

ON THE NETWORK TO DAMASCUS: EMERGING ADULTHOOD,
SOCIAL NETWORKS, AND CONVERSION IN AMERICAN RELIGION

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On the Network to Damascus: Emerging Adulthood, Social Networks, and
Conversion in American Religion

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ABSTRACT

Competing social networks are central to the process of conversion from one religious or spiritual orientation to another. Although numerous sociological, psychological, quasi-economic, and theological forces have been explored as components of an individual's network ties to a religion, the characteristics of the communication that occurs through those ties have been ignored in most research into conversion. This omission hinders a fuller explanation of the conversion process, because the means and manners of communication are the mechanisms through which other social network forces must operate.

This disquisition studies communication at the crucial, initial "preaffiliation" stage of the conversion process (Gooren, 2010) and a stage of life at which a religious practitioner is especially likely to proceed through conversion, the "emerging adulthood" years from ages 18 to 25 (Arnett, 2000). Data from an online survey ($N = 473$) were used to predict the influence of family communication patterns, continued communication with parents through media, beliefs about the appropriateness of online media in religion or spirituality, and consumption of media from an emerging adult's childhood religion or a new religion on an emerging adult's likelihood of exploring new religious beliefs, practices, and identities. Outcome variables included the importance of religion to an emerging adult, his or her attachment to the childhood religion, a "quest" orientation toward religious or spiritual development, perceived support from a group or community in college associated with either the childhood religion or a new religion, and the emerging adult's likelihood of continuing to identify with his or her childhood religion.

Results demonstrate that numerous variables in family communication, attitudes toward media in religion, and consumption of religious media significantly influence emerging adults' approach to the preaffiliation stage of conversion. Family communication patterns, using

communication media to discuss religious or spiritual subjects with one's parents, and watching television programs or visiting websites associated with the childhood religion are especially significant factors seeming to inhibit conversion. Avenues for further exploring these connections are proposed, and conceptual integration of communication into explanations of the conversion process are discussed.

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The first words of thanks for this work must, of course, be *gratia in honoris parentium meorum* — to my first and most excellent teachers, who showed me the satisfaction inherent in learning and the power of education to open possibilities for a more fulfilling life.

Many special thanks are owed as well to my patient and supportive advisor, Ross Collins, and the members of my committee, who have endured and encouraged my interest in topics that tread broadly across methodologies and disciplinary boundaries. I am a better researcher, scholar, and teacher because of their advice and insights.

I also owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Amber Bach-Gorman and my priceless friends in the Perfectionist Club. Academia can be a solitary place, and they have continually reminded me that the best scholars also strive to be complete and fully developed human beings. I have “dared greatly” because of them. It is only fair, also, to acknowledge the tremendous support of my four-legged colleagues, Angel, Brinkley, and Patty Cake, some of whom are not here to celebrate the success of the work in which they were integral.

Beyond the brilliant and supportive faculty in the communication department and their colleagues from other departments with whom I have worked, a couple of visiting scholars deserve thanks for the lines of thought they inspired that are reflected directly in this disquisition. A seminar on social network analysis with Michelle Shumate was a turning point in my thinking about the relationship between religion and media. Much of the evaluation of literature and discussion of ideas regarding social network ties in the conversion process was developed and improved thanks to her suggestions. Also, thanks are due to Paul Schrodtt, who introduced me to family communication patterns and inspired the important insight that advances in media

communication technologies mean many social network ties are simultaneously instances of both media communication and interpersonal communication.

Finally, although the vast majority of material presented in this disquisition has not been published or presented in its current form, some of the literature review on the role of social networks in religion was presented in 2012 at the Association for the Sociology of Religion annual conference in Denver, Colorado, under the title “Online Social Networks in Religious Conversion: Integrating Insights From Health and Wellness Research.”

DEDICATION

To the friends who thought I should, when I didn't think I could.

Non scholae, sed vitae.

PREFACE

This disquisition began worlds away, in topic and scope, from where it ended. I began my forays into research at the intersection of media and religion with the fairly narrow question of the disconnect between journalists and their religious publics when news coverage turns to religious subjects. In large measure, it was the work on these subjects by Doug Underwood, Mark Silk, Judith Buddenbaum, and Stewart M. Hoover and his colleagues that drew me to graduate school and an academic career.

It was not long before I realized that the subject from which I began was just one concrete example of a larger conflict in late modern liberal societies. The meaning and control of religious and quasi-religious symbols are being contested by a variety of social groups in the absence of universally recognized hierarchical authorities over these symbols, the kinds of authorities who, for better or worse, were acknowledged in previous centuries to have the last word on what such symbols meant and how they could be used. At this stage in my thinking, I owe much to a communication theory seminar with Judy C. Pearson, who introduced me to ritual theory, and to my study of the ideas of Ronald L. Grimes on ritual theory and Robert Bellah and his colleagues on American civil religion.

As I searched for the means by which such profound questions could be dissected and resolved, I came upon the fountainhead where all social science on religious subjects begins, Max Müller and his *Lectures on the Science of Religion*. From the section I consider the manifesto of the scientific study of religion, this passage has been my pole star:

In these our days it is almost impossible to speak of religion without giving offense either on the right or on the left. With some, religion seems too sacred a subject for scientific treatment: with others it stands on a level with alchemy and

astrology . . . In a certain sense, I accept both these views. Religion is a sacred subject, and whether in its most perfect or in its most imperfect form, it has a right to our highest reverence. . . . True reverence is shown in treating every subject, however sacred, however dear to us, with perfect confidence; without fear and without favor; with tenderness and love, by all means, but, before all, with an unflinching and uncompromising loyalty to truth. (Müller, 1874, p. 6)

The hallmark, in my mind, of the scientific study of religion is this deliberate neutrality about the ends of religion. True social science can make no judgment about what religion should be, what its symbols should mean, how its practitioners should conduct themselves, or how its place in society should be established. The scientific study of religion is concerned with the *is*, not the *ought*.

The *is* of both religion and media, at least in the global West and arguably even more broadly, is the triumph of bold individualism in belief, practice, and identity. I have taken to summarizing this complex of developments as the “Forrest Gump” theory of religion: “religion is as religion does.” *Religion* as a construct is not synonymous with *church*, nor, in the American context, is it any longer synonymous with Christianity; its substance is not defined by authoritative statements of doctrine, and the individual who practices it is not limited by a label and a membership certificate. Religion in “these our days” can only be understood by how it appears, what it means, and how it is practiced by those who interpret their beliefs, practices, and identities as religious. To some, this state of affairs (like its historical antecedents) is profoundly unsatisfactory. To the social scientist, such debates are beside the point.

That is the perspective I have tried to bring to bear in the disquisition that follows. I have attempted to examine beliefs and practices that seem relevant to a particular stage of religious

experience, rather than relying on assumptions that might no longer hold true and labels that might no longer hold meaning. In particular, I have attempted to examine these religious beliefs and practices in the context of media communication and consumption that participate in the same patterns of individualization currently reshaping religious practice. It is hoped that this endeavor demonstrates the continuing value of a scientific approach to religion in making sense of a period of rapid and fundamental change in two of the institutions most people rely upon to derive meaning from their circumstances.

Fargo, North Dakota

March 14, 2014

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------|
| ABSTRACT..... | iii |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | v |
| DEDICATION..... | vii |
| PREFACE..... | viii |
| LIST OF TABLES..... | xiv |
| INTRODUCTION. ELEVATING THE COMMUNICATION DIMENSION IN THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSION..... | 1 |
| Religious Conversion in American History and Religious Culture..... | 2 |
| Scientific Research Into Conversion: A Brief Overview..... | 3 |
| Defining the Concept of Conversion..... | 5 |
| Importance of U.S. Religious Liberty and Religious Culture to the Study of Conversion..... | 8 |
| CHAPTER ONE. SOCIAL NETWORKS AND CONVERSION IN THE CURRENT AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CULTURE..... | 11 |
| Making First Contact: The Significance of the Preaffiliation Stage of Conversion..... | 11 |
| Explaining Conversion: Social Networks Displace Purely Psychological Perspectives..... | 15 |
| Early Psychological Explanations for Conversion..... | 15 |
| The Social Network Paradigm in Current Conversion Research..... | 17 |
| CHAPTER TWO. FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS, COMMUNICATION MEDIA, AND RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION IN EMERGING ADULTHOOD..... | 26 |
| Prime Time for Conversion: Emerging Adulthood as a Period of Religious Decisions..... | 27 |
| Limitations in Existing Research on Religiosity and Spirituality in Emerging Adulthood..... | 28 |
| The Importance of Emerging Adulthood for Conversion..... | 29 |
| Changes in an Emerging Adult’s Religious and Spiritual Beliefs and Practices..... | 31 |
| The Influence of Higher Education on Emerging Adults’ Religiosity and Spirituality..... | 33 |
| Family Communication and Religious Exploration in Emerging Adulthood..... | 35 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| The Importance of the Family Religious Social Network | 36 |
| Family Communication Patterns in an Emerging Adult’s Childhood Religious Network..... | 37 |
| Media Communication Technologies and Emerging Adults’ Relationships With the Childhood Religious Social Network | 40 |
| Media Communication Technologies and Family Communication | 41 |
| Media Communication Technologies as Forces Promoting Conversion..... | 44 |
| CHAPTER THREE. HYPOTHESES AND METHODS..... | 46 |
| Hypotheses | 47 |
| Measurements | 52 |
| Family Communication Patterns..... | 53 |
| Use of Media Communication Technologies | 53 |
| Measuring the Dependent Variable: Exploring New Religious Beliefs, Practices, and Identities..... | 55 |
| CHAPTER FOUR. RESULTS | 60 |
| Description of the Sample..... | 60 |
| Validation of Scales | 62 |
| Testing Hypothesis 1: The Influence of Family Conversation Orientation | 63 |
| Testing Hypothesis 2: The Influence of Family Conformity Orientation..... | 67 |
| Testing Hypothesis 3: The Influence of Intra-Family Communication Through Media..... | 69 |
| Testing Hypothesis 4: Appropriateness of Media Use in Religion..... | 79 |
| Testing Hypothesis 5: The Influence of Consuming Media From the Childhood Religion.... | 89 |
| Testing Hypothesis 6: The Influence of Consuming Media From a New Religion | 97 |
| CHAPTER FIVE. DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS | 102 |
| Where From Here? Evaluating the Hypotheses Tested | 102 |
| Family Communication Patterns and Emerging Adults’ Religiosity | 103 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Family Communication Through Media: What Are They Talking About? | 105 |
| Beliefs About the Appropriateness of Using Online Media for Religious or Spiritual Purposes | 108 |
| Consuming Media From the Childhood Religion and From New Religions | 111 |
| Notable Patterns Across the Dependent Variables | 115 |
| Limitations of the Sample and Analysis | 118 |
| Conclusion | 120 |
| REFERENCES | 121 |
| APPENDIX. SURVEY INSTRUMENT | 143 |
| Demographics | 143 |
| Family Communication Patterns..... | 144 |
| Family Communication Through Media Technologies..... | 145 |
| Use and Appropriateness of Using Media Technologies in Religion..... | 146 |
| Importance of Religion and Spirituality | 147 |
| Attachment to Childhood Religion..... | 147 |
| Openness and Willingness to Explore | 148 |
| Social Support From a Religious Group or Community | 148 |

LIST OF TABLES

| <u>Table</u> | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| 1. Respondents' Childhood and Current Religious Traditions | 62 |
| 2. Family Communication Through Media as Predictor of Importance of Religion | 71 |
| 3. Family Communication Through Media as Predictor of Self-Identification as Religious | 72 |
| 4. Family Communication Through Media as Predictor of Self-Identification as Spiritual | 72 |
| 5. Family Communication Through Media as Predictor of Attachment to Childhood Religion | 74 |
| 6. Family Communication Through Media as Predictor of Supportive Group in Childhood Religion | 78 |
| 7. Family Communication Through Media as Predictor of Keeping Childhood Religious Identity | 79 |
| 8. Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Importance of Religion | 80 |
| 9. Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Self-Identifying as Religious | 81 |
| 10. Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Self-Identifying as Spiritual | 81 |
| 11. Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Attachment to Childhood Religion | 83 |
| 12. Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Quest Orientation Toward Religion | 83 |
| 13. Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Complexity in Religious Thinking | 84 |
| 14. Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Willingness to Doubt Religious Beliefs | 84 |
| 15. Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Taking Class on Religious Subject | 86 |
| 16. Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Supportive Group in Childhood Religion | 87 |
| 17. Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Supportive Group in a New Religion | 87 |

| | | |
|-----|---|----|
| 18. | Consuming Media From Childhood Religion as Predictor of Importance of Religion | 90 |
| 19. | Consuming Media From Childhood Religion as Predictor of Self-Identifying as Religious | 90 |
| 20. | Consuming Media From Childhood Religion as Predictor of Self-Identifying as Spiritual..... | 91 |
| 21. | Consuming Media From Childhood Religion as Predictor of Attachment to Childhood Religion..... | 92 |
| 22. | Consuming Media From Childhood Religion as Predictor of Perceived Group Support..... | 95 |

INTRODUCTION. ELEVATING THE COMMUNICATION DIMENSION IN THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

The most far-reaching demonstration that an individual's religious liberty is not merely a legal doctrine, but rather a set of genuine choices available in practice, is conversion from one religious identity to another. As will be shown, such conversions are happening more frequently and for more individual religious practitioners in the current religious culture of the United States. Research into the conversion process has established a central role for a potential convert's social network connections, both to the religion seeking conversion and to an existing religious identity working to inhibit conversion. However, at least one significant aspect of these networks remains underappreciated and largely unexplored in the conversion literature: *how* these networks are able to exert influence on a potential convert.

It is here, this disquisition will argue, that communication as a discipline and as a subject-matter focus for research is poised to join sociology, psychology, and some influences from economics and theology in more fully explicating the conversion process and the determinants of whether a conversion is completed. This disquisition will examine two communication phenomena — family communication patterns, and the use of media communication technologies — for their influence on the individual religious practitioner's exploration of new religious beliefs, practices, and identities. Such exploration is the defining characteristic of the first stage of conversion, which, as will be shown, is increasingly important in the current American religious culture.

At the risk of oversimplifying, this disquisition contends that understanding the religious culture of the United States requires understanding conversion; understanding conversion requires understanding how social networks affect the conversion process; and understanding

these networks requires understanding the communication mechanisms by which they exert influence. In doing so, this disquisition seeks both to establish the value of studying communication as part of the larger project of understanding religious conversion and to contribute substantive findings to the study of communication in this context.

Religious Conversion in American History and Religious Culture

The present religious culture in the United States has developed from three great tasks the practitioners of religions have undertaken. The first, dominant from the founding of British North America to the disestablishment of state churches in the early 1800s, was embedding the principle of religious liberty into the law of the secular government and the collective identity of the citizenry (Adams & Emmerich, 1990; Davis, 2012; Dreisbach, 2012; Esbeck, 2012; Marnell, 1964; Miller, 2012). The second task, overlapping and succeeding the first, was expanding the range of religious beliefs and practices permitted to flourish under that freedom. While this challenge still confronts the nation, it was clear by the 1960s that non-Christian religions would have a permanent place of prominence in American spiritual life (Ahlstrom, 2004; Gaustad & Schmidt, 2002; Marty, 1984). The third task provides the backdrop to this disquisition: navigating a religious environment in which decisions about whether, why, how much, with whom, and by what means to adopt religious beliefs, practices, and identities is increasingly a matter of unrestricted individual choice within a mix-and-match “marketplace” (e.g., Iannaccone 1992, 1995) of religiosity and spirituality (Ahlstrom, 2004; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Hoover, 1998; Pew Forum, 2009; Wuthnow, 1996).

Gooren (2010) finds that “an important structural factor” in whether a potential convert completes a conversion is “access to an extensive supply of religious options on the religious market” (p. 111). Thus, it is not surprising that, particularly since the 1960s, conversion has

become increasingly common as the United States has become more religiously diverse (Gaustad & Schmidt, 2002; Hall, 2004), legal protections for religious practice have strengthened (Bellah & Hammond, 1980; Finke & Stark, 2005), and the individualism deeply woven into all aspects of American culture (Lipset, 1996) has promoted greater tolerance of new religions and eclectic combinations of religious beliefs and practices. The likelihood that any given American will change religions is today at least as good as the odds of winning a coin flip (Pew Forum, 2009), a significant increase over the one-third ratio of two decades earlier (Roof, 1989). “Americans convert early and often” (Pew Forum, 2009, p. 1) in the current religious climate.

Scientific Research Into Conversion: A Brief Overview

The social sciences have not ignored the processes and factors involved in religious conversion, despite the hindrance posed by the “secularization thesis” that influenced much twentieth-century social research (McGrath, 2004; Russell, 2002; Schmalzbauer, 2003; Schmalzbauer & Mahoney, 2012; Smith, Mayer, & Fritschler, 2008). Scientific conversion research is detailed in Chapter One, but as an overview, inquiries into this phenomenon can be divided roughly into three groups (see generally Gooren, 2010; Snow & Machalek, 1984). First and earliest, psychological inquiries examined characteristics of the religious convert’s personality, emotional needs, and information processing to assess why some potential converts were more disposed to complete their conversions than others. The second group, reflecting a “sociological turn” that also considers how religious affiliation addresses social needs, includes the largest number of the studies and the dominant theme in conversion research: the role of a convert’s social networks in promoting conversion to a new religion or inhibiting conversion through ties to an existing religious identity. The third and most recently emerged group of conversion studies combines psychological, sociological, theological, and quasi-economic

considerations to research and theorize the “rational choices” a convert is thought to make in an attempt to get the most religious “goods” for the least investment of other resources.

The absence of communication factors as primary objects of study in almost all conversion research is a striking omission. Neglecting communication in the study of conversion ignores the historical importance of communicating a religion (often labeled “evangelizing,” “proselytizing,” “witnessing,” or “testifying”) as a calculated part of the attempt to gain converts. Although not all religions actively solicit new members, and some are closed to anyone who has not been a member since birth, most religions expect that at least a few new adherents will be drawn in by contact with existing practitioners. Moreover, the preeminence, since Lofland and Stark (1965), of social networks as the organizing schema for conversion studies risks collapsing into question-begging if this paradigm cannot provide plausible explanations for *how* social networks convey their values and wield their influence to facilitate or inhibit their members’ conversion processes.

If a more formal argument is needed for an increased emphasis on communication in conversion studies, consider that the means by which social networks influence their members must be communication phenomena if the influence of social networks on religious conversion is to be conceptualized as truly a *network* effect. If network ties are relationships, changes in those relationships must occur either (1) within the perceptions of only one party to the relationship, (2) in a mutual understanding that occurs to both parties contemporaneously, or (3) by the decision of one party that is communicated to the other. Conceptualizing changes in religious social networks as occurring only within the mind of the potential convert would place conversion research back into discredited notions of a convert without agency, driven by emotional “deprivations” and “brainwashing” (see pp. 15-17). It also seems unlikely that the

potential convert and other members of a religious social network would have the same interpretation of their relationship, regardless of whether the network is an existing religion or a religion to which conversion is sought. Therefore, the *means* by which a potential convert's religious social networks — old and new — exert influence during the conversion process are properly placed in the study of communication. Understanding these means of social network influence requires a perspective different from — though always interacting with — the perspectives psychology or sociology bring to other factors in the conversion process.

This disquisition tests two sets of communication characteristics, one interpersonal and the other media-driven, as mechanisms by which one important type of religious social network, the family in which one first is inculcated into a religion, seems likely to be able to exert influence on its members. As justified in Chapter Two, the potential converts studied are the demographic group most likely to convert (Gooren, 2010; Hadaway & Roof, 1988): emerging adults from ages 18 to 25 who have separated, at least partially, from the social networks of their childhood religions to enter higher education and encounter the myriad religious identities, beliefs, and practices offered in that setting. The emerging adults' family communication patterns and their use of new media technologies, both to stay in contact with their families and to consume the media products of various religions, are studied to determine whether differences in these communication characteristics of emerging adults' social networks produce differences in how emerging adults interpret the "marketplace" of religion offered in a higher education community and interact with new and existing religious identities, beliefs, and practices.

Defining the Concept of Conversion

As the term is used in scientific research, *conversion* does not mean merely a change in organizational membership (Snow & Machalek, 1984). Nor does it refer to a change in the

degree of one's involvement with an existing religious identity (Gooren, 2007; Greil, 1977) or to being recruited into participation in a religion, although this certainly could lead to conversion (Gooren, 2010; Greil, 1977; Greil & Rudy, 1984). Rather, the term refers to reordering, down to the foundation, one's beliefs about or understanding of at least one essential element of what it means to be religious. The foundational modern inquiry into the phenomenon defines conversion this way:

All men and all human groups have ultimate values, a worldview, or a perspective furnishing them a more or less orderly and comprehensible picture of the world. . . . When a person gives up one such perspective or ordered view of the world for another we refer to this process as conversion. (Lofland & Stark, 1965, p. 862)

A more recent definition distilled from current research considers conversion to be analogous to other changes in individual identity such as cognitive processing habits or political identification. Similar to the Lofland-Stark approach, this definition couches the concept of conversion in terms of the individual's perspective rather than the formalities of membership in religious institutions:

Conversion means a transformation of one's self concurrent with a transformation of one's basic meaning system. It changes the sense of who one is and how one belongs in the social situation. Conversion transforms the way the individual perceives the rest of society and his or her personal place in it, altering one's view of the world. . . . [W]hen other factors (such as marriage, friendship, geographical and socioeconomic mobility) cause people to consider changing religious affiliation, they are highly unlikely to change their religion dramatically. Such changes are not conversions but simply changed affiliation from one organization to another. (McGuire, 2008, pp. 73-74 [emphasis removed])

It seems unnecessary to carry the definition as far as does Travisano (1970), who conceptualized conversion as a “rupture with a former identity” (p. 598) that transformed the convert’s sense of self across all dimensions of his or her life. This formulation seems to overstate the point. A convert whose identity includes a passion for football or opera might still retain that component of self-image while profoundly reshaping his or her attitudes toward transcendent concepts; the identity of Saul of Tarsus as a devout Jew or scholar of Mosaic law was not “ruptured” by the conversion that moved him to interpret that law toward different ends (Acts 9). However, at a minimum, a conversion would seem to require rejecting (“rupturing” from) at least one religious doctrine, manner of religious experience, or religion-based schema for interpreting the world (McIntosh, 1995), and replacing it with another that contradicts the original so directly that the two cannot be held coherently within the same religious identity. Travisano’s (1970) emphasis on a direct contradiction between old identity and new has the advantage of reserving the label *conversion* for a qualitative change in the nature, the “DNA,” of one’s religiosity. This distinguishes conversion from changes in emphasis that can be accomplished in complete consistency with the existing religious identity.

It would be a contribution of historic significance for a scholar to devise a valid instrument for distinguishing among various degrees of religious conversion. For example, the Catholic who becomes a Methodist probably experiences the characteristics of the conversion process less intently than, say, the Muslim who converts to Buddhism. Sadly, the development of an instrument capable of differentiating between a “one star” conversion and a “five star” conversion must await further explication of the necessary constituents for defining a completed conversion.

