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Faith in Yourself: Self-Esteem in Guatemalan Religious Schools

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Faith in Yourself: Self-Esteem in Guatemalan Religious Schools

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Abstract

This study examines the effect that private religious schools have on self-esteem. Using data collected from 21 Catholic, evangelical and secular private schools in Guatemala, comparisons are made to determine if there are differences between these school types in students' self-esteem and academic confidence. Hierarchical linear models are constructed to further examine school differences in the presence of controls for gender and gender ideology, family influence and various religious measures. Contrary to many previous findings, results in this study show that Catholic school students generally have lower levels of self-esteem and academic confidence than students at other types of private religious schools. These lower Catholic school findings persist for measures of reflected appraisals and math confidence even in the presence of relevant controls. Full models also show that gender ideology, family background, and religious beliefs and practices have a significant effect on student self-esteem and academic confidence. Overall, results highlight the key role that religious beliefs and religious saliency have on student self-esteem

Keywords: self-esteem, academic confidence, religious schools, religion, Guatemala

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La Fe en Sí Mismo: Autoestima en Colegios Religiosos de Guatemala

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Resumen

Este estudio examina el efecto que tienen las escuelas religiosas privadas sobre la autoestima. Usando los datos recogidos desde 21 colegios católicos, evangélicos y seculares en Guatemala, las comparaciones se hacen para determinar si hay diferencias entre estos tipos de la escuela en la autoestima de los estudiantes y académico confianza. Modelos jerárquicos lineales están construidos para estudiar más las diferencias de escuela en la presencia de controles para el género y la ideología de género, influencia familiar y diversas medidas religiosas. Contrariamente a muchas conclusiones anteriores, resultados de este estudio muestran que estudiantes de la escuela católica generalmente tienen niveles más bajos de autoestima y confianza académica que los estudiantes en otros tipos de escuelas religiosas privadas. Estos resultados inferiores de la escuela católica persistan por medidas de tasaciones reflejadas y matemáticas confianza incluso en presencia de los controles pertinentes. Completa los modelos también muestran que la ideología, antecedentes familiares, de género y las creencias religiosas y prácticas tienen un efecto significativo sobre la autoestima del estudiante y confianza académica. En general, resultados destacan el papel clave que tienen creencias religiosas y religioso prominencia sobre la autoestima del estudiante.

Palabras clave: autoestima, confianza académica, las escuelas religiosas, religión, Guatemala

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One important goal for schools is to enhance their students' well-being, including their self-esteem (Bagley, 1989; Bagley et al., 1979). Positive self-esteem is correlated with academic achievement, occupational success, positive relationships with others, healthy coping skills, and a general sense of well-being. On the other hand, low self-esteem is associated with a variety of psychological, physiological, behavioral and social problems (Kutob et al., 2010). Some studies have shown that religious schools, particularly Catholic schools, have higher outcomes for self-esteem (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993; Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982). These studies have a number of shortcomings in that they do not include important controls for factors such as socioeconomic status (SES), gender, and specific religious beliefs. They also do not consider other types of religious schools. They do, however, highlight the importance of religious considerations, which have been shown to have a significant impact on self-esteem (Thompson, Thomas & Head, 2012).

Using data gathered from students in private Guatemalan schools, this research builds on previous studies done in Catholic institutions and extends their findings by introducing comparisons with evangelical schools and by including additional relevant controls. Results improve our understanding of religious factors that are associated with self-esteem outcomes in schools by emphasizing the importance of specific beliefs such as biblical literalism and a belief that the Holy Spirit is active today. While the main thrust of this study is to examine the effect of religious school type and student religiosity on self-esteem, the analysis includes more comprehensive statistical models than past studies on religious schools. It thus provides further insight into self-esteem in schools by introducing measures for family background, gender ideology and the effects of specific types of esteem on one another into the analytical models.

Literature Review

Importance of Self-Esteem

A raft of research has demonstrated the importance of self-esteem. Higher levels of self-esteem have been linked to increased achievement, coping

relationships, well-being and health. On the other hand, low self-esteem is associated with a number of psychological and behavioral concerns ranging from anxiety to suicide (see Trzesniewski et al., 2006, and Kutob et al., 2010 for reviews). More specifically, academic self-esteem is correlated with increased academic achievement, along with decreased substance abuse and deviant behavior (see Cheung & Yeung, 2010, for a review).

The development of self-esteem in children and youth is particularly important. Self-esteem is relatively pliable for children and early adolescents (Trzesniewski, Donnellan & Robins, 2003). Often self-esteem grows during early adolescence—possibly because of greater self-understanding, increased autonomy, and wider latitude to engage in activities that one enjoys (Demo, 1992). Self-esteem then solidifies in the late teens and remains quite stable through adulthood until old age (Trzesniewski, Donnellan & Robins, 2003). The self-concept that forms during these years has long-term consequences. Low self-esteem in adolescence is associated with decreased mental and physical health, lower academic achievement, and increased incidences of financial problems and criminal conduct throughout adulthood (Trzesniewski et al., 2006). For this reason, it is critical for children and adolescents in schools to develop a healthy sense of self-esteem. The following paragraphs will more closely examine the concept of self-esteem along with the factors that contribute to its development.

