Spirituality, Self-Compassion and Empathy

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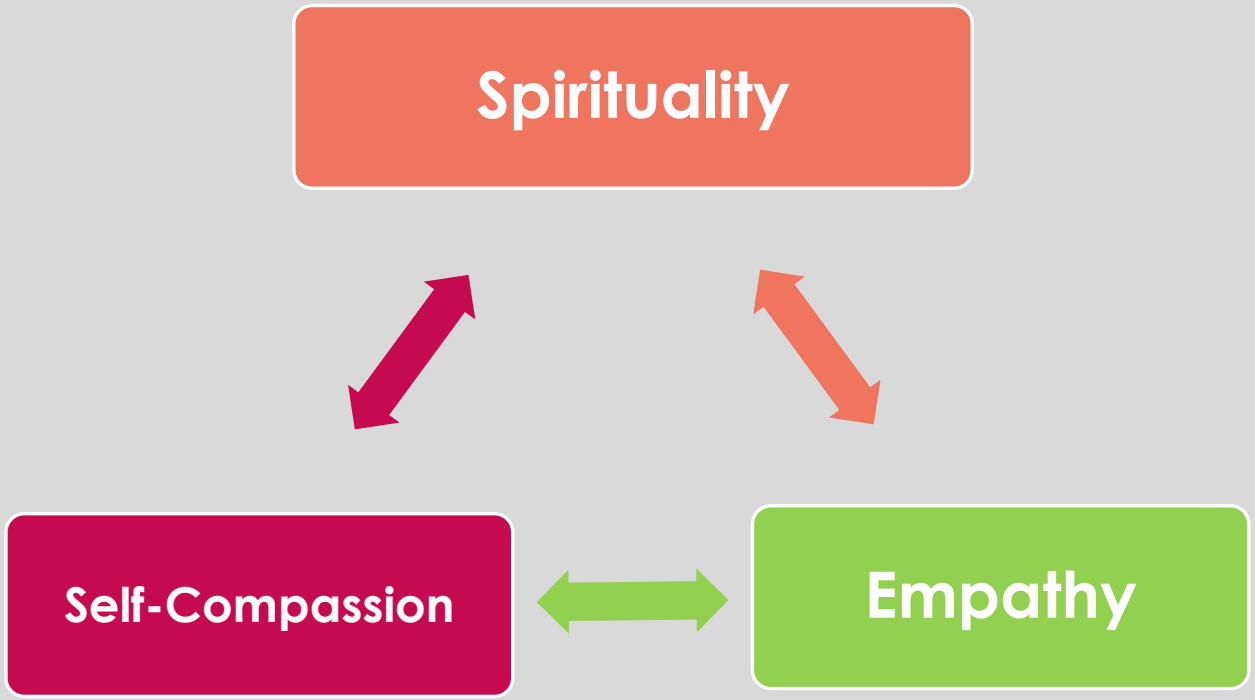
Focus of Study

To explore the interconnectedness among **Spirituality**, **Self-Compassion**, and **Empathy** among emerging adolescents, and how age and gender affects these relations.