Importance of U.S. Religious Liberty and Religious Culture to the Study of Conversion

By the historical circumstance of having Christianity as its preeminent religion, American religious culture has always been conscious of conversion as an important concept, process, and milestone in the religious life (Gooren, 2010). One-third of Americans believe converting others to their religion is somewhat or very important “if one wishes to be a good person” (Baylor Religion Survey, 2007). The command to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19 NRSV, *accord* Mark 16:15-16, Luke 24:47) is a central Christian doctrine, of which the transformation of Saul the persecutor into Paul the evangelist (Acts 9) is unquestionably the paradigmatic example. Attempts to convert the native peoples of North America and African slaves (with tactics of widely varied morality) were fixtures during much of the nation’s history (Ahlstrom, 2004; Gaustad & Schmidt, 2002; Marty, 1984). Conversion en masse, from frontier revival camps to televised Billy Graham crusades, have been taken as signs of a uniquely American religiosity, and each newly invented media technology has been devoted to the task with zealous fervor (Hatch, 1989; Schultze, 2003).

If conversion is understood as a choice or collection of choices (Gooren, 2010) rather than a transformation compelled by supernatural forces or produced by psychological vulnerability to conversion-promoting influences, then a religious climate conducive to conversion must offer the ability to choose among a plethora of options for religious belief and practice with minimal threat of retaliation from either the state or large proportions of one’s fellow citizens. As Gooren (2010) puts the point in criticizing the limits of the rational choice perspective:

The quintessential condition is not the *rationalist* actor or even the cost-benefit analysis, implicit or explicit, people make of the religious group(s) they visit. The

essence is religious liberty: the freedom to choose one's religion and the freedom to express that choice by publicly affiliating with, or perhaps just visiting, a particular religious group. Religious freedom leads to religious pluralism, which in turn leads to interreligious competition for members. (p. 132, emphasis in original)

This has been the religious culture of the United States for decades (Bellah & Hammond, 1980; Finke & Stark, 2005) and, in some places, as far back as colonial times (Hall, 1998). As Gooren (2010) writes, "Ample religious freedom and a minimum of government interference provided a fruitful context for the working of a free U.S. religious economy" (p. 7). The ability to choose openly among competing religious doctrines, interpretive schemas, or modes of expressing one's religiosity, without threat of repercussions from the state, is one of the characteristic tendencies of Western societies (Dobbelaere, 2011), with their liberal traditions of religious liberty.

Waldman (2008) contends that this is the meaning toward which the American rhetoric of religious liberty has been striving since its colonial beginnings: "not only the freedom to believe but also the freedom to change — not only the right to practice one faith but also the right to a spiritual journey" (p. 182).

In private relationships, the individualism that is one of the defining characteristics of American culture (Lipset, 1996) has fueled a tendency in recent decades to bracket religion as one aspect among many in an individual's life and character. Although there certainly are exceptions — as the experience of American Muslims, Sikhs, and some other groups since Sept. 11, 2001, has illustrated (Cimino, 2005; Falcone, 2006; Yaser, 2012) — most Americans are willing to befriend, do business with, and employ their fellow members of society without regard to religious identity. For example, fully 90% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement

that their “religious beliefs have caused problems in my workplace,” and similarly high proportions rejected the idea that religious beliefs made it difficult for them to maintain close relationships (94.9%) or take advantage of financial opportunities (92.6%) (Baylor Religion Survey, 2007). “Indeed,” write Stark and Bainbridge (1980), “one might argue that in some sections of the United States today (e.g., Southern California) the social environment of radical religious groups is nearly as benign as in pagan Rome” (p. 1382).

Barring some reversal of these trends of religious diversification, legal protection, and individual tolerance, conversion is poised to be *the* question of American religious life in the twenty-first century. Moreover, the issues surrounding conversion can be expected to assume even greater significance as other countries replicate the American triumvirate of widespread religiosity, enforceable legal guarantees of religious liberty, and a culture of religious tolerance. (This experience is distinct from that of nations with long traditions of religious liberty but a low prevalence of religion in the culture at large, such as in Western Europe, or those characterized by intense religiosity but virtually no legal or practical ability to choose one’s religious identity, as in many Middle Eastern or Southeast Asian countries.) In matters of religion at least, choosing the United States as the society and culture to be studied is not solely based on the convenience of researchers disproportionately likely to be located in that country. American society’s experience with religion is historically singular (e.g., Bellah, 1967; Hatch, 1989; Jorstad, 1986; Marty, 1984), and certain characteristics of the American religious climate appear to be establishing a model toward which much of the world is moving, intentionally or not. Understanding those characteristics offers a glimpse into the future of world religions and religiosity.

CHAPTER ONE. SOCIAL NETWORKS AND CONVERSION IN THE CURRENT AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CULTURE

Not surprisingly, given the Pauline origins of American notions of conversion (Acts 9), much conversion research has conceptualized the experience as a sudden, radical change (Gooren, 2010; Snow & Machalek, 1984). But although converts commonly describe the experience in those terms, research has contributed at least two significant insights that advance understanding of conversion beyond the simplistic “flash of light” archetype. First, conversion is a process that occurs in differing stages across time and probably is occurring continuously, at least in small ways, for each religious practitioner. Second, whether a conversion occurs and what form and direction that experiences takes are functions of the convert’s environment, social contacts, and status within various social structures, not just the convert’s internal attitudes and psychological needs.

Making First Contact: The Significance of the Preaffiliation Stage of Conversion

Conversion today is universally understood in the social sciences as a multistage process, though considerable disagreement surrounds the precise boundaries and characteristics of each stage. Drawing from a comprehensive and masterfully detailed synthesis of more than a century of conversion research spanning scientific and humanistic disciplines, Gooren (2007, 2010) has labeled this newer scholarly interpretation of religious practice a “conversion career.” The concept’s very definition — “the member’s passage, within his or her social and cultural context, through levels, types, and phases of religious participation” (Gooren, 2010, p. 48) — assumes that fluctuations in the degree and direction of one’s religious attachments are persistent features of the religious life rather than reflections of an adolescent soul that will show greater stability with spiritual maturity. Once conceptualized as a single event, conversion now is considered a

way of life. Formerly a signpost for the beginning or the culmination of religious growth, conversion has become a spiritual trait that continually directs that growth. The possibility of conversion is a characteristic of religiosity even for religious practitioners who never avail themselves of such an opportunity.

Although models of the conversion process differ in their terminology and the precise delineation of each stage of a conversion, all agree on a general image of a potential convert gradually developing an increased sense of identity with the new religion, participating in activities and rituals designed to facilitate and test his or her degree of commitment, and submitting to the assessment of higher-ranking or more thoroughly embedded members of the religion whose functions include judging the potential convert's progress and sincerity (Gooren, 2010). (Throughout this disquisition, "new religion" is shorthand for the religion to which conversion is sought, not necessarily one of the "new religious movements" that preoccupied mid-20th-century conversion research [Gooren, 2010].) Most relevantly to the present inquiry, all models concur about the existence of a crucial stage of "first contact," during which the potential convert encounters a new religion and decides at least provisionally whether further exploration of the religion is desired. During this stage, the particular characteristics of the potential convert and his or her contacts in the new religion contribute to laying a unique groundwork for how future interaction will proceed.

Lofland and Stark (1965), for example, write of "encountering" (p. 870) a new religion as the turning-point experience in which a potential convert's psychological "predisposing conditions" (p. 864) meet the characteristics of his or her social network ties to the new religion, and affective bonds with that religion are formed or fail to form. Straus (1979) phrases the encounter in terms of "experimenting" with a new religious group, "learning the . . . language"

(p. 162), before proceeding to levels of involvement that will require irrevocable abandonment of the potential convert's previous ties. Rational-choice theorists Gartrell and Shannon (1985) describe a "weighing" period (p. 33) in which a potential convert attempts to determine whether social and cognitive rewards of a new religious identity address problems that previously had been unexplainable. Long and Hadden (1983) propose an "affiliation" stage (p. 5) that begins the conversion process, which is then followed by a series of "incorporating activities" that draw the potential convert into deeper commitment to the new religion, "shaping activities" that penalize departures from orthodoxy, and "creating activities" that allow a new recruit to display his or her credentials for being welcomed into full membership in the religious community (pp. 6-8). Bromley and Shupe (1979) went farther in emphasizing the new religion's role in the process, offering active recruitment by the new religion as the defining characteristic of a first-contact stage that might not involve adopting any of the new religion's beliefs. More recently, Rambo (1993) has distinguished between merely encountering a new religion and proceeding to interact with it, but the basic concept of making contact with a religion, coming to understand it, and determining whether and how to proceed with further involvement is nonetheless present in his model.

Gooren's (2010) "preaffiliation" terminology is used in this disquisition, because his work is the most comprehensive synthesis of conversion research to date, and because the "pre-" suggests the important decision-making and contingency factors in play during this stage; barring a return to "brainwashing" theories, no conversion is inevitable at the point of first contact with a new religion (Greil, 1977; Heirich, 1977; Lofland & Stark, 1965; Sherkat & Wilson, 1995; Snow & Machalek, 1984; Stark & Bainbridge, 1980).

Regardless of the label, however, this stage of the conversion process is poised to assume immense importance in the current American religious culture. Increasingly, practitioners of various forms of religion and spirituality should be expected to spend more time in the preaffiliation stage of conversion as the incentives to move on from that stage become weaker and the benefits of remaining there grow greater. Growing religious tolerance has reduced social pressure to settle on a fixed, recognizable, “check the box” religious identity. Religious pluralism limits a religion’s ability to apply sanctions for a lack of commitment (Bellah & Hammond, 1980; Sherkat, 1991; Stark & Bainbridge, 1980). Finally, one need not accept the full measure of a rational choice theory of religion to acknowledge that perpetual openness to new ideas, practices, and identities is to the advantage of the individualistic American seeking a religiosity or spirituality that is as personally fulfilling as possible, regardless of its degree of coherence within a prescribed, institutional orthodoxy.

Naming and making explicit this stage of the conversion process is particularly important to this disquisition, because much research into emerging adults’ religiosity and spirituality is conducted without reference to the conversion literature (e.g., Baumbach, Forward, & Hart, 2006; Forward, Sansom-Livolsi, & McGovern, 2008). Thus, many researchers have not identified the full significance of their findings, because they apparently have not realized, or have not considered it important, that their studies of emerging adults’ religiosity and spirituality were simultaneously describing how emerging adults experience the preaffiliation stage of conversion. At the same time, even Gooren (2010) acknowledges the difficulty of filling in the details of this “highly heterogeneous ‘miscellaneous’ category” (p. 136), a stage of conversion characterized by the *absence* of affiliation with and commitment to the religion to which a subject supposedly is in the process of converting. Much would be gained by increased

interaction between conversion studies and emerging adulthood research: emerging adulthood researchers would gain a more robust theoretical framework for interpreting their religiosity and spirituality findings, and conversion researchers would have more guidance in exploring the conversion career where its beginnings are most active.

Explaining Conversion: Social Networks Displace Purely Psychological Perspectives

Converts asked to assess their conversions retrospectively often point to a single, decisive moment (Lofland & Stark, 1965) toward which their lives had, providentially, been moving (Beckford, 1978). However, a complete explanation for conversion cannot be established within the convert him- or herself, neglecting the external circumstances of the conversion. The empirical evidence on conversion points to a gradual process in which “the experience of ‘seeing the light’ is one that generally occurs after a much less sudden experience of developing loyalties toward those who have already seen the light” (Greil, 1977, p. 188 n. 3). Thus, the direction of a potential convert’s involvement with a religion during the preaffiliation stage is largely a function of the social networks through which the potential convert interacts with both the new religion and his or her previous religious affiliations. Each stage of the conversion process must be understood with reference to the qualities and dynamics of these networks.

Early Psychological Explanations for Conversion

The current dominance of the social networking paradigm for conversion studies becomes a great deal easier to understand when it is viewed against the approaches to explaining conversion in vogue in research during the first half or more of the twentieth century, which the newer view finds unfounded (Greil, 1977; Lofland & Stark, 1965; Stark & Bainbridge, 1980; Stark & Finke, 2000) and strongly rejects (Heirich, 1977; Snow & Machalek, 1984). These early approaches generally interpreted conversion as either a fantasy of escape from a situation of

severe psychological or emotional stress for which the convert had inadequate coping alternatives; an outcome of a socialization process (especially parenting) that left the potential convert “ripe for the plucking” (Heirich, 1977, p. 656); or the product of being surrounded in every aspect of life by adherents of the new religious worldview and completely immersed in their perspective (Heirich, 1977; Snow & Machalek, 1984; Stark & Bainbridge, 1980).

The rhetoric within the research tended to depict conversion more as a problem to be solved than as a morally neutral phenomenon to be understood. Conversion research prior to the landmark study by Lofland and Stark (1965) was largely inspired by mass society theory and lumped together the religious sects to which conversions were sought and “other deviant social movements” (Stark & Bainbridge, 1980, p. 1377). Even after the shift toward social-network explanations, “a link between conversions and pathology” dominated conversion research, especially in psychology (Gooren, 2010, p. 21). Conversion was seen as a problem of the adolescent rather than a lifelong feature of religiosity (Gooren, 2007, 2010). Psychological traits thought to render an individual “susceptible” to conversion were described “as if conversion were a disease” (Snow & Machalek, 1984, p. 180), and converts were characterized as misfits with low intelligence, prone to hysteria, and satisfying the same psychological needs that might otherwise have led to substance addictions (Snow & Machalek, 1984). During and after the Korean War, stories of U.N. prisoners “converted” to the Chinese Communist viewpoint contributed to the popularity of “brainwashing” explanations for conversion that paired the vulnerability of the unsuspecting convert with the power of immersion in the new religion’s teachings (Snow & Machalek, 1984).

Social scientists have since concluded overwhelmingly that the brainwashing hypothesis lacks both evidentiary support and theoretical coherence (Snow & Machalek, 1984). Moreover,

the early psychological explanations overall, even when their troubling normative assumptions about conversion are laid aside, failed to distinguish between individuals who were *likely* to convert and those who actually did, thus demonstrating the inability of these explanations to address *why* certain factors in the conversion process functioned as they did (Heirich, 1977; Smilde, 2005; Stark & Bainbridge, 1980).

This is not to say that psychological explanations have no value or that they have been purged from conversion research. The emphasis in more recent research on the “active” seeker (Gooren, 2007) would be terribly incomplete if it could not account for psychological factors in the potential convert’s decision to explore religious alternatives in the first place. However, beliefs and attitudes often form out of interaction with the beliefs and attitudes of others who surround an individual (Greil, 1977; Sherkat & Wilson, 1995), that is, out of social networks; indeed, “[t]he interconnectedness between personality and social factors is particularly striking” (Gooren, 2010, p. 112). Thus, the insight by Greil (1977) that psychological disposition influences which religious beliefs a potential convert will find plausible continues to have value, largely because Greil (1977) avoids the error of presenting such background characteristics as totalizing explanations for which individuals will be malleable in the hands of a new religion. The failure of early psychological explanations does, however, provide increased confidence in the current, more nuanced, more complex, and morally impartial approach to conceptualizing the conversion process.

The Social Network Paradigm in Current Conversion Research

All understandings of conversion that remain tenable in the social science literature agree that interpersonal connections through social networks are crucial to the process (Gooren, 2007; Loveland, 2003). Put simply, social network analysis examines the relationships between the

networked nodes (such as a potential convert and the existing members of a religion), rather than the attributes of the individual actor, such as psychological trauma, intelligence, or worldview (Knoke & Yang, 2008). This emphasis has been prevalent since its introduction by Lofland and Stark (1965) in their seminal article pointing up the inadequacies of older explanations based either on a congruence between the potential convert's worldview or psychological pain and the worldview or solutions offered by the adopted religion, or on a view of the potential convert as the passive victim socialized and conditioned into ripeness for manipulation by those seeking his or her conversion (Greil, 1977; Heirich, 1977; Lofland & Stark, 1965; Smilde, 2005; Stark & Bainbridge, 1980).

As Lofland and Stark (1965) express the basic principle, "In a manner of speaking, final conversion was coming to accept the opinions of one's friends" (p. 871). Forty years later, Smilde (2005) noted the centrality this concept has assumed in conversion research:

Indeed, recruitment through network ties is one of the most established findings in the sociology of religion. ... Networks, then, are the real causes of conversion, and any "deprivations" addressed by the new religious beliefs and practices are better seen as emergent, ex post rationalizations, or, at best, general limiting conditions not very useful in causal explanation. (p. 758)

Gooren (2010) concurs, noting, "It is clear from the literature that almost all people (men *and* women) are recruited into religious organizations through social networks" (p. 47, emphasis in original). (It is, of course, possible to adopt a new religion based on purely intellectual considerations, or for idiosyncratic personal reasons. However, research to date has not identified consistent, generalizable patterns in such conversions that would constitute a clear alternative to conversion through social network ties.)

Social networks fall into two basic categories in the conversion process (Lofland & Stark, 1965). On one hand are social networks representing a “new” religion, in the sense of being new to the potential convert as a religious identity he or she might consider adopting. On the other hand are conversion-inhibiting networks associated with a potential convert’s existing religious identity. These networks contain valuable interpersonal connections or links to social capital that might be lost by conversion, as well as the potential for other forms of sanctions for doubting or deviating from the existing religious identity.

Social networks’ role in promoting conversion. It is widely acknowledged that network actors’ beliefs are in large part a function of what others around them think (Greil, 1977; Sherkat & Wilson, 1995). For conversion in particular, network ties can supply information about a religion, recruit potential converts, construct “plausibility structures” to establish the credibility of the religion’s teachings, apply pressure to adopt them, and sanction new members for doubt or disobedience (Berger, 1967; Sherkat, 1991; Snow & Machalek, 1984). Lofland and Stark (1965) set the precedent in describing the web of ties by which the core members of the religion they studied were recruited:

In the formation of the original core group, an affective bond first developed between Miss Lee and Bertha (the first to meet Miss Lee and begin to espouse her views). Once that had happened, the rest of the original conversions were supported by prior friendships. Bertha was part of the housewife trio of Minnie Mae and Alice; Merwin was Alice’s husband, and Elmer was Merwin’s friend and workmate. Subsequent conversions also followed friendship paths ... (p. 871).

Another revealing finding from a relatively simple network analysis is reported by Stark and Bainbridge (1980) from data collected by other researchers but omitted from their initial article. Examining defections from a doomsday cult, the authors traced the kinship and friendship networks linking each of the group's 60 adults to its three leaders. Only 14 percent of group members directly related to the leaders defected, compared with two-thirds of members linked to the group by belief but not blood.

Contrary to a psychological-needs or socialization model, however, conversion research since Lofland and Stark (1965) has recognized that mere encounter with a new religion's social network is not enough to produce conversion. Some crucial quality or qualities of the network must reach some threshold of strength or number to change an actor's views or affect the actor's decisions. Lofland and Stark (1965) noted that "intensive interaction" with the network they studied seemed to make the difference, a finding supported by later research (Sherkat & Wilson, 1995; Snow & Machalek, 1984). Lofland and Stark (1965) also pointed out that physical proximity with established network members greatly facilitated intensive interaction, although in the age of online media, it remains to be seen whether that finding will hold true. Heirich (1977) found that network contact plus "encapsulation" (degree of being surrounded by people with the same views) "seems to guarantee" conversion (p. 673) but that encapsulation was not a necessary condition. Other researchers point to the pre-existing significance of interpersonal ties; for example, a spouse converts and by the strength of the marriage is able to persuade the other spouse to convert as well (Greil, 1977; Stark & Bainbridge, 1980). Greil (1977) suggests matching "cognitive styles" may play a role in determining whether a crucial network tie is created: not a similarity of thoughts, as in the older "matching worldviews" model, but essentially a similarity in how things are to be thought about. Finally, the ability of ties to a

religious social network to also connect an actor with prestige and cultural capital must be taken into account (Sherkat & Wilson, 1995).

What remains, then, to be discovered? As Smilde (2005) assesses the need, “We know *that* networks matter, now it is time to understand *how* they matter” (p.759). Neither the Lofland-Stark model nor subsequent research has effectively addressed what moves a convert from one stage of the conversion process to another (Lofland & Stark, 1965; Snow & Machalek, 1984); as noted in the Introduction, if the dynamics of communication could fill this gap, it would be a substantial contribution to understanding conversion. Additionally, granting that social networks have a strong influence on actors already oriented toward religious seekership, why are they so oriented (Heirich, 1977)? Once an actor has become a seeker, why does he or she choose one religious network and not another (Greil, 1977)? Exactly how does a social network produce the social-psychological transformation commonly associated with conversion (Snow & Machalek, 1984), and is there still a role in this process for individual psychological needs or ideology (Stark & Bainbridge, 1980)? In particular, Sherkat (1991) contends that the influence of family networks has been seriously neglected in conversion studies.

This is not to say the Lofland-Stark model itself has been adopted wholesale. A number of studies have questioned aspects of the model, especially its insistence that all seven of the factors it identifies are necessary conditions of conversion and that they occur in sequence as a “funnel” that gradually reduces the pool of potential converts (Gooren, 2007). But in spite of particular objections, the broader point, the importance this model places on social networks, stands virtually undisputed (Gooren, 2007; Heirich, 1977; Smilde, 2005).

More recent research into the “religious marketplace” created by the abundance of available beliefs and practices (Warner, 1993) has connected social networks to rational choice

theory in an attempt to restrain the theory's emphasis on seemingly unrestricted individual volition. Almost all researchers today endorse a vision of an "active" convert (Gooren, 2007), rather than the "brainwashing" model that depicts converts as mentally deficient and conversion as a near-pathology (Snow & Machalek, 1984). However, current work also acknowledges that rational choice theory must be modified to recognize the limits social ties impose, as a practical matter, on the choices available (Loveland, 2003). In particular, Smilde (2005) contends that social network research must do more to understand how the very freedom of choice an individual exercises in social relations plays a part in creating networks that will constrain the actor's future choices.

Social networks' role in inhibiting conversion. Offsetting the influence of the network of the religion to which conversion is sought, the strength or weakness of competing or countervailing social networks also is known to be an important factor in the effectiveness of a conversion network (Greil, 1977; Lofland & Stark, 1965; Stark & Bainbridge, 1980; Sherkat, 1991; Sherkat & Wilson, 1995). Indeed, Lofland and Stark (1965) suggest the very severing of existing social ties (by the convert or by others) can form part of the post hoc justification for converting. Lack of social or geographic mobility (Greil, 1977; Sherkat & Wilson, 1995), frequent socializing with one's family (Sherkat, 1991), strong affective ties to parents (Sherkat, 1991), and a continued affiliation with one's existing religious network all seem to inhibit conversion (Sherkat, 1991).

In an American society less rooted to place and more religiously pluralistic than in decades or centuries past, the relative inability of any one social network to impose significant sanctions for choosing the "wrong" religion has greatly diminished the social cost of conversion (Stark & Bainbridge, 1980). Sanctions for apostasy are imposed through social network ties

(Sherkat, 1991; Stark & Bainbridge, 1980); thus, the weaker a potential convert's investment in those ties, the weaker their power to deter the exploration or adoption of a new religion.