Definitions of Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is commonly defined as "the overall affective evaluation of one's own worth, value, or importance" (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991, p. 115). More broadly, it refers to the positive or negative feelings that one has about oneself including the extent to which one prizes, values or likes oneself (Gecas, 1982).

Studies of global self-esteem of emphasize different aspects or domains of esteem. One of the most commonly studied is a straightforward subjective evaluation that "I like myself," or "I have a high self-esteem" (Robins, Hendin & Trzesniewski, 2001). A second aspect understands self-esteem to be "an internal, psychological system that gauges the degree to which an individual feels included versus excluded by other people" (Cacioppo et al.,

2008, p. 200). Rooted in interactionist theories (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934), this perspective emphasizes that self-concept often reflects people's perceptions of the appraisals that others make of them (Gecas, 1982). This involves a sense of inclusion—of being liked by others. A third aspect of esteem is a sense of confidence that one has the ability to meet the demands of a task or cope with one's social environment (Self-confidence, n.d.; Ridgeway, 1979). This sense of confidence can be applied to specific contexts such as a positive evaluation of school performance (Cheung & Yeung, 2010; Wilhite, 1990).

Each of these three aspects of self-esteem (subjective appraisal, reflective appraisal and self-confidence) is employed as a dependent variable in this study. Analytical models are used to determine if there are correlations with religious school type, student religiosity, and other salient variables to measures of students' self-esteem. The sections below provide more detailed information about these key factors.

Schools and Self-Esteem

Schools are important sites for self-esteem formation (Bagley, 1989). School teachers and administrators work with children and adolescents at a time when they are at vital stages for self-concept formation (Demo, 1992; Trzesniewski, Donnellan & Robins, 2003). Within the school environment, students go through each of four fundamental processes of self-esteem development. Students make social comparisons to their classmates and teachers. Their reflected appraisals are shaped by interactions with peers and authorities at school. School projects and activities provide opportunities for students to develop their own self-perceptions about their abilities and dispositions. Finally, schools directly and indirectly teach values that influence the development of students' psychological centrality, which is their sense of who they are and what is important to them (Rosenberg & Pearlin, 1978).

Because schools emphasize different values and create different environments in which students can make comparisons and evaluate their abilities, one would expect that they would each have different self-esteem outcomes. This has been shown to be the case, especially in religious schools. Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore (1982) and a decade later Bryk, Lee,

and Holland (1993) showed that Catholic students had higher levels of academic achievement and self-esteem when compared to public school students from similar backgrounds. However, further studies have suggested that it is not Catholic schools per se that contribute to improved self-esteem, but rather student religiosity (Bagley & Mallick, 1997; Smith, Weigert & Thomas, 1979). In the studies above, comparisons are made between Catholic and public schools and between Catholic schools in different cultures, but no current studies compare different types of religious schools.

This study expands on the work that has gone before by introducing other school types into the equation. Instead of focusing on comparisons between Catholic and public schools, comparisons in this research are made between Catholic, evangelical and secular schools, thus adding nuance and broadening the scope of religious and non-religious comparisons.

The analysis that follows will test three separate hypotheses about religious school type and student self-esteem. The first is that Catholic school students will have higher self-esteem than private secular school students. This hypothesis is partially supported by Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore (1982) and Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993) who have shown that students in Catholic schools have higher self-esteem compared to public school students. These studies may be uncovering private and public school differences, but this study will test the assumption that these distinctions are actually attributable to differences between religious and non-religious schools. The second hypothesis is that evangelical school students will have higher self-esteem than secular school students. Because there have been no previous studies on self-esteem in evangelical schools, this hypothesis extends the findings for Catholic schools under the assumption that students in other types of religious schools will also have higher self-esteem than those in secular schools. The final hypothesis is that Catholic school students and evangelical school students will not be significantly different in measures of self-esteem. This hypothesis rests on the assumption, which has not been previously examined in the literature, that the key difference is between religious and non-religious schools. It assumes different types of religious schools will produce similar results for self-esteem.

Religion and Self-Esteem

In the social science literature, there is an ongoing debate about the effect that religion has on self-esteem. Some studies have found no relationship between religion and self-esteem, although these focused exclusively on religious attendance and the self-rated importance of religion (Donahue & Benson, 1995; Milot & Ludden, 2009). Another study, using similar variables, found a positive relationship between religiosity and esteem (Bagley & Mallick, 1997). Markstrom's (1999) research found no relationship between religiosity and general self-esteem; however, academic esteem was associated with religious attendance, youth group involvement, and participation in Bible study groups. These mixed results are well documented in the work of Abbotts et al. (2004).

