

**Summer Research 2011**  
**Project Proposal**

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## **Motivational Factors of Young Adults Involved in Buddhist Meditation Practice**

With the guidance of Professor Jose Feito, I plan on investigating what motivates, and continues to motivate young adults to become involved with Buddhist meditation practice. My many research questions come from a variety of sources including Abraham Maslow's theory of motivation, as well as theories on human suffering, self-actualization, and metamotivation. I attempt to answer this question using qualitative and quantitative research through semi-structured interviews and surveys. During a Theories of Personalities class that I took with Professor Feito, I attended a talk on Buddhist psychology at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in Marin County. Since that experience, I've gone on a retreat to Spirit Rock and have noticed that there is a small population of young adults who attend. Professor Feito has many connections to Spirit Rock. I have also received some help from Colette Fleuridas of the Graduate Counseling Program at Saint Mary's on this subject. She too, has connections to Spirit Rock. Through these connections at Spirit Rock, I believe I will be able to obtain enough participants. I will use some standardized tests of motivation like the "Age Universal" I-E Scale (Gorusch, Venable, 1983).

There has been some research on adult motivations towards religion (McFadden, 2008) and research on adolescent motivations towards religion (King, Roeser, 2009). There has even been cross-cultural research on motivations towards religion and spirituality (Piedmont, 2007). However, there has been a lack research done on the young adults age group (around 18-25 yrs old). Seeing as how there is research done on adolescence and adults, it only makes sense to study young adults. Young adults are at an age where they are exploring their own minds and figuring out what they believe in and

how to live their lives. Research should be done on this topic because it is relevant to the challenges and experiences that young adults face. I am interested in what draws young adults to engage in Buddhist meditation practice. I have multiple hypotheses about what I could find in this research. For brevity, I will explain one of them.

Abraham Maslow proposed that people become motivated based upon a hierarchy of needs. The hierarchy is broken up into five levels. The bottom four levels are what he labels “deficiency needs”. These deficiency needs are broken up into physiological needs, safety needs, the need to love and be loved, and esteem needs. The very top of the hierarchy is the need for self-actualization. Maslow defines self-actualization as “the full use and exploitation of talents, capacities, potentialities, etc.” (Maslow, 1950). This last level is labeled as “being needs” such as the need for morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, and acceptance of facts. Maslow believed that each need on the hierarchy must be met in order to go to the next level. Based upon this model, I hypothesize that the young adults involved in Buddhist meditation practice have had their deficiency needs met.

I plan to perform my research at Spirit Rock Meditation Center by conducting semi-structured interviews using a tape recorder with participants. Semi-structured interviews allow me to have a specified list of questions I will ask, but also some room for anything else that the participant or I bring up. I will use an inductive approach to my interviews employed by Sheff. Once all the interviews have been conducted, I will look for themes that emerge from the data (Sheff, 2005). I plan on utilizing the connections I have to Spirit Rock by calling and asking them about their young adults programs. They frequently put on retreats, classes, etc. specifically for young adults. Prior to these events,

I would organize with Spirit Rock to have interviews with attendees on a volunteer basis at the end of the event or when they break for lunch. My goal is to have at least twenty interviews by the end of the summer. Information will not only come from interviews, but also from standardized tests. These will be easily answered questions that participants can complete in a matter of minutes. I would assume to have a larger sample of participants who took the standardized tests.

Part of the mission statement at Saint Mary's states that it encourages students "to probe deeply the mystery of existence by cultivating the ways of knowing the arts of thinking." My hopes are that through this research we can know what draws young adults to get after the nature of reality. If this were available, Saint Mary's could use this research to reach out to those young adults whose mission is the same as the institutions. I also hope that through this research, we can better understand the impact that Buddhist meditation has on young adults. With this information, we can spread its benefits and help people live more authentically.

## References

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