Accordingly, the power of a potential convert's existing religious social network to inhibit conversion is usually studied in mirror image, as the effects of the *absence* of a countervailing network against the influence of affective bonds to one's fellow practitioners of a new religion.

The influence of weak identification with one's current religion, and only nominal involvement in its rituals, as a predictor of increased likelihood of conversion is one of the most solidly supported findings in conversion research. Among the qualities of religious identification that signal a likelihood of converting are infrequent attendance at worship services (Heirich, 1977; Williams & Lawler, 2001) or lapses in participation (Sherkat, 1991); membership in a religion without a corresponding ethnic identity (Sherkat, 1991); openness to doubting, questioning, or exploring religious doctrines (Kahn & Greene, 2004); absence of psychological attachments to parents if one's parents were nonreligious (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990); attending a Catholic high school for less than three years (though only if a child is raised Catholic; other schools were not studied) (Perl & Gray, 2007); and a sense that educational attainment (Sherkat, 1991) or cohabitation (Petts, 2009) have made an individual out of place in his or her childhood religion.

As American religion has become more diverse in recent years and conversion research has expanded beyond Christianity, the importance of weak identification with one's current religion in predicting a switch to a new religion has held true. For example, Hall (2006) has argued that the prevalence of Chinese-American college students converting to Christianity is largely attributable to the waning influences of traditional Chinese religion in China and the corresponding ethnic Chinese identity in America, both of which once powerfully bound

potential converts to their parents' religion. In their study of American women converting to Islam, Maslim and Bjorck (2009) found dissatisfaction with the convert's previous religion to be a primary factor in the choice.

What social networks do for potential converts. From the perspective of a seeker or potential convert — or a religious practitioner desiring a reason to recommit to an existing religion in the face of alternatives — social networks perform at least two important functions. First, such networks make information available about the religion, or about the practice of religiosity and spirituality in general. Information-seeking behavior is important to religious conversion because a true conversion rarely occurs suddenly, nor is it motivated entirely by emotional fulfillment or ecstasy. A full conversion generally follows a careful search for meaning (Snow & Machalek, 1984), a sometimes agonizing examination of the potential convert's own values and the teaching and practices of available religious systems (Beckford, 1978; Greil, 1977; Heirich, 1977).

Second, social networks provide various forms of support for the potential convert as he or she assembles an ideal mixture of beliefs and practices. In general, individuals facing stressful life events or changes, especially those that generate self-doubt, seek social support (Nimrod, 2009). The social support sought by an individual considering or in the process of converting to a new religion has two facets. First, the absence of social support increases the likelihood of conversion (Stark & Bainbridge, 1980), particularly for individuals whose low social support stems from weak ties to family (Sherkat 1991; Williams & Lawler, 2001). Conversely, a supportive relationship with the social network of one's existing religious identity can influence the conversion process. Heirich (1977) found that students who had encountered Pentecostals and were considering joining their tradition frequently turned to trusted faculty, clergy, relatives,

or close friends for advice. The vast majority of students who eventually did convert were those who received no “discordant information” (p. 668) about Pentecostal beliefs and practices from their social support networks. Second, social support satisfies the desire for connection with others, even strangers, who understand the doubts, hopes, and frustrations of the conversion process (Beckford, 1978). Such ties can provide opportunities to observe others wrestling with the same problems, to express oneself about the shared experience, to assess one’s religiosity and spirituality as compared to others, and to receive meaningful recognition for progress or encouragement to persist against difficulties (see Baghaei, Kimani, Freyne, Brindal, Berkovsky, & Smith, 2011; Matzat, 2010).

Social networks’ information-providing and social support functions can be performed regardless of whether the network consists of face-to-face relationships, connections through online media, or a combination of both (Colineau & Paris, 2010; Vergeer & Pelzer, 2009). A third function of social networks, allowing the convert to explore, question, and “try on” a variety of religious identities (Snow & Machalek, 1983) while remaining completely anonymous, can only occur through an online social network (Bryant, Sanders-Jackson, & Smallwood, 2006). The possibility that potential converts will increasingly use anonymous online social networks should not be overlooked. Consistent with rational choice approaches to conversion, such an environment of minimal consequences would be desirable for a potential convert trying to maximize the choices available (Sherkat & Wilson, 1995).

CHAPTER TWO. FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS, COMMUNICATION MEDIA, AND RELIGIOUS EXPLORATION IN EMERGING ADULTHOOD

“Emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2000, 2004) is the label increasingly applied to the years from ages 18 to 25. As the exploration and uncertain individuation of adolescence blend into the autonomy and lifestyle options that come with adulthood (Arnett, 2004), emerging adulthood is associated with a host of attitudinal and behavioral changes (Fromme, Corbin, & Kruse, 2008; Larose & Boivin, 1998; Oswald & Clarke, 2003; Perry, Hladkyj, Pekrun, Clifton, & Chipperfield, 2005; Stearns, Buchmann, & Bonneau, 2009; Vail-Smith, Maguire, Brinkley, & Burke, 2010; Wetherill, Neal, & Fromme, 2010; White & Jackson, 2004/2005). These include exploring new religious ideas, practices, and identities in search of a religiosity or spirituality that is authentically one’s own (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Milevsky & Leh, 2008).

As described in Chapter One, encountering unfamiliar religions and exploring their teachings and rituals, however tepidly, places an emerging adult into the first, “preaffiliation,” stage of religious conversion. The pressures of religious social networks, to promote conversion to the new religion on one hand and to inhibit conversion away from one’s childhood religion on the other, thus come into play, however unevenly. As explained below, the communication patterns within an emerging adult’s family play a significant role in determining how effective that existing religious social network will be in maintaining an emerging adult’s commitment to his or her childhood religion.

A second important communication-related factor in determining whether the family religious social network will outweigh the influence of new religious networks an emerging adult encounters is the degree to which emerging adults and their families use media communication technologies to remain in frequent communication. Rapid advances in interactive media

technologies add to the number of alternative religious social networks a potential convert has available, but such media also may be means by which an existing religious network can encourage recommitment or at least deter conversion. The tug-of-war for influence between “old” and “new” religious networks that is a widely acknowledged part of conversion (Loveland, 2003; Sherkat & Wilson, 1995; Snow & Machalek, 1984) becomes increasingly important for understanding why some potential converts will progress beyond preaffiliation to deeper commitment to a given new religion while others will not. Factors such as physical proximity to fellow practitioners that once gave a clear advantage to one religious network or the other (Lofland & Stark, 1965; Stark & Bainbridge, 1980) have been mitigated, placing any religion on a more equal footing with any other in the competition for adherents. Understanding the influence of religious social networks thus requires discerning what tools religious networks do have available to keep a potential convert within the flock.

Prime Time for Conversion: Emerging Adulthood as a Period of Religious Decisions

The wide range of attitudinal and behavioral changes associated with emerging adulthood include exploration of religious and spiritual beliefs in practices (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Milevsky & Leh, 2008). Thus, it seems justified, in researching conversion as with other topics, to study this period of life as distinct from adolescence or the more stable identity of fully formed young adulthood (Arnett, 2000). This approach is consistent with Gooren’s (2010) call for a life-cycle perspective on conversion that recognizes that, although conversion is more likely in a person’s younger years, it can occur at any time, and that each phase of life could show considerable variation in how the process plays out.

Limitations in Existing Research on Religiosity and Spirituality in Emerging Adulthood

Despite considerable interest in emerging adulthood, existing research into religious and spiritual changes during this life stage suffers from several limitations that make it difficult to state detailed conclusions about religiosity and spirituality during this period (DeHaan, Yonker, & Affholter, 2011). Research about the formation of religious identity tends to ignore emerging adulthood in favor of childhood and adolescence (Barry, Padilla-Walker, & Nelson, 2012; DeHaan, Yonker, & Affholter, 2011), just as much emerging adulthood literature overlooks religion (Barry & Nelson, 2005). However, the more recent research on emerging adulthood seems to show increasing interest in religion and spirituality (Hill, 2011).

Even emerging adulthood research that does incorporate religion, however, often suffers from poor conceptual definitions and a lack of nuance in operationalizing such crucial constructs as “religion” (DeHaan, Yonker, & Affholter, 2011). Frequently, this is because emerging adulthood researchers tend to be interested in health- and wellness-related behaviors such as substance abuse (Fromme, Corbin, & Kruse, 2008; White & Jackson, 2004/2005) or sexual choices (Fromme, Corbin, & Kruse, 2008; Vail-Smith, Maguire, Brinkley, & Burke, 2010; Wetherill, Neal, & Fromme, 2010), or markers of psychological development, reducing religiosity and spirituality to one predictor among many for the dependent variables of interest (Cotton, McGrady, & Rosenthal, 2010). Most researchers recognize that simplistic operationalizations of religiosity and spirituality, such as frequency of attending worship services, are inadequate (DeHaan, Yonker, & Affholter, 2011; Milevsky & Leh, 2008). However, such measures nonetheless remain common (Cotton, McGrady, & Rosenthal, 2010; DeHaan, Yonker, & Affholter, 2011; Hill, 2011; Stoppa & Lefkowitz, 2010).

For example, one review of religiosity and spirituality studies in the health and wellness research found that two-thirds used one- or two-item measures of religiosity or spirituality (Cotton, McGrady, & Rosenthal, 2010), not the kinds of multidimensional scales needed to capture the true nature or intensity of religious dynamics (DeHaan, Yonker, & Affholter, 2011; Stoppa & Lefkowitz, 2010). Another review, this one of the psychological literature on emerging adulthood and religion, found that only one-quarter of the studies operationalized religiosity or spirituality in a way that matched the authors' theoretical conceptualization; typically, the conceptualization was appropriately nuanced but the measures were not (DeHaan, Yonker, & Affholter, 2011). Indeed, 16% of studies on spirituality and religiosity did not even define the construct, and those that did showed almost no agreement on a definition (DeHaan, Yonker, & Affholter, 2011). Nearly two-thirds of studies in the Cotton et al. (2010) review used measures of religiosity and spirituality developed *ad hoc* by the researchers, and many offered no reliability data. (As described in Chapter Three, the measures in this disquisition were chosen with an eye toward overcoming these limitations.)

The Importance of Emerging Adulthood for Conversion

Notwithstanding the conceptual and measurement limitations of much research into religiosity and spirituality during emerging adulthood, this literature does show continuities and recurring findings. These should be interpreted against the background truth that most emerging adults will not complete the conversion process (Ozarak, 1989). However, at least three findings assign importance to emerging adulthood as the key time for conversion, separate from conversion-influencing changes that can happen in adolescence and later adulthood.

First, emerging adults internalize values they did not completely absorb as their own during adolescence (Arnett, 2007). The onset of emerging adulthood brings the capability for

thinking in abstract terms, especially those that assign meaning to emotions and experience (Cotton, McGrady, & Rosenthal, 2010). Such abstract thinking often involves examining existential questions of purpose and questioning previously accepted answers (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). Such existential difficulties are well accepted in the conversion literature through numerous models acknowledging that a potential convert's emotional and psychological state influences his or her receptivity to new religious ideas (e.g., Greil, 1977; Lofland & Stark, 1965; Snow & Machalek, 1983). An emerging adult can become uniquely ripe for conversion because of this desire to resolve issues with moral, spiritual, transcendent, or otherworldly referents.

Second, emerging adulthood is necessarily a time of openness to new religious ideas because it is necessarily an opportunity to question one's childhood religion in a way that is not possible when a child or adolescent is tightly integrated into and controlled by the family religious social network (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Hoge, Johnson, & Luidens, 1993). The emerging adult is at an important milestone developmentally. As God replaces parents in the "all knowing, all powerful" role, religion becomes increasingly salient to many emerging adults (Cotton, McGrady, & Rosenthal, 2010). Questions and doubts that previously seemed unimportant thus can begin to demand resolution.

Third, emerging adults have, as never before in their lives, the freedom inherent in adulthood to choose with whom they will socialize in a variety of contexts, not just religion (Astin, 1993). As emerging adults decide which relationships to form and what the nature and depth of those relationships will be, they are establishing social networks, some of which may prove to be conduits for new religious beliefs, practices, and identities. Stoppa and Lefkowitz (2010) call for further research on this point to understand how emerging adults make such

choices and to determine whether existing religious preferences drive the composition of an emerging adult's social networks or vice versa.

Changes in an Emerging Adult's Religious and Spiritual Beliefs and Practices

Despite the limitations of other studies, some research into emerging adults' religiosity and spirituality has provided enough nuance to discern the characteristics of some of the changes that occur during this important stage of life. Research into religiosity and spirituality generally distinguishes between beliefs and practices (Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007). Both change considerably, though in different ways, during emerging adulthood.

Changes in religious beliefs during emerging adulthood. At least four qualities of emerging adults' changing religious and spiritual beliefs have been well established. First, religious beliefs as religious beliefs are important to emerging adults (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Stoppa & Lefkowitz, 2010; Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007). The popular notion that once-devout children "lose their religion" once they become adults and leave their childhood homes is unsupported by empirical research. Many childhood religious beliefs remain stable, and some are even strengthened, although research findings on this point are mixed (Barry & Nelson, 2005; Barry, Padilla-Walker, & Nelson, 2012; Cotton, McGrady, & Rosenthal, 2010; DeHaan, Yonker, & Affholter, 2011; Hill, 2011; Milevsky & Leh, 2008; Vaidyanathan, 2011).

Second, emerging adults are skeptical of religious institutions and their authoritative proclamations of doctrine (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Stoppa & Lefkowitz, 2008). Consistent with the attitudes of most Americans (Stark, 2008), emerging adults are especially unlikely to accept the claims of "monopolizing" religions; that is, religions that claim they alone possess the truth of sacred matters (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). This finding provides the basis for treating religion (institutional, doctrinal approaches to the sacred and transcendent) and spirituality

(noninstitutional approaches to such ideas) as distinct but overlapping constructs (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Emerging adults tend to move from institutional to noninstitutional expressions of spirituality (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2010; Cherry, DeBerg, & Porterfield, 2001).

Third, and closely related to skepticism of institutional religion, emerging adults value personal experience and a sense of authenticity in religion (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Barry & Nelson, 2005; Stoppa & Lefkowitz, 2008). In large part, this attitude stems from emerging adults' belief that one of the defining criteria of adulthood is deciding one's own beliefs and values rather than accepting teachings handed down by authority (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). Arnett and Jensen (2002) contend that the religion of most emerging adults can be summed up as, "Whatever they choose for themselves" (p. 463).

Fourth, emerging adults' religious beliefs, practices, and identities tend increasingly to be customized, extremely diverse cocktails (Arnett & Jensen, 2002), reflecting both the individualization of religion (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985) and the privatization of religious life (Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007). Emerging adults generally are comfortable accepting some of a religion's beliefs while disregarding others (Barry & Nelson, 2005), treating religious doctrines as "symbolic toolboxes" (Hervieu-Leger, 1993, p. 141) to be drawn upon as needed. Additionally, emerging adults often see no contradiction in identifying oneself with a particular religion while rejecting some of its teachings (Hill, 2011; Stoppa & Lefkowitz, 2008), which also illustrates the importance of not taking such self-identifications at face value without further measures of what an emerging adult actually believes. Combining doctrines and practices from multiple religions also is generally accepted (Roof, 1993), although such "super-empirical" ideas as heaven and hell, demons, ESP,

and communication with the dead are out favor with emerging adults who identify with a variety of religions (Hill, 2011).

Changes in religious practice during emerging adulthood. Compared to beliefs, the change in most emerging adults' religious and spiritual practice is much simpler and accords better with popular images of this period of life. Participation in religious rituals and institutions declines significantly during emerging adulthood, especially for emerging adults who enter higher education (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Barry & Nelson, 2005; Hill, 2011; Stoppa & Lefkowitz, 2008; Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007; Vaidyanathan, 2011). Indeed, the decline probably is steeper than many studies indicate, because many measures of religious activity do not distinguish between attending the rituals of a religious community and engaging in such individualistic practices as private prayer or meditation (Stoppa & Lefkowitz, 2008). The diminished religious participation is attributable at least in part to leaving the strictures of the childhood religious social network (Arnett & Jensen, 2002), although it also reflects increased competition for emerging adults' time as compared to their childhood and adolescent years (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007). Much of this decline in religious activity is temporary: religious participation rises again once an individual marries and has children (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007).

The Influence of Higher Education on Emerging Adults' Religiosity and Spirituality

Most emerging adults spend at least some of these years in an institution of higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), though of course not all who experience the college setting complete their degrees. Several characteristics of the college setting distinguish the religious experience of emerging adults who enter higher education from the experience of those who do not. In general, higher education is a socially approved site for ideological and

lifestyle experimentation and exploration, especially in the early semesters (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). It also requires significant psychological adjustments to meet new demands (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). Curricula continue to prize Enlightenment-style critical evaluation of received ideas (Barry & Nelson, 2005; Hill, 2011; Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007), and the religious pluralism of both the curriculum and the campus life of many large universities (Hill, 2011) undermines the “plausibility structures” (Berger, 1967) surrounding religions that claim exclusive possession of truth.

The longer a student is in college, the more he or she displays a “quest orientation” characterized by ubiquitous questioning and exploration of ideas (Boyatzis & McConnell, 2006), the very qualities that can lead a potential convert in the preaffiliation phase of conversion to take seriously the opportunity to hear a new religion’s teachings and explore its practices. Despite this, however, the broad-brush conception of higher education as a “breeding ground for apostasy” (Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977, p. 109), as the religious environment of such institutions in the 1960s and 1970s has been depicted, receives only lukewarm support from more recent research (Hill, 2011; Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007). These inquiries have not found the significant drops in religiosity that were common in earlier studies. In fact, emerging adults who do *not* go to college show greater declines in religiosity (Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007).

This difference probably is partly attributable to the increased presence of religious student organizations on college campuses (Cherry, DeBerg, & Porterfield, 2001; Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007) — one element of a reaction to the concerns about student religiosity in the ’60s and ’70s. Another proposed explanation is that today’s emerging adults come to college already so cynical about established institutions such as religions that they cannot become any more skeptical (Hill, 2011). It also is possible that emerging adults accustomed to

compartmentalizing their religious beliefs, and perhaps taking a purely instrumental approach to their collegiate coursework, never engage or even recognize contradictions between their religious beliefs and ideas they encounter in class (Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007).

Changes in emerging adults' religiosity are not uniform across higher education. An institution's status as public or religiously affiliated, as well as the religious influence or lack thereof in its curriculum, affects changes in religiosity and spirituality (Reimer, 2010). The way an emerging adult was taught his or her childhood religion matters (Baumbach, Forward, & Hart, 2006). Additionally, some religions retain a more traditional religiosity than others (Loveland, 2003), and some religious identities have less conflict than others with the values of secular society (Hammond & Hunter, 1984; Iannaccone, 1994; Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007).

The many unanswered questions and research yet to be done on this topic do not invalidate the basic point. Entering higher education does not inevitably or consistently produce diminished levels of religiosity and spirituality. The changes in emerging adults' religious and spiritual beliefs and practices in the higher education setting thus must be treated as variables with a full range of motion in the emerging adulthood stage of life, not the uniform products of any anti-religious influence inherent in higher education.

Family Communication and Religious Exploration in Emerging Adulthood

In emerging adulthood, especially in the setting of higher education, one's childhood religious social network is challenged by social networks from other religious traditions, bringing an emerging adult into the preaffiliation stage of conversion in which he or she will need to decide whether to inquire further and commit more deeply to the network of one or more new religions. In the resulting competition for influence, to determine whether the emerging adult will more or less remain in the childhood religious tradition or will complete the

conversion process in a new religion, the childhood religious social network will attempt to exert its influence. But how? As discussed in the Introduction, the mechanisms by which a religious social network exerts influence must be communication processes. Two communication characteristics seem especially plausible as measures of the childhood religious social network's ability to inhibit conversion: family communication patterns, and the family social network's use of media communication technologies once an emerging adult leaves the childhood home.

The Importance of the Family Religious Social Network

The family is the primary and most important network of socialization, including socialization into a religious identity, however malleable (Bao, Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Langer, 1999; Uecker, 2009). Even if this network's beliefs are atheistic or agnostic, it still retains its significance as the starting point for an emerging adult's religious and spiritual change. In the preaffiliation stage of conversion, the influence of this network will compete with the influence of all other religious social networks with which an emerging adult makes contact, determining whether the emerging adult retains his or her childhood religious beliefs, practices, and identity intact; changes them in significant ways short of conversion; or completes the conversion process and adopts at least once belief, practice, or identity that is mutually exclusive with a component of the childhood religious identity.

As the representatives of, and principal actors in, the childhood religious social network, parents typically want their children to continue in the childhood religious identity (Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006). This is true despite the premium society at large places on individually determined religious beliefs (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). However, once an emerging adult leaves the childhood home, parental influence weakens, become indirect, and operates at a distance (Arnett, 1995; Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Barry, Padilla-Walker, & Nelson, 2012; Uecker,

Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007). Parents' influence is especially diminished if they have not undertaken to actively transmit their religion's traditions (Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007). Moreover, emerging adults can become openly hostile to retaining childhood religious beliefs (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). At the same time, other influences on religiosity and spirituality become more proximate and more important, especially media content that conveys messages about religiosity and spirituality in general or about the emerging adult's religious or spiritual quality (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Barry, Padilla-Walker, & Nelson, 2012).

Religious social networks can take a variety of forms, but this disquisition limits its focus to a religious network that consists of a potential convert's immediate family, other relatives whose connection to the potential convert is as intimate and influential as immediate family, and non-relatives treated as effectively "part of the family," such as a priest or other prominent figure in the religious community. Members of this network are assumed to share a common religion; if not, the close family network could not double as a religious network.

Without question, future researchers should test this disquisition's propositions in other types of social networks. For now, however, this delineation is made, first, because the family network is consistently identified as an important factor in conversion (Sherkat, 1991; Loveland, 2003); second, because the involuntary nature of the network and the social expectation of close relationships with one's family force the potential convert's choices into starker relief; and, third, because the close family network possesses the unique power to control and shape children.

Family Communication Patterns in an Emerging Adult's Childhood Religious Network

Family communication patterns theory, more precisely labeled as a theory of communication between parents and children (Baxter & Akkoo, 2011), has been used for decades to classify families into a typology of family cultures (Baxter & Akkoo, 2011; Koerner

& Fitzpatrick, 2002). The two axes that define these categories are a family's "conversation orientation" (the extent to which all members are encouraged to participate in discussions on varied topics) and its "conformity orientation" (the extent to which family members are expected to accept and behave in accordance with a uniform set of beliefs or values, usually determined by the parents) (Baxter & Akkoo, 2011; Colaner, 2009; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). A family with a high conversation orientation will place a premium on frequent and satisfying discussions of a variety of topics and will encourage children to participate in decision-making. On the other dimension, a family with a high conformity orientation will place great value on obedience and uniformity of behavior; such families will tend to display low levels of conflict, because meaningful individual differences are discouraged or suppressed (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002).