Although findings to date are somewhat inconclusive, there are many reasons to postulate that religious factors should affect self-esteem. Emphasizing the sociological aspects of Rosenberg and Pearlin's (1978) theory, Thompson, Thomas, and Head speculate that because they are often supportive environments, "church-based relationships may provide reflected appraisals and social comparisons that facilitate positive self-evaluations as well as opportunities for social interactions that promote positive self-awareness" (2012, p. 387). Smith, Weigert and Thomas (1979) argue that self-esteem differences amongst Catholic students from different cultures in their study may relate to the comparative status of the varying religious groups. Those Catholics in minority positions within their cultures likely had higher levels of self-esteem because "the continuing requirement to affirm status and existence vis-à-vis other meaning systems serves to place the religious dimension in a more salient position in self-evaluation" (1979, p. 58). Finally, for believers, reflected appraisals are additionally formed in light of the divine. Those who believe that they are truly loved and accepted by God despite their sins and shortcomings may have a higher self-esteem regardless of whether they believe that others think well of them. David Myers argues that there is an "interplay between our God-concept and our self-concept" (2008, p. 328). He notes that from a religious perspective, "no longer is there any need to define one's self-worth by achievements, material well-being, or social approval. To find self-acceptance,…*[s]imply accept the fact that you are accepted!"* (p. 327, italics in the original)

Psychological processes are also a consideration. Smith, Weigert, and Thomas argue that churches prescribe values about who one should be and what one should do, providing a standard by which adherents can compare their own conformity. "An individual's evaluation of how well he or she stands with reference to this aspect of the ideal self is related to self-esteem" (1979, p. 52).

Religious tradition is another factor. Some studies have noted associations between higher self-esteem and Protestantism, especially Pentecostalism. Pentecostal churches emphasize that members can relate directly to God. They provide a variety of leadership roles to ordinary lay members and they offer a strong sense of community and support. All of these factors contribute to improved self-esteem (Mariz, 1992).

In addition, Pentecostal theology emphasizes the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in individual's lives. This gives people a sense that their lives can change, reducing fatalistic attitudes and increasing the sense of dignity, self-discipline and initiative (Mariz, 1992; Sherman, 1997). These traits typify the Protestant Ethic, which among other things, has been tied to an increased sense of self-esteem (Quinn & Crocker, 1999; Suh & Jayoung, 2008).

As is the case in many studies of religion, beliefs about the Bible are also a key consideration for self-esteem. In fact, Thompson, Thomas, and Head argue that this "may be one of the most important aspects of religiosity affecting individuals' evaluations of themselves" (2012, p. 387). This is because the Bible authoritatively provides a sense of ontological security, a foundation for hope in difficult circumstances, and the conferment of status in the eyes of God (Thompson, Thomas & Head, 2012).

Though numerous studies have examined the effect of religion on self-esteem, none have directly compared Catholic and Protestant traditions and none have considered all of the aforementioned factors together. This research aims to address these shortcomings by directly comparing the traditions and by introducing measures for church attendance, religious saliency and specific religious beliefs into the analytical models. Although the results are sometimes tenuous, the literature review above indicates that there is evidence that religious attendance, religious saliency, Pentecostal beliefs and an adherence to biblical literalism are all correlated with higher self-esteem. Therefore the analysis below will test the hypothesis that each

of these factors has a positive effect on student self-esteem. Because the Catholic and Protestant traditions have each been linked to improved self-esteem and because they have not been previously compared, the operational hypothesis for this study will be that there is no significant difference in self-esteem between adherents of the two religious traditions.

Family and Self-Esteem

In addition to schools and religious factors, family background plays a key role in students' self-esteem development. Family ties are critical to self-esteem for the duration of life (Coleman, Ivani-Chalian & Robinson, 1993). Parental engagement, closeness, communication and role modeling are key indicators in self-esteem development (Youngblade et al., 2007).

The socioeconomic status (SES) of a students' family is another important consideration. Although SES is more highly correlated with self-esteem in adulthood—likely because esteem is more influence by a sense of earned advantage rather than inherited status (Twenge & Campbell, 2002)—children's self-concepts are also affected by SES through social comparisons and reflected appraisals (Thompson, Thomas & Head, 2012; Twenge & Campbell, 2002). While family is not a central concern for this study, measures of parental engagement and SES (mother's and father's education[1]) are also included models with the hypothesis that students' whose parents have more education and higher levels of engagement will have higher self-esteem.

Gender and Self-Esteem

In 1991, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) published a highly influential study demonstrating that girls' self-esteem dropped precipitously in the transition from childhood into adolescence. As girls moved from elementary school, they became less confident in their math and science skills and expressed lower career aspirations than boys. The AAUW study predicted that this lower sense of self-esteem would have a detrimental effect in girls' futures (AAUW, 1991). Subsequent, more detailed studies have supported the fact that a gender gap in self-esteem persists (Quatman & Watson, 2001), but they have found that the magnitude

of the AAUW's findings are largely overstated. (See Kling et al., 1999, for a meta-analysis.) Additionally, in contrast to the AAUW's findings, Kling et al. (1999) show that gender differences in self-esteem actually remain fairly constant over time.

Gender differences in self-esteem for school children are easily attributable to the key formation processes highlighted by Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978). Through social comparison, girls compare their status and opportunities with those of boys. Girls have different reflected appraisals of approval and expectations from teachers, and they have numerous opportunities to compare their skills and dispositions to those of boys.