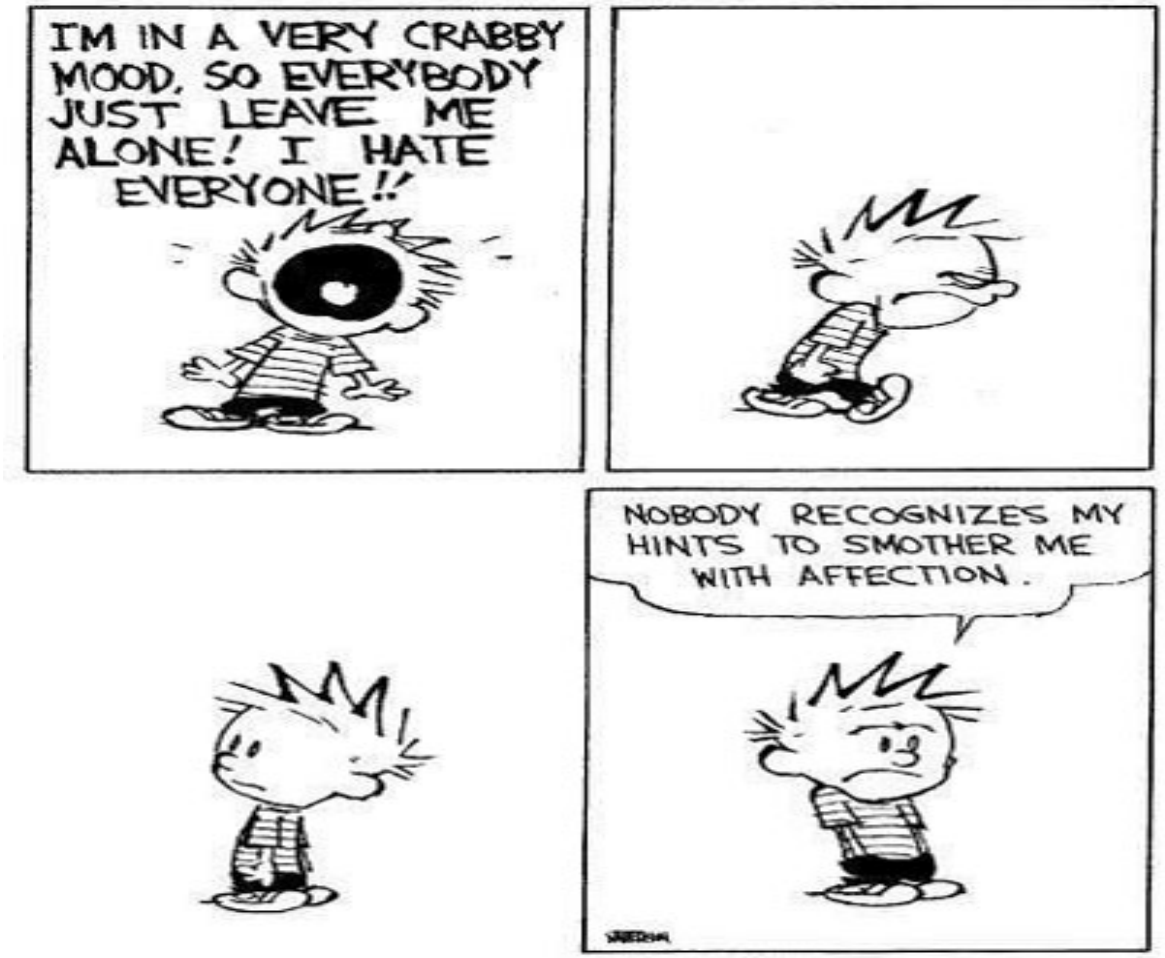
Impact of Age and Gender?

Theory of Mind

- The understanding of ToM guides behaviours (Peterson, 2017)
- Makes children more socially competent (Bosacki & Astington, 1999)
- Provides them with abilities for more prosocial behaviours (Imuta et al., 2016)

ToM influences:

- prosocial behaviours
- **self-compassion**
- self-concept
- mindfulness
- **spirituality**
- self-reflection
- gender identification
- **empathy**