The family communication patterns one experiences in the childhood home are associated with numerous and varied outcomes in later life (Schrodt, 2005; Schrodt & Ledbetter, 2007; Schrodt, Witt, & Messersmith, 2008). These include many variables (e.g., attitudes toward media, family conflict management, belief in the uniqueness of one's religion, and psychological stressors [Schrodt, Witt, & Messersmith, 2008]) that are identified in various conversion models as potential influences on how an emerging adult will make decisions in the preaffiliation stage of conversion (Gooren, 2007, 2010). In other work, family communication patterns are associated with young adults' degree of intellectual inflexibility (Ledbetter & Schrodt, 2008), which could influence receptivity to new religious ideas or willingness to question one's current religion. Baxter and Akkoo (2011) placed religion in a category of family "tradition" that clusters with dating and rules for relationships around the midpoint of the conversation-conformity axes. The authors rightly urged closer study of this inconclusive group of topics.

Although an explicit link apparently has not been drawn between family communication patterns and conversion, numerous studies suggest more directly the value of further exploring the integration of religion and family communication patterns. A family's communication patterns, particularly the amount and openness of communication once an emerging adult has left the childhood home, is more important than the parenting style used in childhood in determining whether an emerging adult will retain a high degree of spirituality (Baumbach, Forward, & Hart, 2006). Baumbach et al. (2006) suggest that frequent and open communication about spirituality during emerging adulthood conveys to emerging adults that parents consider spirituality relevant beyond the childhood years. This assessment states in different terms that the principle of the "conversation orientation" of family communication patterns theory influences spirituality among emerging adults. Mullikin (2006) also found that frequent communication with parents — suggestive of conversation orientation — about religion increases an emerging adult's likelihood of self-identifying as religious, regardless of the emerging adult's gender.

Similarly, while again not specifically using family communication patterns theory, Forward, Sansom-Livolsi, and McGovern (2008) found parents' influence on emerging adults' religiosity to be rooted in a sense during childhood that religion was a source of connection among family members that influenced other forms of family communication. This notion of the religion as a shared quality that the family lives through its interactions, as opposed to a set of rules that parents dictate but are not necessarily bound to follow, fits closely with the construct underlying the "conformity orientation" of family communication patterns theory. Colaner (2009) found that both dimensions of family communication patterns theory were related to beliefs about gender roles within Evangelical families, indicating the continued value of using family communication patterns theory to study religious differences.

Media Communication Technologies and Emerging Adults' Relationships With the Childhood Religious Social Network

The assumption that the childhood family social network loses much of its influence on religious beliefs, practices, and identities once an emerging adult leaves the childhood home, increasingly to enter higher education, is challenged by the rapidly increasing prevalence of new media communication devices among emerging adults and their families. Moreover, the development of these devices beyond simple text-based communication to include pictures, audio-video transmission, real-time interaction, and other features that more closely approximate the richness of face-to-face communication makes increasingly plausible the possibility that the childhood religious social network will continue to exert something approaching the full extent of its conversion-inhibiting power even after an emerging adult is geographically separated from the network.

Examining the influence of changes in media on the conversion process is part of the larger project, not only to understand conversion in a changing society, but also to understand more broadly the effects of increasingly individualized, interactive, and omnipresent media technologies on social life. Media theories developed during decades of one-directional communication controlled by a limited number of gatekeepers — with network television the paradigmatic example — have been challenged by more recent work (e.g., Bennett & Iyengar, 2008, 2010; Chafee & Metzger, 2001; Katz, 1996; Sunstein, 2007, 2009; Webster, 2005, 2011). Questioning assumptions about social networks developed in a simpler media environment contributes to the effort needed in all media-influenced areas of social research “to see where foundational modern theory needs to be adapted and, in some cases, overthrown, in order to keep

pace with the orientations of late modern audiences, and new modes of content production and information delivery” (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008, p. 713).

Media Communication Technologies and Family Communication

The popularity of owning and using media communication technologies among emerging adults, and younger teens on the threshold of emerging adulthood, has been established beyond question (Pearson, Carmon, Tobola, & Fowler, 2009). Since 2006, the proportion of teenagers with Internet access has stayed above 95% (Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi, & Gasser, 2013), and the figure is virtually 100% for emerging adults at higher education institutions (Smith, Rainie, & Zickuhr, 2011). Emerging adults in higher education are also more likely to have access to broadband Internet service and wireless connections to the Internet (Smith, Rainie, & Zickuhr, 2011), the kinds of convenient, high-speed communication that facilitate extensive use of online communication media. Emerging adults ages 18-24 are more likely than other age groups to use new media devices of every kind (Smith, Rainie, & Zickuhr, 2011; Zickuhr, 2011), especially the smartphones that make multimedia communication both convenient and mobile (Madden, Lenhart, Dugan, Cortesi, & Gasser, 2013; Smith, 2012; Smith, Rainie, & Zickuhr, 2011). Smartphone ownership is more prevalent among emerging adults with at least some college education (including those who are still working on their degrees) than among their peers with high school diplomas or less (Smith, Rainie, & Zickuhr, 2011).

Regardless of the media communication device used, emerging adults are more likely than other age groups to use new media technologies for communication (Zickuhr, 2011). Eighty-nine percent of adults ages 18-29 use social networking sites, significantly higher than any other group (Brenner & Smith, 2013). This level of social media use holds true regardless of whether emerging adults are in a higher education setting (Smith, Rainie, & Zickuhr, 2011).

Transmitting text messages has replaced talking on the telephone as the preferred mode of communication for emerging adults and younger teens (Lenhart, 2012b), and these age groups are “far and away” the most frequent users of text messages (Smith, 2011a, p. 3). Emerging adults ages 18-24 exchange a median of 50 text messages per day, although that figure drops after completion of a college degree (Smith, 2011a). Emerging adults also are the most enthusiastic users of video communication, through both uploaded one-way videos and interactive video chat services (Lenhart, 2012a).

Communication through new media technologies does not occur in isolation from an emerging adult’s other communication behaviors. Pearson and her colleagues found low rates of using new media technologies for communication (as opposed to entertainment) among emerging adults with the highest levels of loneliness, while emerging adults with high levels of social connectedness were more likely to use new media for communication (Pearson, Carmon, Tobola, & Fowler, 2009), suggesting that offline communication patterns are at least partially continued in new media. For example, emerging adults who most frequently send text messages also are the most vocal participants in face-to-face communication; that is, texters are also talkers (Lenhart, 2012b). Emerging adults identify staying in contact with others as their principal motivation for using text messages so frequently (Lenhart, 2012b), recognizing the connection between these devices and the maintenance of one’s social networks. Use of social media networks is particularly driven by a desire to stay in contact with family members; 64% of adults listed family connection as a major reason for using social networks, and 23% considered it a minor reason (Smith, 2011b).

Emerging adults, of course, are not the only users of social networks and other media communication technologies. Their parents and other family members also are participating in

this trend. Use of social networking sites has become a “major activity” that crosses all age groups (Brenner & Smith, 2013, p. 2). Using social networking sites, watching videos, and blogging are increasing in popularity faster with older age groups than with adults age 33 or younger (Zickuhr, 2010).

Media communication technologies have the potential both to extend and to change the effects of communication patterns within the family social network (which is also the childhood religious social network) and therefore to preserve more of that network’s control over a physically absent member’s religious and spiritual life than has previously been feasible. Media are well established as sites for the family social network’s control over its child members, communicating rules and expectations for media use (Clark, 2011; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Van den Bulck and Van den Bergh, 2000), mediating the effects of messages received through media (Clark, 2011; Moscardelli & Liston-Heyes, 2005), and shaping attitudes toward online media as an effect of the family’s communication patterns (Ledbetter, 2010). Moreover, the use of media in general and new media technologies in particular is a substantial factor affecting the operation of other dynamics within the family social network (Hoover, Clark, & Alters, 2004). Christensen (2009) found that the frequency of cell phone calls and text messages, combined with a family network’s degree of physical separation, establishes the strength of its “presence at a distance” (p. 449), which in turn reaffirms both parental authority and a child’s sense of being secure and accountable within the family.

However, the family social network’s influence cannot be assumed to continue unchanged through media communication technologies, both because of the limits of the technologies and because newly autonomous emerging adults engage in active boundary management to limit the influence of their childhood family network (Ledbetter, Heiss, Sibal,

Lev, Battle-Fisher, & Shubert, 2010). Beyond this cautionary qualification, the degree of influence the family social network can continue to wield through media communication technologies is difficult to infer even approximately from existing research. Such research has heavily emphasized telephone communication (e.g., Christensen, 2009; Weisskirch, 2011) and situations in which children and adolescents still live in the childhood home (Clark, 2011; Moscardelli & Liston-Heyes, 2005). In part, this disquisition extends family communication research by including the influence of new media communication on relations with a geographically separated member.

Media Communication Technologies as Forces Promoting Conversion

Using media communication technologies to distribute religious ideas has been an element of American religious culture since the Puritan colonists set up North America's first printing press (Emery, Emery, & Roberts, 2000). Since then, the "penny press," radio and television programs, and audio and video recordings have been produced with millennial fervor for religious ends (Hatch, 1989; Hoover, 1988; Schultze, 2003). It thus is hardly surprising that promoting and exploring religion was one of the first, and remains one of the most consistent, purposes to which Internet sites and other media communication technologies are devoted (e.g., Fernback, 2002; Gilmore, 2011; Grimes, 2002; Hoover, 2006; Stout, 2011; Underwood, 2002).

Even a relatively early study of Internet use found extensive activity by "Religion Surfers," of whom about half sought information about other faiths and more than a third were converts (Larsen, 2001). Hoover, Clark, and Rainie (2004) found that most Internet users had engaged in some sort of religious activity online. Although most users who explored religions other than their own listed mere curiosity as their motive, conversion models have long conceptualized a survey of available information on religion, including through media, as part of

the preaffiliation process. Additionally, even Internet users who remained within their home traditions were more likely to engage in personal spirituality than compliance with institutionally mandated practices (Hoover, Clark, & Rainie, 2004). Such individualism is entirely consistent with an openness to entering the preaffiliation stage and exploring other religious options.

More recent research has repeatedly affirmed that today's religious media, as with media of any kind, are increasingly interactive and respond to any purpose for which the practitioner of American religion chooses to use them (Fernback, 2002; Gilmore, 2011; Grimes, 2002; Hoover, 1998; Stout, 2011). However, one dynamic of experiencing religion through media has changed with the spread of these new communication technologies. Religious media products of the past reflected the views of institutional religions or well-funded evangelists. A media user inclined to explore alternatives for religious beliefs, practices, and identities today has unprecedented latitude to ask questions, express doubts, amass information, advocate one's own religious or spiritual ideas, even participate virtually in a religion to "try on" the role of convert (Snow & Machalek, 1983) — and then to "disaffiliate" from a new religion that seems not to provide the answers or meaning a potential convert seeks (Gooren, 2010). It is entirely possible, and perhaps even is becoming probable, that first contact with a new religion, the beginning of the preaffiliation stage of conversion, will occur through media communication technologies rather than the kinds of face-to-face social networks that Lofland and Stark (1965) and research in their tradition envision.

CHAPTER THREE. HYPOTHESES AND METHODS

As justified in Chapters One and Two, this disquisition explores the intersection in emerging adulthood of three constructs: family communication patterns, media communication technologies, and the preaffiliation stage of religious conversion. It is hypothesized that the independent variables, family communication patterns and use of media communication technologies, will contribute significantly to predicting an emerging adult's exploration of alternative religious beliefs, practices, and identities (i.e., the emerging adult's behavior in the preaffiliation stage of conversion). These behaviors are conceptualized as strengthening or weakening the influence of new religious social networks relative to the childhood religious network and therefore largely determining the emerging adult's likelihood of converting partially or completely away from the childhood religion.

This dependent variable — exploration of religious beliefs, practices, and identities — is operationalized in five ways. First, the degree of importance an emerging adult attaches to religion *per se* is evidence of his or her likelihood of exploring alternative religious beliefs, practices, and identities. Such importance is evidence that an emerging adult's religious life is driven by intrinsic motivation to find satisfaction in religion, rather than extrinsic motivation to satisfy others, usually parents in the case of children and adolescents. Intrinsic motivation might prompt a wide-ranging exploration of religious alternatives, or an emerging adult also might be less likely to explore alternatives to a childhood religion he or she practices out of intrinsic motivations. A second way of operationalizing the dependent variable is to measure directly the emerging adult's degree of attachment to his or her childhood religion. Third, the dependent variable is operationalized by measuring an emerging adult's degree of openness toward new religious beliefs, practices, and identities. Fourth, the dependent variable can be operationalized

as the emerging adult's perception that he or she is receiving social support from a religious community on campus: either one associated with the childhood religion (which would inhibit conversion) or one representing a new religion with which the emerging adult is now in preaffiliation (which would promote conversion). Finally, the dependent variable can be operationalized as whether the emerging adult continues to self-identify as part of the religious tradition practiced in the childhood home, conceptualized here as a family religious social network.

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis addresses the effect of “conversation orientation” in a family's communication pattern. Because high conversation orientation indicates that a family encourages open discussion and a role for children in decision-making (Baxter & Akkoor, 2011; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002), it is considered more likely to create intrinsic motivation for practicing and identifying with the childhood religion (Baumbach, Forward, & Hart, 2006). However, the very habit of open conversation that creates this motivation also can lead the emerging adult to engage in dialogue with newly encountered religions, rather than single-mindedly adhering to what was orthodox in the childhood religious social network. This possibility is tested in Hypothesis 1c, in which high conversation orientation is treated as a conversion-promoting force. In the rest of Hypothesis 1, high conversation orientation is hypothesized to inhibit conversion.

H₁: Higher “conversation orientation” in a family's communication patterns will predict the following patterns of exploration of new religious beliefs, practices, and identities in college:

H_{1a}: Greater importance of religion to the emerging adult.

H_{1b}: Greater attachment to the childhood religion.

H_{1c}: Greater openness to new religious ideas.

H_{1d}: Greater likelihood of perceiving supportive connections in college with a religious group or community from the childhood religion, and lesser likelihood of perceiving such connections with a group or community from a new religion.

H_{1e}: Greater likelihood of continuing to identify with the childhood religious tradition.

The second hypothesis takes up the other dimension of family communication patterns. High conformity orientation indicates that a family promotes obedience and suppresses individuality, leading to extrinsic motivation for practicing the childhood religion and identifying with its ideas. It is possible that an emerging adulthood from such circumstances would dismiss religion entirely as a childhood burden that adults have the privilege of discarding; Hypothesis 2_a tests this possibility. However, given that a sizable majority of emerging adults indicate that religion and spirituality remain important to them, it seems more likely that an emerging adult from a high-conformity family would explore a variety religious beliefs, practices, and identities without giving a privileged position to the childhood religion. Conformity orientation thus is conceptualized in Hypotheses 2_b through 2_e as a conversion-promoting force.

H₂: Higher “conformity orientation” in a family’s communication patterns will predict the following patterns of exploration of new religious beliefs, practices, and identities in college:

H_{2a}: Lesser importance of religion to the emerging adult.

H_{2b}: Lesser attachment to the childhood religion.

H_{2c}: Greater openness to new religious ideas.

H_{2d}: Lesser likelihood of perceiving supportive connections in college with a religious group or community from the childhood religion, and greater likelihood of perceiving such connections with a group or community from a new religion.

H_{2e}: Lesser likelihood of continuing to identify with the childhood religious tradition.

The other independent variable, media communication technologies, is tested in Hypothesis 3 for its influence when used for *intra-family* communication, in Hypothesis 4 for the influence of emerging adult's *attitudes* toward using such technologies for religious purposes, and in Hypotheses 5 and 6 for the influence of emerging adults' *actual consumption* of religious media. For Hypothesis 3, the use of communication media technologies within an emerging adult's family is thought to strengthen the childhood religious social network relative to other religious networks the emerging adult might encounter and thus act as a conversion-inhibiting force.

H₃: More frequent communication with family through media will predict the following patterns of exploration of new religious beliefs, practices, and identities in college:

H_{3a}: Greater importance of religion to the emerging adult.

H_{3b}: Greater attachment by an emerging adult to his or her childhood religion.

H_{3c}: Lesser openness to new religious ideas.

H_{3d}: Greater likelihood of perceiving supportive connections in college with a religious group or community from the childhood religion, and lesser likelihood of perceiving such connections with a group or community from a new religion.

H_{3e}: Greater likelihood of continuing to identify with the childhood religious tradition.

Media communication technologies also are a means by which emerging adults can encounter religious social networks without necessarily having face-to-face contact with members of those “new” religions or devotees of unfamiliar religious and spiritual practices. While the vast majority of emerging adults will use media communication technologies for a variety of purposes, it remains an open question whether an emerging adult will consider it appropriate to use these communication technologies for religious or spiritual purposes. If so, the universe of an emerging adult’s religious exploration would expand beyond the possibilities available in person. Belief in the appropriateness of using communication media for religious purposes thus is hypothesized to be a conversion-promoting force.

H₄: Greater belief in the appropriateness of using online media for religious or spiritual purposes will predict the following patterns of exploration of new religious beliefs, practices, and identities in college:

H_{4a}: Greater importance of religion to the emerging adult.

H_{4b}: Lesser attachment by an emerging adult to his or her childhood religion.

H_{4c}: Greater openness to new religious ideas.

H_{4d}: Lesser likelihood of perceiving supportive connections in college with a religious group or community from the childhood religion, and greater likelihood of perceiving such connections with a group or community from a new religion.

H_{4e}: Lesser likelihood of continuing to identify with the childhood religious tradition.

Similar patterns are expected when the independent variable measured is emerging adults’ actual use of media to receive information from or interact with various religions. The effects of such media use should be expected vary considerably by whether the media come from the emerging

adult's childhood religion or a new religion. Media from the childhood religion are conceptualized collectively as a conversion-inhibiting force:

H₅: Greater consumption of religious media content from an emerging adult's childhood religion will predict the following patterns of exploration of new religious beliefs, practices, and identities in college:

H_{5a}: Greater importance of religion to the emerging adult.

H_{5b}: Greater attachment by an emerging adult to his or her childhood religion.

H_{5c}: Lesser openness to new religious ideas.

H_{5d}: Greater likelihood of perceiving supportive connections in college with a religious group or community from the childhood religion, and lesser likelihood of perceiving such connections with a group or community from a new religion.

H_{5e}: Greater likelihood of continuing to identify with one's childhood religious tradition.

Hypothesis 6 is the mirror image of Hypothesis 5, as consuming media from a religion other than the one in which an emerging adult was raised is conceptualized as a conversion-promoting force:

H₆: Greater consumption of religious media content from a religion other than the one in which an emerging adult was raised will predict the following patterns of exploration of new religious beliefs, practices, and identities in college:

H_{6a}: Greater importance of religion to the emerging adult.

H_{6b}: Lesser attachment by an emerging adult to his or her childhood religion.

H_{6c}: Greater openness to new religious ideas.

H_{6d}: Lesser likelihood of perceiving supportive connections in college with a religious group or community from the childhood religion, and greater likelihood of perceiving such connections with a group or community from a new religion.

H_{6e}: Lesser likelihood of continuing to identify with one's childhood religious tradition.

Measurements

Data were collected through an online survey of a required university-wide course at a large Midwestern university. The course typically enrolls more than 1,000 students each semester, representing a broad cross-section of the institution's academic programs. Although students typically take the course during their first two years, undergraduates at all stages of their degrees are represented in the population. Students in this course are required to participate in research studies as a small component (less than 1%) of their course grade. Several studies are available each semester for this purpose, preserving the voluntariness of student participation. Respondents' anonymity was rigorously protected as a condition of obtaining institutional human-subjects approval. This pool of respondents was chosen to produce a sample of students mostly within the age range of emerging adulthood, mostly living on campus (away from the childhood religious social network), and representing a variety of academic programs and years in higher education.

In addition to a set of demographic questions, the survey asked students to identify the religion in which they were raised and their current religious affiliation, adapting Questions 142 and 131 from the General Social Survey (2010). Respondents also were asked the strength of their current religious affiliation, adapting GSS Question 137 (General Social Survey, 2010).

Given the sensitive nature of some survey questions, all respondents were provided information about mental health services and religious support available on campus and in the surrounding metropolitan area.

The complete survey instrument is included as Appendix A. The remainder of this section summarizes and provides justification for each measure, beyond the considerations offered in Chapters One and Two.

Family Communication Patterns

The standard measure of both axes of family communication patterns is the Revised Family Communication Patterns instrument (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). The instrument's scale reliability and conceptual validity have been developed and tested over decades (Baxter & Akkoor, 2011; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002; Ritchie, 1991; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Both scales ask participants to respond to a series of statements using Likert-type agree-disagree scales. The conversation orientation scale comprises 15 items, such as "My parents often ask my opinion when the family is talking about something" and "I really enjoy talking with my parents, even when we disagree." The conformity scale comprises 11 items. Examples include, "My parents often say something like, 'A child should not argue with adults'" and "When anything really important is involved, my parents expect me to obey without question."

Use of Media Communication Technologies

An emerging adult's use of media communication technologies to stay in contact with his or her family, the childhood religious social network, is a currently occurring phenomenon, not a hypothetical future behavior, so it is advantageous to survey participants directly about their contact with family through new media, rather than employing some of the instruments

developed to measure attitudes toward new media and online content. Accordingly, survey participants were asked how many times in a typical week they communicated with their parents or guardians through a variety of social media and telecommunications media.

Respondents also were asked how often they expected to attend a religious service or ceremony with their families in the next year. This item, combined with items in the battery of demographic questions asking how far emerging adults are from their childhood homes and how frequently they return home, will assist in determining whether communication through new media technologies is supplementing or replacing face-to-face connections with the childhood religious network.

Determining whether emerging adults use media communication technologies in ways that might facilitate their connection to new religious beliefs, practices, and identities can be done by extrapolating, first, from their current media *use* and, second, by surveying their *attitudes* toward using media for religious and spiritual purposes. As described in Chapter One, the scientific study of religion suffers from a dearth of validated measures that embody a nuanced conceptualization of religion and spirituality; this is especially apparent when studying the intersection of religion and media. However, enough work has been done to allow some measures to be deployed. The Private Religious Practices subscale within the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness and Spirituality proposes items about media use for religious purposes. Although this scale has not been subjected to published testing, collections of similar items proved reliable in other work (Chatters, Levin, & Taylor, 1992; Levin, 1993; Levin, Taylor, & Chatters, 1995).

These questions are adapted in this disquisition to ask how often in a typical week an emerging adult uses various media from the religious tradition in which the emerging adult was

raised, and how often in a typical week he or she consumes media from a different religion. Measuring each item with a self-reported number will produce continuous data that allows more sophisticated testing than the categorical answer choices proposed in the BMMRS.

Because emerging adults might be quite early in their exploration of new religious beliefs, practices, and identities, it also is desirable to measure participants' attitudes toward using new media for religious and spiritual purposes. Such attitudes provide an indication of what an emerging adult's future religious exploration might involve. Although the religious uses of media are potentially as diverse as religiosity itself, many of the most common can be extracted from the discussion by Grimes (2002) of the use of media in religious rituals: for example, reading a religious text, requesting or offering prayers, or participating virtually in a religion's rituals. Respondents were asked to assess each practice, when conducted through online media, on a seven-point Likert-type scale from "entirely unacceptable or inappropriate" to "entirely acceptable or appropriate."