Rosenberg and Pearlin's (1979) claim that self-esteem is closely connected to the psychological centrality of one's values also has implications for gender. This is because values are a key component of gender ideology. For example, a girl who excels in math and science may get messages from authority figures that "girls don't do that." This disconnect between perceived skills and internalized values about what girls should and should not do could negatively affect self-esteem. Research has clearly shown the importance of gender ideology for girls' self-esteem development. Girls with non-traditional attitudes toward gender roles are more likely to have higher self-esteem (Lennon et al., 1999), while less egalitarian gender attitudes negatively affect self-esteem (Brown, 2003). This association works both ways. Girls with a higher sense of self-esteem are also more likely to hold to less traditional gender roles (Ridgeway & Jacobson, 1979). Since studies of religion and gender have generally concluded that the religiously affiliated, especially Conservative Protestants, are less egalitarian in their gender ideologies (see Fan & Marini, 2000, for a review) gender is an important consideration in this study of religious schools.

Analysis in this study will test the hypothesis that girls will have lower self-esteem in all three aspects (subjective appraisal, reflective appraisal and self-confidence). It will be assumed that these lower esteem levels will hold regardless of school type. A related hypothesis is that those who hold more traditional gender ideologies will score lower on self-esteem scores.

Academic Confidence and Self-Esteem

Students' overall sense of self-esteem, often referred to as global self-esteem, is affected by various aspects or domains of esteem including subjective appraisals, reflective appraisals and a sense of self-confidence. Additionally, each domain is distinct and can have an effect on the others (Tafarodi & Swan, 1995). Academic confidence is one domain-specific aspect of self-esteem that has received much attention in the literature. Studies have shown that, while the effect is mediated by the value that students put on academic performance, academic self-esteem has a powerful influence on global self-esteem (Rosenberg, Schooler & Schoenbach, 1989; Rosenberg et al., 1995)[2]. This study uses a number of specific measures to assess subjective appraisals, reflective appraisals and academic self-confidence to test the hypothesis that each will have a positive effect on the others.

Data and Methods

Data

This paper draws on data collected in 2009 for a larger study on girls' education in private religious schools. Guatemala was selected for this project because a high percentage of its schools are private and many of these schools have religious affiliations (MINEDUC, 2008). In this context, 21 different private schools (7 Catholic, 9 evangelical and 5 secular) were studied to assess the gender attitudes within their schools. (Secular institutions were included as a comparison group.) The school sample was chosen from a list, provided by the Guatemalan Ministry of Education, of all schools in the Department of Sacatepequez, which lies just to the west of the capital city. Schools were selected for consideration if they were private and if they had students at the primary and junior levels (1^{st}–10^{th} grades). Efforts were made to choose a similar number of urban and rural schools, and when possible Catholic, evangelical and secular schools were chosen from the same area in an attempt to include similar demographics in the sample.

Public schools were not included in the sample for two reasons. First, a

main thrust of this study is to understand the effect that religion and religious schools have on educational outcomes. Since the key comparison is religious versus secular and not private versus public, the school types included are sufficient. Second, adding public schools to the sample would introduce unnecessary complexity because there tend to be substantial differences between Guatemalan private and public schools in class size, teacher dedication, and resources[3]. Since private schools are generally more similar to each other in these and other areas, restricting the sample to private institutions makes it easier to focus comparisons on religious factors.

Given this study's comparative analysis of different school types, one area of special concern is the possibility that outcomes may be influenced by school selection biases. While it is very difficult to control for such biases without interviewing parents and students about their school selection processes, steps have been taken to address this concern. Most importantly, controls for parental educational levels are included along with measures of parental academic expectations and involvement in their children's schoolwork[4]. Though these controls in no way eliminate the potential effect of selection bias, they do provide some indication of whether such bias is an important factor for the assessed outcomes.

The data for this study were derived directly from student surveys, which, among other things, included questions about the students' family and religious background, and assessments of their self-esteem, school performance and religious beliefs and values. At each school, surveys were administered to all the students in grades 5 to 9 who were in attendance on the day of the field visit. Surveys were completed by a total of 1682 students (178 from the largest school and 22 from the smallest). Exact figures are not available, but the response rate exceeded 90 percent.

Methods

Using this survey data I make self-esteem comparisons between students in Catholic, evangelical and secular private schools. Measures for the three different aspects of self-esteem mentioned in the literature review above are considered.

The first measure is a subjective self-appraisal. It is simply derived from students' Likert-type responses to the statement "I like myself." Though

using a single self-report item is less common than more complex self-esteem scales such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem (RSE) Scale, Robbins, Hendin, and Trzesniewski (2001) have shown that a single item provides a reliable alternative to multiple item scales, especially in circumstances such as this where the goal is to discover individuals' conscious experience of self-esteem.

A second measure that gauges the degree to which students feel accepted and included is employed to specifically measure students' reflective appraisals of themselves. Again, a single Likert-type statement, "people like me," is used.

Finally, a third set of measures is included to assess students' academic esteem, a commonly used, domain-specific measure that examines students' self-confidence in their ability to complete tasks and cope with life's challenges (Cheung & Yeung, 2010). Here, three measures are used to—self-evaluations of reading, math and science confidence.

The analysis begins with a direct comparison of the three different school types contrasting student outcomes for each aspect of self-esteem. In these cross tabulations, I include comparisons of all students, girl students separately, boy students separately, and a differential between boys and girls for self-esteem in each type of school.

