

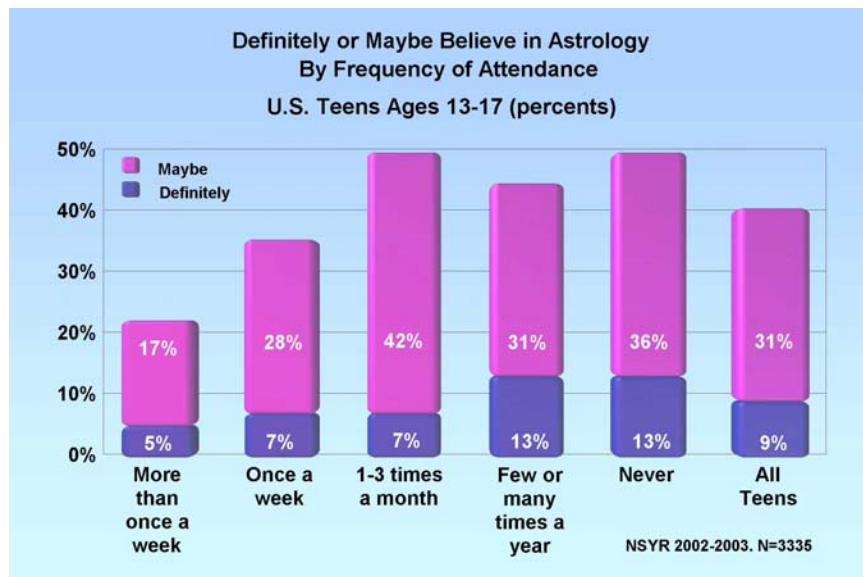
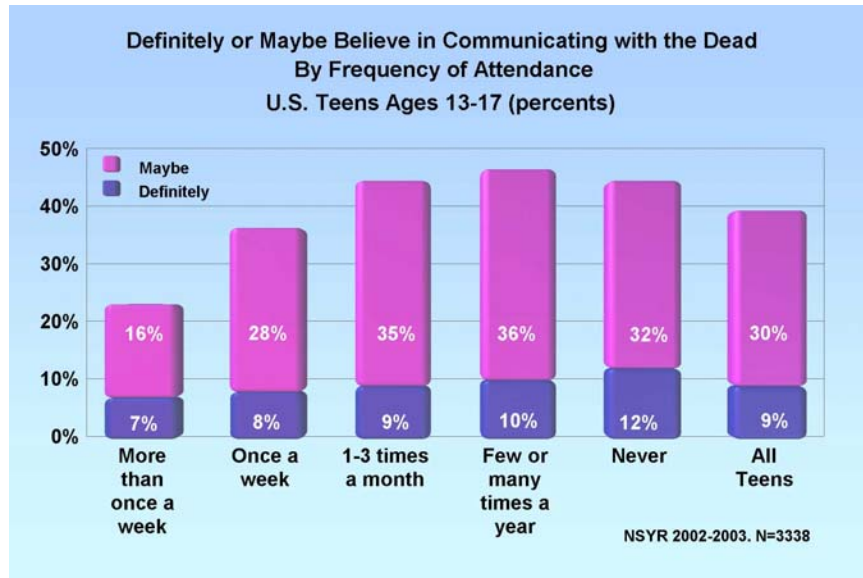
Religion and the Paranormal

With Halloween around the corner, many children are thinking about costumes, candy, goblins, and monsters. For at least this night, the world of the living and the world of the dead seem to coexist in popular culture. Though with all of Halloween's ghosts and various other paranormal phenomena, we might ask, do any U.S. teenagers actually believe in these things?

According to researchers with the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), in a nationally representative survey of more than 3,000 U.S. teenagers, many teens say they are open to believing in psychics, astrology, and communicating with the dead. Relatively few teens say that they "definitely" believe in these paranormal experiences, but a large minority says "maybe" when asked if they believe in them. Overall, 40 percent of teens maybe or definitely believe in astrology, 39 percent maybe or definitely believe in communicating with the dead, and 27 percent maybe or definitely believe in psychics and fortune tellers. However, while many teens do not deny the possibility of the paranormal, fewer teens believe in these things without doubt. So, whereas 40 percent say they maybe or definitely believe in astrology, only 9 percent of teens definitely do. Similarly, only 9 percent of teens say they definitely believe in communicating with the dead and only 6 percent say they definitely believe in psychics and fortune tellers.