Measuring the Dependent Variable: Exploring New Religious Beliefs, Practices, and Identities

This disquisition's dependent variable, the degree to which an emerging adult engages in exploration of new religious beliefs, practices, and identities, and therefore the degree to which he or she progresses in the preaffiliation stage of conversion and begins forming religious social networks that will compete with the childhood religious social network for influence, was operationalized in five ways. Each has its own set of measurements.

Importance of religion and spirituality to the emerging adult. The importance an emerging adult attaches to religion and spirituality was measured by the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire (Lewis, Shevlin, McGuckin, & Navrátil, 2001). This ten-item

scale is a fast yet comprehensive assessment of an emerging adult's attitude that religion and spirituality are or are not important. Its reliability is well established, most recently by Barry, Padilla-Walker, and Nelson (2012). Unlike other such scales, the Santa Clara instrument does not presume membership in an organized, institutional religion, nor does it use involvement in religious activities and rituals as a proxy for religious attitudes. Items ask respondents to indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement with such statements as, "I look to my faith as a source of inspiration" and "My faith is an important part of who I am as a person."

To supplement the Santa Clara scale and to aid in integrating this disquisition with other research, participants were asked two additional questions drawn from the General Social Survey (2010; Questions 402 and 403) and included in the Overall Self-Ranking Scale and the Commitment Scale of the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness and Spirituality:

- To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person?
- To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person?

The emerging adult's attachment to his or her childhood religious tradition. The religions representing the vast majority of American religious practice, though taught to children through the family religious social network, involve participation in an organized setting such as a church, cathedral, synagogue, mosque, or temple. The strength of the emerging adult's connection to his or her childhood religious social network can be measured in part by how strongly he or she feels connected to a childhood religious community in which the family participated. This is measured in this study by the "Fit" subscale within the Organizational Religiousness Scale of the BMMRS. Although the measure in its BMMRS form has not been tested for reliability, its components are drawn from items previously validated by Pargament, Tyler, and Steele (1979) and Benson and Eklin (1990). This scale is used with two recurring

modifications: references to the religious community “I attend” were changed to “I was raised in,” and the terms “church” or “congregation” were replaced with “religious community.”

To probe a dimension not captured by the “Fit” subscale, the scale was supplemented by one reverse-coded item adapted from the Religious Behavior Questionnaire (e.g., Schapman & Inderbitzen-Nolan, 2002): “In the church or other religious community I was raised in, I felt pressured by my parents to engage in religious activities that meant little to me.”

Openness and willingness to explore. The degree to which an emerging adult explores new religious beliefs, practices, and identities can be conceptualized in a third way, as a function of the emerging adult’s disposition to be open to the idea of such exploration and willing to take the risks of engaging in it. The degree to which an emerging adult sees his or her religious and spiritual life as a “quest” rather than the maintenance of a fully formed religious identity or the continuation of established practices acts as a proxy for the emerging adult’s willingness to explore new beliefs, practices, and ideas. The Amended Quest Religious Orientation Scale (Maltby & Day, 1998) measures this attitude with a twelve-item instrument probing three factors that constitute a “quest” orientation: the complexity of the respondent’s religious thinking (a typical item posits, “I was not very interested in religion or spirituality until I began to ask questions about the meaning and purpose of my life”), the respondent’s willingness to doubt existing religious or spiritual beliefs (e.g., “For me, doubting is an important part of what it means to be religious or spiritual”), and the respondent’s recognition that his or her beliefs are tentative (e.g., “As I grow and change, I expect my religion or spirituality to also grow and change”).

Additionally, to explore the extent to which emerging adults in the setting of higher education explore — or decline to explore — new religious beliefs, practices, and identities

because of the ideas encountered in the classroom, respondents were asked four items developed from the observations of Hill (2011) and Uecker, Regnerus, and Vasler (2007) about the apparent disconnect between emerging adults' religious beliefs and their coursework:

- I have taken classes that explored spiritual or religious topics.
- I have taken a class that reinforced my religious or spiritual beliefs.
- I have taken a class that seemed to challenge or contradict my religious or spiritual beliefs.
- My religious or spiritual beliefs have nothing to do with my college coursework.

(Reverse coded)

Perceived support from a religious or spiritual group or community in college. In addition to the variety of measures thus far proposed for detecting changes in an emerging adult's attitudes toward exploring new religious beliefs, practices, and identities, the development of a religious social network to support or to compete with the childhood religious network can be inquired about directly. Whether an emerging adult away from the childhood religious social network establishes new network ties to the childhood religion, establishes new ties to a different religion, or does not establish religious ties at all reveals a great deal about which religions are poised to promote or inhibit the emerging adult's conversion. Establishment of social network ties can be observed in the emerging adult's perceptions about whether he or she is receiving social support, either from the childhood religion or from a new religion.

This disquisition measures this aspect of an emerging adult's religious and spiritual life through items adapted from the BMMRS Religious Support Scale. This scale combines items developed and tested for reliability by Krause (1995, 1997) and Krause and Markides (1990), modifying them to ask specifically about support from one's childhood religion as opposed to a

new religion. Respondents were asked to assess a series of social-support statements on seven-point Likert-type scales from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” and to identify whether the social support derived from the respondent’s childhood religion or a different religion.

Continuing to identify with the childhood religious tradition. This operationalization of the dependent variable is a binary measure, indicating that the emerging adult either does (1) or does not (0) identify currently with a religious tradition other than the one in which he or she was raised. This measure is not necessarily synonymous with conversion, because the occurrence category (“1”) includes emerging adults who report being raised in a particular religion but now indicate they are not sure what they believe about religion. However, it does provide a fairly direct measure of a conversion-related behavior. Respondents who reported not being raised in a religious tradition were excluded from calculation of this variable. Although, in principle, sincere and considered atheism can be considered a religious tradition, the mere absence of a childhood religious tradition is too vague a circumstance to be interpreted as affirmatively atheistic.

CHAPTER FOUR. RESULTS

Online surveys were initiated by 490 respondents. Excluding respondents who fell outside the target age range of 18 to 25, as well as respondents who left a substantial number of items incomplete, yielded 473 usable responses.

Description of the Sample

The sample includes representatives of every age, in years, from 18 to 25, inclusive, with a mean and median of 19 years old ($SD = 1.2$). The most common ages were 19 (41.9%, $N = 198$) and 18 (41.4%, $N = 196$), followed by 20 (8.7%, $N = 41$), 21 (4.0%, $N = 19$), 22 (1.5%, $N = 7$), 24 (1.3%, $N = 6$), and ages 23 and 25 (each 0.6%, $N = 3$). The sample is 53.1% female ($N = 251$) and 46.7% male ($N = 221$). Matching the racial composition of the university overall and the region in which it is located, the sample is overwhelmingly white (91.1%, $N = 431$), with 2.1% identifying as Hispanic or Latino ($N = 10$), 1.7% each as African-American or multiracial ($N = 8$), 1.3% each as Asian-American or a student from outside the United States ($N = 6$), 0.6% as a race or ethnicity not listed ($N = 3$), and 0.2% as American Indian, Alaska Native, or U.S. Pacific Islander ($N = 1$). Because the number of international students was small, and because their religious experiences probably differ profoundly from those of lifelong American students, international students were excluded from subsequent analysis.

A considerable majority of the respondents live on campus (78.4%, $N = 371$), while 15.2% live off campus ($N = 72$), and 6.3% reported still living with their childhood families ($N = 30$). Eleven percent of respondents ($N = 52$) were the first generation of their immediate family to attend college. Estimates of how long respondents required to travel from their university to visit their childhood families ranged from less than one hour to 48 hours, with a median of three hours and a mean of 3.45 ($SD = 4.85$). Approximately one-fifth of the sample (21.0%, $N = 99$)

live within one hour of their childhood families. On a categorical measure, most respondents reported seeing their immediate families at least once a month (58.8%, $N = 278$), and more than one-fifth (21.4%, $N = 101$) see them at least once a week.

The sample's religious composition is displayed in Table 1. Again reflecting the region in which respondents are located, the most common childhood religions were Lutheranism and Catholicism. The next most common religious traditions were nondenominational Christian, "other Protestant", Methodism, and Islam. Other religions each represented less than 1% of the sample. Respondents' current religious identities followed similar ratios, adjusted for the unsurprising pattern of most religions losing adherents. This was particularly pronounced for the two largest childhood religions, Lutheranism (declined 8.4 percentage points in share of the sample overall) and Catholicism (declined 9.3 percentage points). Some of these losses are reflected in the 14.2% of respondents ($N = 67$) who identified as uncertain what they believe about religion or the 6.3% ($N = 30$) who did not believe in any religion. These items represent the categories of religious belief commonly labeled "agnostic" and "atheist." Those labels were not used in the survey, to avoid the loaded, pejorative meanings often associated with those terms. The phrasings presented to participants were crafted with an eye toward preserving the distinction between, on one hand, a conscious rejection of all religious belief and, on the other, uncertainty about which religious beliefs one might end up accepting or rejecting.

Religious traditions that saw increases in the sample were Buddhism (increased 0.2 percentage points), nondenominational Christian (increased 2.6 percentage points), Southern Baptist (increased 0.4 percentage points), and other/multiple religions (increased 0.2 percentage points). Overall, about one-quarter of respondents (26.0%, $N = 123$) identified with a religious tradition other than the one in which they were raised.

Respondents showed some affinity for their current religious identifications: the mean strength of religious identification was 4.94 on a seven-point scale ($SD = 1.69$). However, respondents were lukewarm about identifying themselves with the labels “a religious person” ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.78$) or “a spiritual person” ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.72$). Consistent with this age group’s preference for self-defined “authentic” beliefs, rather than those prescribed by institutions or authority, a paired-samples t -test revealed that respondents were significantly more likely to identify as “spiritual” than “religious,” $t(466) = -6.75$, $p = .000$.

Table 1
Respondents’ Childhood and Current Religious Traditions

| Religious Tradition | Raised | | Currently | |
|--|--------|----------|-----------|----------|
| | % | <i>N</i> | % | <i>N</i> |
| Buddhist | .6 | 3 | .8 | 4 |
| Catholic | 35.9 | 170 | 26.6 | 126 |
| Hindu | .6 | 3 | .6 | 3 |
| Lutheran | 41.2 | 195 | 32.8 | 155 |
| Methodist | 3.2 | 15 | 2.3 | 11 |
| Muslim | 1.1 | 5 | .6 | 3 |
| Nondenom. Christian | 8.2 | 39 | 10.8 | 51 |
| Orthodox Christian | .8 | 4 | .4 | 2 |
| Presbyterian | .8 | 4 | .8 | 4 |
| Southern Baptist | .2 | 1 | .6 | 3 |
| Other Protestant | 2.1 | 10 | 1.9 | 9 |
| Other or multiple | .6 | 3 | .8 | 4 |
| I was not raised in any religion | .6 | 3 | — | — |
| I do not believe in any religion | — | — | 6.4 | 30 |
| I’m not sure what I believe about religion | — | — | 14.2 | 67 |

Validation of Scales

All scales of survey items used in this study had previously been tested for their reliability, and the results published. However, the numerous adaptations made to these

instruments to accommodate a broad definition of religion and spirituality made it especially advisable to recheck the reliability with which these scales measure a single construct through a collection of related questions. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's $\alpha \geq .70$ as the threshold for a reliable scale. Acceptable reliabilities were obtained without changes for the conversation orientation subscale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$) and conformity orientation subscale (.88) of the Revised Family Communication Patterns instrument; the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire (.98); the Fit scale (.92) and the items used from the Support scale (.98) of the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness and Spirituality; and the Quest Religious Orientation Scale (.89), including two of its subscales, Complexity (.84) and Tentativeness (.81). No large increases in reliability could be obtained for any of these scales by eliminating items.

However, the "Doubt" subscale of the Quest instrument initially did not prove reliable, Cronbach's $\alpha = .45$, largely because the reverse-coded item ("I find religious or spiritual doubts upsetting") failed to vary consistently with the rest of the scale. Placing the item in the scale as entered (without reverse coding) produced a minimally acceptable reliability, Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$, but the scale's reliability could be raised to .79 by eliminating the item. Because of this fact, and because the item's unreliability in its proper, reverse-coded form suggests respondents might not have understood the question, the item was eliminated, and the Doubt subscale was used with the remaining three items. Removing this item did not affect the reliability of the Quest scale overall.

Testing Hypothesis 1: The Influence of Family Conversation Orientation

Hypothesis 1_a proposes that greater family conversation orientation will predict greater importance of religion to the emerging adult. An ordinary least squares regression, using the conversation orientation measure of the RFCP instrument to predict respondents' mean score on

the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire, supported Hypothesis 1a. Family conversation orientation is a significant predictor of the importance emerging adults place on religion, $F(1, 437) = 33.62, p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .07$ ($\beta = .44, SE = .08$). Family conversation orientation also is a significant predictor of emerging adults' likelihood of identifying themselves as religious people, $F(1, 466) = 28.54, p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .06$ ($\beta = .38, SE = .07$), or as spiritual people, $F(1, 465) = 33.97, p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .07$ ($\beta = .40, SE = .07$).

Hypothesis 2_b proposes that greater family communication orientation will predict greater attachment to the childhood religion. This dependent variable is measured by the Fit scale of the BMMRS, which measures an emerging adult's perception that he or she "fits" into the childhood religious network. An OLS regression supported Hypothesis 2_b: family conversation orientation is a significant predictor of emerging adults' attachment to their childhood religions, $F(1, 447) = 27.70, p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .06$ ($\beta = .36, SE = .07$). However, the additional item included to test a frequent anecdotal complaint about childhood religions did not prove significant. Family conversation orientation had no significant influence on emerging adults' likelihood of reporting that their childhood families had pressured them into religious rituals that meant little to them, $F(1, 446) = 1.80, p = .18$.

Hypothesis 1_c proposes that greater family conversation orientation will predict greater openness to new religious ideas, as measured by the Quest Religious Orientation Scale and its subscales. A series of OLS regressions mostly supported Hypothesis 1_c. Family conversation orientation was a significant predictor of "quest" orientation overall, $F(1, 464) = 8.96, p = .003$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = .15, SE = .05$); the complexity of an emerging adult's religious thinking, $F(1, 464) = 5.78, p = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .14, SE = .06$); and an emerging adult's openness to religious doubts and questions, $F(1, 462) = 15.52, p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .03$ ($\beta = .22, SE =$

.06). However, family conversation orientation did not significantly predict an emerging adult's degree of recognition that his or her religious beliefs are tentative or provisional, $F(1, 463) = 2.67, p = .10$.

Addressing the additional items included to assess openness as taking classes in religious subjects and hearing one's religious ideas challenged produced a mixed picture. Family conversation orientation was not a significant predictor of taking a classes on religious or spiritual topics, $F(1, 462) = 2.08, p = .15$, nor did it significantly predict an emerging adult's likelihood of saying religious or spiritual beliefs had no connection with his or her college coursework, $F(1, 463) = .25, p = .62$. However, family conversation orientation did significantly predict having taken a class that reinforced an emerging adult's religious or spiritual beliefs, $F(1, 461) = 13.45, p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .03$ ($\beta = .31, SE = .08$), or seemed to contradict those beliefs, $F(1, 461) = 15.56, p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .03$ ($\beta = .30, SE = .08$).

Hypothesis 1_a proposes that greater family conversation orientation will predict greater likelihood of perceiving supportive connections in college with a religious group or community from the childhood religion, and lesser likelihood of perceiving such support from a group or community from a different religion. For respondents who indicated that the "most important" religious group or community in college, for purposes of assessing their receipt of social support from such a group, was associated with the childhood religion, Hypothesis 1_a was supported: an OLS regression revealed that family conversation orientation did significantly predict greater perceived support from this group, $F(1, 219) = 11.88, p = .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .05$ ($\beta = .40, SE = .12$). For respondents who indicated that the most important group in this regard was from a religion other than the ones in which they were raised, family conversation orientation was not a significant predictor of perceived support, $F(1, 224) = .65, p = .42$.

If receipt of social support from a group is a proxy for establishing connections with that group, then the likelihood of an emerging adult establishing the new connections proposed by Hypothesis 1_d seems to depend more on the college religious or spiritual group's status as either part of the childhood religion or a different religion than on the conversation orientation of the respondent's family. This interpretation is consistent with the finding from an independent-samples *t*-test that respondents who continue to identify with their childhood religions ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.86$) vary significantly from respondents who no longer identify with their childhood religions ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 1.85$) in perceived support from a religious or spiritual group encountered in college, $t(466) = 5.77$, $p = .000$. When all these findings are taken together, Hypothesis 1_d is not considered supported as a whole, though its first half appears to be supported.

Hypothesis 1_e proposes that greater family conversation orientation will predict greater likelihood of the emerging adult continuing to identify with the childhood religion. The outcome variable is binary (the emerging adult either does or does not continue to identify with the childhood religion), so probit regression was used to predict this variable from the family conversation orientation scale. The relationship was significant, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 8.37$, $p = .004$, Nagelkerke pseudo- $R^2 = .03$.¹ Because the "occurrence" in the binary outcome variable was defined as no longer identifying with the childhood religion, the negative unstandardized coefficient ($\beta = -.16$, $SE = .06$) indicates that higher family conversation orientation predicts lesser likelihood of ceasing to identify with the childhood religion. Hypothesis 1_e is supported.

¹ Probit regression, with its binary dependent variable, does not allow for the calculation of explained variance (r^2) that is typical in OLS regression. However, several methods are possible to estimate the "goodness of fit": how well the proposed model of predictor variables fits the outcome variable. Pseudo- r^2 is one such method in widespread use, though, despite its name, it cannot be interpreted as simple explained variance.

Testing Hypothesis 2: The Influence of Family Conformity Orientation

Hypothesis 2_a tests for the possibility that pressure to conform in a family's communication patterns will "turn off" an emerging adult to all religious or spiritual matters. The hypothesis proposes that greater family conformity orientation will predict lesser importance of religion to the emerging adult. An OLS regression using the family conformity orientation scale of the RFCP instrument to predict a respondent's mean score on the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith instrument does not support Hypothesis 2_a: family conformity orientation is not a significant predictor of the importance an emerging adult places on religion, $F(1, 437) = 2.89$, $p = .09$. On the contrary, family conformity orientation significantly predicts that emerging adults are more likely to identify themselves as religious people, $F(1, 466) = 7.29$, $p = .007$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .20$, $SE = .07$), or as spiritual people, $F(1, 465) = 7.91$, $p = .005$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = .20$, $SE = .07$).

Hypothesis 2_b proposes that greater family conformity orientation will predict lesser attachment to the childhood religion. An OLS regression, conducted with the Fit scale of the BMMRS as the dependent variable, revealed a significant relationship in the opposite direction of the hypothesis, $F(1, 447) = 10.74$, $p = .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = .23$, $SE = .07$). Higher family conformity orientation predicts *greater* sense of "fit" with (i.e., attachment to) the childhood religion. However, family conformity orientation does significantly predict an emerging adult's feeling that he or she was pressured to participate in religious activities that mean little to the emerging adult, $F(1, 446) = 10.02$, $p = .002$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = .25$, $SE = .08$), providing support for this limited aspect of Hypothesis 2_b.

Hypothesis 2_c, likewise, is supported in the opposite direction of the hypothesis. A series OLS regression revealed that family conformity orientation significantly predicts greater "quest"

orientation toward religion overall, $F(1, 464) = 22.10, p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .04$ ($\beta = .23, SE = .05$); as well as the complexity of an emerging adult's religious or spiritual thinking, $F(1, 464) = 11.88, p = .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = .21, SE = .06$); willingness to doubt, $F(1, 462) = 15.47, p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .03$ ($\beta = .22, SE = .06$); and belief that his or her religious or spiritual beliefs are tentative or provisional, $F(1, 463) = 20.76, p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .04$ ($\beta = .26, SE = .06$). Higher family conformity orientation significantly predicts *greater* openness to new religious ideas.

Testing the additional items related to coursework on religious or spiritual subjects, family conformity orientation significantly predicted an emerging adult's likelihood of taking classes on religious or spiritual subjects, $F(1, 462) = 10.66, p = .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = .29, SE = .09$); a class that reinforced the emerging adult's religious or spiritual beliefs, $F(1, 461) = 8.65, p = .003$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = .25, SE = .09$); and a class that seemed to contradict those beliefs, $F(1, 461) = 4.70, p = .03$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .17, SE = .08$). However, family conformity orientation also significantly predicted an emerging adult's likelihood of reporting that religious or spiritual beliefs have nothing to do with his or her coursework, $F(1, 463) = 15.39, p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .03$ ($\beta = .34, SE = .09$). These findings provide qualified additional support for Hypothesis 2c.

Hypothesis 2a, proposes that greater family conformity orientation will predict lesser likelihood of perceiving supportive connections in college with a religious group or community from the childhood religion, and greater likelihood of perceiving such support from a group or community from a different religion. For respondents who indicated that the "most important" religious group or community in college, for purposes of assessing their receipt of social support from such a group, was associated with the childhood religion, Hypothesis 2a was not supported:

an OLS regression revealed that family conformity orientation was not a significant predictor of perceived support from a religious group or community in college, $F(1, 219) = 3.16, p = .08$. However, for respondents who indicated that the most important group in this regard was from a religion other than the ones in which they were raised, family conformity orientation did significantly predict greater perceived support from a religious group or community in college, $F(1, 224) = 4.22, p = .04$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .20, SE = .10$), supporting the second half of Hypothesis 2_d. The data do not completely support Hypothesis 2_d for reasons that seem similar to those articulated for Hypothesis 1_d. The significance of both aspects of family conversation patterns (conversation orientation and conformity orientation) in predicting perceived support from a new religious group or community in college seems less important than the relationship of that group or community to the emerging adult's childhood religion.

Hypothesis 2_e proposes that greater family conformity orientation will predict lesser likelihood of the emerging adult continuing to identify with the childhood religious tradition. A probit regression was conducted to predict this binary outcome variable. The relationship is not significant, Wald $\chi^2(1) = .51, p = .48$. Unlike family conversation orientation, tested in Hypothesis 1_e, family conformity orientation does not significantly predict whether an emerging adult will continue to identify with his or her childhood religion.

Testing Hypothesis 3: The Influence of Intra-Family Communication Through Media

Hypothesis 3_a proposes that more frequent communication with family through media will predict greater importance of religion for the emerging adult. A series of OLS regressions as conducted using several measures of how frequently respondents communicated with their families through communication media to predict a respondent's mean score on the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire. The media-communication independent variables

were phrased in terms of “how often in a typical week” respondents communicated with their families through a particular medium. As often happens with such “count” data, the mode for each medium is zero, often overwhelmingly so. To minimize the risk of an OLS regression model being oversensitive to such a skew in the independent variable, results also were calculated for each technology using only respondents who reported using it at least once in a typical week (i.e., a response greater than zero). Any value of the independent variable more than three standard deviations from the mean ($Z > |3.29|$) was excluded as an outlier.