Next I develop multivariate models to assess correlations between the various types of self-esteem and a list of independent variables. Drawing from the theoretical frameworks reviewed above, independent variables for school type, gender and gender ideology, grade level, parent's education, parental support, and religious measures such as attendance, saliency, Pentecostal beliefs and biblical literalism are included to test the effect of these factors on esteem.

In these full models, I use hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to minimize the distortion of estimates that could be caused by intraschool correlations. This approach partitions error variances into between-school and within-school components (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). In this way between-school effects, such as school type, and within-school effects, such as students' gender, grade, family background and religious beliefs, can be assessed simultaneously. Hausman tests, which showed no significant difference between random-effects and fixed-effects models, were used to determined that the random-effects models are most appropriate for

analysing differences between these school clusters. Variance inflation factors were checked to ensure that independent variables are not highly correlated. All VIF values were under 4 indicating that mulitcolinearity is not an issue. Finally, results for each model have been checked to ensure that outliers do not have an undue impact on coefficients.

Results

School Type Comparisons of Self-Esteem

The first analytical step is complete a bivariate comparisons of self-esteem outcomes for each type of school. Table 1 provides results for the self-evaluation and reflected appraisal variables. The first section of the table displays the percentage of students who strongly agree to the statement "I like myself." Results, which are provided for all students, girl students, and boy students, are broken out by school type. Asterisks indicate that outcomes for one school type are significantly different from all other school types. The last column notes the differences between girls and boys in each school type. Crosses in this column indicate significant differences between boys and girls, all of which are at the $p<0.001$ level.

Table 1
Cross-tab between School Comparisons of Self-Esteem and Reflected Appraisals

		I like myself (% strongly agreeing)			
	N	**All Students**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls - Boys**
All Schools	1678	76.22%	76.59%	75.79%	0.80%
Catholic Schools	725	73.93%*	73.39%*	74.39%	-1.00%
Evangelical Schools	658	76.90%	78.74%	75.43%	3.31%
Secular Schools	295	80.34%*	80.69%	79.86%	0.83%
		People like me (% strongly agreeing)			
	N	**All Students**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls - Boys**
All Schools	1680	34.58%	29.46%	39.66%	-10.20%†
Catholic Schools	725	30.76%**	24.03%** *	37.80%	-13.77%†
Evangelical Schools	659	37.62%*	34.44%**	40.29%	-5.85%
Secular Schools	296	37.16%	33.56%	42.36%	-8.80%

Significantly different from all other school types at *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001 (one-tail test)
†Significant differences between boys and girls at p<0.001 (one-tail test)

While the overall results show that a high number of students—about 76%—strongly agree that they like themselves, Catholic students, in general, and Catholic girls, in particular, report lower levels of self-esteem than students at other schools. This is contrary to hypothesized expectations. Secular school students report higher levels of self-esteem than other schools. There are no significant differences between boys and girls on these self-evaluations.

The second section of Table 1 shows results for the reflected appraisal statement "People like me." Here the rates are much lower. On average, only 34% of students strongly agree that they think others like them. This represents a 42% differential between the self-evaluation and the reflected

appraisal. Findings here also indicate that there is a wide gap between boys and girls in reflected appraisals across all schools. This gap between boys and girls is widest at Catholic schools. Again Catholic school students, in general, and Catholic school girls, in particular, report significantly lower reflected appraisals than the other schools. Evangelical school students, in general, and evangelical school girls, in particular, report significantly higher reflected appraisals.

Table 2
Cross-tab between School Comparisons of Academic Confidence

		% considers self really good or good in reading			
	N	**All Students**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls - Boys**
All Schools	1682	74.44%	80.84%	67.60%	13.24%†
Catholic Schools	725	70.48%**	77.26%*	62.20%**	15.07%†
Evangelical Schools	661	78.82%***	87.42%***	71.02%*	16.39%†
Secular Schools	296	74.32%	76.71%	71.53%	5.18%
		% considers self really good or good in math			
	N	**All Students**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls - Boys**
All Schools	1682	62.60%	62.28%	62.99%	-0.71%
Catholic Schools	725	59.45%**	57.11%*	61.28%	-4.17%
Evangelical Schools	661	62.63%	63.58%	62.50%	1.08%
Secular Schools	296	70.27%	73.29%**	68.06%	5.23%
		% considers self really good or good in science			
	N	**All Students**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls - Boys**
All Schools	1682	73.96%	75.09%	73.06%	2.03%
Catholic Schools	725	70.07%**	71.83%*	67.99%*	3.85%
Evangelical Schools	661	76.40%*	79.47%*	74.15%	5.32%
Secular Schools	296	78.04%*	74.66%	81.94%**	7.29%

Significantly different from all other school types at *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001 (two-tail test)
†Significant differences between boys and girls at p<0.001 (two-tail test)

Table 2 reports findings for three different indicators of students' academic esteem—confidence in reading, math and science. All three indicators are

derived from a question asking students how good they think they are at these respective subjects. The tables indicate the percentage of students who marked "good" or "really good" for each subject.[5] There are too many significant findings in this table to discuss in detail, but the general trend is that Catholic school students report significantly lower levels of confidence across all subjects for boys and girls. (Boys' math scores are the one exception.) Interestingly, there are no significant differences between boys and girls in math and science, and girls generally have a much higher confidence score in reading than boys do.

