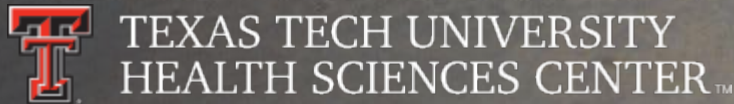


Adolescent Moral
Development:
Effectiveness of Engaging
Youth in the Critical
Appraisal of Theological
Content



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Purpose

The purpose of this presentation is to report the preliminary findings of *Vocati*, a youth intervention designed to engage U.S. high school students in the critical appraisal of theological content, on adolescent moral development as a strategy to promote adolescent health and well-being

Background & Significance

Globally 1 in 6 People
are Adolescents
age 10-19

Promoting health and reducing risks
for this age group has life-long
health and societal consequences

Positive and Negative risk-taking
behaviors cluster in this population.

Meta-analysis of 50 studies investigating the
cognitive-developmental approach to
adolescent moral judgment showed lower
stage moral development in youth with
delinquent behaviors as compared to non-
offenders

(Busch, Van Stel, Schrijvers & de Leeuw, 2013; Stams, Brugman, Dekovic, Rosmalen, van der Laan, & Gibbs, 2006; World Health Organization, 2018)

Adolescent research suggests

Acceleration

Adolescent physical
Maturity

Slowing

Psychological and
behavioral
development

Multiple Social Identities

Intersectionality
Multiple identities
Historical background to
present



(Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, 1998; Jones, Kim, & Skendall 2012; Tanti, Stukas, & Halloran, 2008; Twenge & Park, 2017)

A romantic couple is shown in a close embrace, kissing. The man, with long brown hair and a beard, is wearing a patterned sweater and is kissing the woman on the cheek. The woman has dark hair and is wearing a light-colored top. They are standing in a dark, wooded area with dense foliage in the background. The lighting is soft, highlighting their faces against the dark background.

Prosocial

behavior=benefits others

Antisocial

behavior=harm to others

Vocati Intervention

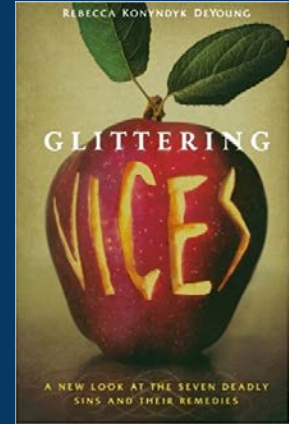
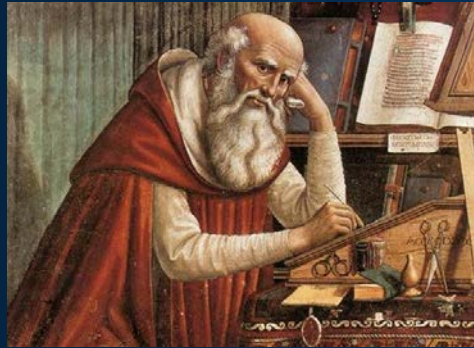
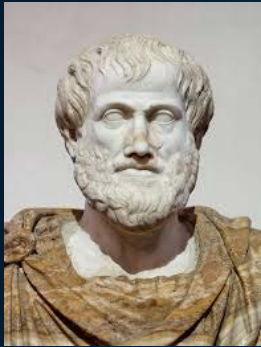
The *Vocati Institute* is an inter-generational program designed to engage high-school aged youth in:

- 1) A week-long summer residency focused on critical appraisal of theological content and engagement
- 2) A year-long once monthly dialogue/discussion related to theology and culture
- 3) Implementation of a community-based service project



Critical Appraisal of Theological Content

Vocati scholars critically appraise program content by engaging with an interdisciplinary team comprised of Analytic Theologians, Youth and Family Ministry, Dance, Theater Fine Arts, Arts and Humanities experts, and an embedded Nursing Scientist



Method

Longitudinal,

Mixed-Method

- Cohort 1: n=28
- Youth 14-18
- 3 southwestern states
- Institutional Review Board approval
- Adolescent Assent
- Parental Consent

Research Question: How does participation in *Vocati* impact youth moral development?