Results are reported in Table 2. In general, Hypothesis 3_a was not supported; frequency of communication with family through media did not consistently predict importance of religion to the emerging adult.

Some notable exception emerge in the data, however. Communicating with family by telephone was a significant positive predictor of the importance of religion, regardless of whether respondents communicated with family by phone zero times in a typical week or some greater number. Communicating via Facebook was a significant predictor for respondents who use that medium to communicate with family, but the relationship ran opposite the hypothesized direction: more frequent communication with family through Facebook predicted *lesser* importance of religion for the emerging adult. Communication with family through email or discussing religious or spiritual topics with parents through media were significant predictors of the importance of religion for the sample as a whole, but this finding disappeared when considering only respondents who used these media at least once in a typical week. Thus, these last two findings might be statistical artifacts, or they might indicate that the crucial question is *whether* an emerging adult uses media at all to communicate with family, with no significant additional gain in the importance of religion as the *amount* of media communication increases.

Table 2

Family Communication Through Media as Predictor of Importance of Religion

| Medium | All Respondents | | | | Communicate at Least Once Per Week | | | |
|------------------|------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) |
| Facebook | 1.36 (1, 435) | .25 | — | — | 5.68 (1, 80) | .02* | .06 | -.29 (.12) |
| Twitter | 1.11 (1, 435) | .29 | — | — | .64 (1, 10) | .44 | — | — |
| Other online | .38 (1, 435) | .54 | — | — | 1.11 (1, 69) | .30 | — | — |
| Phone | 5.75 (1, 429) | .02* | .01 | .09 (.04) | 4.95 (1, 402) | .03* | .01 | .09 (.04) |
| Texting | 1.44 (1, 435) | .23 | — | — | 1.36 (1, 407) | .24 | — | — |
| Email | 4.82 (1, 434) | .03* | .01 | .11 (.05) | .94 (1, 175) | .33 | — | — |
| Religious topics | 58.33 (1, 424) | .000*** | .12 | 1.03 (.14) | 1.99 (1, 71) | .16 | — | — |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Dependent variable is mean score on the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith questionnaire. Estimates of unstandardized coefficients and explained variance are reported only for significant predictors.

For the most part, frequency of communication with family through media did not predict likelihood of identifying oneself as a “religious person.” The OLS regression results displayed in Table 3 reveal that communicating with family through Twitter or email, and discussing religious or spiritual topics, do significantly predict such identification, but only when respondents who use such media zero times in a typical week are included. Here, again, it seems that *whether* an emerging adult uses such media communication technologies is more significant than how much he or she uses them to communicate with family. The one medium for which the was not true was Facebook: among respondents who used Facebook at least once in a typical week to communicate with family, greater use of Facebook for intra-family communication significantly predicted lesser likelihood of identifying oneself as a religious person.

Similarly limited support for the hypothesis is found when the regression outcome variable is change to respondents’ willingness to self-identify as “spiritual.” As shown in Table 4, most intra-family media communication variables are not significant predictors. Talking by

Table 3

Family Communication Through Media as Predictor of Self-Identification as Religious

| Medium | All Respondents | | | | Communicate at Least Once Per Week | | | |
|------------------|------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) |
| Facebook | 1.37 (1, 463) | .24 | — | — | 4.95 (1, 88) | .03* | .04 | -.21 (.09) |
| Twitter | .55 (1, 463) | .46 | — | — | .10 (1, 10) | .76 | — | — |
| Other online | 2.03 (1, 462) | .16 | — | — | 3.42 (1, 74) | .07 | — | — |
| Phone | .57 (1, 457) | .45 | — | — | .11 (1, 423) | .74 | — | — |
| Texting | 1.15 (1, 463) | .28 | — | — | 1.81 (1, 433) | .18 | — | — |
| Email | 5.51 (1, 461) | .02* | .01 | .11 (.05) | .18 (1, 184) | .68 | — | — |
| Religious topics | 32.92 (1, 453) | .000*** | .07 | .79 (.14) | 1.05 (1, 70) | .31 | — | — |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Dependent variable is seven-point Likert-type scale in response to, “To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person?” Estimates of unstandardized coefficients and explained variance are reported only for significant predictors.

Table 4

Family Communication Through Media as Predictor of Self-Identification as Spiritual

| Medium | All Respondents | | | | Communicate at Least Once Per Week | | | |
|------------------|------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) |
| Facebook | 1.56 (1, 462) | .21 | — | — | 5.01 (1, 88) | .03* | .04 | -.20 (.09) |
| Twitter | 1.55 (1, 462) | .21 | — | — | 1.48 (1, 10) | .25 | — | — |
| Other online | 1.03 (1, 461) | .31 | — | — | 2.82 (1, 74) | .10 | — | — |
| Phone | 4.88 (1, 456) | .03* | .01 | .07 (.03) | 2.54 (1, 422) | .11 | — | — |
| Texting | .56 (1, 462) | .46 | — | — | .53 (1, 432) | .47 | — | — |
| Email | 2.84 (1, 460) | .09 | — | — | .10 (1, 184) | .75 | — | — |
| Religious topics | 29.25 (1, 452) | .000*** | .06 | .73 (.14) | .71 (1, 69) | .40 | — | — |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Dependent variable is seven-point Likert-type scale in response to, “To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person?” Estimates of unstandardized coefficients and explained variance are reported only for significant predictors.

phone and discussing religious or spiritual topics do significantly predict greater likely of

identifying as spiritual, but the significance disappears when the sample is restricted to

respondents who use those means to communicate with their families at least once in a typical

week. Again, Facebook is a significant predictor, for respondents who use it to communicate with family at least once in a typical week, of lesser likelihood of self-identifying as spiritual.

For comparison with face-to-face communication, a one-way ANOVA showed that the categorical variable measuring how often a respondent sees his or her family in person was not significantly associated with the importance of religion to the emerging adult, $F(6, 432) = 1.72$, $p = .12$, indicating that at least some forms of intra-family communication through media can have different dynamics than face-to-face communication with regard to conversion-influencing beliefs and behaviors. However, an emerging adult's frequency of face-to-face communication with family is significantly associated with his or her degree of self-identification as religious, $F(6, 461) = 3.35$, $p = .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$, or spiritual, $F(6, 460) = 2.28$, $p = .04$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. Given the variety of inconsistent findings, Hypothesis 3_a can be considered supported, but only with regard to certain media technologies and under certain usage conditions.

Hypothesis 3_b proposes that these same means of media communication with family will predict an emerging adult's greater attachment to his or her childhood religion, as measured by the Fit scale of the BMMRS. Analysis proceeded as describe for Hypothesis 3_a, and results are displayed in Table 5.

Almost without exception, Hypothesis 3_b is not supported; frequency of communication with family through media does not predict an emerging adult's degree of attachment to his or her childhood religion. (Additionally, another series of OLS regressions revealed that no forms of intra-family media communication significantly predicted whether an emerging adult felt pressured as a child to participate in religious rituals that meant little to him or her.) The two exceptions in the results occur only when the regression sample includes respondents who report using such media zero times in a typical week. As with Hypothesis 3_a, this suggests the crucial

difference is the yes-or-no question of whether emerging adults communicate with their families through media at all, rather than a sliding scale of the amount of such communication.

Table 5
Family Communication Through Media as Predictor of Attachment to Childhood Religion

| Medium | All Respondents | | | | Communicate at Least Once Per Week | | | |
|------------------|------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) |
| Facebook | .21 (1, 445) | .65 | — | — | 1.90 (1, 85) | .17 | — | — |
| Twitter | .94 (1, 445) | .33 | — | — | .56 (1, 10) | .56 | — | — |
| Other online | .01 (1, 444) | .92 | — | — | 1.35 (1, 70) | .25 | — | — |
| Phone | 1.27 (1, 439) | .26 | — | — | .27 (1, 409) | .27 | — | — |
| Texting | 1.12 (1, 445) | .29 | — | — | .79 (1, 417) | .38 | — | — |
| Email | 6.85 (1, 443) | .01** | .01 | .12 (.05) | .01 (1, 178) | .93 | — | — |
| Religious topics | 22.05 (1, 434) | .000*** | .05 | .62 (.13) | .36 (1, 71) | .55 | — | — |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Dependent variable is mean score on the Fit subscale of the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness and Spirituality. Estimates of unstandardized coefficients and explained variance are reported only for significant predictors.

For comparison with face-to-face communication, a one-way ANOVA found that the categorical variable measuring how often a respondent sees his or her family also was significantly associated with the emerging adult’s attachment to the childhood religion, $F(6, 442) = 2.80, p = .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$. Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons revealed that emerging adults who see their families “a few times a month” ($M = 5.00, SD = 1.75$) reported significantly higher attachment to their childhood religion than those who saw their families “only during breaks from school” ($M = 4.09, SD = 1.79$).

Hypothesis 3_c proposes that more frequent communication with family through media will predict the emerging adult’s lesser openness to new religious ideas, as measured by the quest religious orientation instrument. As with the previous two parts of Hypothesis 3, separate OLS regressions were conducted for all respondents and for just those who reported their actual use

a particular medium. Results indicated that Hypothesis 3_c is unsupported for almost every media type and aspect of the quest religious orientation. The only exception is Twitter, which, for respondents who used it to communicate with family at least once in a typical week, significantly predicted overall quest religious orientation, $F(1, 10) = 6.52, p = .03$, adjusted $R^2 = .33$ ($\beta = .57, SE = .22$), complexity of religious thinking, $F(1, 10) = 8.81, p = .01$, adjusted $R^2 = .42$ ($\beta = .57, SE = .19$), and acknowledgment of tentativeness in religious thinking, $F(1, 10) = 6.19, p = .03$, adjusted $R^2 = .32$ ($\beta = .68, SE = .28$). While the small number of respondents ($N = 11$) on whom these models are based strains the reliability of ordinary regression, the consistency of the finding and the magnitude of the effect size suggests further exploration is warranted to determine whether Twitter is a genuine exception to the main finding. When all respondents were included to calculate the model, Twitter was still a significant predictor of quest orientation, but the explained variance dropped drastically, $F(1, 461) = 3.93, p = .048$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .21, SE = .11$). Overall, more frequent communication with family through media seems to have no relationship with an emerging adult's degree of openness to new religious ideas.

For comparison with in-person communication, a one-way ANOVA found that the categorical variable measuring how often a respondent sees his or her family face to face also was not significantly associated with the emerging adult's "quest" orientation toward religion, $F(6, 459) = .89, p = .51$, the complexity of his or her religious thinking, $F(6, 459) = 1.60, p = .15$, the emerging adult's willingness to doubt religious beliefs, $F(6, 457) = .98, p = .44$, or the recognition of tentativeness in his or her religious thinking, $F(6, 458) = .43, p = .86$.

A series of OLS regressions also was run to test whether communication with family through media would significantly predict openness to new religious ideas shown through one's selection of college coursework. Taking a class that explored religious or spiritual topics was

significantly less likely the more frequently emerging adults communicated with parents through online media other than Facebook or Twitter, $F(1, 74) = 4.22, p = .04$, adjusted $R^2 = .04$ ($\beta = -.20, SE = .10$), though only when the sample was restricted to respondents who did so at least once in a typical week. Using media to discuss religious or spiritual topics with parents significantly predicted taking a class on a religious or spiritual subject, $F(1, 450) = 3.92, p = .048$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .33, SE = .17$), and taking a class that seemed to reinforce the emerging adult's religious or spiritual beliefs, $F(1, 449) = 9.24, p = .003$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = .50, SE = .17$), though both findings were only significant when all respondents, including "zero"-frequency responses, were included. Taking a class that seemed to challenge or contradict the emerging adult's religious beliefs was not significantly predicted by any media-communication variables. An emerging adult also was significantly less likely to report that religion or spirituality had nothing to do with his or her college coursework the more frequently he or she exchanged emails with parents in a typical week, both when all respondents were considered, $F(1, 458) = 4.41, p = .04$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = -.12, SE = .06$), and when the sample was restricted to those who exchanged emails at least once a week, $F(1, 184) = 4.65, p = .03$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = -.16, SE = .07$). Seeing no connection also was significantly less likely the more frequently an emerging adult used media to discuss religious or spiritual subjects with parents, both when all respondents were considered, $F(1, 451) = 12.00, p = .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = -.57, SE = .17$), and when the sample was restricted to respondents who had such discussions at least once in a typical week, $F(1, 71) = 6.94, p = .01$, adjusted $R^2 = .08$ ($\beta = -.95, SE = .36$). Overall, media communication with family does not seem to predict greater openness to religious or spiritual ideas through taking classes in which those ideas will be encountered, except when the media communication includes spiritual or religious topics.

Hypothesis 3_d proposes that more frequent communication with family through media will predict an emerging adult's greater likelihood of perceiving supportive connections with a religious group or community in college from the emerging adult's childhood religion, and lesser likelihood of perceive such support from a group or community of a different religion. For respondents who indicated that the "most important" religious group or community in college, for purposes of assessing their receipt of social support from such a group, was associated with the childhood religion, the first half of Hypothesis 3_d was partially supported. A series of OLS regressions, reported in Table 6, revealed that several media used to communicate with family significantly predicted greater perceived support in college from a group or community associated with the childhood religion. These findings held true, however, only when including respondents who reported zero uses of each medium to communicate with family in a typical week. Using communication media to discuss religious or spiritual subjects with parents significantly predicted greater likelihood of perceived support from a new group or community of the childhood religion regardless of whether the "zero" responses were included or excluded.

For respondents who indicated that the most important group in this regard was from a religion other than the ones in which they were raised, use of media to communicate with family generally did not significantly predict perceived support from a religious group or community of the new religion in college. The one exception did support the second half of Hypothesis 3_d. Communicating with family through Facebook at least once in a typical week significantly predicted lesser perceived support from a religious group or community in college not associated with the childhood religion, $F(1, 40) = 4.15, p = .048, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .07$ ($\beta = -.21, SE = .10$). However, using communication media to discuss religious or spiritual topics with parents significantly predicted *greater* perceived support from such a group or community, $F(1, 221) =$

16.41, $p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .07$ ($\beta = 1.12$, $SE = .28$). Given these findings, only the first half of Hypothesis 3_a can be considered partially supported.

Table 6
Family Communication Through Media as Predictor of Supportive Group in Childhood Religion

| Medium | All Respondents | | | | Communicate at Least Once Per Week | | | |
|------------------|-----------------|----------|---------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|----------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| | <i>F (df)</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R²</i> | β (<i>SE</i>) | <i>F (df)</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R²</i> | β (<i>SE</i>) |
| Facebook | 2.64 (1, 218) | .11 | — | — | .32 (1, 42) | .58 | — | — |
| Twitter | 7.01 (1, 218) | .009** | .03 | .45 (.17) | .23 (1, 6) | .65 | — | — |
| Other online | 4.67 (1, 218) | .03* | .02 | .24 (.11) | 1.11 (1, 35) | .30 | — | — |
| Phone | .89 (1, 215) | .35 | — | — | .22 (1, 203) | .64 | — | — |
| Texting | 1.16 (1, 218) | .28 | — | — | 1.69 (1, 208) | .20 | — | — |
| Email | 4.42 (1, 218) | .04* | .02 | .15 (.07) | 1.74 (1, 101) | .19 | — | — |
| Religious topics | 17.44 (1, 209) | .000*** | .07 | .68 (.16) | 4.05 (1, 53) | .049* | .05 | .63 (.31) |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Dependent variable is mean score on the Support subscale of the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness and Spirituality. Estimates of unstandardized coefficients and explained variance are reported only for significant predictors.

Hypothesis 3_e proposes that more frequent communication with one’s family will predict greater likelihood of continuing to identify with the childhood religion. The results of a series of probit regressions are displayed in Table 7. In most instances, communication with family through media was not a significant predictor of an emerging adult’s likelihood of continuing to identify with the childhood religion. The two significant exceptions differ in the direction of their effects: communication with family through email significantly predicted greater likelihood of continuing to identify with the childhood religion (though only when including respondents who used this medium zero times in a typical week), but communication with family through online media other than Facebook and Twitter significantly predicted *lesser* likelihood of doing so (regardless of whether “zero” responses were included). Discussing religious and spiritual topics with parents through media significantly predicted greater likelihood of continuing to identify

with the childhood religion, but only with “zero”-frequency responses included. Again, the significance of discussing religious or spiritual topics with parents through media seems to depend upon whether such communication occurs at all, rather than the frequency of such communication once it does occur. Overall, Hypothesis 3_e is not supported.

Table 7
Family Communication Through Media as Predictor of Keeping Childhood Religious Identity

| Medium | All Respondents | | | | Communicate at Least Once Per Week | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|----------|---|--------------|------------------------------------|----------|---|--------------|
| | Wald χ^2 (df) | <i>p</i> | Nagelkerke pseudo- <i>R</i> ² | β (SE) | Wald χ^2 (df) | <i>p</i> | Nagelkerke pseudo- <i>R</i> ² | β (SE) |
| Facebook | 3.45 (1) | .06 | — | — | 3.68 (1) | .06 | — | — |
| Twitter | .11 (1) | .74 | — | — | .49 (1) | .48 | — | — |
| Other online | 4.30 (1) | .04* | .01 | .07 (.04) | 5.80 (1) | .02* | .13 | .14 (.06) |
| Phone | .42 (1) | .52 | — | — | .16 (1) | .69 | — | — |
| Texting | 1.39 (1) | .24 | — | — | .97 (1) | .33 | — | — |
| Email | 5.07 (1) | .02 | .02 | -.10 (.04) | 1.86 (1) | .17 | — | — |
| Religious topics | 9.93 (1) | .002** | .04 | -.49 (.16) | .09 (1) | .76 | — | — |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Probit regression. Goodness of fit (pseudo- R^2) and coefficients are reported only for significant predictors. Negative coefficients indicate greater likelihood of identifying with the childhood religion.

For comparison, frequency of face-to-face communication also seems to make little difference. A chi-square test revealed no significant differences in likelihood of continuing to identify with the childhood religion when measure against the categorical item asking respondents how often they saw their immediate families in person, $\chi^2(6) = 7.63, p = .27$.

Testing Hypothesis 4: Appropriateness of Media Use in Religion

Hypothesis 4_a proposes that belief in the appropriateness of using online media for religious purposes will predict greater importance of religion for the emerging adult. A series of OLS regressions was conducted using attitudes toward several religious uses of communication

media to predict a respondent’s mean score on the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire. Results are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8
Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Importance of Religion

| Use of Online Media | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Read religious text | 32.78 (1, 435) | .000*** | .07 | .33 (.06) |
| View sacred images | 18.34 (1, 435) | .000*** | .04 | .24 (.06) |
| Listen to religious music | 32.23 (1, 434) | .000*** | .07 | .37 (.07) |
| Discuss religious topic | 42.25 (1, 433) | .000*** | .09 | .37 (.06) |
| Offer/request prayers | 51.13 (1, 434) | .000*** | .10 | .40 (.06) |
| Learn relig. history/teachings | 25.47 (1, 434) | .000*** | .05 | .35 (.07) |
| Ask help with doubts/questions | 23.81 (1, 435) | .000*** | .05 | .27 (.06) |
| Express desire to explore new rel. | 2.77 (1, 434) | .10 | — | — |
| Express desire to change religions | .06 (1, 433) | .81 | — | — |
| Talk w/someone in different relig. | 3.00 (1, 431) | .08 | — | — |
| See whether others feel the same | 14.13 (1, 435) | .000*** | .03 | .21 (.06) |
| Take virtual pilgrimage or tour | 4.14 (1, 433) | .04* | .01 | .11 (.05) |
| Watch rituals or ceremonies | 8.92 (1, 434) | .003** | .02 | .17 (.06) |
| Participate virtually in rituals/cer. | .85 (1, 433) | .36 | — | — |
| Obtain certification of rituals | .07 (1, 433) | .80 | — | — |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Dependent variable is mean score on the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire. Estimates of unstandardized coefficients and explained variance reported only for significant predictors.

Most uses of online media were significant positive predictors, with five exceptions. Belief in the appropriateness of using online media to express a desire to explore new religions, or to change religions, to talk with someone from a different religion, to participate virtually in rituals or ceremonies, or to obtain certification that a ritual has been performed did not significantly predict the importance an emerging adult places on religion. Additionally, numerous measures of an emerging adult’s belief in the appropriateness of using online media for religious purposes significantly predicted his or her degree of self-identification as a “religious person” or a “spiritual person,” as reported in Tables 9 and 10. Overall, the results strongly support Hypothesis 4a.

Table 9

Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Self-Identifying as Religious

| Use of Online Media | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Read religious text | 22.23 (1, 464) | .000*** | .04 | .26 (.06) |
| View sacred images | 18.17 (1, 464) | .000*** | .04 | .22 (.05) |
| Listen to religious music | 23.86 (1, 463) | .000*** | .05 | .30 (.06) |
| Discuss religious topic | 27.03 (1, 463) | .000*** | .05 | .28 (.05) |
| Offer/request prayers | 36.58 (1, 463) | .000*** | .07 | .32 (.05) |
| Learn relig. history/teachings | 16.15 (1, 463) | .000*** | .03 | .25 (.06) |
| Ask help with doubts/questions | 21.07 (1, 464) | .000*** | .04 | .24 (.05) |
| Express desire to explore new rel. | .54 (1, 462) | .46 | — | — |
| Express desire to change religions | .97 (1, 462) | .33 | — | — |
| Talk w/someone in different relig. | .56 (1, 460) | .46 | — | — |
| See whether others feel the same | 9.17 (1, 464) | .003** | .02 | .16 (.05) |
| Take virtual pilgrimage or tour | .69 (1, 462) | .41 | — | — |
| Watch rituals or ceremonies | 6.59 (1, 463) | .01* | .01 | .14 (.05) |
| Participate virtually in rituals/cer. | .01 (1, 462) | .94 | — | — |
| Obtain certification of rituals | .11 (1, 462) | .74 | — | — |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Unstandardized coefficients and explained variance are reported only for significant predictors.

Table 10

Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Self-Identifying as Spiritual

| Use of Online Media | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Read religious text | 22.15 (1, 463) | .000*** | .04 | .25 (.05) |
| View sacred images | 20.11 (1, 463) | .000*** | .04 | .22 (.05) |
| Listen to religious music | 30.78 (1, 462) | .000*** | .06 | .32 (.06) |
| Discuss religious topic | 40.96 (1, 461) | .000*** | .08 | .33 (.05) |
| Offer/request prayers | 34.20 (1, 462) | .000*** | .07 | .30 (.05) |
| Learn relig. history/teachings | 17.60 (1, 462) | .000*** | .04 | .25 (.06) |
| Ask help with doubts/questions | 14.61 (1, 463) | .000*** | .03 | .20 (.05) |
| Express desire to explore new rel. | 1.67 (1, 461) | .20 | — | — |
| Express desire to change religions | .29 (1, 461) | .59 | — | — |
| Talk w/someone in different relig. | 4.32 (1, 459) | .04* | .01 | .11 (.06) |
| See whether others feel the same | 16.72 (1, 463) | .000*** | .03 | .20 (.05) |
| Take virtual pilgrimage or tour | 2.38 (1, 461) | .12 | — | — |
| Watch rituals or ceremonies | 5.04 (1, 462) | .03* | .01 | .12 (.05) |
| Participate virtually in rituals/cer. | .14 (1, 461) | .71 | — | — |
| Obtain certification of rituals | .98 (1, 461) | .32 | — | — |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Unstandardized coefficients and explained variance are reported only for significant predictors.