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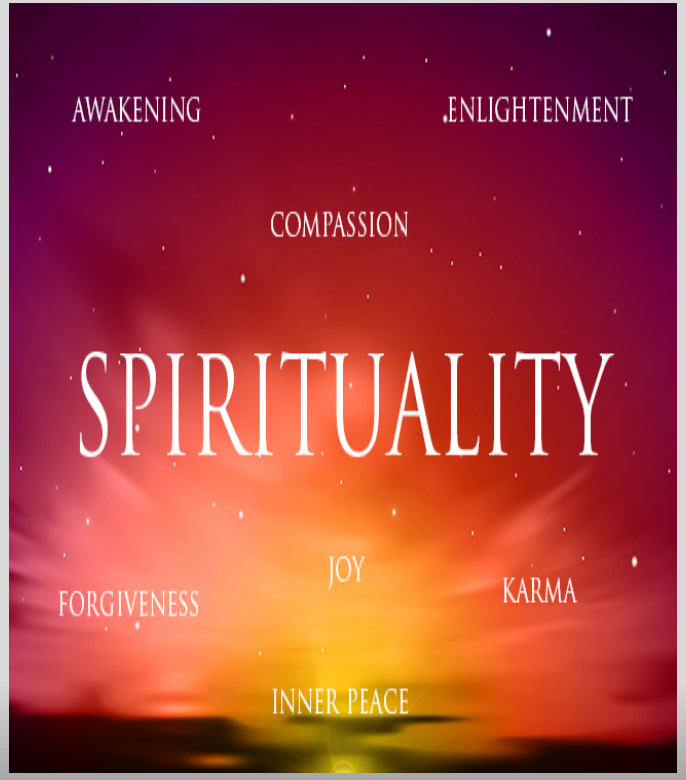
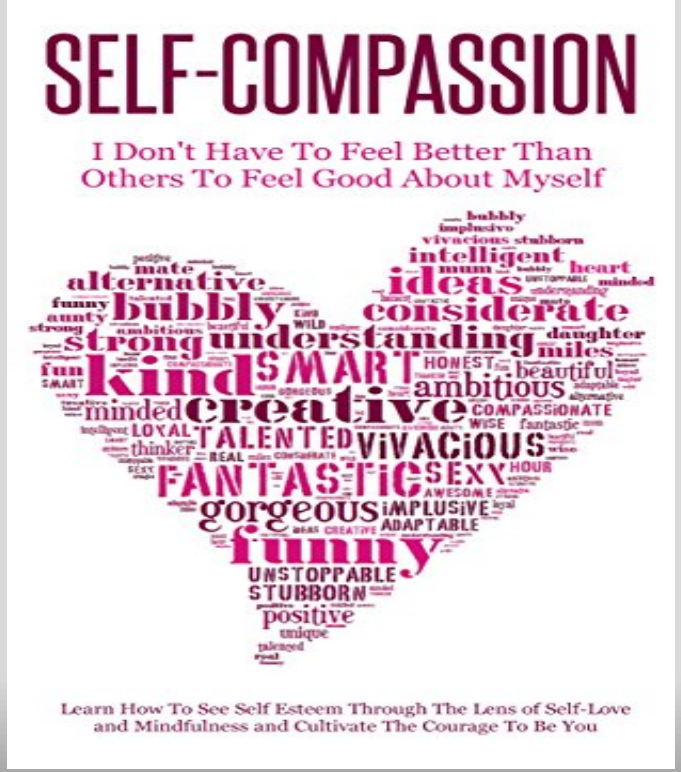
Processes

Spirituality



Self-Compassion



Empathy

Processes

Spirituality

- A multifaceted construct that focuses on the meaning and value of life, belief systems, and a moral order (Moore, Talwar, & Bosacki, 2012).

- Spiritual beliefs may be defined as any beliefs or faith related feelings to a perceived sacred or supernatural phenomena, and not necessarily religion oriented (Klůzová Kráčmarová, L., Dutková, K., & Tavel, P., 2018).

- A broad definition of spirituality encompasses the concept of religiosity as a system of attitudes, practices, rites, ceremonies and beliefs of an individual in relation to God or a supernatural power (Bosacki, Moore, Talwar, & Park-Saltzman, 2011).

