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Contextual influences on faith development in adolescents and emerging adults

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CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES ON FAITH DEVELOPMENT
IN ADOLESCENTS AND EMERGING ADULTS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Science

in

The School of Human Ecology

by
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Abstract

Recent research has revealed that high religiosity is associated with positive life outcomes in adolescents and emerging adults. However, the mechanisms and processes that underscore faith development, which is crucial to experiencing these outcomes, are not well understood. Furthermore, most research on faith development in adolescents and emerging adults is based on quantitative data and fails to examine the influence of developmental contexts on faith development. To address this, a racially diverse New England sample of 30 highly religious Christian, Jewish, New World faiths, and Muslim families were interviewed regarding their faith and family life. Focusing specifically on the faith development of the adolescents and emerging adults (age 12-25; $N = 43$) in this sample, qualitative coding and analysis revealed three key themes: (a) contexts, (b) personal beliefs, and (c) personal practices. Qualitative data is provided to explain each theme. Implications for religious institutions, families, and social service organizations are discussed.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Within the past 10 years, social scientists have begun to call for more research into the development of religiosity (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003; Dollahite, Marks, & Goodman, 2004; King, 2003; Smith & Snell, 2009). Religiosity is a three-part construct composed of religious beliefs, religious practices, and participation in a religious community (Marks, 2005). At the present time, the largest and most helpful data set on adolescent (age 12-17) and emerging adult (age 18-25) religiosity is the National Survey of Youth and Religion, a longitudinal qualitative and quantitative research project that includes three waves of data collection to date (Smith & Snell, 2009). This survey has revealed significant positive outcomes for highly religious (as opposed to moderately religious or nonreligious) adolescents and emerging adults, such as less drug use (including less alcohol use, less binge drinking, less illegal drug use, and less smoking); less sexual activity outside of marriage (including less cohabitation, less pornography use, less unwed pregnancy, and less risky sexual behavior); greater civic engagement (including greater charitable giving, greater concern about equality, greater frequency of voluntary community service, greater sense of gratitude, and greater involvement in organized activities); better relationships (including less physical fighting and better relationships with both mother and father); better self concept (including less depression, greater morality, less consumerism, greater life purpose, greater life satisfaction, better mental health, and better self image); better health (better Body Mass Index and better physical health); as well as greater achievement (including greater education level and greater employment status).

With such positive life outcomes in the balance, it is vitally important that we understand the processes of faith development in adolescents and emerging adults. Increased knowledge of the processes of faith development will enable families and religious institutions to better reach their goals and extend the benefits of religiosity to more individuals. Not only is more research

needed in general, but also researchers are calling for new information about the influential mechanisms and processes that underscore the development of religiosity and that account for its outcomes (Dollahite & Marks, 2009). Furthermore, scholars note that the impact of the family context, in particular, must be better understood (Petts, 2009)—as well as that of the community of faith (King, 2003) and peer relationships (Schwartz, 2006). Some researchers are beginning to examine the role of the individual in faith development by modeling developmental trajectories based on varying degrees of religiosity (Petts, 2009; Smith & Snell, 2009).

The present study seeks to explore the influences of individual autonomy, as well as familial, congregational, and social contexts, on the development of religiosity in adolescents and emerging adults. As there is much to be learned about faith development, the present study will utilize qualitative methods to explore participants' own thoughts and experiences for new insights. The current study contributes to the existing body of research by examining multiple variables, something previous studies have failed to do (Schwartz, 2006), as many studies have focused only on the mechanisms of transmission or transaction. However, based on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, individuals develop through interactions with multiple contexts: therefore, there are more mechanisms at work in faith development than parent → child (transmission) or parent ↔ child (transaction) processes. Furthermore, the inclusion of autonomy distinguishes the present study from the majority of the adolescent religiosity literature. Lastly, unlike other studies limited to a Judeo-Christian sample, this study includes Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and New World faiths (Latter Day Saints/Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses). This diversity within the sample will improve understanding of religious processes that may be "missed" in work focusing on fewer faith groups.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Adolescence is a time of dramatic growth and change in the life cycle. A sure indication that a child is entering adolescence is the adolescent growth spurt that precedes puberty, during which a child grows at a pace unmatched since the age of two (Arnett, 2010). Not only do adolescents change dramatically in physical domains, they also develop rapidly in cognitive and social domains. For this reason, adolescence (age 12-17 years) is a critical time in the lives of many individuals and deserves attention from social scientists. In particular, relatively little is known about the development of spirituality or religiosity at this time in the lifespan (Benson, et al., 2003; King, 2003; Schwartz, 2006). For example, researchers have determined that many adolescents commit to a faith tradition by the age of 14 (Smith & Snell, 2009) and that 82% of American adolescents consider themselves members of a religious belief system (Smith & Denton, 2005). Yet it remains unclear what characteristics or environments lead to developing a religious commitment in adolescence (Benson, et al., 2003; Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003; Schwartz, 2006; Smith & Snell, 2009; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999).

Similarly, little is known about the religiosity (religious beliefs, practices, and community) of emerging adults, the group of 18-25 year-olds who are between adolescence and adulthood (Marks, 2005; Arnett, 2010). Arnett (2010) lists five defining characteristics of emerging adults, all of which may have profound implications on religiosity: “the age of identity explorations; the age of instability; the self-focused age; the age of feeling in-between; and the age of possibilities” (Arnett, 2010, p. 8). The self-focused and uncommitted nature of this life stage may have profound implications on religious commitments, often including a decrease in religious commitment and practice. More research is needed to identify the mechanisms and processes that lead to the development of religiosity in adolescence and emerging adulthood (Dollahite et al., 2004; Smith & Denton, 2005).

In order to better inform future research on adolescent and emerging adult religiosity, the present study will address several primary questions: (a) What is developmentally unique about adolescents and emerging adults? (b) What is the religiosity of adolescents and emerging adults like? (c) What is known about the development of religiosity in adolescents and emerging adults? and, (d) What theories may be useful for better understanding adolescent and emerging adult religiosity, given the developmental considerations of both groups? To answer these questions, I will focus first on the development of adolescents and emerging adults, specifically in the domains of cognitive, identity, and faith development. Second, I will discuss the existing research on both the characteristics and development of religiosity in adolescents (age 12-17) and emerging adults (age 18-25). Third, I will examine two theoretical models that may be useful for studying the development of religiosity in adolescents emerging adults.

Adolescent and Emerging Adult Development

Adolescence is an age-related stage of development that bridges childhood and adulthood, and, as a result, psychologists have long recognized adolescence as a critical time in the life span (Arnett, 2010). In 1904, G. Stanley Hall labeled adolescence as a time of *storm and stress*, which involved three elements: conflict with parents, mood disruptions, and risky behavior. Hall did not end the adolescent period at age 18, as modern Americans do; rather, Hall advocated for ending adolescence at age 24, a time by which many had entered adulthood through marriage and childrearing. Only recently, based on Arnet's (2010) work on emerging adulthood, have we returned to Hall's idea of adulthood beginning in the mid-twenties. The early twenties parallel adolescence as a time of great change and stress, although not in physical development. Instead, the emerging adult period is often filled with multiple transitions and new beginnings: new educational options, new employment opportunities, new places of residence, new marriage, and starting a new family (Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth, 2005). Because

adolescence (age 12-17) and emerging adulthood (age 18-25) are such monumental times of change in the lifespan, it is important to understand the developmental concerns of both adolescents emerging adults. While reviewing theories of cognition, identity, and faith, I will focus on the relevant stages for adolescence and emerging adulthood.

Piaget's Developmental Theory of Cognition

Jean Piaget was a Swiss psychologist who was fascinated by children's ability to learn basic concepts, such as time and space, through interaction with the natural world (Miller, 2002). Piaget observed and interacted with children to learn how they understood the world around them. Perhaps one of Piaget's most notable contributions to our understanding of adolescent development is the transition from *concrete thinking* to *abstract thinking* that occurs around age 11 with the onset of the *formal operations stage* (Lerner, 2002). Elementary aged children think about objects in terms of real properties and qualities, but at adolescence they become able to think in purely abstract ways. This new ability to think about completely intangible concepts in logical ways is especially important for understanding the religious lives of adolescents. Once children reach adolescence, they are finally able to think about God as transcendent and not in mere concrete terms. For example, a child might say, "God is like an old man with a long white beard;" whereas an adolescent might say, "God is loving and He does things for our good."

Also, upon entering the formal operations stage, an adolescent is able to think hypothetically, in "if, then" statements (Miller, 2002). This thinking is similar to the logic of the scientific method (Lerner, 2002), and it allows adolescents to make conclusions about ideas. The ability to deduce could have profound implications on an adolescent's religious beliefs. Adolescents in the formal operations stage are also able to *transform* a problem and examine all possible aspects of it. Transformations allow adolescents to *identify*, *negate*, *reciprocate*, and *correlate* aspects of a problem. As any one who has argued with a 10-year-old and a teenager

knows, the teen is much better at identifying various aspects of a given problem and negating them. This aspect of the formal operations stage also has implications for adolescent religiosity. Adolescents are able to think critically about faith and analyze its aspects in ways that children cannot. Negating is often an important, perhaps even central, feature of adolescent and emerging adult interaction with religious ideas.

Adolescents, like those in younger stages of cognitive development, are affected by *egocentrism* (Lerner, 2002). In adolescence, egocentrism affects thought in at least three ways: *centration*, *the imaginary audience*, and the *personal fable*. Centration is the adolescent's preoccupation with self. Because they have just developed the ability to think about their own thinking, adolescents may spend long periods of time analyzing themselves or dreaming about their future. Centration differs from egocentrism; centration is ruminating on the self, whereas egocentrism is an inability to take on the perspectives of another (to think past one's own perspective). David Elkind contributed the ideas of the *imaginary audience* and the *personal fable* to Piaget's understanding of adolescent egocentrism (Lerner, 2002). The imaginary audience is a fictitious group that adolescents may believe are always watching them. The imaginary audience is a symptom of teenagers' inability to differentiate their own preoccupation with themselves (centration) from everyone else's interest in them. The personal fable is the belief of adolescents that they are unique from anyone else in all of time. The personal fable may cause the adolescent to feel isolated and misunderstood by others (e.g., "No one understands the way I feel."). These aspects of egocentrism may be important for adolescent religiosity. Feeling unique and misunderstood could impact an adolescent's experience of the transcendent, for example, by causing the adolescent to believe that no one in her religious community cares about her.

Emerging adults may enter a new phase that has been termed by neo-Piagetians *postformal operations* (Arnett, 2010). Postformal operations include pragmatism, dialectical thought, and reflective judgment. Pragmatism incorporates real-world constraints into logical thought processes. This ability separates adolescents from emerging adults: emerging adults understand the complexities of life and are able to consider limitations in ways that most adolescents do not. Dialectic thought is the realization that life's complex problems are not easily solved and that decisions often are made with incomplete information. Reflective judgment is an increased ability to judge the soundness of an argument. These advances in cognitive development may allow emerging adults to better address the ideological concerns of forming life-long commitments to individuals and institutions, which are examined in the next section.

Erikson's Psychosocial Theory

Erik Erikson (and his wife Joan) developed the psychosocial theory of development (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). The psychosocial theory stemmed from Freud's psychosexual theory; however, rather than emphasizing sexuality as Freud did, Erikson emphasized social relations and personal identity (Miller, 2002). *Identity*, in Erikson's view, is the understanding of who one is and of one's place in society. *Identity versus identity confusion* is the crucial task of adolescence. During adolescence, youth shift from relying on parents for direction to relying on mentors and peers (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). Adolescents search for ideologies to guide their lives, which can be found in "religious, political, or intellectual" institutions or belief systems (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 73). Clearly, the task of identity achievement has strong implications for the religiosity of adolescents. In searching for ideologies to guide their lives, some adolescents turn toward religion as others turn away.

Although traditionally identity is viewed as the task of adolescence, Erikson argued that adolescence was lengthening into the early adult years. Nearly a decade before Arnett (2010)

defined emerging adulthood, Erikson wrote, “Adolescence and the ever more protracted apprenticeship of the later school and college years can, as we saw, be viewed as a psychosexual *moratorium*: a period of sexual and cognitive maturation and yet a sanctioned postponement of definitive commitment” (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, pp. 74-75). Arnett (2010), as already noted, has defined emerging adulthood as a time of having few commitments, experimenting with multiple identities, and focusing on the self. The observations of Erikson and Arnett are complementary: The delay of secure identity that Erikson foresaw has resulted in delayed entry into adulthood. Furthermore, there may be implications for individual religiosity that stem from delayed identity achievement, such as a prolonged period of religious moratorium in which individuals simultaneously evaluate multiple religions.

Scholars theorize that one result of delaying adulthood is a concurrent delay of marriage by many emerging adults (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003; Arnett, 2010). These delays may coincide with delaying the timing of the Eriksonian stage of *intimacy versus isolation*, in which emerging adults willingly share themselves with a life partner (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). For Erikson, the act of intimacy requires commitment and the ability to relinquish one’s desires in order to benefit one’s lover:

Young adults emerging from the adolescent search for a sense of identity can be eager and willing to fuse their identities in mutual intimacy and to share them with individuals who, in work, sexuality, and friendship promise to prove complementary. One can often be “in love” or engage in intimacies, but the intimacy now at stake is the capacity to commit oneself to concrete affiliations which may call for significant sacrifices and compromises. (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 70)

It could be that the self-focused nature of emerging adulthood prevents emerging adults from sacrificing themselves for another and, thus, from experiencing true intimacy. Erikson is clear that being “in love” is not the same as establishing true intimacy, rather commitment, sacrifice, and compromise are the hallmarks of “the intimacy now at stake.” What kind of

relationships are most likely to be characterized by commitment, sacrifice, and compromise? Empirical research suggests that married people have more satisfying and stable (committed) relationships than cohabitators, whose relationships tend to be less committed and more volatile (Kamp Dush, Cohan, & Amato, 2003; Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004; Yabiku & Gager, 2009). This evidence is compounded further by the finding that highly religious people more often support lifelong marriage and discourage cohabitation than do less religious or nonreligious people (Thornton, Axinn, & Hill, 1992; Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004; Zhai, Ellison, Stokes, & Glenn, 2008; Bulanda & Bulanda, 2008; Eggebeen & Dew, 2009; Mahoney 2010). This evidence suggests that highly religious emerging adults are more likely than their peers to favor marriage, a relationship characterized by commitment, which may influence their resolution of Erikson's intimacy versus isolation stage. This pathway (highly religious emerging adults favor marriage → commit to spouse → resolve intimacy versus isolation) could be one of several pathways that lead to positive life outcomes in highly religious emerging adults. The next section explores one relationship between adult romance and faith development.

Attachment Theory

Adolescent and adult development is predicated on infant and child development, to which we now turn our attention briefly. *Attachment theory* was developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth to explain emotional responses in children separated from their mothers (Cassidy, 1999). Attachment, simply put, is an infant's desire to maintain proximity to the primary caregiver, who is usually the child's mother. This proximity provides safety for the child and shapes the growing child's understanding of the world as either safe and trustworthy (*secure* attachment) or as harmful and unreliable (*avoidant* or *ambivalent* attachment) (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Miller, 2002). The child's understanding of the world that develops through interactions with the primary caregiver is called the *internal working model* (Cassidy, 1999).