Hypothesis 4_b proposes that belief in the appropriateness of these uses of media for religious purposes would predict an emerging adult's lesser attachment to his or her childhood religions. A series of OLS regressions similar to that for Hypothesis 4_a was conducted, with the respondents' mean scores on the Fit scale of the BMMRS as the outcome variable. Results are displayed in Table 11. The data provide considerable support in the opposite direction of Hypothesis 4_b; most measures of attitudes toward the appropriateness of using online media in religion significantly predict *greater* attachment to the childhood religion. Again, there are several exceptions: belief in the appropriateness of expressing a desire to explore new religions, or to change religions, to talk with someone from a different religion, to take a virtual pilgrimage or tour, to participate virtually in religious rituals, or to obtain virtual certification that a ritual has been performed do not significantly predict an emerging adult's degree of attachment to his or her childhood religion. A separate series of OLS regressions found no beliefs about the appropriateness of using media for religious purposes significantly predicting an emerging adult's likelihood of having felt pressured to participate in religious rituals with little meaning to him or her.

Hypothesis 4_c proposed that greater belief in the appropriateness of using online media for religious purposes will predict greater openness to new religious ideas. Another series of OLS regressions was conducted, as for the previous components of Hypothesis 4, using the quest religious orientation instrument and its subscales as dependent variables. Results are displayed in Tables 12 through 14. The uses of online media are split about evenly between those whose appropriateness in the mind of an emerging adult significantly predicts his or her "quest" orientation and those that do not.

Table 11

Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Attachment to Childhood Religion

| Use of Online Media | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Read religious text | 24.99 (1, 445) | .000*** | .05 | .27 (.05) |
| View sacred images | 19.98 (1, 445) | .000*** | .04 | .22 (.05) |
| Listen to religious music | 22.92 (1, 444) | .000*** | .05 | .29 (.06) |
| Discuss religious topic | 30.69 (1, 443) | .000*** | .06 | .29 (.05) |
| Offer/request prayers | 32.68 (1, 444) | .000*** | .07 | .30 (.05) |
| Learn relig. history/teachings | 18.69 (1, 445) | .000*** | .04 | .26 (.06) |
| Ask help with doubts/questions | 18.51 (1, 445) | .000*** | .04 | .22 (.05) |
| Express desire to explore new rel. | 1.22 (1, 444) | .27 | — | — |
| Express desire to change religions | .003 (1, 443) | .96 | — | — |
| Talk w/someone in different relig. | 2.18 (1, 441) | .14 | — | — |
| See whether others feel the same | 10.23 (1, 445) | .001** | .02 | .16 (.05) |
| Take virtual pilgrimage or tour | 2.38 (1, 443) | .12 | — | — |
| Watch rituals or ceremonies | 6.18 (1, 444) | .01* | .01 | .13 (.05) |
| Participate virtually in rituals/cer. | .03 (1, 443) | .87 | — | — |
| Obtain certification of rituals | .26 (1, 443) | .61 | — | — |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Dependent variable is mean score on the Fit subscale of the BMMRS (as adapted). Estimates of unstandardized coefficients and explained variance are reported only for significant predictors.

Table 12

Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Quest Orientation Toward Religion

| Use of Online Media | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Read religious text | 2.75 (1, 462) | .10 | — | — |
| View sacred images | 4.19 (1, 462) | .04* | .01 | .07 (.04) |
| Listen to religious music | 1.38 (1, 461) | .24 | — | — |
| Discuss religious topic | 3.98 (1, 460) | .047* | .01 | .07 (.04) |
| Offer/request prayers | 2.69 (1, 461) | .10 | — | — |
| Learn relig. history/teachings | 5.00 (1, 461) | .03* | .01 | .10 (.04) |
| Ask help with doubts/questions | .58 (1, 462) | .45 | — | — |
| Express desire to explore new rel. | 3.85 (1, 460) | .05* | .01 | .07 (.04) |
| Express desire to change religions | 2.58 (1, 460) | .11 | — | — |
| Talk w/someone in different relig. | 5.41 (1, 458) | .02* | .01 | .09 (.04) |
| See whether others feel the same | 6.32 (1, 462) | .01* | .01 | .09 (.04) |
| Take virtual pilgrimage or tour | 2.29 (1, 460) | .13 | — | — |
| Watch rituals or ceremonies | 5.62 (1, 461) | .02* | .01 | .09 (.04) |
| Participate virtually in rituals/cer. | .60 (1, 460) | .44 | — | — |
| Obtain certification of rituals | .07 (1, 460) | .80 | — | — |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Dependent variable is mean score on the “Quest” religious orientation scale (as adapted).

Estimates of unstandardized coefficients and explained variance reported only for significant predictors.

Table 13

Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Complexity in Religious Thinking

| Use of Online Media | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Read religious text | 4.49 (1, 462) | .04* | .01 | .10 (.05) |
| View sacred images | 4.22 (1, 462) | .04* | .01 | .09 (.04) |
| Listen to religious music | 3.08 (1, 461) | .08 | — | — |
| Discuss religious topic | 5.35 (1, 460) | .02* | .01 | .10 (.05) |
| Offer/request prayers | 4.09 (1, 461) | .04* | .01 | .09 (.04) |
| Learn relig. history/teachings | 5.37 (1, 461) | .02* | .01 | .12 (.05) |
| Ask help with doubts/questions | 1.14 (1, 462) | .29 | — | — |
| Express desire to explore new rel. | 2.53 (1, 460) | .11 | — | — |
| Express desire to change religions | 2.10 (1, 460) | .15 | — | — |
| Talk w/someone in different relig. | 3.26 (1, 458) | .07 | — | — |
| See whether others feel the same | 5.32 (1, 462) | .02* | .01 | .10 (.04) |
| Take virtual pilgrimage or tour | 1.67 (1, 460) | .20 | — | — |
| Watch rituals or ceremonies | 2.82 (1, 461) | .09 | — | — |
| Participate virtually in rituals/cer. | .06 (1, 460) | .81 | — | — |
| Obtain certification of rituals | .02 (1, 460) | .88 | — | — |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Dependent variable is mean score on the Complexity subscale of the “Quest” religious orientation scale. Unstandardized coefficients and explained variance reported only for significant predictors.

Table 14

Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Willingness to Doubt Religious Beliefs.

| Use of Online Media | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Read religious text | 2.26 (1, 460) | .13 | — | — |
| View sacred images | 4.03 (1, 460) | .045* | .01 | .08 (.04) |
| Listen to religious music | 1.17 (1, 459) | .28 | — | — |
| Discuss religious topic | 2.37 (1, 458) | .12 | — | — |
| Offer/request prayers | 3.03 (1, 459) | .08 | — | — |
| Learn relig. history/teachings | 4.66 (1, 459) | .03* | .01 | .11 (.05) |
| Ask help with doubts/questions | 1.56 (1, 460) | .21 | — | — |
| Express desire to explore new rel. | 7.39 (1, 458) | .007** | .01 | .11 (.04) |
| Express desire to change religions | 1.98 (1, 458) | .16 | — | — |
| Talk w/someone in different relig. | 9.88 (1, 456) | .002** | .02 | .14 (.04) |
| See whether others feel the same | 8.14 (1, 460) | .005** | .02 | .11 (.04) |
| Take virtual pilgrimage or tour | 4.55 (1, 458) | .03* | .01 | .08 (.04) |
| Watch rituals or ceremonies | 6.64 (1, 459) | .01** | .01 | .11 (.04) |
| Participate virtually in rituals/cer. | 2.89 (1, 458) | .09 | — | — |
| Obtain certification of rituals | .31 (1, 458) | .58 | — | — |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Dependent variable is mean on Doubt subscale of the “Quest” religious orientation scale. Unstandardized coefficients and explained variance reported only for significant predictors.

However, findings are not consistent across the subscales on *which* attitudes toward online media in religion predict each aspect of the quest orientation. Notably, none of the uses of online media predicted emerging adults' mean response on the tentativeness subscale. Enough significant findings are present to consider Hypothesis 4_c partly supported, but much more research is necessary to determine why attitudes toward some kinds of online media use for religion are significant predictors while other are not.

Considering college coursework, although most predictors were not significant, several attitudes regarding the appropriateness of using media for religious purposes did significantly predict an emerging adult's likelihood of taking classes that explored religious or spiritual topics. The models are reported in Table 15. In addition, the likelihood of an emerging adult perceiving that a class reinforced his or her religious beliefs was significantly predicted by a belief in the appropriateness of using online media to view sacred images, $F(1, 459) = 8.87, p = .003$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = .18, SE = .06$), offer or request prayers, $F(1, 458) = 9.37, p = .002$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = .19, SE = .06$), or learn about a religion's history or teachings, $F(1, 458) = 5.15, p = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .17, SE = .07$).

Perceiving that a class had challenged or contradicted an emerging adult's religious or spiritual beliefs was significantly predicted, again, by belief in the appropriateness of using online media to view sacred images, $F(1, 459) = 6.62, p = .01$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .15, SE = .06$), as well as belief in the appropriateness of watching rituals or ceremonies online, $F(1, 458) = 5.70, p = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .14, SE = .06$). No attitudes toward use of media for religion predicted the belief that an emerging adult's college classes had nothing to do with his or her religion or spirituality. Thus, the predictors that were significant tended to support Hypothesis 4_c, though most predictors were not significant.

Table 15

Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Taking Class on Religious Subject

| Use of Online Media | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Read religious text | 3.28 (1, 460) | .07 | — | — |
| View sacred images | 12.47 (1, 460) | .000 | .02 | .22 (.06) |
| Listen to religious music | 1.89 (1, 459) | .17 | — | — |
| Discuss religious topic | 4.20 (1, 458) | .04* | .01 | .13 (.07) |
| Offer/request prayers | 8.26 (1, 459) | .004** | .02 | .19 (.06) |
| Learn relig. history/teachings | 4.96 (1, 459) | .03* | .01 | .17 (.08) |
| Ask help with doubts/questions | 1.57 (1, 460) | .21 | — | — |
| Express desire to explore new rel. | .69 (1, 458) | .41 | — | — |
| Express desire to change religions | .15 (1, 458) | .70 | — | — |
| Talk w/someone in different relig. | 1.80 (1, 456) | .18 | — | — |
| See whether others feel the same | 1.03 (1, 460) | .31 | — | — |
| Take virtual pilgrimage or tour | 1.23 (1, 458) | .27 | — | — |
| Watch rituals or ceremonies | 7.24 (1, 459) | .007** | .01 | .17 (.06) |
| Participate virtually in rituals/cer. | < .01 (1, 458) | .96 | — | — |
| Obtain certification of rituals | .23 (1, 458) | .63 | — | — |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Dependent variable is response to the statement, “I have taken classes that explored spiritual or religious topics.” Estimates of unstandardized coefficients and explained variance are reported only for significant predictors.

Hypothesis 4_d proposed that favorable attitudes toward using online media for religious purposes would predict lesser likelihood of perceiving support from a new group or community within the childhood religion, and greater likelihood of perceiving such support from a group or community of a new religion. Measures of attitudes about the appropriateness of using online media for religious purposes were deployed in a series of OLS regressions, with a respondent’s mean score on the Support scale of the BMMRS as the dependent variable. Results are displayed in Tables 16 and 17 and reveal that all significant findings exert influence in the opposite direction of the hypothesis.

For respondents who indicated that the “most important” religious group or community in college, for purposes of assessing their receipt of social support from such a group, was

Table 16

Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Supportive Group in Childhood Religion.

| Use of Online Media | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Read religious text | 6.34 (1, 218) | .013* | .02 | .23 (.09) |
| View sacred images | 2.81 (1, 218) | .10 | — | — |
| Listen to religious music | .59 (1, 217) | .44 | — | — |
| Discuss religious topic | 14.70 (1, 218) | .000*** | .06 | .32 (.08) |
| Offer/request prayers | 5.04 (1, 218) | .03* | .02 | .21 (.09) |
| Learn relig. history/teachings | 3.21 (1, 218) | .08 | — | — |
| Ask help with doubts/questions | 10.89 (1, 218) | .001*** | .04 | .27 (.08) |
| Express desire to explore new rel. | .01 (1, 216) | .94 | — | — |
| Express desire to change religions | .16 (1, 217) | .69 | — | — |
| Talk w/someone in different relig. | 1.84 (1, 216) | .18 | — | — |
| See whether others feel the same | 11.40 (1, 218) | .001*** | .05 | .27 (.08) |
| Take virtual pilgrimage or tour | 1.95 (1, 217) | .16 | — | — |
| Watch rituals or ceremonies | 2.12 (1, 218) | .15 | — | — |
| Participate virtually in rituals/cer. | 1.04 (1, 216) | .31 | — | — |
| Obtain certification of rituals | .25 (1, 217) | .62 | — | — |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Dependent variable is mean score on the Support scale of the BMMRS (as adapted). Estimates of unstandardized coefficients and explained variance are reported only for significant predictors.

Table 17

Appropriateness of Media in Religion as Predictor of Supportive Group in a New Religion

| Use of Online Media | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Read religious text | 1.81 (1, 223) | .18 | — | — |
| View sacred images | 1.76 (1, 223) | .19 | — | — |
| Listen to religious music | 2.85 (1, 223) | .09 | — | — |
| Discuss religious topic | 1.61 (1, 221) | .21 | — | — |
| Offer/request prayers | .09 (1, 223) | .76 | — | — |
| Learn relig. history/teachings | 1.19 (1, 222) | .28 | — | — |
| Ask help with doubts/questions | .94 (1, 223) | .33 | — | — |
| Express desire to explore new rel. | .94 (1, 223) | .33 | — | — |
| Express desire to change religions | 5.80 (1, 222) | .02* | .02 | -.15 (.06) |
| Talk w/someone in different relig. | 8.67 (1, 221) | .004** | .03 | -.23 (.08) |
| See whether others feel the same | .85 (1, 223) | .36 | — | — |
| Take virtual pilgrimage or tour | 5.29 (1, 222) | .02* | .02 | -.15 (.06) |
| Watch rituals or ceremonies | .51 (1, 222) | .48 | — | — |
| Participate virtually in rituals/cer. | 3.82 (1, 223) | .052 | — | — |
| Obtain certification of rituals | 4.17 (1, 222) | .04* | .01 | -.12 (.06) |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Dependent variable is mean score on the Support scale of the BMMRS (as adapted). Estimates of unstandardized coefficients and explained variance are reported only for significant predictors.

associated with the childhood religion, attitudes regarding the appropriateness of using online media to read religious texts, discuss religious topics, offer or request prayers, ask for help with doubts or questions, and see whether others feel the same about religion significantly predicted *greater* perceived support from the religious group or community in college. For respondents who indicated that the most important group in this regard was from a religion other than the ones in which they were raised, belief in the appropriateness of using online media to express a desire to change religions, talk with someone in a different religion, take a virtual pilgrimage or tour, or obtain certification that a ritual had been performed significantly predicted lesser perceived support from the new religious group or community. The consistency of these findings is noteworthy, but each directly contradicts the expected direction of effects proposed in Hypothesis 4_d.

Hypothesis 4_e proposes that greater belief in the appropriateness of using online media for religious purposes will predict lesser likelihood of continuing to identify with the childhood religious tradition. A probit regression was conducted to predict this binary variable from the various measures of belief in the appropriateness of using online media for religious purposes. Belief in the appropriateness of various uses of online media in religion does not significantly predict likelihood of continuing to identify with the childhood religion, except for belief in the appropriateness of offering or requesting prayers online, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 7.22, p = .007$, Nagelkerke pseudo- $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = -.11, SE = .04$), which contradicts the hypothesis by significantly predicting *greater* likelihood of continuing to identify with the childhood religion. Overall, Hypothesis 4_e is not supported.

Testing Hypothesis 5: The Influence of Consuming Media From the Childhood Religion

Hypothesis 5_a proposes that greater consumption of religious media content will predict greater importance of religion to the emerging adult. A series of OLS regressions was conducted using the number of times, in a typical week, an emerging adult consumed particular types of religious media content from his or her childhood religion, to predict the importance of religion to the respondent, as measured by the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire. For open-ended, self-reported independent variables, responses more than three standard deviations from the mean ($Z > |3.29|$) were excluded as outliers. Additionally, because the mode response for each media format was overwhelmingly zero, each regression was conducted twice: once for all respondents, and again including only respondents who reported using consuming religious content from that medium at least once in a typical week.

Results, displayed in Table 18, support Hypothesis 5_a, but only when respondents who report zero uses of each medium in a typical week are included. As with the uses of media to communicate with family, considered in Hypothesis 3, the value of consumption of religious media for predicting the importance an emerging adult places on religion seems to depend on whether the emerging adult consumes such media at all, not the frequency of consumption.

A similar conclusion about the importance of consuming media from the childhood religion at all, as opposed to the amount consumed, seems required by patterns in the way such media consumption predicts emerging adults' self-identification as religious or spiritual. As displayed in Tables 19 and 20, most forms of consuming media from the childhood religion predicts a greater degree of self-identification by the emerging adult as "a religious person" or "a spiritual person," supporting Hypothesis 5_a, but the significance disappears when the sample is restricted to respondents who actually consume each media type at least once in a typical week.

Table 18

Consuming Media From Childhood Religion as Predictor of Importance of Religion

| Medium | All Respondents | | | Use Medium at Least Once Weekly | | | | |
|--------------|------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj.</i> <i>R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj.</i> <i>R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) |
| TV | 9.93 (1, 433) | .002** | .02 | .39 (.12) | .03 (1, 41) | .87 | — | — |
| Radio | 28.98 (1, 424) | .000*** | .06 | .51 (.09) | 2.77 (1, 50) | .10 | — | — |
| Website | 18.86 (1, 425) | .000*** | .04 | .72 (.17) | .09 (1, 50) | .76 | — | — |
| Online forum | 4.00 (1, 428) | .046* | .01 | .73 (.37) | 1.25 (1, 14) | .28 | — | — |
| Videos | 20.29 (1, 424) | .000*** | .04 | .76 (.17) | .08 (1, 51) | .78 | — | — |
| Article | 29.04 (1, 425) | .000*** | .06 | .65 (.12) | .10 (1, 86) | .76 | — | — |
| Blogs | 22.86 (1, 424) | < .01** | .01 | .66 (.25) | .40 (1, 27) | .53 | — | — |
| Comment | .22 (1, 425) | .64 | — | — | <i>Insufficient data</i> | | | |
| Get link | 9.04 (1, 424) | .003** | .02 | .26 (.09) | .01 (1, 98) | .92 | — | — |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Dependent variable is mean score on the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire. Estimates of unstandardized coefficients and explained variance are reported only for significant predictors.

Table 19

Consuming Media From Childhood Religion as Predictor of Self-Identifying as Religious.

| Medium | All Respondents | | | Use Medium at Least Once Weekly | | | | |
|--------------|------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj.</i> <i>R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj.</i> <i>R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) |
| TV | 8.27 (1, 462) | .004** | .02 | .36 (.12) | .91 (1, 40) | .35 | — | — |
| Radio | 19.80 (1, 453) | .000*** | .04 | .41 (.09) | .85 (1, 50) | .36 | — | — |
| Website | 15.67 (1, 454) | .000*** | .03 | .64 (.16) | 1.66 (1, 50) | .20 | — | — |
| Online forum | 6.12 (1, 457) | .01* | .01 | .87 (.35) | .53 (1, 15) | .48 | — | — |
| Videos | 18.19 (1, 453) | .000*** | .04 | .73 (.17) | .000 (1, 50) | .995 | — | — |
| Article | 24.71 (1, 454) | .000*** | .05 | .59 (.12) | .31 (1, 88) | .58 | — | — |
| Blogs | 4.62 (1, 454) | .03* | .01 | .52 (.24) | .69 (1, 27) | .41 | — | — |
| Comment | .57 (1, 454) | .45 | — | — | <i>Insufficient data</i> | | | |
| Get link | 4.73 (1, 453) | .03* | .01 | .18 (.08) | .11 (1, 100) | .74 | — | — |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Dependent variable is response to the question, “To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person?” Estimates of unstandardized coefficients and explained variance are reported only for significant predictors.

Table 20

Consuming Media From Childhood Religion as Predictor of Self-Identifying as Spiritual

| Medium | All Respondents | | | | Use Medium at Least Once Weekly | | | |
|--------------|------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj.</i> <i>R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj.</i> <i>R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) |
| TV | 6.66 (1, 461) | .01** | .01 | .31 (.12) | .10 (1, 40) | .76 | — | — |
| Radio | 24.10 (1, 452) | .000*** | .05 | .44 (.09) | .97 (1, 50) | .33 | — | — |
| Website | 17.39 (1, 453) | .000*** | .04 | .65 (.16) | .04 (1, 50) | .84 | — | — |
| Online forum | 1.39 (1, 456) | .24 | — | — | .28 (1, 15) | .60 | — | — |
| Videos | 19.96 (1, 452) | .000*** | .04 | .74 (.17) | .04 (1, 50) | .84 | — | — |
| Article | 22.96 (1, 453) | .000*** | .05 | .55 (.11) | .003 (1, 88) | .96 | — | — |
| Blogs | 12.40 (1, 453) | .000*** | .02 | .82 (.23) | 3.39 (1, 27) | .08 | — | — |
| Comment | < .01 (1, 453) | .96 | — | — | <i>Insufficient data</i> | | | |
| Get link | 12.21 (1, 452) | .001** | .02 | .28 (.08) | .80 (1, 100) | .37 | — | — |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Dependent variable is response to the question, “To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person?” Estimates of unstandardized coefficients and explained variance are reported only for significant predictors.

Hypothesis 5_b proposes that greater consumption of religious media content from the emerging adult’s childhood religion will predict greater attachment to the childhood religion. A series of OLS regressions was conducted, following the same pattern described for Hypothesis 5_a, using the Fit scale of the BMMRS as the outcome variable to measure attachment to the childhood religion. As displayed in Table 21, results generally supported Hypothesis 5_b. Five of the nine media formats significantly predicted greater attachment to the childhood religion, though these predictors were only significant when the sample included respondents who consumed media from their childhood religions zero times in a typical week.

Most measures of consuming media from the childhood religion did not significantly predict an emerging adult feeling that, as a child, he or she was pressured into participating in religious rituals that meant little to the emerging adult. However, visiting a website about the childhood religion did predict lesser likelihood of feeling that way, $F(1, 434) = 6.19, p = .01$,

adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = -.43$, $SE = .17$), as did watching videos about the childhood religion, $F(1, 433) = 8.98$, $p = .003$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = -.53$, $SE = .18$), but, in both cases, only when respondents were included who reported visiting such a website zero times in a typical week. Interestingly, participating in an online discussion forum about the childhood religion, for respondents who did so at least once in a typical week, predicted greater likelihood of perceiving such pressure as a child, $F(1, 15) = 6.60$, $p = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .26$ ($\beta = 2.36$, $SE = .92$). Overall, this additional measure provided no consistent evidence for or against Hypothesis 5_b.