Processes

Self-Compassion

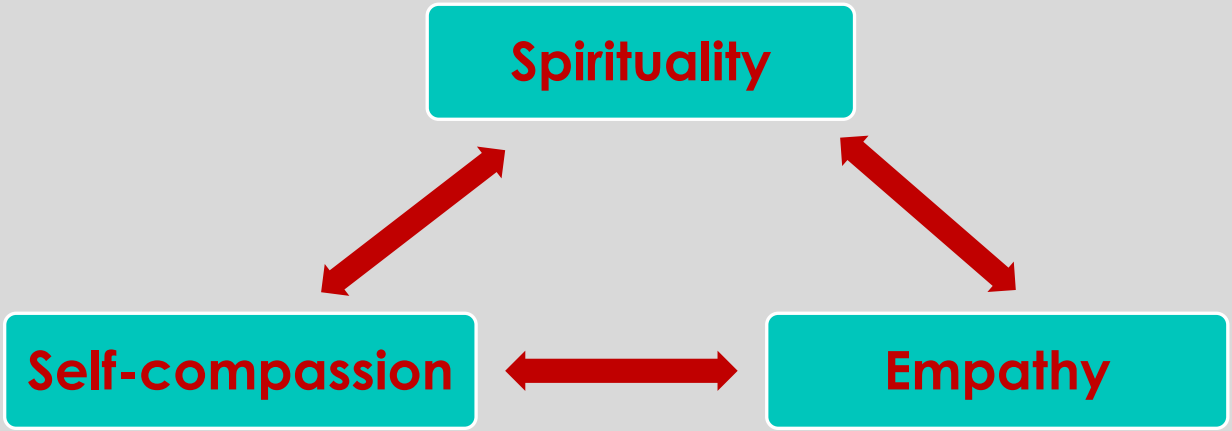
- The act of caring, feeling warm, and understanding towards oneself (Peterson, 2017; Van der Gucht et al., 2017).
- Involves a healthy self-attitude and non-judgemental understanding of one's self, including pain and failures. (Bluth & Neff, 2018).
- Lower negative self-judgement is related to less judgement of others, prosocial behaviour, and a positive emotional and caring attitude towards oneself (Neff, 2003a).

Processes

Empathy

- Refers to the process of understanding and sharing the feeling of others, either positively or negatively with the knowledge that the other person is the origin of these feelings (Doenyas, 2017; Preckel et al, 2018).
- Central in social interaction relating to social emotions and social reasoning.
- Used to assess how others are likely to act in a given situation, with the ability to change places with the sufferer emotionally (Artinger, Exadaktylos, Koppel, & Sääksvuori, 2014).

Empirical Evidence



- Although past research has explored religious experiences in children, little research examines how spiritual experiences, outside of an organized faith-based organization, affect the quality of emerging adolescents' relationships
- Few studies explore the influence of gender and age on the development of these concepts
- Our study investigates the interconnectedness of spirituality, self-compassion, and empathy.

Research Questions

- How are adolescents' perceptions and experiences of spirituality, self-compassion, and empathy interconnected?
- How does gender and age influence these interconnections?

Method

Participants

- 293 students (9.9-14.3 years; M_{age}= 12.7, 173 females), from 24 schools in Eastern Canada, Mainly middle-class social economic background and mainly Euro-Canadian ethnicity

Procedure

- Measure included standardized self-report questionnaires (pencil and paper tasks) focusing on spirituality, self-compassion, and empathy.

Measures

Children's Spiritual Lives (CSL), (Moore, Talwar, & Bosacki, 2016).

31-item 5 point Likert-scale self-report questionnaire

- Measure consists of three main factors: comfort, omnipresence, and duality
- Questions regarding receiving comfort from God, perceptions of God, and if children believe that people have dual identities (spirit and body)

Measures

Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWB), (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982).

20-item 6 point Likert-scale self-report questionnaire

- Two subscales: religious well-being (relationship with God), and existential well-being (sense of purpose or meaning of life)
- Total scores were calculated by means – the higher score is an indicative of greater levels of well-being

Measures

Self-Compassion Short-Form Scale (SCS-SF, Neff, 2003b)

- 12-item Likert scale self-report questionnaire
- Item ratings begin at 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always) – negative subscale items are reverse scored.
- Total scores were calculated by means – higher score referring to higher self-compassion.