Often, infants use the primary caregiver as a *secure base*, that is, as a safe place from which children explore the world and return as needed (Miller, 2002).

Attachment theory is useful for understanding adolescent development and religiosity in two ways. First, attachment theory coincides with Erikson's first psychosocial stage of *basic trust versus basic mistrust* (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). This complementarity strengthens the simultaneous use of both theories to understand human development. Second, recent work in attachment theory has compared the internal working models of emerging adults to both adult romantic relationships and adult conceptions of God (Kirkpatrick, 1998; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). These researchers have found that securely attached emerging adults tend to have more stable religious experiences than those with avoidant or ambivalent internal working models (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). Furthermore, one's God-figure can represent a secure base or attachment figure for adults (Kirkpatrick, 1998). These scholars believe that adult attachment may be studied more accurately through adult religiosity than through adult romantic relationships (Kirkpatrick, 1998; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). Clearly, an adolescent's internal working model may directly affect their conception and experience of God: specifically, those whose internal working model shows a trustworthy view of the world may similarly view of God as trustworthy. Understanding attachment may be vital for understanding the development of religiosity in adolescents and emerging adults. The following section reviews faith development theory, which further integrates the previous theories with faith development.

Fowler's Faith Development Theory

Influenced by Piaget and Erikson, James Fowler developed the *faith development theory* in the 1970s and 1980s (Fowler & Dell, 2006). According to Fowler, faith does not require a religious belief or setting. Rather, faith is a lens through which one views the world:

Faith forms a way of seeing our everyday life in relation to holistic images of what we may call the *ultimate environment*. Human action always involves responses and initiatives. We shape our action (our responses and initiatives) in accordance with what we see to be going on. We seek to fit our actions into, or oppose them to, larger patterns of action and meaning. (Fowler, 1981, p. 24)

With the ultimate environment in mind, Fowler describes the growth of individual faith in light of developmental constraints. For example, Fowler describes an infant's dependence on caregivers as a first conception of God: if the infant's needs are met, the world and God may be trusted; if the infant's needs are not met, a loving God must not exist (Fowler & Dell, 2006). Fowler's concept of *primal faith* corresponds nicely with the internal working model of attachment theory and trust versus mistrust of Erikson's psychosocial theory (Erikson & Erikson, 1997).

Continuing to consider the developmental needs of individuals, Fowler's faith development theory also addresses adolescents and emerging adults. Fowler labeled adolescent faith as *synthetic-conventional faith* (Fowler, 1981). He claims that the cognitive abilities and identity needs of adolescents allow them to integrate their faith into their personal and collective identities (Fowler, 1991; Templeton & Eccles, 2006). The personal identity refers to the way an adolescent sees himself, whereas the collective identity refers to the groups to which the adolescent considers himself a member. In adolescence, faith becomes more internalized and more able to support one's personal identity as it simultaneously binds adolescents to others in their religious community (Fowler, 1991). In other words, adolescents develop a personally meaningful faith at the same time they value membership in a religious community. Also, because adolescents lack the ability to take the perspective of an objective other (due to centration), they adhere closely to significant others such as parents, peers, or mentors (Fowler & Dell, 2006; Lerner, 2002). Adolescents are able to mentally represent God-figures with more abstract personal characteristics, such as compassionate, helpful, and loving. As individuals age

into emerging adulthood, their faith continues to develop due to the gained abilities of reflective thinking and decreased egocentrism (Arnett, 2010; Fowler, 1991). Fowler called the faith of emerging adults *individuated-reflective*, designating that emerging adults think critically about their beliefs and experiences at the same time that they develop greater internalization of values and ideologies (Fowler, 1981, 1991). The increased ability to cognitively separate themselves from their faith allows emerging adults to consider deeper issues than was possible in adolescence. Fowler notes that at this stage emerging adults reevaluate former beliefs and assumptions as they address major existential questions (Fowler & Dell, 2006). It is in this stage of development that emerging adults begin to form commitments both to others and to institutions (Fowler, 1991). Fowler's suggestion that emerging adults form life commitments to people and beliefs corresponds to Erikson's stage of intimacy versus isolation.

Summary

To summarize, adolescents and emerging adults experience a variety of developmental changes cognitively, psychosocially, and spiritually. These changes include new thinking abilities and examinations of self and beliefs. Adolescents and emerging adults reevaluate prior ideas and values before forming life-long commitments to self, others, and groups. As we shift our attention to the aspect of religiosity in the lives of adolescents and emerging adults, it will be important to keep these developmental concerns in mind. Table 1 contains a summary of this information.

Characteristics of Religiosity

In the quest to understand religiosity, researchers have classified various levels of religiosity within their populations of study (Dollahite, Layton, Bahr, Walker, & Thatcher, 2009; Petts, 2009; Smith & Snell, 2009). Typically, researchers categorize religiosity into at least three

Table 1

Comparison of Age and Developmental Stage according to Theorist

Theorist	Adolescence	Emerging Adulthood
Piaget	Formal Operations	Post-Formal Operations
Erikson	Identity versus Identity Confusion	Intimacy versus Isolation
Folwer	Synthetic-Conventional Faith	Individuative-Reflective Faith

levels: nonreligious, moderately religious, and highly religious. The highly religious subgroup is often characterized by high importance of faith, frequent practice of faith (such as daily prayer), and frequent participation in a religious group (such as weekly attendance at worship; Smith & Snell, 2009). This following section will focus mainly on the highly religious subgroup, which will be further clarified subsequently.

Adolescents

Outcomes. Researchers have identified several different types of religiosity in American adolescents. Using data from the National Survey of Youth and Religion (NSYR), Smith and Denton (2005) classified the religiosity of adolescents into four categories:

The Devoted (8% of American youth)

Attends religious services weekly or more.

Faith is very or extremely important in everyday life.

Feels very or extremely close to God.

Currently involved in a religious youth group.

Prays a few times a week or more.

Reads scripture once or twice a month or more.

The Regulars (27% of American youth)

Attends religious services two to three times a month or weekly.

Faith ranges from very to not very important in everyday life.

Closeness to God, youth group involvement, prayer, and scripture reading are variable but less religious than for the Devoted.

The Sporadic (17% of American youth)

Attends religious services a few times a year to monthly.

Faith ranges from somewhat to not very important in everyday life.

Closeness to God, youth group involvement, prayer, and scripture reading are variable.

The Disengaged (12% of American youth)

Never attends religious services; or attends many times a year and identifies as not religious.

Faith is somewhat, not very, or not important in everyday life.

Feels only somewhat close to God or less close.

Is not involved in a religious youth group.

Prays one to two times a month or less.

Reads scripture one to two times a month or less. (Smith & Denton, 2005, p. 220)

The Devoted subgroup corresponds to the *highly religious* group described in the present study.

The highly religious adolescents are distinct from their peers in that they autonomously practice their faith regularly and they value their faith more than their peers. This group, even though it is only an estimated 8% of the nation's adolescents, experiences their faith in ways that distinguish them from the moderately religious (the Regulars and the Sporadic) and nonreligious adolescents (the Disengaged).

Research indicates that highly religious adolescents frequently have better life outcomes than nonreligious adolescents (Smith & Denton, 2005). For instance, highly religious adolescents experience both personal (spiritual) and relational (communal) benefits from sacrificing for their faith (Dollahite et al., 2009). For example, a highly religious adolescent might sacrifice for her faith by not attending school events that happen on religious holy days or by wearing more modest clothing than her peer group. These behaviors may benefit the adolescent personally and spiritually by helping her to feel connected to God (Dollahite et al., 2009). The adolescent also may benefit in relational and community-oriented ways by feeling more connected to her religious community and by fulfilling the expectations of her religious community. Adolescents

also benefit in a variety of behavioral measures: highly religious adolescents are less likely to smoke, drink underage, be truant, be sexually active, use marijuana, and experience depression (Laird, Marks, & Marrero, 2010). In this sense, religiosity seems to be a protective factor, not a sign of pathology as Freud suggested (Laird et al., 2010; Miller, 2002). Furthermore, highly religious adolescents excel in most areas of life when compared to their peers. Based on longitudinal data, Smith and Denton (2005) concluded:

American adolescents as a whole exhibit a positive association between greater teen religious involvement and more positive outcomes in life. In general, for whatever reasons and whatever causal directions, more highly religiously active teenagers are doing significantly better in life on a variety of important outcomes than are less religiously active teens (p. 28).

Religious adolescents are more likely to participate in voluntary community service (King, 2003). Notably, highly religious adolescents are more committed to improving their relationships and resolving disputes (Chaney, 2008; Smith & Denton, 2005) and they are more likely to interact positively with parents, peers, and significant adults (King, 2003). Religious adolescents also internalize values, purposes, and group belonging through religious communities (King, 2003). (See Table 2 for a list of outcomes influenced by high religiosity in adolescents.)

Beliefs and Culture. The first wave of the NSYR (National Survey of Youth and Religion) revealed some interesting characteristics of adolescent religiosity. For example, youth groups appear to be largely ineffectual in reaching large numbers of kids—especially those who are not already strongly committed to their faith (Smith & Denton, 2005). Over three-quarters of the adolescent respondents self-identified as Christian, yet many were confused about basic theological doctrine. For example, roughly one in seven Christian adolescents believe in astrology and reincarnation, two beliefs that contradict Christian doctrine. These adolescents, who are unable to clearly state their beliefs, likely adhere to an ambiguous faith that Smith and Denton labeled *moral therapeutic deism* (MTD; Smith & Denton, 2005). MTD is a

Table 2

The Effects of Religiosity on Life Outcomes of Adolescents

Greater Academic Achievement	Higher Educational Attainment	Less Pornography Use
Less Frequent Alcohol Use	Greater Frequency of Volunteerism	Less Pregnancy
Healthier Body Mass Index	Greater Gratitude	Better Relationships with their Mothers
Higher Charitable Giving	More Involvement in Organized Activities	Better Relationships with their Fathers
Less Frequent Cohabitation	Greater Sense of Life Purpose and Goal	Less Frequent Risky Sexual Behavior
Greater Concern about Poverty	Greater Life Satisfaction	More Positive Self-Image
Less Consumerism	Better Mental Health	Less Frequent Smoking
Less Frequent Depression	Greater Sense of Morality	Better Social Relationships
Less Illegal Drug Use	Better Physical Health	Less Frequent Unemployment

Note: The results above remain true despite controlling for the following variables: “adults’ age, sex, race region of residence, parental education, parental marital status, individual income, and parental assistance with expenses” (Smith & Snell, 2009, p. 277).

conglomeration of beliefs from major U.S. religions in which the main point is to be a good person and to feel good about one's self. The adolescents who hold to this belief system are unable to articulate their faith clearly and precisely. They use vague terms to describe loose ideas about who God is and what God wants for mankind. It seems that, according to these adolescents, God is a creator who made the universe and now sits back managing it. God only intervenes in humans’ lives when they call on him, usually in times of distress. God’s ultimate desire for people is twofold: first, that they are good people, and second, that they are happy. In

this belief system, good people go to heaven. Although the faith many adolescents hold to is MTD, there are other adolescents who believe nothing at all and still others who passionately believe the tenets of their faith system. Still, the majority of US teenagers seem to believe in MTD. Finally, Smith and Denton point out that the adolescents did not create this belief system themselves, rather many adults believe it as well, and these adults passed MTD on to their children (Smith & Denton, 2005).

Emerging Adults

Outcomes. Arnett (2010) has defined emerging adulthood as a time of having few commitments, experimenting with multiple identities, and focusing on the self. The cultural elements of emerging adults' religiosity parallel those of their culture: tentative, relevant, personal, and largely inconsequential (Smith & Snell, 2009). Unsurprisingly, in light of these cultural elements, relatively few emerging adults are *highly committed* to a religion and many are uncommitted. But exactly what proportion of emerging adults is highly religious? Smith and Snell identified six religious types in emerging adulthood:

1. *Committed Traditionalists* ("I am really committed," 15%);
2. *Selective Adherents* ("I do some of what I can," 30%);
3. *Spiritually Open* ("There's probably something out there," 15%);
4. *Religiously Indifferent* ("It just doesn't matter much," 25%);
5. *Religiously Disconnected* ("I really don't know what you're talking about," 5%); and
6. *Irreligious* ("Religion just makes no sense," 10%; Smith & Snell, 2009, pp. 166-168).

Three of these groups, representing about 40% of the emerging adult population, are essentially nonreligious because they lack beliefs, practices, and a religious community, while only 15% are considered highly religious. This leaves 45% of emerging adults who are considered moderately

to minimally religious. By comparing the life outcomes of highly religious emerging adults to nonreligious emerging adults, we can examine the impact of religiosity on their lives.

The NSYR has provided new information on the topic of adolescent and emerging adult religiosity. Even after controlling for age, sex, race, income, region of residence, parental education, parental marital status, and parental assistance with expenses, highly religious emerging adults do better on a variety of life outcomes compared to less religious peers, such as higher life satisfaction and greater sense of life purpose; higher educational achievement and less unemployment; greater financial giving and volunteerism; greater concern about the poor, homeless, elderly, and racism; less recurring depression; feeling closer to parents; less casual sex and thus less frequent risk of contracting STDs and less unwed pregnancy; healthier body weight and better physical health; and less smoking, alcohol, and marijuana use, including less binge drinking (Smith & Snell, 2009). The more adolescents and emerging adults integrate faith into all aspects of their lives, the better their life outcomes seem to be (Smith & Snell, 2009). The link between belief and action despite difficulty is known as *belief-behavior congruence* (Atkins & Kessel, 2008; Marks, 2004)—discussed next.

Beliefs and Culture. Examining belief-behavior congruence reveals remarkable differences in family formation between highly religious and nonreligious emerging adults. One way in which the difference between emerging adults with high religiosity and belief-behavior congruence and those who are nonreligious is evident is in family formation.

Family formation is significantly linked to religiosity. Since the 1980s, cohabitation—the practice of living together before marriage—has increased, contributing to a cultural shift (Amato, et al., 2003). Today, many emerging adults marry and have children at older ages than previous generations (Amato, et al., 2003; Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Smock, 2000). However, highly religious emerging adults are four-times less likely to cohabit than their nonreligious peers

(Smith & Snell, 2009, p. 273). An examination of cohabitation and family formation helps to elucidate the distinction between highly religious emerging adults (15% of the emerging adult population) and the larger culture. Highly religious adolescent females are more likely to delay family formation by attending college, a choice that is linked to more positive projected outcomes than early family formation outside of marriage (Amato, et al., 2008). Additionally, the effects of religiosity seem to span generations: highly religious grandmothers are more likely to have grandchildren who do not cohabit (Thornton, Axinn, & Hill, 1992). Furthermore, cohabitation is associated with decreased male religiosity, while not cohabiting is associated with increased male religiosity (Stanley et al., 2004). These associations are significant because highly religious people are less likely to cohabit and they are less likely to experience the negative effects of cohabitation, known as the *cohabitation effect* (Kamp Dush et al., 2003). The cohabitation effect includes less marital satisfaction, less marital stability, and greater divorce proneness. Individuals with high religious service attendance and high fervor are more likely to marry if Conservative Protestant and less likely to cohabit if Catholic (Eggebeen & Dew, 2009). However, some argue that the effect of religion on predicting marriage is stronger for whites than for blacks (Bulanda & Bulanda, 2008). As the incidence of cohabitation has risen since the 1980s, so has the influence of religiosity on families (Amato et al., 2003), perhaps partially through the association between cohabitation and its effects. Religiosity affects families in more ways than decreasing cohabitation.