- Measurement:
- Defining Issues Test, Version 2 (DIT-2)
- Vocati Instrument Questionnaire (VIQ)
- Focus Group

Defining Issues Test Version 2 (DIT-2)

- 1999 Neo-Kohlbergian measure of moral cognitive sophistication
- Activates use of moral schemas to the extent that a person has developed them
- High reliability (.78 -.82) and published national norms
- Range 20-70

The developmental indices in the DIT-2 are categorized considering Kohlberg's developmental model as follows:

- The Stage 2/3 score considers fairness, good/evil intentions, concern for maintaining good relationships, and personal approval.
- The Stage 4, Maintaining Norms score represents consideration of maintaining social norms, including legal systems, and roles in existing formal organizational structures.
- The P-Score/Post Conventional score is categorized as Stage 5/6 in Kohlberg's model. This score is focused on consideration on societal organization through appeal to consensus, due process, and safeguarding of minimal basic rights.
- The N2 score is a relatively newer, sophisticated combination of items and reflects the acquisition of more sophisticated moral thinking and the extent to which individuals reject ideas because they are simplistic or biased. The N2 Score is generally **considered the most powerful index** of moral development.

Vocati Institute

Questionnaire (VIQ)

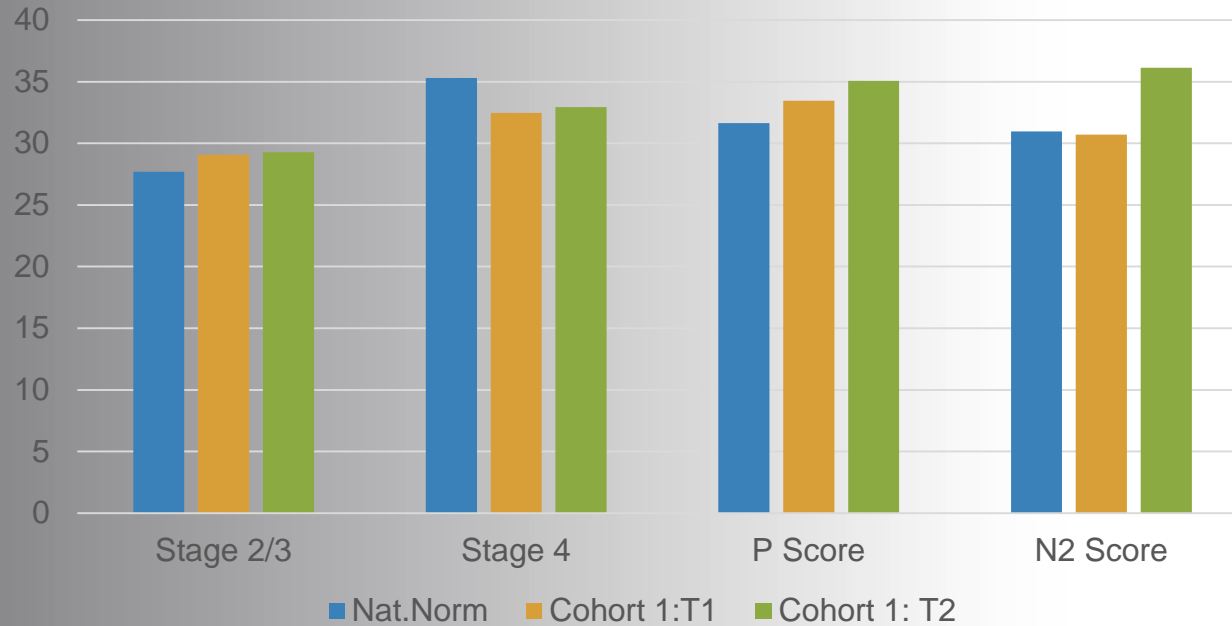
VIQ consists of six Likert-type questions and seven open-ended questions developed as a content-specific measurement

- Test-retest reliability of Likert-type questions
 - Cronbach's Alpha of .86
- Content Validity Index .94