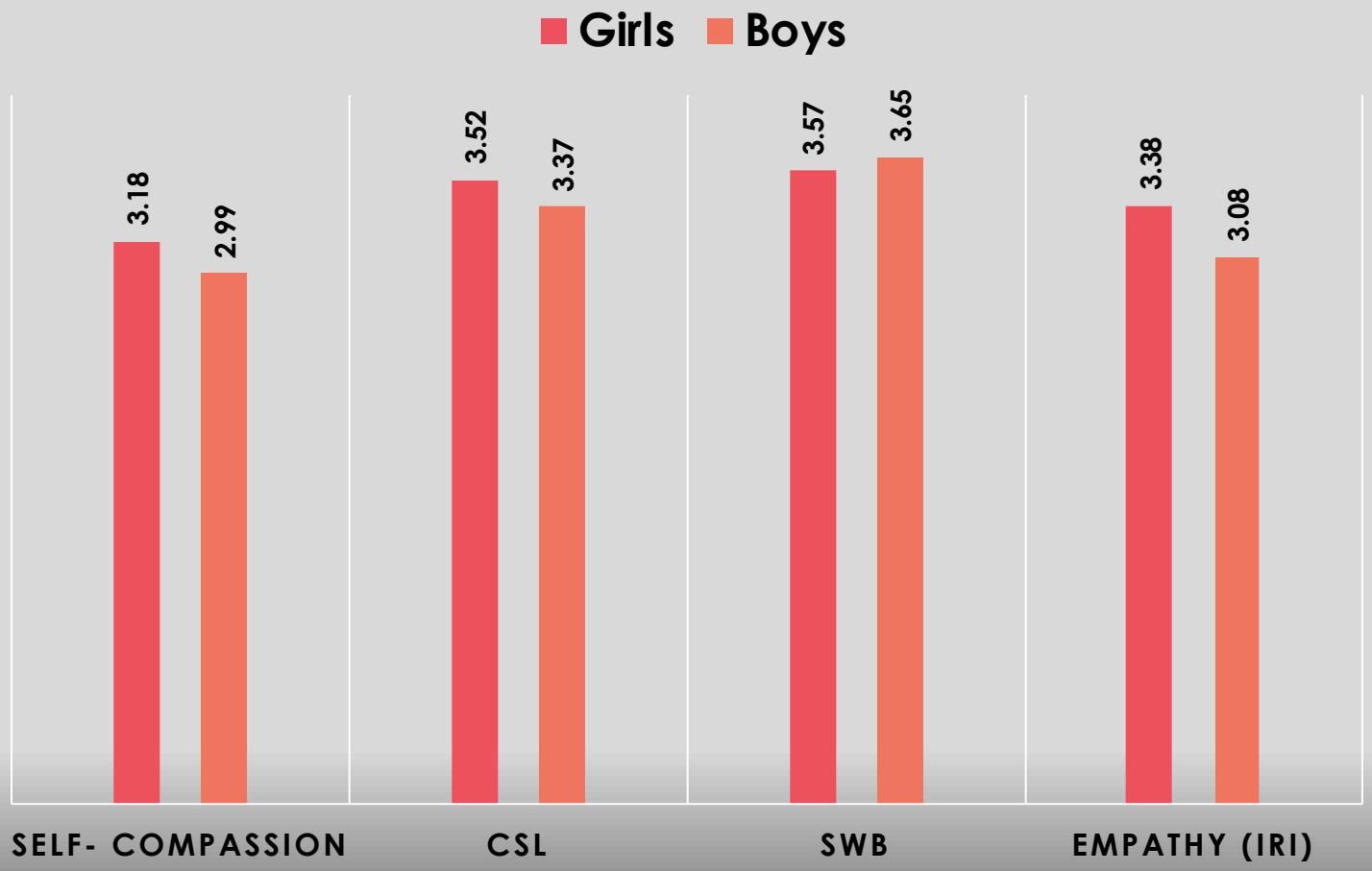
Measures

Empathy – Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), (Davis, 1980).

- 28-item 5 points Likert-scale self-report questionnaire
- 4 subscales: perspective-taking scale (PT), fantasy scale (FS), empathic scale (EC), and personal distress scale (PD).
- Subscale scores were calculated using the mean of each subscale.