Marriage and Family. Just as individuals of various ages apparently benefit from religiosity and experience positive outcomes, so do marriages and families. Couples who view their marriage as sacred (sanctified) tend to have higher levels of adaptive functioning than those who do not (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003). Highly religious married couples report more marital satisfaction, less divorce, and less domestic violence than

less religious couples (Vaaler, Ellison, & Powers, 2009). Furthermore, highly religious married spouses recognize fewer opportunities for infidelity than less religious couples—it appears that religiosity alters the perception of spouses (Vaaler, Ellison, & Powers, 2009). Highly religious persons who attend religious services frequently are also less likely to engage in marital infidelity (Atkins & Kessel, 2008). Religiosity is also a characteristic of enduring marriages (Robinson & Blanton, 1993) although dissimilar religious beliefs among spouses are correlated with marital distress and instability (Vaaler et al., 2009).

The positive outcomes of highly religious families include higher family cohesion, family flexibility, conflict resolution, family structure, family organization, family effort (Marks, 2004), and commitment (Robinson & Blanton, 1993). Highly religious families value belief-behavior congruence and they sacrifice for their faith (Marks, 2004). Highly religious families have higher charitable giving than their less religious peers, a finding that holds true for emerging adults as well (Marks, Dollahite, & Dew, 2009; Smith & Snell, 2009). Because families are the primary environments in which children are socialized, they are critical contexts for religious socialization as well (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003; Smith & Denton, 2005).

Development of Religiosity

Adolescents

Mechanisms and Processes. Social scientists have identified two ways that children and adolescents may internalize the beliefs and values of their parents: transmission and transaction (Flor & Knapp, 2001). In the transmission model, parents pass their values to their children unidirectionally. The child passively receives the information from the parents and internalizes it. The second model is called transaction, transformation, or bidirectional reciprocity (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003; Flor & Knapp, 2001). As the names imply, in this model the child is active instead of passive. Both parents and children exchange ideas and beliefs; both learn and grow together.

As researchers have tested and compared these models, they have come to support bidirectional reciprocity. For example, in a study of parents and children (ages 3-12), both children and parents initiated religious conversations, which suggested that children are actively involved in learning about religion. From this finding, researchers concluded that effective parent-child religious socialization more likely features bidirectional reciprocity than transmission (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003). This study also revealed that most religious parent-child religious conversations were about prayer, Jesus, God, or current events and holidays. Furthermore, another study involving parents and preteens (ages 10-12), researchers found that recurring bidirectional relations promoted adolescent religiosity (Flor & Knapp, 2001). Frequent, open conversations about religion increased adolescent religious activity, importance (Flor & Knapp, 2001), and internalization (Schwartz, 2006). Some scholars who support bidirectional religious socialization suggest that social learning theory or socio-cultural theory may explain the relationship between parents and children (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003; Flor & Knapp, 2001). As adolescence is a time of exploring ideas in new ways due to the onset of abstract thinking (see previous discussion), it appears that parents who exchange abstract religious ideas together with their children are the most successful at raising religious children.

Contexts. Home is the most important context for adolescent faith development. According to research, adolescent religiosity develops best in two-parent homes, even if only one parent is biological (Armet, 2009; Petts, 2009). Furthermore, parents whose values match their behavior, who intentionally communicate about religion with their children, and who have strong cohesion with their children are likely to promote the development of religiosity in their adolescents (Armet, 2009). Adolescent religiosity develops best in families with established patterns of religious behavior (frequent practices; Armet, 2009; Marks, 2004). In a study focused on children, mothers were more active in faith conversations than were fathers (Boyatzis &

Janicki, 2003). Although there may be gendered differences in the roles of parents in religious socialization, parents are undoubtedly the main source of faith development for their children (Armet, 2009; Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003; Flor & Knapp, 2001; Garland, 2002; Petts, 2009; Schwartz, 2006; Smith & Denton, 2005; Smith & Snell, 2009; Templeton & Eccles, 2006). However, it is important to note that parental desire for religious children has less effect on promoting religiosity than parental *modeling* of a religious life (Flor & Knapp, 2001).

While faith development in the family context has been expanded in research, other contexts of faith development have largely been neglected. Very few studies examine peer, school, and church environments. A single study of peer support of faith found that peer influence was more salient for adolescents than parent support (Schwartz, 2006). However, this study was conducted at the end of a weekend-long adolescent religious event, a time when adolescent affection for peers is notably higher than normal. This same study reported that religious parents who provide faith support to their adolescents are more likely to have adolescents who choose friends who provide faith support as well. In other words, the effect of religious support in the family context may carry over to the peer context.

In a study about the impact of religious schooling versus public schooling on emerging adult religiosity, researchers found that adolescents who attended private, religious high schools were more likely as emerging adults to attend religious services frequently and to base important decisions on their faith (Uecker, 2009). However, using NSYR data, Smith and Denton (2005) found that participation in youth groups has been shown to have little impact on adolescent religiosity. It appears that youth group participants tend to be adolescents who are already highly committed to their faith, rather than those who are less committed or “at risk” of leaving their faith altogether (Smith & Denton, 2005). Despite a general lack of information about contexts of faith development, the qualitative portion of the NSYR has shown that adolescents who are able

to integrate their faith into all areas of their lives are most likely to be highly religious (Smith & Denton, 2005). For example, highly religious adolescents are more likely to choose peers who are also religious (or at least supportive of religiously-based choices), to participate in a youth group, to practice their faith in personal ways (such as daily private prayer), and to include their faith in sexual choices such as when to date and when to have sex (Smith & Denton, 2005). Aside from private prayer, these examples that are based in empirical evidence, have spillover into the peer context.

Emerging Adults

Mechanisms and Processes. Several researchers have proposed specific mechanisms to explain the development of religiosity. It seems that the choices adolescents make about their religious commitment have measurable effects in emerging adulthood. Drawing from the NSYR, Smith and Snell (2009) suggest that three influential processes during adolescence contribute to high religiosity in emerging adulthood: (a) significant personal relationships with faith members, (b) belief and commitment to faith, and (c) frequent religious practice. Other research on emerging adult religiosity also supports the importance of personal relationships and belief commitment during adolescence (Schwartz, 2006).

Smith and Snell also theorize eight mechanisms that lead to higher emerging adult religiosity: socialization, avoidance of relationship breakdown, enjoyment of participation rewarding continuation, belief and desire reinforcement, habituation, conserving accumulated religious capital, drive for identity continuity, and cognitive belief commitment (Smith & Snell, 2009, p. 241). These mechanisms, although often occurring before the individual is an emerging adult, culminate in high religiosity in emerging adulthood. While these mechanisms and processes have yet to be tested, they have been developed using a large, longitudinal study featuring both quantitative and qualitative methods. *Socialization* is the transmission of beliefs

and values through teaching and modeling. This includes a mother teaching her child to pray and a child witnessing a father praying. *Avoidance of relationship breakdown* is the maintenance of important relationships through behavior that would please them, such as a teenage boy removing his hat before entering the sanctuary. *Enjoyment of participation rewarding continuation* is the intrinsic reward that is continued and internalized, such as a feeling of connection to God that “rewards” the practice of prayer. *Belief and desire reinforcement* means that beliefs are reinforced cognitively and emotionally through experience. For example, when adolescents believe that they should help others, volunteering at a homeless shelter reinforces that belief. *Habituation* is establishing a routine, such as going to church every Sunday or praying before each meal. *Conserving accumulated religious capital* refers to the rewards of membership and the cost of leaving the group. For example, an adolescent may get to go overseas on a mission trip if she maintains group membership; exiting the group would cost her this reward. *Drive for identity continuity* is the desire to maintain a sense of personal and collective self. In other words, if an adolescent values being Jewish, then he will desire to maintain his identity by doing Jewish things and spending time with Jewish people. Finally, *cognitive belief commitment* refers to the worldview and life purpose gained from a religious belief system. For example, a Christian might view his life purpose as caring for the needy; whenever he sees someone care for a needy person, he will interpret that action as a holy behavior. Again, these mechanisms and processes are theoretical and not empirically tested; future research should examine and test these mechanisms (Smith & Snell, 2009).

Contexts. Smith & Snell (2009) found that religiosity seems to be somewhat epigenetic: The best predictor of emerging adult religiosity is adolescent religiosity. The most important context for developing high religiosity in emerging adulthood is the home environment of adolescence. The family environment, in addition to the family structure, of adolescents leads to

increased religiosity for emerging adults (Petts, 2009). In other words, highly religious families who create religious family environments through frequent and repeated religious practices and conversations are more likely to produce emerging adults who are also religious. Also, adolescents from religious families tend to experience decreased religiosity in emerging adulthood less than any other group of adolescents. However, if religiosity does change, as it does for many emerging adults, it usually declines. Most adolescents decrease their religious participation as they enter emerging adulthood, but later increase participation as they form families (Petts, 2009).

Also, Smith and Snell have identified the most salient teen factors predicting emerging adult religiosity: parental religious service attendance and importance of faith; teen importance of faith; teen has personal religious experiences; teen prays or reads scripture; teen has no religious doubts; and teen has many adults in congregation for support and help (Smith & Snell, 2009). Conversely, many factors do not have a large impact on emerging adult religiosity: Sunday school attendance; youth group participation; belief in miracles; religious friends; belief in sexual abstinence before marriage; teen was teased for religion; attendance on mission trips; attends religious high school. Clearly there is some conflicting evidence about faith development, especially relating to the influence of religious peers (Schwartz, 2006) as well as attendance at a religious high school (Uecker, 2009). Regardless of external factors that influence religiosity, internal expression of religiosity almost always coincides with external expression (Smith & Snell, 2009).

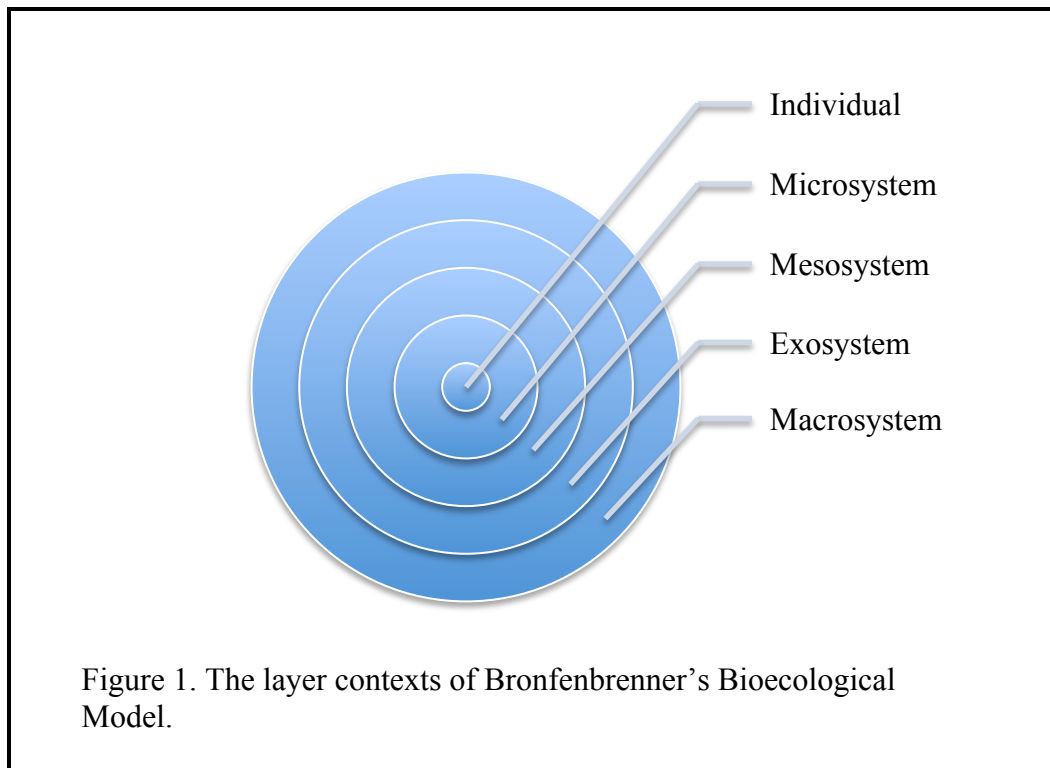
Useful Models for Studying Adolescent and Emerging Adult Religiosity

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development

In 1979 Urie Bronfenbrenner redefined the role of the environment in human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner described the environment as a layered

series of contexts, one inside the other. Starting at the center and working toward the outside, the first context is called the *microsystem* and it includes the individual and those with whom the individual directly interacts. The microsystem includes such settings as the home, school, religious community, and peer group. The individual interacts with the microsystem through “activities, roles, and relations” with the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 11). The next context is the *mesosystem*, representing the relationships between elements of the microsystem, such as the relationship between the religious community and school. As an example, the interactions between a conservative Christian church and a high school science teacher who teaches evolution may leave an impact—either positive or negative—on a developing adolescent who is, according to Erikson, searching for ideologies to govern his life (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). The third layer of the contextual model is the *exosystem*, which includes elements that influence the individual indirectly, such as a parent’s work environment or a peer’s home life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The final and external layer in the contextual model is the *macrosystem*, which includes the subculture and larger culture within which the individual is embedded (See Figure 1). The macrosystem includes the national religious climate (such as an Evangelical movement or a pervasive attitude nationally toward a certain religious group), popular culture, government decisions and politics, and historical events that impact the individual in the center of the microsystem.

In the later part of the 1990s, Bronfenbrenner revised his model to include a more comprehensive understanding of the individual and a more dynamic understanding of the process of development (Lerner, 2002). Bronfenbrenner stressed the interconnectedness of the contextual system and a *bio-psycho-social* conception of individuals. In Bronfenbrenner’s new, more holistic understanding of development he recommended studying human development by examining the interaction of *process, person, context, and time* (PPCT). Simply put, throughout



the life course, a *person* interacts with *contexts* through *processes* that occur over *time*, and scholars must analyze all four components to fully understand development. If one component is not analyzed, the resulting view of development will be incomplete. For example, an adolescent who has an imaginary audience (person) may interpret nightly (time) family prayer (process) as a time of great support or great embarrassment, depending on the presence of a new friend (context). Also, Bronfenbrenner argued that *proximal processes*, which are interactions between the person and the context that occur repeatedly over time, are the most significant source of development (Lerner, 2002).

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model is useful for studying the development of adolescent religiosity. The bioecological model incorporates the interaction of an individual with multiple contexts over time (Lerner, 2002). This is useful for studying the development of religiosity because religiosity is an aspect of life that often transcends multiple contexts simultaneously (e.g. home, religious community, school, or peer group; Smith & Denton, 2005).

Additionally, the bioecological model recognizes the individual as an active organism—both as producer and product of context (Lerner, 2002), which is important given the developmental task of adolescents: individuals must establish their identity through a series of choices based on their interactions with their contexts (Erikson & Erikson, 1997).