Results

- 16 (57%) were male and 12 (43%) were female
- Results of the DIT-2 mean scores at time one and 12 months were compared to the aggregated national norms (NN)
- The greatest change compared to NN was seen in the N2 score
 - Cohort 1 - T1 (baseline) 30.71
 - Cohort 1 - T2 (12 months) 36.14
 - Compared to NN of 30.97

Defining Issues Test Version 2
National Norm
Vocati Cohort 1: T1 2016 – T2 2017



VIQ Results

- ▶ A paired t-test was conducted to compare VIQ scores prior to summer residency (baseline) and at 6 months
- ▶ The mean scores increased in 5 of 6 VIQ questions suggesting a significant difference in participant self-reported practices 6 months following the summer residency

VIQ-T1 & T2 RESULTS

Self-reported increased ability to:

Q1: Understand theological wisdom of Christian tradition ($t(18) = 3.897, p < .001^{**}$)

Q3: Ability to engage in my culture ($t(18) = 2.926, p < .009^{**}$)

Q4: Familiarity with primary thinkers, theology and wisdom from the Christian tradition
($t(18) = 2.935, p < .009^{**}$)

Q5: Practice private and communal spiritual disciplines ($t(18) = 2.357, p < .030^{*}$)

Q6: Intentionally engage with issues of morality, ethics, justice and broader vision of
the world ($t(18) = 2.731, p < .014^{*}$)

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

VIQ

T1: Baseline T2: Six Months

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Q1: T1-T2	1.053	1.177	.270	.485	1.620	3.897	18	.001**
Q2: T1-T2	.263	1.284	.295	-.356	.882	.893	18	.384
Q3: T1-T2	.737	1.098	.252	.208	1.266	2.926	18	.009**
Q4: T1-T2	.895	1.329	.305	.254	1.535	2.935	18	.009**
Q5: T1-T2	.579	1.071	.246	.063	1.095	2.357	18	.030*
Q6: T1-T2	.842	1.344	.308	.194	1.490	2.731	18	.014*

*p < .05, **p < .01

Narrative Focus

Group Data

- Focus-group participants were asked 7 open-ended questions derived from the VIQ
- Three members of the research team independently read and reflected on the data using a qualitative interpretative approach
- Similar ideas were noted, clustered, coded, categorized and cross-checked for comparison



“Awareness of self”

“Eye Contact”

“Be Present”

“Use Talents”

“Listen”

“Erase Boundaries”

“Break Barriers”

“Empathy”

“Awareness of others”



Pittman's 4 Categories of Positive Youth Development

Competence

Connectiveness

Confidence

Character

Community

Service Project

Examples

LZ: Worked with homeless organization to help educate the community in how to relate to and communicate with homeless individuals.

EC: Created a roofing project for his community. EC was voted the “Outstanding Citizen of the Year” in his city, the first time in the history of his town a youth, rather than adult was given this recognition.



AJ: Increased her volunteerism throughout the year in local events to help children.

Synthesized literature reporting mediators of health promoting healthy adolescent lifestyle behaviors

Significant mediators of nutrition

Increased:

- Self-efficacy
- Pros and forward stage movement
- Planning
- Perceived parental support
- Goal intention

Decreased:

- Perceived barriers with outcome expectation

Self-efficacy and autonomous motivation indirectly mediating outcome

Significant mediators of physical activity

- Perceived environmental barriers
- Goal intention

Decreased:

- Perceived barriers with outcome expectations
- Self-efficacy and autonomous motivation indirectly mediating the outcome

Significant mediators of screen time

- Autonomous motivation

Conclusion

Engagement of youth in the critical appraisal of theological content may promote increased adolescent moral development and prosocial concepts linked to positive youth behaviors and well-being. It is not yet known how increasing adolescent moral development may mediate other healthy lifestyle behaviors in youth and is a research question in need of further investigation.

Limitations

- Our preliminary findings are from a small sample of adolescents from 3 states self-selecting into the program



Future Direction

- ❑ Future research is needed to determine the potential mediating effects increased moral development may have on adolescent health
- ❑ Continue to track study findings over time
- ❑ In the fall of 2018 cohort, we will add a comparison group to flesh-out impact of Vocati as an intervention to enhance the moral development of youth

THANK YOU!



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