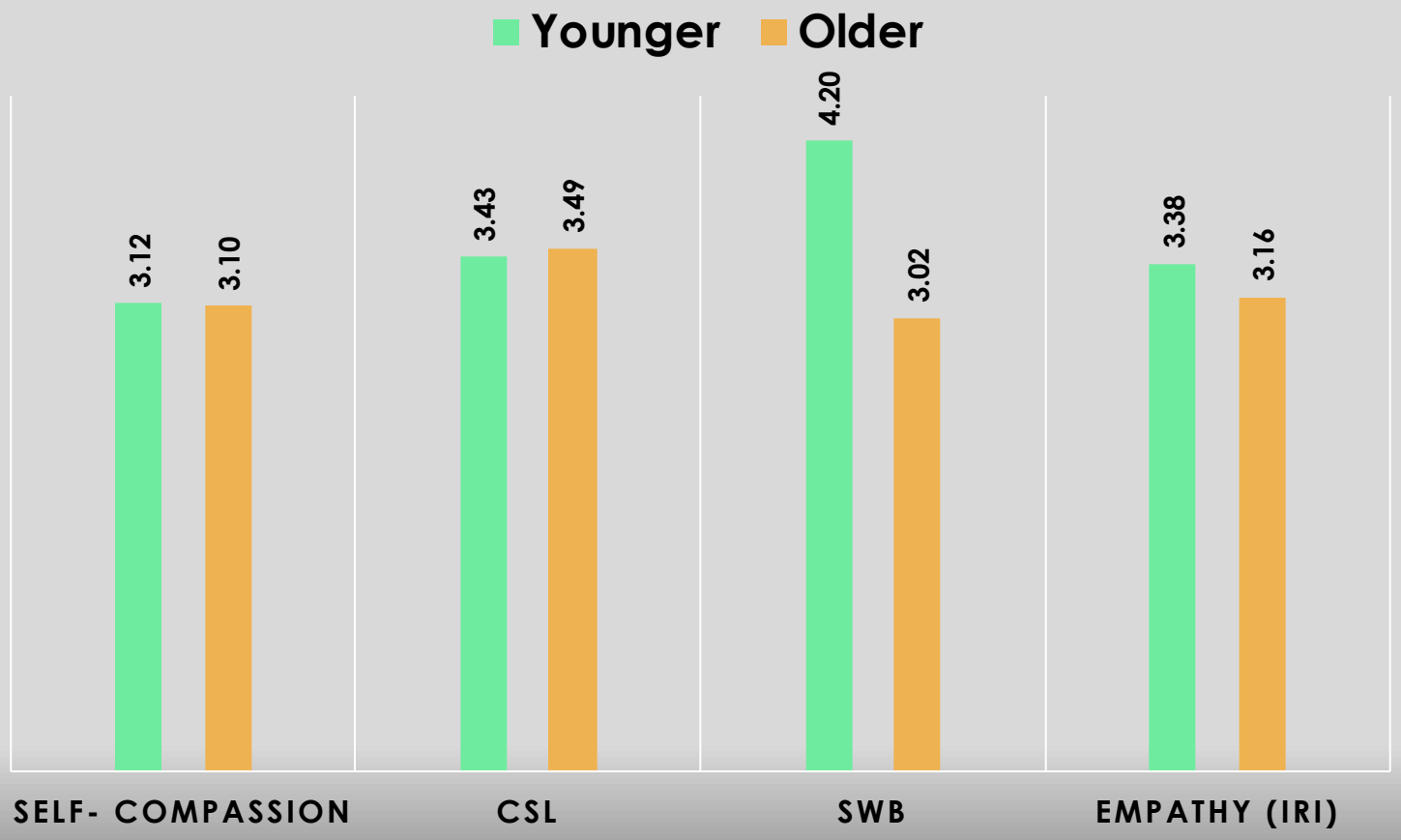
Results

- Girls scored higher than boys in all variables (except on SWB)