Marks and Dollahite's Model of Religiosity

In 2001, Marks and Dollahite proposed that the concept of religiosity was a more complex variable than many previous researchers had recognized. They recommended that religiosity included three elements: *religious beliefs*, *religious practices*, and *religious communities* (Dollahite et al., 2004). Marks and Dollahite (2004, p. 413) define their terms as:

- (a) *religious beliefs* (personal, internal beliefs, framings, meanings perspectives),
- (b) *religious practices* (outward, observable expressions of faith such as prayer, scripture study, rituals, traditions, or less overtly sacred practice or abstinence that is religiously grounded), and
- (c) *religious communities* (support, involvement, and relationships grounded in a congregation or less formal religious group).

This threefold definition is meant to improve upon common, single-item religious measures in social research, such as only church attendance or religious affiliation as a measure of religiosity.

In 2005, Marks updated this definition by linking it to the bio-psycho-social person. In his model, Marks relates the biological aspect of humans to religious practices, the psychological aspect to religious beliefs, and the social aspect to religious community (See Figure 2; Marks, 2005). In linking the biopsychosocial person to his definition of religiosity, Marks demonstrated that his concept was both thorough and holistic, accounting for all aspects of the human person. Much like Bronfenbrenner argued that the PPCT model was necessary for a complete

understanding of development, Marks argued that his threefold definition was necessary to operationalize religiosity.

Taking Marks' argument one step further, I propose that Marks' definition parallels Bronfenbrenner's three ways the individual interacts with context: activities, roles, and relationships (see Table 3; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). That is, activities are related to religious practices, roles are related to religious beliefs, and relationships are related to religious communities. This similarity of conceptualization further supports the use of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model as a tool for research on religiosity. Ideally, religious research would use the PPCT model to analyze a person's actions/practices, roles/beliefs, and relationships/community. While this suggestion may appear logically and theoretically sound, it should be noted that empirical evidence further promotes studying religiosity in this threefold way: The National Survey of Youth and Religion (NSYR) combined three measures to distinguish various levels of religiosity in the respondents (Smith & Snell, 2009). After evaluating multiple combinations of variables to reveal diversity in religiosity, researchers settled on the following measures: importance of faith, frequency of prayer, and worship attendance. Again, these parallel Marks' threefold definition: importance of faith relates to belief, frequency of prayer relates to practice, and worship attendance relates to community. Based on the interconnection of these constructs, I recommend using Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (and PPCT) and Marks' definition (beliefs, practices, and community) to gain a complete understanding of religious phenomena in development.

Conclusion

The field of human development is now contributing to our understanding of faith development largely through longitudinal, quantitative studies. Within the past 10 years, social scientists have begun to call for more research on the development of religiosity (Benson, et al.,

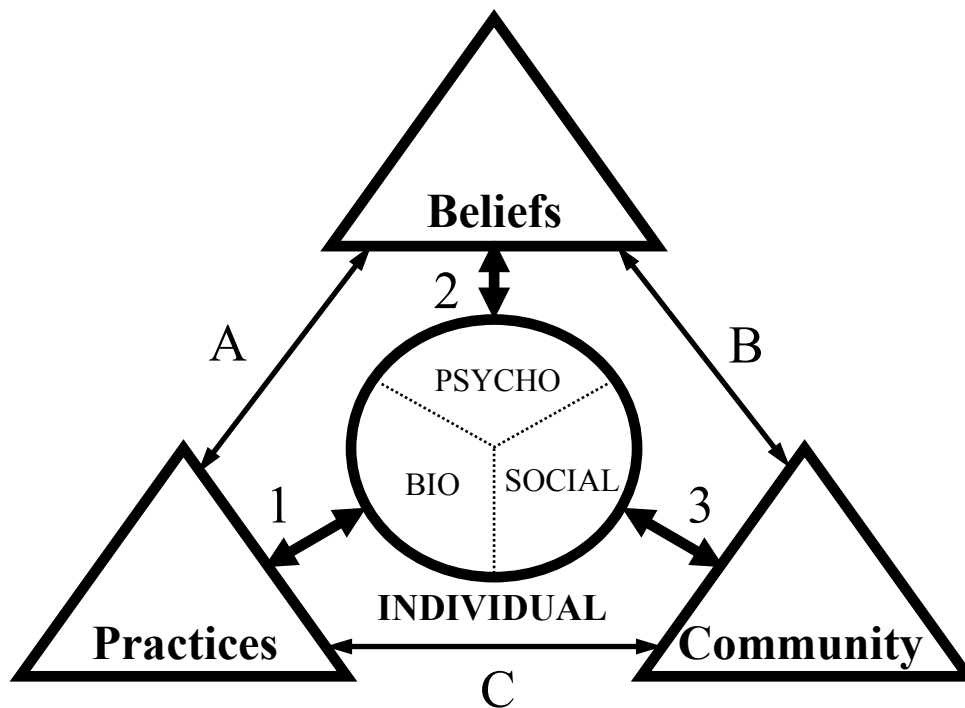


Figure 2. Research connections between religious beliefs, practices, and communities and individual biological, psychological, and social health.¹

Table 3

The Bio-psycho-social Person Compared to the Models of Bronfenbrenner, Marks & Dollahite, and Smith & Snell

Individual Aspects	Bronfenbrenner	Marks & Dollahite	Smith & Snell
Biological	Activity	Practice	Frequency of Prayer
Psychological	Role	Belief	Importance of Faith
Social	Relationship	Community	Attendance at Worship

¹ From "Religion and bio-psycho-social health: A review and conceptual model," by L. Marks, 2005, *Journal of Religion & Health*, 44(2), p. 177. Copyright 2005 by Journal of Religion & Health. Reprinted with permission.

2003; Dollahite et al., 2004; King, 2003; Smith & Snell, 2009). Responding to this call, research studies have revealed several important findings about faith development. For instance, research reveals that parents contribute significantly to the faith development of their children (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003; Smith & Denton, 2005). Research suggests that religiosity tends to decline in emerging adulthood but increase with family formation (Petts, 2009; Smith & Snell, 2009). Research also reveals that individuals and families benefit from religiosity both directly through immediate benefits and indirectly through life outcomes (Laird et al., 2010; Smith & Snell, 2009). [Dr. Marks—I tinkered with this whole section, rearranging paragraphs and sentences into a more convincing argument as Dr. Baumgartner suggested. Not all of that is bolded.]

Additionally, there is a strong empirical foundation about the cognitive and identity development of adolescents and emerging adults. For example, adolescents have newly acquired cognitive skills that include abstract and hypothetical thinking. They are also able to examine all aspects of a problem and transform it (Lerner, 2002). Adolescents are often limited in their thinking by egocentrism, specifically through centrism, the imaginary audience, and the personal fable. The primary task of adolescents is to establish their identity; however, this task may be extended into emerging adulthood (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). Adolescents think critically about their faith as they examine ideologies and form close ties to significant people of faith (Fowler & Dell, 2006). Emerging adults continue to develop cognitively, as is demonstrated by pragmatic, dialectical, and reflective thinking (Arnett, 2010). Emerging adults tend to focus on themselves, but they are not limited by egocentrism in the same way that adolescents are. The primary task of emerging adults who have established their identity is to form an intimate union with another person (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). Emerging adults also reevaluate their former beliefs before forming long-term commitments to ideologies (Fowler & Dell, 2006).

Furthermore, there is a large theoretical base for future research on adolescent and emerging adult religiosity. Erikson, Fowler, and Bronfenbrenner built on the work of Piaget in their respective theories (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Fowler, 1981; Erikson & Erikson, 1997). The theoretical unity of cognition, identity, and faith is valuable to our understanding of the whole person who develops through contextual interactions over time. Future researchers of religiosity would be wise to consider the developmental needs of adolescents and emerging adults as they examine religiosity through Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Researchers could use the Marks and Dollahite (2004) definition of religiosity to search for the influence of beliefs, practices, and communities on the contextual interactions of adolescents and emerging adults.

Despite this headway, there are still many questions about faith development that remain unanswered. Not only is more research needed in general, but researchers are calling for new information about the specific, influential mechanisms and processes that underscore the development of religiosity and that account for its outcomes (Dollahite et al., 2004). Previous research focused largely on single-item measures of religiosity, such as frequency of worship attendance, which failed to capture the depth and diversity of religious experience (Schwartz, 2006). For this reason, researchers must use multiple measures and new variables to study the processes and mechanisms of religiosity (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003; Laird, et al., 2010; Mahoney, et al., 2003; Smith & Snell, 2009; Zinnbauer, et al., 1999). Qualitative methods may be particularly useful to test models of religiosity (Poll & Smith, 2003; Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). Furthermore, scholars note that the impact of the family context in particular must be better understood, as there is much we still do not know about religious socialization within the home (Mahoney, et al., 2003; Petts, 2009). Additional contexts deserving further study also include the religious community (King, 2003) and peers (Schwartz, 2006). A few new studies

have examined the role of the individual in the development of religiosity, most notably by studying developmental trajectories (Petts, 2009; Smith & Snell, 2009), although more work is needed. Finally, many of our existing studies are limited to Judeo-Christian samples that exclude other religious traditions (Dollahite et al., 2004). This limitation impairs our understanding of the potential diversity of religious processes.

Better understanding of the processes and mechanisms of the development of religiosity will strengthen our understanding of holistic human development. Also, increasing our knowledge about the development of religiosity will enable the scientific community to support the efforts of parents and religious communities to provide better care for their adolescents and, hopefully, improve the life outcomes of future generations.

Chapter 3 - Method

Research Questions

The current study seeks to examine the role of developmental context on faith development. Specifically, the current study examines whether some contexts support or hinder faith development, whether there is consistency of high religiosity across multiple contexts, and what role the individual has on his or her own faith development. These topics will be explored using in-depth, qualitative interviews that allow participants to freely share their thoughts about their faith and lives.

Qualitative Research

To address the questions and hypotheses above, the researcher analyzed and coded verbatim interview transcripts from Dollahite, Layton, Bahr, Walker, & Thatcher (2009), which was gathered in 2002 (New England subsample). Qualitative research is particularly suited to exploratory research questions (Singleton & Straits, 2010). Furthermore, qualitative research is recommended for studying religiosity because it allows respondents to use their own words to describe their “meanings, processes, and relationships that are difficult to obtain through other approaches” (Marks, 2004, p. 219).

Sample and Procedures

The sample used for the present study was collected in 2002 in a New England community. This community is generally characterized by low religiosity, high educational attainment, and high socioeconomic status. The interviewer contacted local religious institutions for potential participants. The referred participants were those considered to be the most religious by the religious leaders at each institution. In this way, the highly religious families of a religious community were contacted, and interviews were scheduled. The participants represent a variety

of faith traditions including Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and New World faiths (Latter Day Saints/Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses; Dollahite et al., 2009). All interviews occurred in the family home or, on occasion, the religious institution of which the family had membership. Families were given a copy of the interview questions before the interview and had the option of ending the interview at any point.

For the present study, interviews were selected from the original sample based on child-participant age. The original sample include child participants ages 10 to 25. However, because the present study focuses on adolescents (ages 12-17) and emerging adults (ages 18-25), younger participants (ages 10-11) were not included in the analysis. This reduced the total original sample from 32 families to a subsample of 30 families for the present study. The average age of fathers in the subsample was 47 years and the average age for mothers was 45 years. There were 18 male children interviewed in the subsample; their average was 16 years. There were 25 female children interviewed in the subsample; their average age was 16 years. Most families were first marriages for both spouses (29 families) and most families had between 2 and 4 children (26 families). Ethnically, 21 families were Caucasian, 2 families were African American, 2 families were Hispanic, and 5 families were other ethnicities (Asian-descent, Indian, or other). The subsample includes 13 Protestant families, 3 Catholic families, 4 Islamic families, 4 Jewish families, and 6 families of New World faiths. For a summary of the demographic information of the subsample, see Table 4. All personal, identifying information of the participants, including their names, has been changed to protect their privacy. As much as possible, the words of the participants have been unaltered. In some cases repeated words were removed for clarity when written. Occasionally brackets were used to identify referents for vague pronouns or to clarify sentences taken from larger dialogues. Ellipses were used to condense long speeches or to indicate a pause in speech. Of the 43 adolescents and emerging adults in the subsample, 31

Table 4

Demographic Information of Participants in Subsample

	Religious Tradition	Ethnicity	Father Age	Mother	Male Child	Female	Number of Children
1	Episcopalian	White	45	43	14		3
2	Latter Day Saint	White	56	55		16	3
3	Latter Day Saint	White	55	51	16		4
4	Latter Day Saint	White	40	35		14	4
5	Muslim	East Indian	48	46		19	3
6	Baptist	White	47	47	21 17		2
7	Methodist	White	47	48		12	2
8	Latter Day Saint	White	38	39		13	3
9	Congregational	White	52	50	15		2
10	Baptist	White	40	44		17	2
11	Jehovah's Witness	White	62	55		25	2
12	Catholic	White	47	41	15		4
						13	
13	Muslim	Asian/White	46	46		17	3
14	Catholic	White	43	42	15 14		5
15	Baptist	White	43	45	18		4
16	Jewish (Modern Orthodox)	White	47	48	20		3
						17	
17	Methodist	Black	50	49		16	1
18	Baptist	White	46	44		18 16	3
19	Sabbath Keeping Christian	Native American/ White	43	42	18	20 16 14	7
20	Jewish	White	52	48	19 18 15		3
21	Jehovah's Witness	White	41	38		19 16	2
22	Jewish	--	53	52		17	2
23	Episcopalian	White	51	50	15		2
24	Muslim	East Indian	58	54		20	7
25	Jewish (Orthodox)	White	42	38	14		7
26	Evangelical Christian	White	45	41		15	2
27	Lutheran	White	46	43		15	
28	Catholic	Hispanic	46	43	15		2
29	Muslim	Black	46	46		18 17 14	11
30	Pentecostal	Puerto Rican	37	37	16		2
Summary:		Average:	47	45	16	16	3.4
		Minimum:	37	35	14	12	1
		Maximum:	62	55	21	25	11
		Total Number:	30	30	18	25	100
Total Individuals Interviewed Subsample:			103				

Note: Families are listed in chronological order of interview.

(72%) are presented through direct quotes in the current study.

Interview Schedule

All interviews were semi-structured and conducted in the family home or religious institution of membership. Interview length generally varied in time from one to two hours. Typically the first half of the interview featured marriage-focused questions for the husband and wife only, followed by family-focused questions for the husband, wife, and children ages 10 to 25 years. Not all children in the family were present for every interview due to age limitations or schedule conflicts. Some interviews were shorter in length due to time constraints of the participants. Participants often had a copy of the interview questions with them at the time of the interview and worked with the interviewer to address each question. When needed, the interviewer would ask follow-up or clarifying questions (such as, “What meaning does that have for you?” or “Can you tell me more about what that was like?”) to gain further understanding of the participant’s response.