The general pattern highlights the surprising outcome that students from Catholic schools have lower self-esteem than students in other types of schools. These results, which contradicts previous findings, will be explored in detail below.

Multivariate Analysis of Self-Esteem

Though it is the main focus of this study, school types are just one factor that could influence self-esteem in children. In this next section, I create multivariate models incorporating variables that have been shown in past research to affect self-esteem. These models are designed to test each of the hypotheses described above while also serving as a check to see if the significant differences uncovered in Table 2 still stand in the presence of relevant controls.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Independent Variables

Independent Variable	Description of Variable	Sample Mean or %	Cath. Schl. Mean or %	Evan. Schl. Mean or %	Secular Schl. Mean or %
Catholic school	Student goes to Catholic school	43.10%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Evangelical school	Student goes to evangelical school	39.30%	0.00%	100.00 %	0.00%
Female student	Student is female	50.33%	54.13%	46.18 %	50.34%
Student grade level	Student's grade in school (Range 5-9)	7.09 (1.41)	7.06 (1.40)	7.19 (1.43)	6.97 (1.40)
Not gender egalitarian	Student classified as non-egalitarian through latent class analysis.*	25.58%	25.93%	28.29 %	24.32%
Father's education	0=did not complete primary school; 1=completed primary school; 2=completed middle school; 3= completed secondary school; 4=attended university	2.24 (1.43)	2.17 (1.39)	2.17 (1.48)	2.58 (1.39)
Mother's education	0=did not complete primary school; 1=completed primary school; 2=completed middle school; 3= completed secondary school; 4=attended university	2.03 (1.42)	1.96 (1.37)	1.96 (1.48)	2.42 (1.32)
Parents provide homework help	Parents help student with homework (% answering "yes")	64.10%	67.52%	60.03 %	64.83%
Church attendance	Attends church 6=Once a week or more; 1=almost never	4.72 (1.72)	4.75 (1.67)	4.77 (1.70)	4.50 (1.85)
Serving God is important	Serving God is one of student's top four values**	81.62%	75.29%	89.54 %	79.64%
Catholic student	Student self-identifies as Catholic	58.90%	85.04%	32.12 %	54.58%
Holy Spirit is active today	Student strongly agrees that God still pours out his Spirit on believers today like he did in biblical times.	66.11%	61.79%	70.50 %	66.89%
Biblical literalism	Student strongly agrees that the Bible is inspired by God and must be accepted literally word for word.	67.36%	63.86%	70.80 %	68.24%

Standard deviation in parenthesis

*Non-egalitarian students are more likely to believe that men should be the head of the family; men are better leaders than women; women can't do the same jobs as men; and they would not like to see a woman president.

**Other values include thinking for myself, success, honest, hard work, enjoying life, family and friends, getting good grades, doing right, respecting other (10 total)

Table 3 contains a list of the independent variables used in this analysis. These variables are displayed with descriptive statistics for the entire sample and for each school type. To test for the effect of school type, Catholic and evangelical school dummies are included in the main model with secular schools withheld for comparison.

The next three variables are used to assess the gender differences in self-esteem. A female dummy variable is used along with a variable to assess non-gender-egalitarian attitudes.[6] School grades serve as a basic control, but this variable is also used as an interaction term with the female dummy to assess whether older girls have higher or lower levels of self-esteem than younger girls.

To evaluate the influence of family background on self-esteem, a block of three more variables are included. Father's and mother's education provide a rough measure of SES and another variable asking whether parents provide homework help serves as an indicator of parental involvement.

The remaining variables are all religious measures, used to test the effect of student religiosity, which is another key focus of this study. The first two, "church attendance" and "serving God is important," are included to examine the influence that church attendance and religious saliency have on self-esteem. The next two variables focus on the student's religious tradition—one is for Catholic students and the other, which asks if students believe the Holy Spirit is active today, is used as a rough indicator of Pentecostal beliefs and practices. Finally, a measure for biblical literalism is tested using these models. Though they are not listed in Table 3, different measures of self-esteem, will be included in the models to evaluate the ways that they affect each other.

Table 4 provides the results of multivariate HLM models for each of the five measures of self-esteem. Because the dependent variables are dummies assessing high levels of esteem in each of these five areas, logit models are used. The coefficients are displayed as odds ratios. Any result that is greater than one indicates increased odds, whereas results less than one represent decreased odds.