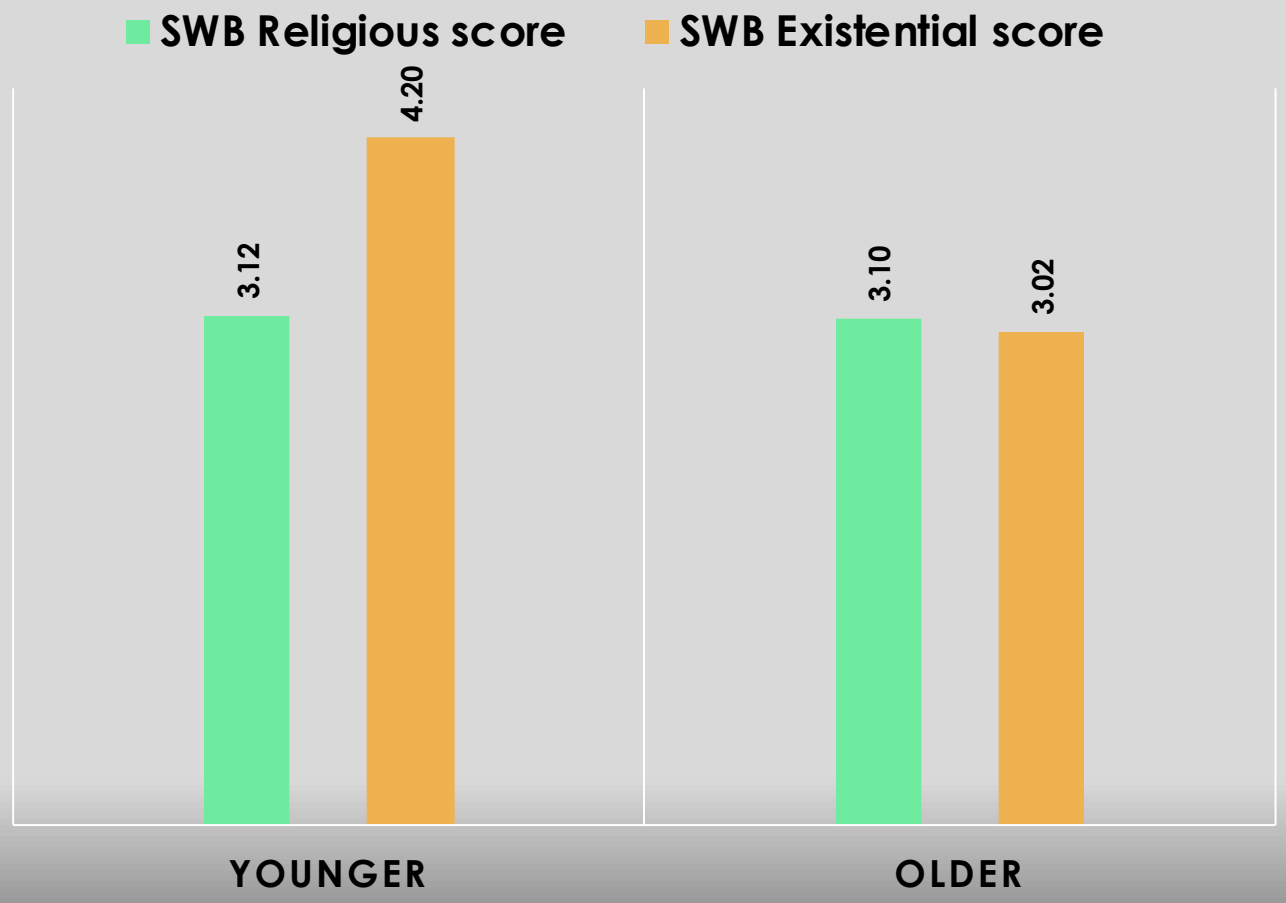
Results

- Younger students scored higher in all variables (except on CSL)



Results

- Factorial 2 X 2 ANOVA (age x gender) showed significant age effects on SWB scores $F(1,268) = 119.6$, $p < 0.01$, (younger adolescents scored significantly higher than the older ones), especially in the existential spiritual well-being subscale $t(277) = 19.1$, $p < 0.01$.