Coding

Measures

Both *religiosity* and *faith* were operationalized as a single concept composed of three elements: beliefs, behaviors, and religious community (Dollahite & Marks, 2009). Beliefs are faith-based beliefs, meanings, and views. Behaviors are religiously sanctioned actions such as prayer, fasting, scripture study, meditation, traditions, or abstinences. Religious community referred to involvement, relationships, and support from one’s congregation or religious group. *Contexts* referred to various developmental contexts from Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of human development, such as family/home, extended family, religious community, school, peers,

city, and culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). An individual's *autonomy* was operationalized as their own activity in shaping their development (Lerner, 2002).

Analysis

A combination of analytic induction and grounded theory was used to analyze each interview. In respect to analytic induction, each interview was coded initially according to developmental context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and the three elements of religiosity (Dollahite & Marks, 2009). Specifically, during initial coding of the transcripts, statements were labeled according to both faith element and context. For example, popular codes included *personal beliefs*, *personal practices*, *family practices*, *peers*, *school*, and *religious community*. Grounded theory was also used during initial coding to generate codes that did not relate specifically to contexts or religiosity. Generation of new codes ceased after half of the transcripts were coded. Once the initial coding of all transcripts was completed, codes were tallied and counted. The researcher examined the codes for similarities and collapsed some codes into larger, more unified groups. After this, several codes were selected for continued analysis. These selected codes were compiled, such that all statements coded as "personal practice" were gathered in a new document. The same was done for each code used in this analysis.

Following this compilation, grounded theory was used to allow themes to emerge from the data. Themes and core ideas were identified relating to each initial code. This allowed the nuanced and multifaceted nature of each code to emerge. Counter examples were also noted during this phase; previously, counter examples were not identified in order to prevent researcher bias toward ideas. For example, the "peers" code was not labeled as supportive or challenging until the second round of coding so that the researcher would remain open to various descriptions of peer relationships. After this second round of coding, all new codes were listed in a single document to reveal the relationships between the new codes. Once the relationships between

codes were identified, the researcher compared the findings to previous research and theory about adolescent and emerging adult religiosity.

Qualitative Methodological Considerations

Validity and Reliability

The data for the present study was collected by an experienced interviewer. This interviewer graciously provided the researcher with the transcripts of his interviews. Because the researcher was not present in the interviews and has not met the participants, it is possible that their true meaning was not fully captured in this research. To combat this limitation, the original interviewer, who has also worked extensively with this data, reviewed the present study for validity and reliability. The interviewer was not present during the researcher's coding and analysis, such that there was no chance for the interviewer to influence the interpretation of the researcher, or vice versa. Because the interviewer supports the researcher's findings in the present study, the results are valid and reliable.

Reflexivity

Religion is deeply personal and often influences one's worldview. Furthermore, qualitative analysis by nature is subject to researcher bias. For this reason I, the researcher, wish to disclose that I am is a devout Christian. I was raised in the Lutheran church, but currently attend a Presbyterian church. Before beginning this study, I was employed at a church, and though not ordained, have spent many years in youth ministry. My questions about faith development motivated this study, as it is partially an attempt to bring scientific study to a domain that is largely non-academic, opinion-based, and evidence deficient. In that light, I have tried to be objective and give each voice and faith a full hearing. I intentionally chose codes and concepts that apply to many faith traditions (beliefs, practices, and communities, for example).

Furthermore, the original interviewer and my advisor are not of my same faith. These two individuals have helped me to give a fair hearing and equal representation to all participants.

Limitations

This study is limited by its specific population. Results cannot be extrapolated to moderately or nonreligious adolescent or emerging adult populations. Furthermore, the sample is not nationally representative. Although the population of study represents a diverse region of the United States, it fails to represent the nation. Thus, the results of this study are not generalizable to less religious populations or those who have different regions of residence. Additionally, some might argue that this method of interviewing is weak because individuals are interviewed in families and not separately. This argument is based in the concern that individuals, particularly children, will not reply honestly in the presence of others, often their parents, for fear of some social consequence, such as punishment. However, the researcher considers family-based interviewing a strength because a family is a unit of individuals who are able to reconstruct memories collectively and more clearly explain themselves as both a group and individuals (Dollahite et al., 2009; Garland, 2002). Often family members pieced stories together collectively, as will be demonstrated in the following results. In addition to collective memories and prompting each other to answer the questions (which was particularly helpful with certain adolescents), family-based interviewing also allows the interviewer a special glimpse into the family context itself, as social relationships are observed during the interview. The way that families interact and their co-constructed dialogue reveals much about the warmth, acceptance, and discipline in the home. Furthermore, as the family context is consistently cited as a critical source of faith development (Armet, 2009; Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003; Flor & Knapp, 2001; Garland, 2002; Petts, 2009; Schwartz, 2006; Smith & Denton, 2005; Smith & Snell, 2009;

Templeton & Eccles, 2006), it is appropriate to research faith development through family-based interviews.

Chapter 4 - Results

The results of the present study are grouped according to the three constructs of religiosity: beliefs, practices, and community (Dollahite & Marks, 2009). Due to the focus of the present study, the personal thoughts, ideas, actions, and decisions of the adolescent and emerging adult participants were of particular interest. Personal beliefs and behaviors that are based in religion carry significant weight because they are autonomously chosen by the individual. As such, the meaning of personal beliefs and personal practices will be discussed. Additionally, the adolescents and emerging adults in this study identified their religious community, school, and peers as the three most salient developmental contexts of their lives. All three of these contexts had a dynamic impact on the adolescent or emerging adult's faith development; often the impact was positive in nature, but sometimes it was not. These three contexts of community—religious community, school, and peers—will be discussed first.

Theme 1: Contexts

The adolescent and emerging adult participants frequently discussed the influence of three contexts, their peers, school, and religious community, on their faith development.

A. Peers

On the whole, the highly religious adolescents and emerging adults in this study had a strong feeling of being different from the majority of their peers. Many discussed their keen awareness that they had different beliefs and opinions than their peers. Specifically, the participants described difference in their choices and behaviors—often their peers would engage in negative or inappropriate behavior in which these highly religious adolescents and emerging adults choose not to participate. Daniel², a 19-year-old Jewish male, said,

² Participant names and identifying information have been changed to protect their privacy.

Some of my friends would use drugs occasionally, and drinking. Instead of that, I decided I'm going to go to Israel. And being in Israel definitely helped me. I got to learn from why I was there and read a lot. It just, it helped me think that I want to be religious. I don't want to do anything else.

Similarly, Kaitlin, a 25-year-old Jehovah's Witness said,

I would never feel comfortable going somewhere where drinking was going on, either illegal drinking or over drinking even if it was legal. I wouldn't be comfortable going somewhere where the music bothered my conscience [through the] the lyrical content. So that prevented me from participating in some things that I may have otherwise in school, while I was in school.

Later, when asked "Which part of living your faith is most challenging or difficult for the children in the family?" Kaitlin replied, "Being different." Her father echoed her words, "Being different I think is probably the hardest." Finally, a 16-year-old Mormon boy named Tyler described his friends' strange reaction when he arrived at a party. Apparently his friends thought he should not participate in the events at the party.

Mother: You know, it's like going to that party that you did the other night.

Tyler: Yeah.

Mother: He'd never been to a party and he just stopped by to just to see what it was like, and knocked on the door and somebody said...

Tyler: And before I even got in the door I, some kid goes, "What are you doing here, Tyler?" You know, like, "We should beat him up for just being here." And just because I walked in, people were surprised to see me, like "What are you doing here?" And they just, they all knew, and I guess I didn't, what was going to happen later on that night. I think they have a different attitude.

Several adolescents also discussed the negative impact that being highly religious has on their social lives. These adolescents mentioned feeling isolated, left out, and forgotten. A 17-year-old Jewish girl named Ruth said,

I think the strongest sort of challenges come from when you feel like being Jewish like isolates you from your friends, or isolates you from the

surrounding area, or that having any sort of like strong faith isolates you.... I think if I were even more observant it would even be more difficult, like... “Why can’t you eat shrimp?” “Well it has, you can’t eat the shell.” “Why can’t you eat the shell?” “Well it’s in Deuteronomy,” and that sort of thing. [And every] reception at my dad’s place of work, oh it’s shrimp or it’s bacon, or it’s meat and cheese together, and that’s fine, but it’s just like.... they kind of disregard [our religion] I think, and I don’t think it’s on purpose. I think that’s what makes it difficult, the sort of feeling left out of it, or feeling that you’re going to miss something big because it’s on a Saturday and you just go somewhere else. And I think that’s why it’s difficult. And it is much easier, especially living in a town like this, to just not do anything. And that’s hard.

An 18-year-old Protestant female named Anna described the similar impact her faith had on her socially.

I feel like I’ve really just not had a very active social life, because almost everything that most of my friends at school are doing is something that I don’t feel would be glorifying God.... I feel like there are definitely a lot of things that I don’t do, or that I do because of my faith. And even though a lot of people might look at that and say, “Oh man, do you have any fun?” and it might seem like a sacrifice to a lot of people who don’t understand, [who] don’t know us.

Not all interaction with peers was negative for highly religious adolescents and emerging adults, however. Many described the social support they received from their closest friends. This support, which was more proximal than the feelings of isolation from the larger peer group, encouraged the participants. When asked why attending church was so meaningful, Ashley, a 15-year-old Lutheran, contrasted her understanding of church with that of her friends’. She sees a clear distinction between the meaning of church for herself and her peers, but she also talks freely to her friends about it without feeling ashamed or isolated.

Ashley: Just that every Sunday we go. It shows effort, like it’s a show of faith. Like some of my friends say, “Wow, you go *every* Sunday? That’s pretty amazing.” Because they’ll go to church twice a year or something. And then, I would say, the way we look at Christmas, because we try to think of Christmas, instead of just as giving presents and a family time, as more of a religious time. Whereas most of my friends, they think of it as just kind of like a holiday.

Interviewer: So your friends know you as a religious person?

Ashley: Yeah. They know that I'm religious and that I teach Sunday School and all that.

John, a 15-year-old Episcopalian male, took the idea of his friends supporting his faith to a new level when he said they would not be good friends if they did not support him.

A lot of my friends probably don't know that I go to church every Sunday. I mean, I'm not like, "Oh I go to church every Sunday. Look at me: I'm cool." But I mean, if they'd ask I'd say, "Yeah, I go to church." And if they had a problem with that, I don't think they'd be very good friends.

Likewise, Megan, a 14-year-old Mormon described the specific ways her friends respect her faith. Megan's parents carefully monitor what cultural influences Megan experiences, and her friends are mindful of that.

So like, my close friends respect me though. And they'll sometimes, you know, of course they'll want to go see this movie, and they know I couldn't come [because of its rating], so they'll go see it. But then other times they'll call and say, "Do you want to see this movie or this movie?" and it'll just be two PG's. So they know that I can't see the PG-13's.

Highly religious adolescents and emerging adults also saw a difference between themselves and their peers in their home lives. The highly religious participants in this study observed more strife and arguments in the homes of their less religious peers. A 17-year-old Asian-American Muslim female named Zeenat described her relationship with her parents in sharp contrast to her peers' relationships with their parents.

In Islam, there's rights and duties upon the parents to the child and the child to the parents. And you know, my right and duties are that I have to respect my parents. If my parents happen to be non-Muslim, I still have the obligation to be kind to them, but being that we're of the same faith, I have to be kind, I have to obey them, no matter what, except in the case that they would ask me to do something against Islam. And because there's that mutual thing that I respect them and they are very merciful upon me, and they guide me, I have a peaceful relationship with them. And there's a lot of understanding. And I see a lot of other kids at school, you know, they fight with their mom and dad every day. Or they absolutely just take no, no heed to what their parents say; and they get in a lot of trouble. Or they're sneaking around behind their [parents'] back. I don't really feel the need to do that, because there's a mutual

understanding. And I understand what they say; there's a wisdom behind it and I understand what that is. And I know that it's better for me. If I don't understand it now, I just let it go, because I'm sure I'll understand it tomorrow or ten years from now.

One 16-year-old female African American Methodist named Natalie described a subtle difference in the way she related to her parents during disagreements that distinguished her from her friends.

I also think this is cultural in a way, but I think a lot of my friends swear at their parents or swear in the presence of their parents, and I could never, ever, ever get away with that.... And so I think that interactions, and specifically the words that you use with people when you're arguing, could have an effect. Because some words you're going to remember that someone said that to you and a lot of words I just don't say, because of my religion; and I think a lot of people don't have that sort of restriction. Like they know, they just don't have any reason to not.... Don't get me wrong, I say hurtful things, but I think it's specific words. I don't say as many as I think some of my friends do when they argue with their parents.

Another girl mentioned that she sometimes wishes she had the freedom that her friends have, even though she knows her parents are trying to do what is best for her. Mary, a 16-year-old of Native-American decent and a Sabbath-Keeping Christian said,

Sometimes I actually feel lesser than my friends because they get to do whatever they want. Their parents don't really care where they go. They don't ask, "Where you going? When are you going to be home? What's the number where you're going to be so I can call you?" It kind of amazes me that they can turn on the TV and watch whatever they want. They can go wherever they want. They can buy whatever they want. I wish I could do that, but....

Not all adolescents and emerging adults were envious of their peers. Some had observed differences in the way religion was practiced in their home and their friends' homes, noting the dramatic differences in the outcomes as well. Despite the parents' best intentions, these friends turned away from religion in response to their parents' forcefulness. When asked about his future hopes about a family of his own, Paul, an 18-year-old Baptist, told a story about one of his friends.

I don't want to take it to the extreme, but I've seen how some of my friends have acted, where their parents are slamming Bible verses in their face, and really not loving them, not helping them grow. It's more like forceful thing, at unnecessary times, when it really would have been helpful just for them to sit down and talk with their kid. And I definitely don't want that to happen [when I'm a parent someday], because I've seen too many friends just go off the deep end, so to speak, and try to live lives for themselves. And I have a friend who's, thankfully he's going to end up with no criminal record, but he just got out of house arrest and serving a little bit of jail time for stealing a car at age 17. And you know, a lot of that's his own personal choices, but I can also relate it to the way, five years ago, his parents handled things that he was struggling with, the ways that they handled them weren't helpful. So that's sort of a personal example, but I definitely hope I'll bring my kids up like my parents brought me up.

Suzanne, a 17-year-old Baptist also described the difference between her home life and that of her friends'.

One of the biggest things that I see in my friends who have very poor relationships with their parents, is a lot of times because their parents are like, "No you can't do that, because I said so," or whatever, when it's totally irrational. And they may do it when it's good for the kid also, but when it's irrational, it robs trust out of that relationship. And I think that's like one of the big things. I remember my mom talking about that when I became a teenager, and explaining that to me that if I was going to be trustworthy, then I would be trusted.... I know that I've seen that in friends' families...parents are just very controlling and they kind of take like the rules and the guidelines of scripture, and kind of like beat their kids over the head with it, you know, it's not very healthy at all.

This strong identification of differences between themselves and the larger peer group is noteworthy due to the primary developmental task of adolescence: establishing one's identity (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). For highly religious adolescents and emerging adults, their identity—the key definition of themselves—pivots around their religion. These adolescents and emerging adults see themselves as distinct from their larger peer group. This distinction influences their social experiences as well as their interactions with their parents. This distinction is further emphasized through their experience in school.

