54% enjoy the social aspect of church (seeing friends)
- Few teens read the Bible with their families

Figure 3

- Even spread of teens reading in free time
- 69% use the NIV translation
- 70% never go to Christian websites
- Half never/rarely listen to Christian radio stations or visit Christian book stores
- 40% read devotionals 1-2 days, 30% rarely

Q35 On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is never/not at all and 5 is all the time, how often do you read the Bible with your family?



METHODOLOGY (continued)

Data Collection

- The survey was distributed and conducted online via surveymonkey.com and printed as well.
 - Data collected during the summer
 - Parents' consent and students' assent
 - Age range: 12-17
 - 37 participants from various churches and youth groups in the community.

Data Analysis

35% Male participants

65% Female participants

91% Attend Youth Group Weekly

Age Distribution



CONCLUSIONS

Implications

- **Where: Youth Group**— "Kids know youth group, not church." (*Sticky Faith*)
- **Who: Parents**— "Parents matter most"? (*Almost Christian*)
- **What:** "We watched these clips every day in Sunday school...about different stories in the bible. It was cartoon and it had some humor to it. I liked those a lot because it made everything a lot less complicated than when I read the bible by myself." (survey respondent)

Limitations

- The total number of surveys and the representativeness of various faith backgrounds
- The summer proved to be a hard time to collect surveys