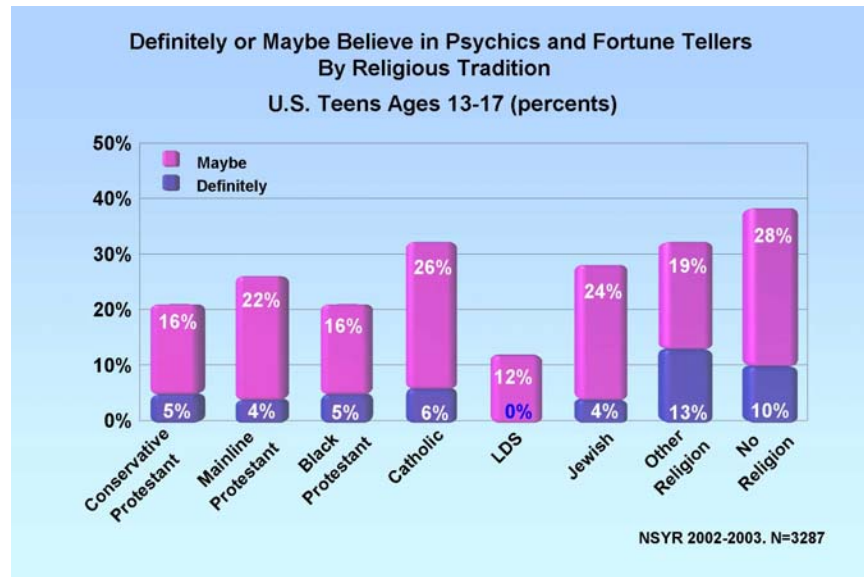
"Most American teens are at least somewhat skeptical of paranormal beliefs; very few of them say they definitely believe in these phenomena" reports Dr. Phil Schwadel, a postdoctoral researcher with the NSYR at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He adds, "Despite their skepticism, however, many of them are open to the possibility of paranormal phenomena."

What differences does religion make? Teens who regularly attend religious services are less likely to believe in the paranormal. For instance, 44 percent of teens who never attend religious services say they maybe or definitely believe in communicating with the dead, compared to 23 percent of teens who attend more than once a week. Likewise, 49 percent of teens who never attend religious services report maybe or definitely believing in astrology, while 35 percent of teens who attend weekly and 22 percent of teens who attend more than once a week say the same. Overall, religious activity is negatively associated with paranormal beliefs.



In addition to the effects of religious service attendance, there are differences in paranormal beliefs between different religious traditions. As the graph below shows, Mormon teens are particularly unlikely to believe in psychics and fortune tellers, with only 12 percent saying they maybe believe. Within the Protestant community there is not much variation, though mainline teens are slightly more likely than conservative and black Protestant teens to say they might believe in psychics and fortune tellers. Among

all Christian teens, Catholics are especially likely to report believing in the paranormal. Teens who do not affiliate with a religious tradition are the most likely to report paranormal beliefs. Thirty-eight percent of nonaffiliated teens, for example, say they maybe or definitely believe in psychics and fortune tellers. The high rates of belief in the paranormal among Catholic and nonaffiliated teens also applies to their belief in astrology and communicating with the dead (not shown).



This report is based on the following questions from the NSYR telephone survey: “Do you believe in astrology, that stars and planets affect people’s fates, definitely, maybe, or not at all,” “Do you believe in the possibility of communicating with the dead directly or through séances, definitely, maybe, or not at all,” and “Do you believe in the power of psychics and fortunetellers, definitely, maybe, or not at all?”

The National Study of Youth and Religion is funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. More than 3,350 teens along with one of their parents participated in the random-digit-dial telephone study of U.S. parent-teen pairs. The purpose of the project is to research the shape and influence of religion and spirituality in the lives of U.S. adolescents; to identify effective practices in the religious, moral and social formation of the lives of youth; to describe the extent to which youth participate in and benefit from the programs and opportunities that religious communities are offering to their youth; and to foster an informed national discussion about the influence of religion in youth's lives to encourage sustained reflection about and rethinking of our cultural and institutional practices with regard to youth and religion.