Table 4

Multivariate Models of Self-Esteem

	I like myself			People like me			Reading confidence			Math confidence			Science confidence		
	OR		SE	OR		SE	OR		SE	OR		SE	OR		SE
Catholic school	0.82		(0.24)	0.66	*	(0.14)	0.88		(0.18)	0.64	♀	(0.15)	0.86		(0.24)
Evangelical school	0.77		(0.23)	0.98		(0.20)	1.41		(0.30)	0.82		(0.19)	1.03		(0.29)
Female student	1.25		(0.98)	1.43		(0.98)	2.22		(1.60)	2.96	♀	(1.95)	1.20		(0.89)
Student grade level	1.10		(0.09)	1.09		(0.08)	1.03		(0.07)	0.95		(0.06)	0.87	♀	(0.06)
Female x grade level	0.98		(0.11)	0.86		(0.08)	1.01		(0.10)	0.85	♀	(0.08)	0.99		(0.10)
Not gender egalitarian	0.65	*	(0.11)	0.70	*	(0.12)	0.67	*	(0.11)	0.97		(0.14)	0.77		(0.13)
Father's education	0.92		(0.06)	1.01		(0.06)	1.03		(0.06)	1.06		(0.06)	1.06		(0.07)
Mother's education	1.03		(0.07)	1.13	♀	(0.07)	1.10		(0.07)	1.10	♀	(0.06)	1.06		(0.07)
Parents provide homework help	1.36	♀	(0.22)	1.27	♀	(0.18)	1.03		(0.15)	1.04		(0.14)	1.37	*	(0.20)
Church attendance	0.98		(0.04)	1.03		(0.04)	1.08	*	(0.04)	1.02		(0.04)	1.02		(0.04)
Serving God is important	1.52	*	(0.29)	0.92		(0.17)	1.20		(0.22)	1.20		(0.20)	0.91		(0.17)
Catholic student	1.05		(0.20)	1.21		(0.20)	1.03		(0.17)	1.12		(0.17)	0.84		(0.14)
Holy Spirit is active today	1.46	*	(0.25)	1.09		(0.17)	1.09		(0.18)	1.36	*	(0.20)	1.16		(0.19)
Biblical literalist	1.76	**	(0.30)	1.50	**	(0.25)	0.85		(0.14)	0.89		(0.13)	1.11		(0.18)
I like myself				2.72	**	(0.52)	1.04		(0.18)	1.10		(0.17)	1.08	**	(0.18)
People like me	2.71	**	(0.52)				1.64	**	(0.26)	1.30	♀	(0.18)	1.86	**	(0.30)
Reading confidence	1.14		(0.12)	1.27	**	(0.12)									
Math confidence	1.00		(0.11)	1.18	♀	(0.11)									
Science confidence	1.05		(0.12)	1.35	*	(0.14)									
N	1152			1152			1190			1190			1190		
Wald chi-square	91.19			124.61			71.91			46.03			53.12		

♀p<.10; *p<.05; **p<.01; **p<.001

Results in Table 4 indicate that even when controls are added, students in Catholic schools lag behind secular school students in their reflected appraisal that "people like me." They also score lower than secular school students in math confidence. Evangelical schools do not differ from secular schools in any of these self-esteem measures. Again, these findings are contrary to the hypothesized results and are anomalous to previous studies.

Results on gender and gender ideology are also contrary to expectations. The full models do not reveal hypothesized significant gender differences in self-esteem, except with regard to math. Here, instead of having lower self-confidence, girls are reported to exhibit significantly more self-confidence in math than boys, although this confidence was lower for girls in higher grades. Gender ideology, however, did have the hypothesized effect. Students (both boys and girls) holding non-egalitarian ideologies were significantly less likely to like themselves, to feel that others liked them and to have confidence in reading.[7]

Family factors had a significant effect that mirrored hypothesized results. Those whose mothers had higher levels of education were more likely to believe that other people liked them and to have confidence in math. Father's education had no effect on any of the models. As hypothesized, parental involvement through homework provided a significant boost to students' science confidence. It also had a positive effect on their self-evaluations and their reflected appraisals of themselves.

Next, student religiosity variables provided a number of interesting findings, which aligned with hypothesized results. As expected, church attendance positively affected reading confidence, and religious saliency (in this case the belief that serving God is important) was linked to a stronger sense that "I like myself." Two measures of religious tradition were also assessed. Here Catholic students are not significantly different from others, but those with more Pentecostal beliefs that the Holy Spirit is active today were more inclined to like themselves and to have higher levels of math confidence. Finally, biblical literalists are estimated to be significantly more inclined to like themselves and to believe that others like them.

The last block of variables assesses the extent to which the self-esteem variables affect each other. As predicted by the hypotheses, each type of self-esteem (subjective appraisal, reflective appraisal and self-confidence) each have a positive effect on the other domains. The subjective variable, "I

like myself," is highly correlated with the "people like me" variable. Those who believe that others like them are also significantly more likely to like themselves. Contrary to expectations, academic confidence is not related to self-evaluated esteem. The reflected appraisal variable, "people like me," on the other hand, is significantly associated with all the other types of esteem as was hypothesized. Finally, all three academic confidence measures are positively correlated with a higher reflected appraisal. Though it is clear that self-evaluations, reflected appraisals, and academic confidence are correlated with one another, without structural equation models, it is not possible to determine the direction of the relationship.

Discussion

The main thrust of this research was to build on existing studies of self-esteem in Catholic schools by introducing comparisons to evangelical schools and by adding a more comprehensive list of controls, especially for student religiosity. The Guatemalan context for this study is also informative as little research on self-esteem in religious schools, aside from the work of Smith, Weigert, and Thomas (1979), has been done outside of Western contexts.