B. School

The adolescents and emerging adults in this sample described unique experiences in public schools that are directly tied to their identity as highly religious people. Some experienced conflict with school staff and curriculum that was anti-religious in nature. Others felt support from the school system. Still others withdrew from public schools and chose either homeschooling or private school. A few remain in public schools as a witness for their faith, such as Megan, a 14-year-old Mormon who recently moved to New England from Utah,

Well, definitely, like people know, especially this year, in history class, we were studying how the Mormons moved from New York and came to Utah. And they knew, a lot of people know that I moved from Utah to [here], and so they know that I'm or they ask if I'm a Mormon. And so a lot of people know that I'm a Mormon; and I'm the only one in the grade. So I have like a responsibility to be an example and just show my faith and what I believe in through what I do.

Megan feels a responsibility to represent her faith well in the public schools. Anna, the Methodist female who spoke previously about the impact of her faith on her social life, told about her effort to pray with some friends at school before classes began.

It's just been a little group of mostly Christian people, but I think some people maybe who don't have much faith come once in a while. It's people who feel like it's important to have people praying in the school whether it's a little, tiny group of people and we [only] meet for half an hour or something.... We've had some opposition sometimes, principals who say, "It's controversial and we don't want it." But then we tell them, "Well, it's constitutionally protected, so you decide." ...[Other groups can be] an established club, [but] we're just a meeting. We're allowed to use a room if we can get a teacher who will let us use a room. I think having some prayer in the school is encouraging.

A Muslim student also asked to pray in school. As she told her story, Nadia, who is an East Indian 19-years-old, emphasized the importance of daily prayer in the Islamic faith.

Nadia: Well, basically, we pray five times a day. And usually two of those prayers are, well in the wintertime, two of them are during school hours.³

³ The Muslim practice of praying five times each day is scheduled according to daylight hours, thus in the winter when days are shorter, two prayer times occur during the school day.

And so what I would do is during lunchtime or whenever I didn't have a class, I had already talked to the principal, and they gave me a room where I could go pray. And so I would just go do that.

Interviewer: Were you the only Muslim person in the school?

Nadia: I was the only Muslim girl who practiced.

Other students found the school faculty, administration, and curriculum less accommodating than Nadia did. In particular, Chelsea, a 15-year-old Protestant female, recalled an assignment in elementary school that directly clashed with one of the tenets of her faith: to have no other gods before hers.

Chelsea: Well there's this inner battle between what you feel is right and what you want to do. In elementary school, I think that was the hardest time for my faith... I didn't know any Christians in my school. And it was hard for me to be the odd one out and everything. But now it's not so hard.

Interviewer: So how did that manifest itself when you were in elementary school? I guess I didn't even realize that most kids in elementary school even talk about faith much in their school situation.

Chelsea: In third grade we were supposed to make our own gods, and that was something that, you know, as a Christian family, we didn't want to do.

Interviewer: Make your own gods?

Mother: They were studying Native Americans.... There's a lot of things. That was a good example, where we didn't want her to do that. So then it becomes an issue because...

Interviewer: Right, all the other kids are...

Mother: You try to write a note to the teacher, or you talk to the teacher.... And there was...the alternative life-style conversations, and getting into sex education. We kept her out of it. So people would know. It was obvious that she was different.

Ruth, who spoke earlier about the unintentional disregard for Jewish customs by the larger culture, also experienced similar conflict with her public school. Ruth's conflict involved a required band trip that overlapped with Passover, one of the most important of Jewish holidays.

We had a combined chorus, orchestra, and band trip. It was an overnight, two-night over night. And it's a required trip because we perform on it, and performance is a part of your grade and this stuff. And they help you pay for it, and that's fine. But the last day of the trip was first day of Passover, and we were getting back, 6 or 7, which is really, it's late to start a Seder [Passover meal], even if you're having one here, it's way too late if you need to travel anywhere else to get it. And I was not the only Jewish person on the trip, I would say there were a dozen or so, at least a dozen or so that had to leave. So, we got [there], we gave our performances, and while everyone else had free time, on the third day, an entire day of free time and came back late at night, we got up at 4 in the morning and took a train back home to get here. The school paid for the train and they gave us a chaperone, but it was like, couldn't you have looked at the calendar? It's Passover, like it's not a strange, a strange holiday... And I think that's very typical. Our graduation is on a Friday night... I always stay out for two days of Rosh Hashanah, most people don't. You know, I have to make up that work.... I think it's a kind of disregard for Jewish holidays, and the importance of Jewish holidays. You know, Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah are absences from school; those are three [absences]. If you're sick, [you can] get a waiver and that sort of deal.

Ruth's school's policy routinely challenges her religious practice. Not only are required events scheduled on some holy days, but also holy days are unexcused absences. Many schools have stringent sanctions for students who are truant and have too many unexcused absences; Ruth, however, is missing school for religious reasons and her school failed to differentiate between truancy and religious practice.

For this reason and others, highly religious families sometimes choose to send their children to private, faith-based schools that recognize and support religious practice. When asked, "What part of living your religion is the most challenging or difficult?" David, a 15-year-old Jewish male, replied,

David: I'd say going to private schools right now.

Interviewer: Really? Why is that?

David: Because it just takes up the whole entire day. That, like, some of my friends that don't go to private, Jewish schools, get out at 2:30 and have the whole day in front of them to do whatever they want. Do homework early.

Interviewer: What time do you start in the morning?

David: I start, well I leave here around 7:00, and then I get home at around 6:00.

Interviewer: Really? Wow. And that's, so that's because it's doing both Jewish subjects and secular subjects?

David: Every day.

Father: It's also a 45-minute to an hour drive.

David: But if I was going to a public school, I'd have like a 10 minute commute—maybe. I'd get home 2:30.

David's family believes this sacrifice is worthwhile because they want their son to know the richness of his faith. They chose to enroll him in a school that is an hour away because the curriculum includes Jewish topics. Mary's parents (Sabbath Keeping Christian) homeschool their children. For a few years, the children were in public schools, but the environment was not supportive of one of the family's values: compassion.

Mother: There were a lot of things and what really upset me was Mary came home crying because a lunch lady threw a kid against the wall. And she was upset for a whole night crying about this incident that she saw. And I called the assistant superintendent at the time and said, "What's going on here?" And he said, "Well, they have to become desensitized to those kinds of things." And I said, "I'm raising kids to be sensitive to people's needs and..."

Father: Suffering.

Mother: Yeah, "To care about people." And he told me, "Once they were..." and I said, "I don't really want a part of this." And I realize that our family was, it seemed to be falling apart. And when I pulled them out of school, I had a teacher tell me that one of my children was a rose among the thorns. She cried. She mentioned the kids during... I had teachers applaud me and say, "I'm glad you're doing this. This is the best thing that you can do."

Mary's parents are not religious extremists who think that the public school system is filled with evil. Rather, these parents love their children deeply and they are trying to raise responsible, caring children. These highly religious parents are trying desperately to do the best thing for their

children, as are many less religious parents. However, for Mary's parents, the public school environment proved too hurtful for the children to remain enrolled. When Mary's mother said, "And I realize that our family was, it seemed to be falling apart," she revealed that the influence of the school environment was spilling over into their home environment. The influence of this mesosystem context led the family to withdraw from public education and turn to homeschooling (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

C. Religious Community

In sharp contrast to the public schools' generally negative influence, the religious community reportedly provided a positive influence on highly religious adolescents and emerging adults. Most adolescents and emerging adults described their religious community as warm, caring, supportive, and meaningful. Jennifer, a 12-year old Methodist female said, "There's a lot of nice people at our church." Likewise, Samina, a 25-year-old East-Indian Muslim female described the way her religious community felt like home. She said, "Ramadan's really special too. [It's] a time when everybody is together, not just family, but friends, and the community and the Mosque is, it's like a second home, ultimately." Suzanne, who spoke earlier about her peers' parents, also described how the way she views God is shaped by the powerful, long-lasting relationships in her religious community.

Besides having a personal relationship with God, which is like the main thing that I think about my faith, one of the other really big things is community. There's like a lot of the areas in the church that I'm involved with that are community based... And with having lifetime friends in this church that came and visited me when I was born in the hospital, having that connection with people just your whole entire life, and having them know you that well, just really is very powerful.

Kaitlin, the 25-year-old Jehovah's Witness who feels so different from her peers, finds support from her religious community and their worship experiences.

Looking at our daily and our weekly routine I would describe every aspect of our worship as a spiritual experience. Especially when we congregate at the Kingdom Hall. We feel that that is a place where God does give that Holy Spirit to those who are in attendance and worshipping Him.

Aside from being a spiritually meaningful place, the adolescents and emerging adults in this sample reportedly received practical help from members of their religious community as well. Several adolescents found comfort in having a supportive environment to help them navigate the challenges of teenage life. Specifically, Megan, a 14-year-old Mormon female, described the help she received from participating in a peer group at her religious community.

[It] strengthens you, it gives you the extra boost to get through your week and you learn different things from each girl or each boy. You learn how they deal with things and you can use it in your life as well.

Justin, an 18-year-old Sabbath-Keeping Christian male of Native American decent, described the support he received from adults at his religious community.

When I have a hard time or something, I have people from church who I can e-mail and talk to. It helps a lot, but you don't really know at the time because you're kind of feeling sorry for yourself or whatever. But I think it helps a lot.

Naming one particular member, Justin continued, "He helps me a lot."

However, the religious community is not always a place of warmth, support, and deep meaning. Sometimes the people within religious communities make choices that end up hurting the feelings of other members. When this happens to adolescents and emerging adults, who are in the process of forming lifelong commitments to individuals, ideas, and institutions, the results can be devastating. Natalie, a 16-year-old African American Methodist female, told a story about a time that her religious community treated her unfairly.

Natalie: There was a while back, I would say like a couple months ago [when] they said I couldn't teach anymore because I was too young, although they allowed the pastor's son to teach, even though he was under 18. And they said that I was under 18, so I got really mad, and I didn't want to go to church. And so I didn't go.

Interviewer: Do you mean “they” meaning the pastor, or “they” meaning your folks?

Natalie: No, “they” meaning the church committee or something, not the pastor. I don’t think our pastor would have minded at all. But apparently they didn’t ask his son what age he was, even though we were both under 18. So I was very mad and I didn’t want to go to church for... I didn’t go to church for a couple months, two or three months. And [my parents] said, “We really want you to come, everybody misses you and asks about you.” And I said, “You know, I just don’t want to go, I don’t feel comfortable.” And then one day I decided to go back and [I] hopped in the car and went.

Mother: That was an amazing act of forgiveness on your part.

For Natalie, this experience was hurtful, but not devastating. Her faith was shaken, but not defeated. It is possible to imagine that the outcome would have been different for someone who was less religious than Natalie when this event began. Perhaps that adolescent would not have returned to the religious community as Natalie did. But, as her mother pointed out, she forgave the church committee and returned to worship. During the course of the interview, Natalie mentioned this story not to defame her religious community but as an example of her parents’ patience with her. She was grateful that they gave her the freedom to decide if she wanted to attend church or not. In this respect, many adolescents and emerging adults are similar to Natalie: they also have the freedom to decide if they participate in their religious community or not. Most of them agree with Ashley, a 15-year-old Lutheran female, who said, “As I’ve gotten older, I like church better.” To which her mother added, “Ashley gets upset if we for some reason skipped.”

Theme 2: Personal Beliefs

Just as the religious community seems to provide adolescents and emerging adults with support, so do their religious beliefs. For the highly religious adolescents and emerging adults in this sample their personal beliefs offer both a source of guidance and of identity. These

adolescents and emerging adults report receiving comfort and guidance from both the divine being and the teachings of their various religious traditions. Also, their self-conception is so deeply rooted in their religious beliefs that many cannot think of themselves apart from their beliefs. Before examining the influence of religious beliefs on identity, the comfort and guidance religious beliefs provide will be discussed.

A. Belief Provides Comfort and Guidance

One example of the adolescents and emerging adults in this sample receiving comfort occurred during times of grief. When they lost loved ones, these adolescents and emerging adults reported turning to God for comfort. While describing the death of her grandfather, who lived in her home at the time, an 18-year-old Protestant named Anna said, “It was really sad, but I think through the whole thing God did so many things that made us feel like He was really there and He really cared about us and that what was happening was okay.” Similarly, Natalie, a 16-year-old African American Methodist shared a story about the recent death of a friend.

I think that a lot of my ability to deal with [grief] comes from God. Just recently my friend died, a couple weeks ago. I found out that he went to the camp that I went to for like 2 years. And I found out from another friend that it was in a youth group that he was saved, and I was so happy to hear that. And so I think that seeing God work in their lives comforts me, like knowing my grandmother believed in God, my uncles, my aunts, everybody believed in God. That makes me feel better. And additionally being able to talk to God and honestly being able to say, “I’m really mad at you! You can’t take them from me. I love these people. What’s wrong with you? What are you doing?” Just being able to always talk to someone and say how you feel, honestly, without having to lie [helps me]. Because He knows anyway, so there’s really no point in lying.

Natalie’s story reveals an intimacy in her relationship with God; she communicates with him in a personal way. This belief in the nearness of God comforts her in times of grief and trouble.

Megan, a 14-year-old Mormon, also found comfort from her belief in heaven. However, for

Megan, heaven is more than a place for people who have died, it is also a place to which she looks forward.

With our faith, when we die, we believe that we'll return to Heavenly Father eventually and be with people we know and love and be with our family eternally, if we're righteous. And that's a great thing. And worse than death would just be knowing that you're not doing the right thing, so you're not going to be able to make it to be with your family eternally, or your friends eternally, people you love eternally.

A 19-year-old Jehovah's Witness named Lauren also expressed a hope for the future that she gains from her faith. Lauren's belief in the future comforts her today and helps her through difficult situations.

The point about the faith is that I have a hope for the future and it makes me think, "Okay I can get through this because of God." Horrible things happen to people all the time, absolutely horrible things and it's very depressing if you want to sit here and think of all the bad things that happen to people. But what keeps me going is the fact that I know that eventually these horrible things will in some way, shape, or form be taken care of.

Paul, an 18-year-old Baptist male, described how he has hope that is rooted in his religious beliefs. In Paul's view of the world, some of the "bad things" that happen actually occur inside of him because he is a "faulty human being." Paul is comforted by his belief that he is forgiven for these bad things.

Even though I recognize that I'm a faulty human being, that I have issues and problems, I can admit those and I can be satisfied with knowing that I'm forgiven, that I'm still a work in progress. [I have] hope [that] there's something that's greater than material wealth or being successful. It's like an inner peace with events, with things that happen, even if things go pretty wrong.

Luke, a 15-year-old Catholic male, discussed how his beliefs comfort him when life becomes challenging. Luke said, "Being religious is kind of like you have another friend, it's God and Jesus. You feel like you're able to lean back on someone if the going's tough."

Other adolescents and emerging adults described how their religious beliefs specifically guide them through the hassles of life. For example, a 17-year-old Baptist female named Suzanne found guidance in challenging life situations through prayer.

I think praying in [tough] situations always seems to bring about something that I wouldn't have thought of. Like I'll think and think and think about something, and then it seems like once I pray about it, it's like, "Oh, duh."

Similarly, Pedro, a 15-year-old Hispanic Catholic male, found guidance through prayer.