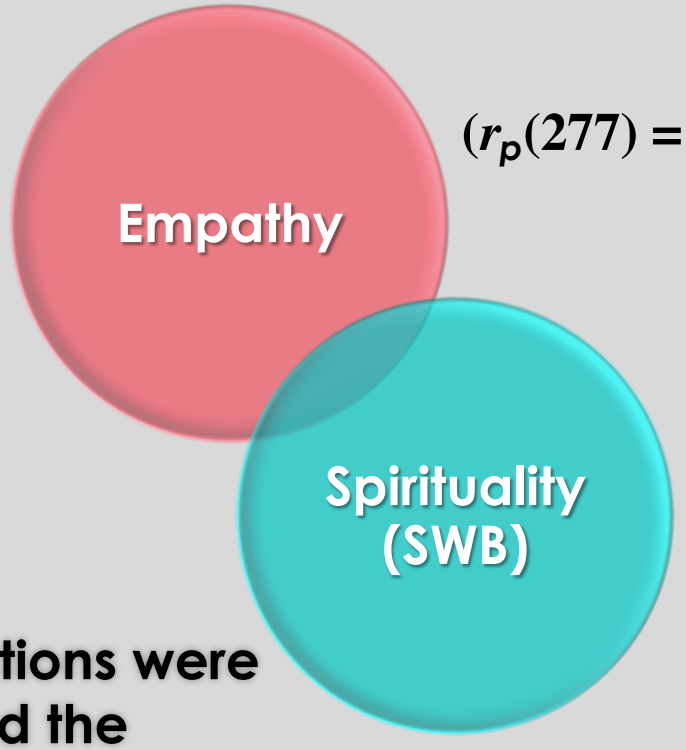
Results

- The two-way factor analysis revealed a significant effect of Gender when added for Self-Compassion, $F(1,284) = 8.32$, $p < 0.01$ (G > B)
- Significant effects of age and gender on students' empathy scores (IRI) were also reported, $F(1,284) = 22.12$ (age) 33.95 (gender), $p < 0.01$.

Results

Spirituality and Empathy

- Significant positive correlations were found between empathy and spirituality (total SWB and SWB existential subscale)



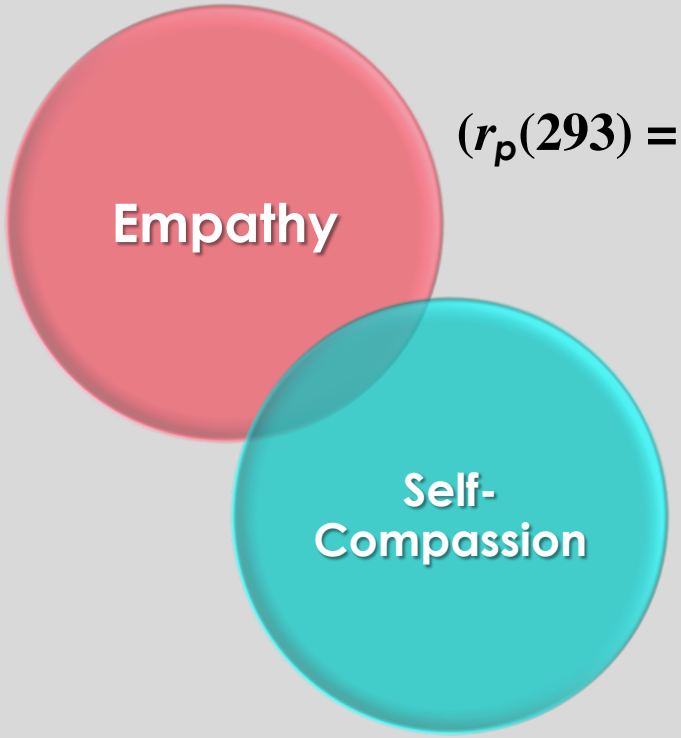
$(r_p(277) = .191, p < .01)$

* Only for girls, significant correlations were also found between empathy and the religious well-being subscale.

Results

Self-Compassion and Empathy

- Empathy was also positive correlated to self-compassion, r (293) = .491, p < .01



$(r_p(293) = .491, p < .01)$

Discussion

- Findings suggest that age and gender may influence emerging adolescents' spirituality and empathy. Younger adolescents were likely to score higher on all measures.
- Gender played a significant role in adolescents' self-compassion and empathy. Girls reported higher levels of self-compassion and empathy than boys.
- Although no relations were found between spirituality and self-compassion, findings demonstrate that positive links may exist among spirituality, empathy, and self-compassion.
- Results suggest that girls' empathy is connected with both dimensions of spirituality: the relationship with God and the existential purpose of life, while boys' empathy is only associated with existential well-being.

Conclusions

Theoretically

- Our research highlights the interconnectedness among empathy, self-compassion, and spirituality.
- Specifically, results suggest that age and gender influence adolescents' experiences and understandings of these psychosocial abilities.

Practically

- Our research provides a framework for educational programs that promote spiritual development in the home's and school's environments that foster a greater sense of empathy, self-compassion, and overall well-being in youth.

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Thank You!

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