While early studies of Catholic schools in the United States suggest that Catholic students have higher levels of self-esteem than students in public schools (Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982; Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993), results from this study show that Catholic schools actually score lower than evangelical and secular private school students in every measure of self-esteem and academic confidence. These results held true for measures of reflected appraisals and math confidence even when appropriate controls were added. These varying outcomes could result from different comparisons—Catholic schools vs. public schools in previous research as opposed to Catholic schools vs. other private schools in this study. However, it also seems likely that these differences are attributable to student religiosity, bolstering claims by Bagley and Mallick (1997) and Smith, Weigert, and Thomas (1979) that religiosity, not school type, is the key differentiating factor. This is partially supported in this study by results showing that the introduction of religious variables decreased the significance of the Catholic school variable in many instances. Also, as

Smith, Weigert, and Thomas (1979) point out, in contrast to the United States, Catholics in Latin contexts like Guatemala often attribute less saliency to their faith than members of groups like evangelicals who have minority status. Thus if religiosity is the main factor, Catholic schools could potentially score higher in the United States and lower in Guatemala. More studies in wider contexts, with broader comparisons between different types of religious and non-religious schools should be done to increase our understanding of the effect that these schools have on their students. Because so many children, particularly in the developing world, attend religious schools (Mather, 2013) it is important for us to learn more about their influence on children.

While the existing literature on the influence of religion on self-esteem is somewhat inconclusive, this study shows that, for these Guatemalan students, specific religious attributes are highly significant factors, exerting a largely positive influence on students' self-perception and self-confidence. Church attendance and religious saliency, two of the most commonly used measures of religiosity in self-esteem studies, have a significantly positive affect on reading confidence and student self-appraisal respectively. Catholic students were not significantly different from other students in any of the self-esteem measures; however, students with Pentecostal beliefs were significantly higher than others in their self-appraisals and their confidence in math. In addition to Smith, Weigert and Thomas' (1979) contention that self-esteem and religious saliency, these differences may also be reflected in distinctions between the two religious systems. Pentecostals tend to put more emphasis on relating personally to God, living in the power of the Holy Spirit, the work of the laity, and overcoming sin (as opposed to stressing guilt). These theological distinctives may have an influence on Pentecostal students' self-esteem. Finally, results from this study lend support to Thompson, Thomas and Head's contention that students' view of the Bible is an important factor affecting individuals' view of themselves. On the whole, these findings suggest that more needs to be done to uncover the relationship between religion and self-esteem. Future studies should include more comprehensive religious variables than the attendance and saliency measures that are most commonly employed.

Although not a main area of emphasis in this study, gender comparisons also provided results that are worthy of note. Although bivariate results vary

significantly, multivariate models indicate that in the Guatemalan context there are no significant differences between boys and girls in self-appraisals and reflected appraisals of self-esteem. The one key difference comes in the area of math. Here girls in general have much higher levels of academic confidence than boys although older girls have less confidence in their math skills than younger girls. This may indicate a decline in confidence as girls get older, replicating the AAUW (1991) findings in the Guatemalan context. However, this cannot be demonstrated conclusively without a longitudinal study.

It is important to consider that, in this study, gender ideology had more of a significant effect than gender itself. Results show that a less egalitarian gender ideology negatively affects students' self-appraisal, their reflected appraisal and their confidence in reading. These outcomes, which support the findings of Brown (2003) and Lennon and her co-authors (1999) in other contexts, affirm the importance of gender ideology in self-esteem by showing that girls' (and boys') views of who women should be have strong influence on how they view themselves.

In short, this study makes important contributions to a number of ongoing academic debates. First, it provides evidence supporting conflicting contentions that religious school type and the religiosity of students are key differentiating factors in self-esteem levels. While school type is a significant indicator in this study, much of the difference could be attributable to student religiosity. More needs to be done to flesh out the effects of school type and religiosity. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this research shows that specific religious factors, especially religious saliency, biblical literalism and Pentecostal beliefs are significant and should be considered in ongoing research on self-esteem.

Notes

1 In this study, measures of SES are limited to parents' education because accurate data on parents' income and occupations was unavailable.

2 Interestingly, Rosenberg et al. (1995) demonstrated that academic self-esteem has a more powerful influence on global self-esteem than the effect that global self-esteem has on school marks.

3 In fact, some of the private schools in this study enrolled students who could not afford to go to the public schools, which often have fees for uniforms, books and other expenses.

Thirteen of the 21 schools in the sample reported that 50% or more of their students were poor or very poor. Only 3 schools reported that less than 20% of their students were poor or very poor.

4 This measure was not included in final models because it had no significant effect on the outcomes addressed in this study.

5 An overall academic confidence scale was not used because the three variables lacked internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.49).

6 A non-egalitarianXfemale interaction term was also tested, but it produced no significant results and had little effect on the models, so it was removed from the final output.

7 Alternatively, models using a highly gender egalitarian variable (which were not included) did not produce significant results. Interaction terms were also used to test the specific influence of gender egalitarian and non-egalitarian ideologies in girls. These interactions produced no significant results, except in the science confidence models. Here girls with a highly gender egalitarian ideology were nearly four times more likely to have high confidence levels in science when compared to other girls.

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