I think my relationship with God is... I view Him as like a second father kind of. I can look to Him if I have any doubt in anything or if I have any questions. And I do that through prayer. And that's affected my relationship with other people, because it's helped me. I might not have considered a certain way of doing something if I hadn't prayed or if I hadn't gone to church and thought about it.

Pedro also said that his faith gave him values and rules to guide his actions, "If I'm not remembering my parents' rules, then [remembering] the religious rules, knowing, 'Oh, this isn't right' helps me make decisions." Similarly, several of the Muslim adolescents and emerging adults expressed their gratitude for the guidance they receive from their faith. As an example, Faiza, a 17-year-old African American Muslim female, said,

Islam teaches you how to do things, when to do things, and basically the best way to do it. You don't have to question yourself or your actions, because it lays it out for you that that's the way to do it. If you take it seriously, then it really lays everything out easy for you. And there's no question between right and wrong. There's a lot of problems in society [who don't know] what's right and what's wrong, or they're lenient about punishing wrong, rewarding good. Islam tells you how to do that and what to do, too.

B. Identity—"The Most Important Thing about Who You Are"

For many of the highly religious adolescents and emerging adults in this sample, their religious beliefs are intricately tied to their identity. They seem to view their religion as a part of themselves so much that they cannot imagine life without their faith. When asked about the

importance of her faith, a 12-year-old Methodist named Jennifer responded, “Well, it’s pretty important, because I’m pretty religious and we go to church almost every week.” Similarly Nadia, a 19-year-old East Indian Muslim female, said,

I can’t really imagine what [life] would be like without my faith, because to me, the whole basis is the faith. Everything, all the happiness and the comfort, I think that all comes from the faith more than anything else.

Other youth discussed how their faith gives their lives meaning. Several mentioned having a higher purpose or a different perspective on life than others who do not share their faith. Tyler, a 16-year-old Mormon, described how his faith helped him to answer some of life’s biggest questions.

I think I don’t really have to ask myself a question: Where am I? Why am I here? What am I here for? What do I think I can and can’t do before I die? Or what ever happens after death? Or what do I have to worry about at judgment? I think those questions I already have answered.

Tyler’s description of having a sense of peace in life that is rooted in his faith was echoed by Rana, a 14-year-old African American Muslim female who talked about the guidance she receives for her life from her faith and sacred texts.

And for me, I never thought I didn’t know who I was or what I was going to do, because all I have to do is open up any book, like the Qur’an, and it tells me what I should do and who I am and basically why I was on this earth.... So I never thought, “Oh, I don’t know who I am or where I’m going,” because I know this is who I am and this is my purpose on earth. And then when I die, I’ll be brought back to my Lord and be judged for what I’ve done on this earth. And I’ve never had any thoughts about “Oh, should I do this or should I do that?” because it’s already there written for me in my life.

For some adolescents and emerging adults, more than directing the purpose of their lives, their faith colored every aspect of their lives. For these individuals, their faith literally changed the way that they lived, day in and day out. These adolescents and emerging adults have allowed their religious identity to shape their worldview and their very existence. Moshe, a 20-year-old Modern Orthodox Jewish male, described the deep influence of his faith on every thing he did.

Judaism is a very legal religion, and if you are dedicated to following [the laws] then there practically isn't any aspect of your life that isn't going to be affected. You can't separate the other things that you do from the religious things that you do. There really isn't any separation. So you could say that God has as much role in our lives as children as does in everything else, which is to say, a constant. You can't even get up in the morning without doing something that directly reminds you of who you are and what it is you're doing... I would say that it's impossible not to, if you're Jewish and you're serious about it, then it becomes, whether you intend it or not, the, perhaps, most important thing about your identity. Every thing that you do, you have to examine... If you're serious about it, you cannot escape having it become a hugely important, if not the most important thing about who you are. You just can't escape it, it happens.

Moshe was not the only participant who could not escape the far-reaching grasp of his religion on his identity. Brett, a 17-year-old Baptist male, described the difference his faith had on his life by saying,

It makes a difference in my life because it completely changes my life. It changes the focus of my life to bettering myself, to trying to serve God in any way I can in the community I'm in. So it completely alters your whole reality.

As Brett continued he revealed that his faith had really become important to him about three years before this interview, when he was 13 or 14 years old. He described the difference in his life with a clear "before and after" view of himself.

I finally understood the true meaning of what serving God is really supposed to be about. Before then I'm just like, "Oh, yeah, I serve God. I go to church on Sunday. I go to Sunday School." [But now] it's part of my identity somehow. When people ask me, "So what do you believe in?" I say "Christian," I say, "God." But now it's like really that changes my whole perception of everything because now it's dying to yourself to live. So if I had to phrase it all in one sentence it would be dying to yourself so you can live.

Brett concludes his story by referencing the biblical concept of "dying to self" (seeking God's will over one's own) to demonstrate how deeply his self-conception is altered by his religion.

However, not all adolescents and emerging adults from highly religious families view themselves as highly religious. It seems that being raised in a religious environment and

participating in a religious community does not guarantee that one will adopt the religious beliefs of the family and religious community. For example, Robert, a 15-year-old Jewish male, described God as an acquaintance: “My relationship to God is kind of like we know of each other. We’re in the same school and we acknowledge each other’s presence.” Robert struggled to clarify his faith any more than that. Another Jewish adolescent, Ruth, who earlier spoke of her struggle to practice her faith in the school context, also was unsure about God. She clarified her beliefs before the interview began by saying,

I should probably say, just in the beginning, that I’m still figuring out my definition of God, and that I do believe in like some sort of higher faith, higher being, higher power. It would be very lonely, if it turned out there wasn’t one. I’m not exactly sure what it is, so....

A Baptist adolescent also admitted that he was unsure about if there was a God and if it was the one that was familiar to him. As he spoke about his beliefs, Paul seemed to be putting his ideas together on the spot, actively working them out during the interview.

Paul: Um, I don’t necessarily say that I’m Christian. I mean I’ve gone to church every Sunday, with a few exceptions maybe.

Mother: You usually say, “Because you make me.”

Paul: Yeah, because that’s what I have to do. And I know everything that we say by heart. I don’t look at the book. And I wouldn’t say that I don’t necessarily believe in everything that the Bible says or...I don’t believe that the Bible necessarily, automatically happened just because it’s a book that was, that told me: “Hey, this is the truth.” But, I mean, we were talking about it, and I believe there has to be something, not necessarily about God, like Jesus Christ, I’m...not necessarily He’s the Son of God, but like, the earth didn’t just like pop up from somewhere. And even if it did, like all these theories, [the] big bang theory, something did start before that. I mean the start of the universe, my Dad always says is...came from somewhere and I guess there’s something out there that had to start that. And maybe it was God, maybe the Bible’s right, but maybe it wasn’t, and I don’t know. I mean I guess I’ll never know necessarily. And it’s just, I guess I believe more Christian because I was brought up in a Christian church, and if I was brought up Jewish, I’d believe that, just because that’s what I was taught. But even if I wasn’t, I guess I’d still wonder what was happening, I’d look into other religions and see what was out there.

Notice the long, uninterrupted pauses Paul was granted as he pieced his thoughts together. For both Paul and Ruth, as well as the other participants who were unsure about their faith, their families gave them space to think and work out their answers. The parents seldom interrupted these lengthy monologues of their children. As the interview continued Paul said, “I think I’ve grown up in a house where I’m allowed to be who I am.” This lack of interference on the part of the parents seems particularly telling in an interview about highly religious families. One can imagine some parents might desire to appear as religious as the interviewer perceives them to be, and thus try to mask or shape their child’s answer in a socially desirable way. Yet that is missing in these interviews. Instead, the parents say that they have been praying for their child, trusting that God will bring him or her to the faith. Furthermore, this distinction of highly religious families with less religious members has not been captured by large-scale quantitative research methods. This distinction may be too subtle and happens too rarely for quantitative methods to find. Yet it is significant in the lives of these adolescent, emerging adults, and parents.

As demonstrated, some adolescents and emerging adults do not come to believe the faith in which they have been raised. For some reason, the family and religious community that they grow up in does not become a part of their identity. However, for most adolescents and emerging adults from highly religious families, the family’s beliefs become theirs. Most develop a firm faith-identity that is rooted in their experience of life and religious beliefs. They become their faith; it defines them. When a 14-year-old Orthodox Jewish male named Abraham was asked how his religion influenced him, he simply replied, “I can’t picture myself without it.”

Theme 3: Personal Practices

Aside from simply having religious beliefs, religious people also have religious practices that help them to act out their faith and to connect to the divine. For most of the highly religious

adolescent and emerging adult participants in this study, religious practice is simply part of being a religious person. Religious practices seem to help these adolescents and emerging adults be who they are; their practice is a part of their identity. Religious practices also reportedly helped these highly religious adolescents and emerging adults connect to the divine. There is an intangible reward to their practices that keeps them practicing—even when they don’t want to—as some will point out. Before discussing the connection of religious practices and identity, the usage of religious practices to connect to God will be discussed.

A. Connection to God

Religious practices are one way that the highly religious adolescents and emerging adults in this sample reported connecting to God. By praying, reading sacred texts, and keeping holy days, these adolescents and emerging adults claimed to access a spiritual dimension in their lives that they think their peers fail to grasp. For many participants, prayer was one of the most meaningful religious practices. When asked what religious practices were special to her, Samina, a 20-year-old East Indian Muslim female, replied,

Just daily prayer, whether it was in congregation or by ourselves, supporting each other and praying for each other. When we prayed on our own, I would always wish something for my parents or my brother or my sister-in-law, just something. And then I would wait and see if it comes true, and if it does it’s just so much self-satisfaction. And then you know it works. So you do it again. So it’s just an ongoing pattern of goodness.

Pedro, a 15-year-old Hispanic Catholic male, told a story about what prayer meant to him.

I don’t remember specifically the time or what was going on, but I was praying, and I think I was praying for somebody who was sick or some type of thing. I’m not sure. And I felt like, not a presence, but I just felt like all the sudden this feeling. I don’t know; it felt like warm or something. As if all the sudden a weight was lifted or something. Just something that I don’t even know what it was.

Although Pedro struggles to articulate this experience, it seems that his prayer connected him to the divine in a meaningful way. Claire, a 16-year-old Mormon female, discussed why she chooses to pray, even at times that she does not desire to do so.

Well, even when you're like having a bad day or you're just, you know, nothing wrong in person, even though you don't want to pray. I always remember, because one time I was in church or something and they were talking about the time you need to pray the most is when you don't want to, because that's when you really need it. And so I always remember that, even if I don't want to at all, I am praying and it always turns out okay afterwards.

Other adolescents and emerging adults in the sample discussed particularly meaningful religious practices aside from prayer. For two Modern Orthodox Jewish siblings Shabbas (the Sabbath) had special meaning. Rachel, a 17-year-old female, began discussing the importance of Shabbas to her family and religion, followed by her 20-year-old brother Moshe:

Rachel: [Shabbas] means that I don't have to worry about the usual things. The rest of the week [is a] totally different time. We have Shabbas, and that's Shabbas. It's different. We don't have to worry about the rest of the world. The rest of the world goes on, but we're here with our family and our religion. It's our time.

Moshe: I don't know if there's any particular practice [other than Shabbas], that I can think of, that's more meaningful than any other to me personally.

Samina, who values the Islamic practice of praying five times each day, also values reading her sacred texts.

I know that if I get lazy and if I don't want to pray for a week or not open up the Qur'an and stuff, I just feel this, I literally feel some sort of like restless sensation, like something's missing in my life. It's basically like taking a dose of our daily medicine. When we don't take it on time, properly and religiously, you just feel emptiness and you don't feel self-control at all.

For Samina and the other highly religious adolescents and emerging adults in this study, practicing their faith is a way of connecting to God. Something is missing in the lives of these

highly religious adolescents and emerging adults if they do not pray, read sacred texts, keep the Sabbath, or attend worship. They feel restless and they long to reconnect to the divine.

Yet these adolescents and emerging adults have integrated their faith into all aspects of their lives. Religion is more to them than something they do on Sundays or something they say quickly before they fall asleep. Religion is a guiding force in their daily lives, in the small decisions they make. For one adolescent in particular, the decision to join a volleyball team had spiritual implications. Sophia, a 16-year-old Jehovah's Witness female, had the opportunity to join a new volleyball team in the fall. However, she was concerned that her teammates were not positive examples for her to follow and might influence her to do things she should not do. She used a Bible verse to help her make the difficult decision:

First Corinthians 15:33: "Bad associations spoil useful habits." [This verse] plays a part in my life, a large part, because I'm constantly in school. And then outside of school you're faced with certain issues, that influence [you]... And it helps you keep your head straight and makes you think, "Hmm. Are these the people that I want to be like?" Because inevitably they're going to affect you; and so you want to keep your balance and be careful of that. So that's kind of like one scripture that, in particular, that I find [helpful].

An 18-year-old Protestant named Anna also described how her faith influenced her decisions:

I guess one thing that my faith has made me think about is: I want to stay [sexually] pure until I get married, and save myself for my husband, because that's something that's really pretty rare in terms of people who don't have faith that I've seen. And I think it's not only just practically the best way to do things, but I've got that from my faith.... I think that if God's the center of my life, and I marry someone who has something else as the center of his life, I think it's just not going to work from the outset. So that's very important and also, once my mom, when I was thinking about dating someone, asked me... "Is your relationship going to bring both you and him closer to God? Is you two dating going to work to bring you both closer to God?" And I hadn't really thought about it in that way, but I think that's something that's very important. And that's very big and hard to pinpoint. How is somebody going to bring me closer to God or not? But that's one thing that's very important to me.

An 18-year-old Baptist named Paul allowed his faith to influence his life decisions. Anna's decision was a large, life-commitment to sexual purity before marriage. Paul's decisions are more earthy and grounded. When asked what he had been asked to sacrifice for his faith, Paul said "ignorance," meaning that he was unable to be naïve about life and the choices he was making. As a religious person, Paul was could not to lie to himself about the likely outcome of his decisions. When asked clarifying questions, Paul continued,

There's an understanding of right and wrong, and there's an understanding that certain things are really going to be detrimental to me both physically and spiritually. And that's definitely been something that I've had to sacrifice, having to know and think a lot about consequences. I think a lot of my friends, and people that I work with, are sort of thinking short term and not thinking about consequences. But I think one thing that I've been really challenged to think about [is] what are the consequences of these actions? What is the right thing to do in this situation? You're not going to be all wishy-washy and say, "You know, just do whatever's right for you."

Paul practices his religion by thinking about the consequences of his actions and examining their affects on him physically and spiritually. Paul is not alone in this practice; these highly religious adolescents and emerging adults reported including their faith in everything they do. They view life—their friends, their activities, even their opinions—through a religious lens. In this way, religion continues to influence their identity as each day they choose to align themselves with their faith.

B. Identity—"Everything I Do Is Affected by It"

As religious people, the practices of the highly religious adolescents and emerging adults in this sample were quite diverse. They reported the following religious practices: prayer, forgiveness, Sabbath-keeping, abstinence (from certain peer groups, activities that conflicted with religious services, drugs, parties, and sexual activity), service, obeying their parents, attending religious services, keeping religious holidays, keeping dietary laws, dressing modestly or wearing religious clothing, studying or reading sacred texts, and making decisions in order to

please God. All these practices are an extension of the identity of these highly religious adolescents and emerging adults. They see themselves as religious, so they conduct themselves as religious people, by dressing modestly, praying frequently, and choosing wisely whom to befriend and how to use their free time. They live their faith day in and day out because their faith is central to their identity.

The highly religious adolescents and emerging adults in this sample choose to orient their lives around a religious center. Rachel, a 17-year-old Modern Orthodox Jewish female, said succinctly, “My whole life is based around being Jewish. Everything I do is affected by it somehow.” Similarly, Lauren, a 19-year-old Jehovah’s Witness, described the way she felt about her religious practices, which can be viewed as restrictive by some: “I’ve never felt deprived in the fact that I couldn’t do things, because my parents never sat there and said, ‘Well you can’t do this. And you can’t do that.’ Ultimately it was always my decision.” These adolescents and emerging adults are living for a higher purpose that infuses everything they do.

The adolescents and emerging adults in these highly religious families also reported being motivated by their faith to resolve conflict. In order to live their faith, these participants actively worked to make peace with their family members. One adolescent described her motivation to make peace with her sister comes from her faith. This 15-year-old Protestant named Chelsea said, “We sure have conflict, but it gives us a reason to resolve it. All we need to do is remind each other, ‘Are you doing what Jesus would want you to do?’ And it puts things back into perspective.” Brett, a 17-year-old Baptist male, described the way he and his family tried to integrate their religious beliefs into the way they live their lives,

I think that our family is a very real family. We deal with reality. I think one of the things that forces us to be so real with each other is that all four of us, in different ways, are very, very social... And what happens is that one person will be hurting, and the rest of us will be there to care for them. We don’t ignore issues. We try to apply what we know to be, what we believe to be right, and we try to act accordingly.

Brett's family consciously tries to live out their faith in the way they care for each other because they are a religious family. They are trying to apply "what we believe to be right."

Other highly religious adolescents and emerging adults also try to apply what they know to be right. For some, the way they dress is a way to identify themselves as different than their peers or the larger culture. They distinguish themselves through their clothing and identify themselves as religious people. Kaitlin, a 25-year-old Jehovah's Witness, explained why she dresses modestly, saying, "Definitely my style of clothing has been affected by [my faith]. I try to be a modest person. The Bible says men and women should be well arranged and modest, so there's certain styles I definitely avoid." In a related vein, Rana, a 14-year-old African American Muslim female, explained her reasoning for dressing modestly and covering with a Hijab.

Well, with me, I've never seen it as a problem or a hardship because, I don't think it is, because I would rather cover my body and stuff, then to go outside wearing shorts or miniskirts and tank tops so that everyone can see all your beauty and your body, who is not in your family or your husband or something. So to me, I would say that it's a blessing and not a hardship at all. And I think it's a beautiful thing. And that's how I look on it. I've been wearing, I've been dressed like this ever since I was like 11 years old. And it hasn't been a problem for me.

Another Muslim female, 17-year-old Zeenat who is of Asian decent, described her choice to cover with a Hijab: "We believe that this entire life is a test for us, that this year I really strongly believe that I wasn't being true to myself, being true Muslim, 'cause I wasn't covering like with Hijab, and so I started."

Not all the participants fully grasped the connection between religious practices, religious beliefs, and personal identity. One such adolescent, John, admitted that he did not pray often and recalled a particular day when he did pray. John, who is a 15-year-old Episcopalian, said,

I don't pray on a regular basis. I'll pray when something bad happens, or if I just remember it before I fall asleep. And I remember that night that I did pray and say, "Bless all the people that died." And it did have an effect. And I guess in that sense it made me a little bit more religious that day.

John's practice of prayer made him more religious for a day. But religious practices often had a greater, more long-lasting impact on the other adolescents and emerging adults in this sample.

One Modern Orthodox Jewish male, in particular, described how practicing his faith was intricately tied to the importance he gave his religion and to his identity. Twenty-year-old Moshe said,

I would say, the point at which I started to take any notice of this, take it seriously, I was quite young at the time, of course, was when my parents started taking on some of the Kashrut laws, the dietary laws.... Once you change the food, then you really notice... So I would say the actual practice and really intentional practice of Halakhah is what, is what was necessary to transmit a sense of Jewish identity to me, otherwise I probably wouldn't have had much of one.

For the majority of highly religious adolescents and emerging adults, practicing the faith is synonymous with believing the faith. Both belief and practice are deeply rooted in the identities of these adolescents and emerging adults, who are forming life-commitments to groups and ideologies (Fowler & Dell, 2006). Several of the participants told stories of a time of commitment to their faith, whether personally deciding to continue in the faith, or through a specific rite such as baptism or a bar mitzvah. Their commitment was more than just word; it was also in deed. In short, these adolescents and emerging adults reported doing religious things because they viewed themselves as religious people.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

The findings of the present study highlight the connection between high religiosity and identity: highly religious adolescents and emerging adults seem to view themselves as highly religious people so they do religious things. More specifically, highly religious adolescents and emerging adults reported that the most influential developmental contexts on their faith were the religious community, the school environment, and their peers. The context of the religious community was often described as a supportive context and many adolescents and emerging adults reported a close connection to specific individuals there. The school context seemed to challenge personal religion through curriculum, required activities, and policies that made practicing religion difficult, at best. The peer context was mixed: highly religious adolescents and emerging adults reported that they often felt very different from the larger peer group, although their closest friends typically support their religious choices.

Highly religious adolescents and emerging adults also report that they receive comfort from God and that their identities that are rooted in their religious beliefs. Many of the participants reported that the hope of heaven comforts them in times of grief and encourages them in times of stress. Like a compass and a map, personal religious beliefs seem to guide highly religious adolescents and emerging adults through life. But more than simply guiding them, their personal beliefs also shape *who they are*. Highly religious adolescents and emerging adults have integrated their beliefs into their lives and many claim that they cannot conceive of themselves apart from their beliefs.

Highly religious adolescents and emerging adults also reported frequently using religious practices to express their religious identity and to connect to God. They reported praying, reading sacred texts, dressing modestly, resolving conflicts, obeying their parents, following dietary laws, keeping religious holidays, and abstaining from popular pleasures all for the sake of their

religion. By participating in religious practices, highly religious adolescents and emerging adults seem to feel connected to God, some sensing his presence, some seeing their prayers answered, and some living a life oriented toward the divine. Furthermore, these religious practices are a part of the identity of these adolescents and emerging adults. There appears to be a circular loop of reinforcement: I am religious, so I do religious things, which make me more religious, so I do religious thing, and so on.

The findings of the present study suggest that identity is crucial to the faith development of highly religious adolescents and emerging adults. The participants in this study were forming life-long commitments to ideas and ideologies, as both Erikson and Fowler suggested (Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Fowler, 1981). Recall that Erikson feared that the extended period of adolescence into the early 20s, defined by Arnet (2010) as emerging adulthood, could lead to a psychosexual moratorium in which adolescents delay committing to ideologies and institutions (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). It appears that many adolescents and emerging adults do delay committing to ideologies and thus forming an identity, as there are significant declines in religiosity in adolescence and especially in emerging adulthood (Smith & Snell, 2009; Petts, 2009). However, this does not appear to be the case for highly religious adolescents and emerging adults. In contrast to their peers, these young people have made defining commitments to their faiths, some even publicly through declarations of commitment, bar mitzvahs, baptisms, and confirmations. Rather than experiencing identity moratorium, the highly religious adolescents and emerging adults in this sample appear to have achieved their identities as religious people.

Recent research examining the connections between religion and identity has proposed two main ideas: first, that the religious context fosters positive identity development (King, 2003) and second, that individuals develop a spiritual identity (a “spiritual me”) in addition to other identities such as the “social me” or the “material me” (Poll & Smith, 2003; Templeton &

Eccles, 2006). In contrast to studying identity development, the present study sought to examine faith development. The findings of the present study reveal a much deeper connection between religion and identity for highly religious adolescents and emerging adults. Religion does not assist identity development nor is religion one aspect of a person's identity: religion is identity. This may not be the case for all adolescents and emerging adults, but for the highly religious, it seems that religion is "The most important thing about who you are" and that "Everything [you] do is affected by it." In this sense, religion has done more than provided a "rich context for identity formation" (King, 2003, p. 201) or helped "individuals develop a sense of spiritual self" (Poll & Smith, 2003, p. 139). For the highly religious population in particular, religion is identity.

It is reasonable to ask, "How did these teens and young adults become so religious that their faith was synonymous with their identity?" Theoretically, the bioecological model of human development would suggest that this development occurred through proximal process, that is repeated interactions between the individual and the immediate environment over time (Lerner, 2002). Thus, frequent attendance at worship, frequent conversations about faith and religion, frequent religiously-motivated decision making, frequent interactions with significant adults in the religious community, frequent prayer or religious practice, frequent practice of personal faith in the school context, and other such activities, roles, and relationships that repeatedly occurred over time were the catalysts of faith development in the lives of the adolescents and emerging adults in this sample. As one emerging adult, Moshe, stated,

Once you change the food, then you really notice... So I would say the actual practice and really intentional practice of Halakhah is what, is what was necessary to transmit a sense of Jewish identity to me, otherwise I probably wouldn't have had much of one.

The most likely source of this religious development was the day-in and day-out practice of the faith, involvement in the religious community, and a family context centered on religious beliefs.

The results of this study support the continued use of Marks' (2004) three-part model of religiosity and the bioecological model of human development for studying faith development.

A growing body of evidence is revealing that highly religious adolescents, emerging adults, and families are different from moderately religious and nonreligious peers (Marks, 2004; Smith & Denton, 2005; Smith & Snell, 2009; Petts, 2009). Not only do highly religious adolescents and emerging adults experience positive life outcomes (see Table 2 on page 19; Smith & Snell, 2009), but they appear to have achieved their identity as religious people when their peers may be experiencing a moratorium. Thus, highly religious adolescents and emerging adults appear to be *categorically* different than their peers. This group does not seem experience life the same way that the majority of their peers do. Remember that the highly religious group is predicted to be 8% of adolescents (Smith & Denton, 2005) and 15% of emerging adults (Smith & Snell, 2009). It appears that researchers and social service professionals need to reconsider what they know and understand about this particular population. To begin, researchers and social service professionals must recognize that the highly religious group has a worldview, identity and family context that are very different from that of the majority. Sensitivity and respect for these differences is crucial. For example, religious people may be motivated to spend their money in ways that are not "best" and financial counselors have been encouraged to respect those differences (Marks, Dollahite, & Dew, 2009).

One additional finding, which has not been previously discussed, deserves consideration: the adolescents and emerging adults in the present study are extremely articulate. Although the transcripts have been edited slightly to remove duplicate words, clarify referents, and conceal identities, their words are coherent, specific, and insightful. This eloquence is lacking in Smith's analysis of NSYR data (Smith & Denton, 2005; Smith & Snell, 2009). Rather, Smith's adolescents and emerging adults seem inarticulate, brief, unsure, and even shallow. Smith's

participants are presented in short comments and stunted sentences; there are few lengthy monologues. In contrast, the adolescents and emerging adults in the present study have lengthy speeches in which they speak clearly and communicate the deep and personal meaning of their faith. There are several possible reasons to explain the eloquence of these individuals; first, highly religious people are socialized through their religious community to think about and express their faith, so the interview structure was not novel to them. Second, highly religious adolescents tend to excel academically, which could aid in oral communication (see Table 2 on page 19; Smith & Snell, 2009). Finally, highly religious adolescents and emerging adults have invested personal time and energy in the practice of their faith, and in doing so they have likely considered their motives for such costly practices, thus the interview questions were not surprising.

Although the present study utilized a religiously diverse sample, it was limited geographically. The present study did not include moderate or non-religious persons. Additionally, the use of family-based interviews may be considered a weakness by some. However, the author feels that this is a strength, as families often collectively retold a common story, prompted each other to answer, and the interviewer was able to observe family dynamics (Dollahite, Layton, Bahr, Walker, & Thatcher, 2009). Furthermore, the present study included ethnic participants and was not limited to a Judeo-Christian sample, as are many studies on religiosity. Future research should also include ethnically and religiously diverse samples so that our understanding of religiosity accurately represents our national population.

It is worth noting that the present study did not discuss the influence of the family context on faith development, despite the large number body of evidence which suggests that the family contexts is central to faith development (Armet, 2009; Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003; Flor & Knapp, 2001; Garland, 2002; Petts, 2009; Schwartz, 2006; Smith & Denton, 2005; Smith & Snell, 2009;

Templeton & Eccles, 2006). This might seem like a significant error on the part of the researcher, especially considering that these interviews were family-based. The researcher coded for family beliefs and family practices, just as personal beliefs and personal practice were coded. However, the sheer volume of codes relating to family beliefs and family practices was too great to include in the present analysis. For more information on the family context in the faith development of the participants in this sample, please see Dollahite & Thatcher (2008), Dollahite & Marks (2009), and Layton, Dollahite & Hardy (2011) and for alternate samples see Garland (2002) and Mahoney (2010).

Future research should examine the specific connections between religion and identity: Does religion provide a positive context for identity development? Do people develop religious identities? Is the identity of highly religious adolescents and emerging adults different from their less religious peers? Can religion be more than an identity resource or separate self, but rather transcend and infuse all other identities? Future research would be wise to longitudinally follow, both qualitatively and quantitatively, the adolescent members of one religious community (or more) to document the transitions in thought both over time and between varying levels of religiosity among the group. Finally, more qualitative research is needed to guide the study of faith development. As this field of study has increased in the last 10 years and is still in infancy, the exploratory nature of qualitative research will offer much help to planning larger, quantitative studies. Also, because of the deeply personal nature of faith and religion, qualitative research may be particularly suited for this topic of study.

One of the primary implications of the present study is for families and religious institutions to focus on personal identity in faith development. Asking questions about why adolescents and emerging adults are making decisions and how they are prioritizing their lives may help accomplish this. Additionally, a time of learning about the faith before encouraging

adolescents and emerging adults to choose to commit to the faith (or not) may be beneficial. Furthermore, families and religious institutions should encourage faith development by promoting daily religious practice, connecting adolescents and emerging adults to significant adults within the religious community, and challenging and guiding personal beliefs. Integrating religion into all aspects of one's life is also encouraged. Religious institution staff (clergy and active volunteers) should try to build positive relationships with the schools of the adolescents in their religious community so that they can try to promote acceptance of religious practice for their members. Adolescents should also be encouraged to find a group of close peers who support their religious decisions, beliefs, and practices.

Public schools should respond by easing the obstacles to personal practice, such as allowing religious groups to use spaces on campus for meetings and establishing a list of major religious holidays recognized as excused absences, such as Yom Kippur. Exceptions must be made for students who cannot participate in assignments and activities due to religious beliefs. Social institutions and individuals, including colleges, guidance counselors, faculty, and medical professionals, should recognize that highly religious people view themselves differently than the general population and have different motives for behavior.

Overall, highly religious adolescents and emerging adults seem to have internalized their faith in a way that makes them uniquely different from their peers. They repeatedly described their faith as so deep-seated that it has become the very essence of their identity.

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Vita

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