Table 21

Consuming Media From Childhood Religion as Predictor of Attachment to Childhood Religion

| Medium | All Respondents | | | | Use Medium at Least Once Weekly | | | |
|--------------|------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R</i> ² | β (<i>SE</i>) |
| TV | 7.79 (1, 443) | .005** | .02 | .33 (.12) | .03 (1, 40) | .87 | — | — |
| Radio | 12.87 (1, 434) | .000*** | .03 | .32 (.09) | 1.08 (1, 50) | .30 | — | — |
| Website | 7.44 (1, 435) | .007** | .02 | .43 (.16) | 2.59 (1, 50) | .11 | — | — |
| Online forum | 1.70 (1, 438) | .19 | — | — | .01 (1, 15) | .95 | — | — |
| Videos | 8.29 (1, 434) | .004** | .02 | .46 (.16) | .33 (1, 51) | .57 | — | — |
| Article | 10.71 (1, 435) | .001** | .02 | .38 (.12) | .000 (1, 89) | .98 | — | — |
| Blogs | .77 (1, 434) | .38 | — | — | .24 (1, 27) | .63 | — | — |
| Comment | .001 (1, 435) | .97 | — | — | <i>Insufficient data</i> | | | |
| Get link | 2.72 (1, 435) | .10 | — | — | 1.28 (1, 98) | .26 | — | — |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Dependent variable is mean score on Fit subscale of the BMMRS (as adapted). Estimates of unstandardized coefficients and explained variance are reported only for significant predictors.

Hypothesis 5_c proposes that greater consumption of religious media content from an emerging adult's childhood religion will predict lesser openness to new religious ideas. A series of OLS regressions was conducted following the pattern described for Hypothesis 5_a, using as the outcome variable the quest religious orientation instrument and its subscales. Overall, Hypothesis 5_c was not supported. No measures of consuming media from the childhood religion

significantly predicted quest religious orientation overall or the complexity of religious thinking that is a component of the quest measure. Most media consumption measures also did not significantly predict the other two factors within the quest orientation. However, the two exceptions, supporting Hypothesis 5_c, are noteworthy: respondents who at least once in a typical week read an online article from their childhood religions were significantly less likely to doubt their religion beliefs, $F(1, 89) = 4.05, p = .047$, adjusted $R^2 = .03$ ($\beta = -.34, SE = .17$), and respondents who at least once in a typical week read a blog from the religion in which they were raised were significantly less likely to recognize tentativeness in their religious beliefs, $F(1, 27) = 8.21, p = .008$, adjusted $R^2 = .21$ ($\beta = -1.51, SE = .53$). Thus it seems that, while the overall conclusion must be that Hypothesis 5_c is not supported as stated, it does appear supported in somewhat consistent patterns for certain media types under certain usage conditions.

Consuming media from the childhood religion did consistently predict taking a college class about religious or spiritual topics, providing more consistent support for Hypothesis 5_c. Listening to radio programs, $F(1, 451) = 5.81, p = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .27, SE = .11$), visiting a website, $F(1, 452) = 5.34, p = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .45, SE = .20$), participating in a discussion forum, $F(1, 455) = 5.55, p = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .99, SE = .42$), watching videos, $F(1, 451) = 4.12, p = .04$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .41, SE = .20$), reading online articles, $F(1, 452) = 12.36, p = .000$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = .50, SE = .14$), reading a blog, $F(1, 451) = 5.07, p = .03$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .65, SE = .29$), or receiving a link to online media about the childhood religion, $F(1, 452) = 4.74, p = .03$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .21, SE = .10$), significantly predicted taking such a class, though these media were not significant when the sample was restricted only to respondents who consumed these media at least once in a typical week. Reporting that such a class reinforced the emerging adult's religious or spiritual beliefs was

significantly predicted by listening to radio programs, $F(1, 450) = 4.13, p = .04$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .22, SE = .11$), visiting a website, $F(1, 451) = 4.35, p = .04$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .40, SE = .19$), participating in an online discussion forum, $F(1, 454) = 8.31, p = .004$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = 1.18, SE = .41$), watching online videos, $F(1, 450) = 4.85, p = .03$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .43, SE = .20$), or reading an online article, $F(1, 451) = 9.02, p = .003$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = .42, SE = .14$), about the childhood religion, though only when including respondents who consumed such media zero times in a typical week. Perceiving that a class challenged or contradicted one's religious or spiritual beliefs was significantly predicted by listening to radio programs, $F(1, 450) = 5.33, p = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .24, SE = .10$), reading online articles, $F(1, 451) = 10.03, p = .002$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = .41, SE = .13$), or reading blogs, $F(1, 450) = 12.22, p = .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = .91, SE = .26$), from the childhood religion. Listening to radio programs, $F(1, 452) = 5.03, p = .03$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = -.25, SE = .11$), visiting a website, $F(1, 453) = 3.90, p = .049$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = -.38, SE = .19$), watching online videos, $F(1, 452) = 7.84, p = .005$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = -.55, SE = .20$), reading articles online, $F(1, 453) = 7.71, p = .006$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = -.40, SE = .14$), and receiving a link about the childhood religion, $F(1, 452) = 5.27, p = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = -.22, SE = .10$), significantly predicted an emerging adult rejecting the ideas that religious and spiritual beliefs had nothing to do with his or her coursework though only when "zero"-frequency responses were included.

Hypothesis 5_d proposes that greater consumption of media content from an emerging adult's childhood religion will predict greater likelihood of perceiving support in college from a religious group or community associated with the childhood religion, and lesser likelihood of perceiving such support from a group or community representing a new religion. A series of OLS regressions was conducted following the pattern in Hypothesis 5_a, using respondents' mean

score on the Support scale of the BMMRS as the outcome variable. Results are displayed in Table 22.

Table 22
Consuming Media From Childhood Religion as Predictor of Perceived Group Support

| Medium | Group Associated With Childhood Religion | | | Group Associated With New Religion | | | | |
|--------------|--|----------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R²</i> | β (<i>SE</i>) | <i>F</i> (<i>df</i>) | <i>p</i> | <i>Adj. R²</i> | β (<i>SE</i>) |
| TV | | | | | | | | |
| All | 9.24 (1, 217) | .003** | .04 | .41 (.14) | 3.67 (1, 224) | .06 | — | — |
| Users | .97 (1, 25) | .33 | — | — | 1.32 (1, 9) | .28 | — | — |
| Radio | | | | | | | | |
| All | 23.75 (1, 212) | .000*** | .10 | .48 (.10) | .87 (1, 220) | .35 | — | — |
| Users | 2.01 (1, 40) | .16 | — | — | .29 (1, 6) | .61 | — | — |
| Website | | | | | | | | |
| All | 10.47 (1, 210) | .001** | .04 | .67 (.21) | 2.48 (1, 223) | .12 | — | — |
| Users | .67 (1, 32) | .42 | — | — | .05 (1, 14) | .83 | — | — |
| Online forum | | | | | | | | |
| All | 2.60 (1, 213) | .11 | — | — | .22 (1, 223) | .64 | — | — |
| Users | .09 (1, 10) | .78 | — | — | <i>Insufficient data</i> | | | — |
| Videos | | | | | | | | |
| All | 9.19 (1, 210) | .003** | .04 | .64 (.21) | 8.87 (1, 222) | .003** | .03 | .76 (.25) |
| Users | 4.18 (1, 36) | .048* | .08 | .99 (.4) | .04 (1, 11) | .84 | — | — |
| Article | | | | | | | | |
| All | 14.12 (1, 210) | .000*** | .06 | .55 (.15) | 5.84 (1, 223) | .02* | .02 | .52 (.22) |
| Users | 3.78 (1, 59) | .06 | — | — | 2.19 (1, 25) | .15 | — | — |
| Blogs | | | | | | | | |
| All | 2.68 (1, 210) | .10 | — | — | .86 (1, 222) | .36 | — | — |
| Users | .04 (1, 16) | .84 | — | — | .26 (1, 8) | .63 | — | — |
| Comment | | | | | | | | |
| All | .35 (1, 211) | .55 | — | — | .02 (1, 222) | .89 | — | — |
| Users | <i>Insufficient data</i> | | | <i>Insufficient data</i> | | | | |
| Get link | | | | | | | | |
| All | 9.77 (1, 211) | .002** | .04 | .32 (.10) | .14 (1, 221) | .71 | — | — |
| Users | .13 (1, 65) | .72 | — | — | 1.14 (1, 29) | .30 | — | — |

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Note: Dependent variable is mean score on the Support scale of the BMMRS (as adapted). Estimates of unstandardized coefficients and explained variance are reported only for significant predictors.

For the most part, respondents' consumption of media associated with their childhood religious traditions did significantly predict greater likelihood of receiving support in college from a group or community associated with the childhood religion. However, all but one of these findings followed the pattern identified in other hypotheses of becoming nonsignificant when the sample was restricted to respondents who used each medium at least once in a typical week. One notable exception is online videos, which explained *more* of the variance in perceived support ($\Delta R^2 = .06$) when the sample included only respondents who watched such videos at least once in a typical week.

For respondents assessing a group or community from a different religion than the ones in which they were raised, most media consumption variables again were not significant predictors of perceived support. Surprisingly, watching online videos was a significant predictor of perceived support from the group or community representing a new religion, though, unlike consumption of videos from the childhood religion, significance was found only when "zero" responses to the frequency of consuming this medium in a typical week were included. Reading articles from one's childhood religion significantly predicted higher perceived support from a group or community representing a new religion, though only when "zero" responses to frequency of such reading in a typical week were included. Overall, Hypothesis 5_d is not supported as written. Where predictors are significant, media from the childhood religion have the hypothesized effect, greater perceived support from a group or community in college associated with the childhood religion. However, two significant findings also show consumption of media from the childhood religion significantly predicting increased perceived support from a group or community representing a new religion, directly contrary to the hypothesized effect.

Hypothesis 5_e proposes that greater consumption of media content from an emerging adult's childhood religion will predict greater likelihood of continuing to identify with the childhood religion. A series of probit regression was conducted using the frequency of consuming media content from the childhood religion in a typical week to predict the binary outcome variable of whether an emerging adult continued to identify with the childhood religion. Overall, results were nonsignificant, failing to support Hypothesis 5_e. However, the two media formats that are significant predictors support the hypothesis. Watching television programs from the childhood religion, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 5.80, p = .02$, Nagelkerke pseudo $R^2 = .03$ ($\beta = -.56, SE = .23$), and visiting websites from that religion, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 9.63, p = .002$, Nagelkerke pseudo- $R^2 = .05$ ($\beta = -.69, SE = .22$), significantly predict greater likelihood of continuing to identify with the childhood religion.

Testing Hypothesis 6: The Influence of Consuming Media From a New Religion

Hypothesis 6_a proposes that greater consumption of media content from a religion other than the one in which an emerging adult was raised will predict greater importance of religion to the emerging adult. A series of OLS regressions was conducted using the number of times, in a typical week, an emerging adult consumed particular types of religious media content from religions other than the one in which he or she was raised, to predict the importance of religion to the respondent, as measured by the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire. For open-ended, self-reported independent variables, responses more than three standard deviations from the mean ($Z > |3.29|$) were excluded as outliers. Additionally, because the mode response for each media format was overwhelmingly zero, each regression was conducted twice: once for all respondents, and again including only respondents who reported using consuming religious content from that medium at least once in a typical week.

While most predictors are not significant, the three that are support Hypothesis 6_a. Importance of religion to the emerging adult was significantly predicted by listening to radio programs, $F(1, 424) = 5.99, p = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .26, SE = .11$), visiting websites, $F(1, 430) = 5.64, p = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .12, SE = .05$), and participating in online forum, $F(1, 425) = 3.87, p = .05$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .78, SE = .40$), about a religion other than the one in which an emerging adult was raised. However, they do so only when respondents with zero uses in a typical week are included. A similar pattern was observed for Hypothesis 5_a, highlighting again the recurring finding that whether media consumption occurs at all is significant, even if the frequency of consumption typically is not.

Most forms of consuming media from a new religion do not significantly predict any effect on an emerging adult's self-identification as religious or spiritual, and thus these data do not support Hypothesis 6_a. The only exceptions are watching television programs from the new religion, which significantly predicts greater identification as a religious person, $F(1, 455) = 5.28, p = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .26, SE = .12$), and as a spiritual person, $F(1, 454) = 5.18, p = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .25, SE = .11$); and watching videos from a new religion, which significantly predicts greater identification as a spiritual person, $F(1, 449) = 3.88, p = .05$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .26, SE = .13$). Both predictors are only significant when all respondents are entered in the sample, including those who consume each media format zero times in a typical week.

Hypothesis 6_b proposes that greater consumption of media content from a religion other than the one in which an emerging adult was raised will predict lesser attachment by an emerging adult to his or her childhood religion. A series of OLS regressions was conducted, following the same pattern described for Hypothesis 6_a, using the Fit scale of the BMMRS as the outcome

variable. No predictors were significant, and thus results did not support Hypothesis 6_b.

Consumption of media from a religion other than the one in which a respondent was raised does not significantly predict an emerging adult's attachment to his or her childhood religion.

Similarly, no forms of consuming media from a new religion significantly predicted an emerging adult's likelihood of feeling pressured as child into participating in religious rituals that meant little to him or her, again offering no support for Hypothesis 6_b.

Hypothesis 6_c proposes that greater consumption of media content from a religion other than the one in which an emerging adult was raised will predict greater openness to new religious ideas. A series of OLS regressions was conducted following the pattern described for Hypothesis 6_a, using as the outcome variable the quest religious orientation instrument and its subscales.

Overall, Hypothesis 6_c was not supported. In most formats, consumption of media from a religion other than the one in which a respondent was raised did not significantly predict the emerging adult's quest orientation toward religion, willingness to doubt, or recognition of tentativeness in one's beliefs. The one exception is notable. Visiting a website from a religious tradition other than the one in which a respondent was raised significantly predicted complexity of religious thinking, $F(1, 459) = 5.15, p = .02, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .01 (\beta = .09, SE = .04)$, though this finding disappears when the sample is restricted to respondents who visit such a site at least once in a typical week.

Watching TV programs, $F(1, 452) = 4.96, p = .03, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .01 (\beta = .31, SE = .14)$, or reading online articles, $F(1, 450) = 5.16, p = .02, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .01 (\beta = .38, SE = .17)$, from a religion other than the one in which the emerging adult was raised significantly predicted greater likelihood of taking a class about religious or spiritual topics, though only when respondents who watched such programs zero times in a typical week were included. Watching TV programs from

a new religion, $F(1, 451) = 5.41, p = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .31, SE = .13$), or participating in an online discussion forum about such religions, $F(1, 450) = 4.51, p = .03$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .93, SE = .44$), also significantly predicted taking a class that reinforced the emerging adult's religious or spiritual beliefs, though only when including respondents who watched such programs zero times in a typical week. On the other side of the coin, perceiving that a class challenged or contradicted one's religious beliefs was significant predicted by watching TV programs from a new religion, $F(1, 451) = 5.37, p = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = .29, SE = .12$), or participating in an online discussion forum about such religions, $F(1, 12) = 5.66, p = .04$, adjusted $R^2 = .26$, though, for most predictors, only when "zero"-frequency respondents were included. Interestingly, watching TV programs, $F(1, 38) = 4.81, p = .04$, adjusted $R^2 = .09$ ($\beta = .55, SE = .25$), and watching online videos, $F(1, 42) = 4.87, p = .03$, adjusted $R^2 = .08$ ($\beta = .75, SE = .34$), from a religion other than the one in which respondent was raised significantly predicted the belief that religious and spiritual beliefs had nothing to do with the emerging adult's coursework, though only for respondents who did so at least once in a typical week. However, receiving a link about a new religion significantly predicted emerging adults rejecting the idea of a disconnect between religion and their coursework, $F(1, 449) = 7.29, p = .007$, adjusted $R^2 = .01$ ($\beta = -.51, SE = .19$), when "zero"-frequency respondents were included. Overall, the findings about perceptions of college coursework provide only limited support for Hypothesis 6c, though the media variables that were significant tended to predict in the direction of the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 6d proposes that greater consumption of media content from a religion other than the one in which an emerging adult was raised will lesser perceived support from a religious group or community in college associated with the childhood religion, and greater perceived

support from such a group associated with a new religion. A series of OLS regressions was conducted following the pattern in Hypothesis 6_a, using respondents' mean score on the Support scale of the BMMRS as the outcome variable. For respondents who indicated that the group or community whose support they were evaluating was from the religion in which they were raised, consumption of media from other religions did not significantly predict perceived support from the religious group or community encountered in college, probably not a surprising finding given the way respondents were divided. For respondents assessing a group or community from a different religion than the ones in which they were raised, most media consumption variables again were not significant predictors of perceived support. Listening to radio programs from the new religion, $F(1, 221) = 5.23, p = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = .46, SE = .20$), and watching online videos from the new religion, $F(1, 219) = 4.32, p = .04$, adjusted $R^2 = .02$ ($\beta = .40, SE = .19$), did significantly predict increased perceived support from the group or community associated with the new religion, though only when the sample included respondents who consumed such media zero times in a typical week.

Hypothesis 6_e proposes that greater consumption of media content from a religion other than the one in which an emerging adult was raised will predict lesser likelihood of continuing to identify with the emerging adult's childhood religious tradition. A series of probit regressions was conducted using the frequency of consuming media content from a new religion in a typical week to predict the binary outcome variable of whether an emerging adult continued to identify with the childhood religion. Hypothesis 6_e is not supported for any media format: none of these forms of consuming media from a religion other than the one in which a respondent was raised significantly predicts likelihood of continuing to identify with the childhood religion.

CHAPTER FIVE. DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

If the initial, preaffiliation, stage of conversion, a process especially likely to play out in emerging adulthood, is a tug-of-war for influence between an existing religious affiliation and a new religious or spiritual orientation, what are the forces pulling from either side? This is the question numerous disciplines involved in the scientific study of religiosity and spirituality are trying to answer. To that discussion, this disquisition adds the forces of communication, whether in person or through media, as influences in their own right that affect a potential convert's attitudes and actions during the crucial process of deciding whether to explore new religious or spiritual possibilities. This disquisition establishes that a religious social network's beliefs, expectations, promises, values, threats, and evaluations cannot be said to simply be "communicated" or "conveyed" or "expressed" to a member or potential member of the network. The detailed circumstances of this process — the means and the manner of communication — appear to be among the factors that determine whether a potential convert will remain thoroughly embedded in the existing religious social network, deviate from it to greater or lesser degrees as connections are maintained with other networks, or convert entirely by adopting a new fundamental orientation toward religious or spiritual matters.

Where From Here? Evaluating the Hypotheses Tested

It should surprise no one familiar with this area of study that the process of and motivations for conversion are complex and interrelated in ways that have only begun to be understood. Thus, to the question of *which* means and manners of communication will produce greater or lesser influences on certain aspects of the conversion process, this disquisition can only begin to offer some tentative answers. The findings in the current study, however, do illustrate some promising directions for articulating more definite statements about the

relationships among family communication, media attitudes and consumption, and religious beliefs and practices.

Family Communication Patterns and Emerging Adults' Religiosity

These promising findings begin with family communication patterns, whose influence on emerging adults' religious attitudes has been indicated by previous research and whose role in shaping the preaffiliation stage of conversion is established here. Two general conclusions can be stated: family communication patterns appear to be strong predictors of emerging adults' religious attitudes; and, contrary to this study's hypothesized expectations, both conversation orientation and conformity orientation tend to exert their influence in the same directions.

Both conversation orientation and conformity orientation predict greater likelihood of emerging adults identifying themselves as religious or spiritual people; conversation orientation also predicts high scores on the Santa Clara Strength of Faith measure. Both conversation orientation and conformity orientation predict greater attachment to the childhood religion, though high conformity orientation does predict greater perception that, as a child, the emerging adult was pressured in to religious activities in which he or she found little meaning. Both conversation orientation and conformity orientation predict the emerging adult's greater openness to new ideas; of particular significance, both orientations predict greater willingness to entertain doubts about one's current religious or spiritual beliefs.

Thus, the assumption underlying much of Hypotheses 1 and 2, that family conversation orientation would be a conversion-inhibiting force while family conformity orientation would tend to promote conversion, is not supported by this study's findings. One plausible explanation for these findings is that high conversation orientation and high conformity orientation both encourage the emerging adult to treat religion as an important aspect of life. If this belief were

shared by emerging adults from both high-conversation/low-conformity families and low-conversation/high-conformity families, it might explain similarities in their religious attitudes upon entering emerging adulthood and higher education. Further investigation that can detect more nuanced relationships among these variables, such as a path model testing the role of belief in the importance of religiosity and spirituality as an intervening variable, would add much to explaining the link between family communication patterns and subsequent attitudes toward religiosity and spirituality.

It should be noted, however, that the two orientations do diverge in two significant respects. First, they predict opposite outcomes regarding an emerging adult's attachment to a religious or spiritual group he or she encounters in college, an important measure in the preaffiliation stage of conversion, since such face-to-face relationships and being immersed in a religious group are typically considered strong influences on likelihood of conversion (see pp. 19-22). In this study's findings, high family conversation orientation predicts that an emerging adult will perceive greater social support from a religious or spiritual group associated with the childhood religion, but it predicts nothing about social support from a group associated with a new religion. Family conformity orientation predicts the opposite pattern, offering no predictive power about support from a group associated with the childhood religion, but predicting greater perceived support from a group associated with a new religion. It would seem that, even assuming conversation orientation and conformity orientation are unified in that both promote belief in the importance of religiosity in general, it remains possible for them to differ in how emerging adults channel that belief. These findings are consistent with the proposition that high family conversation orientation leads emerging adults to channel their heightened sense of the

importance of religion back into the childhood religion, while high conformity orientation seems to direct the same belief toward exploration of new religious possibilities.

The other key difference is that higher family conversation orientation predicts greater likelihood of continuing to identify with the childhood religion, while conformity orientation does not predict anything about such identification. This finding can be interpreted in light of a similar finding on the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith measure: conversation orientation predicts greater strength or importance of religiosity, while conformity orientation offers no predictive power. The degree to which a family's communication patterns demand conformity to the family's (i.e., the parents') religious beliefs, practices, and identity seems to have no effect on the emerging adult's likelihood of continuing in the family religion once out of the childhood home and into the more open atmosphere of higher education. Rather, the degree to which the family's religious beliefs, practices, and identity were open for discussion — even if they were not open to change — seems to be the driving factor in the emerging adult's approach to religion.

Family Communication Through Media: What Are They Talking About?

Although family communication patterns are generally assumed to be established through a multitude of face-to-face interactions among people living in the same home, this disquisition joins a small but growing body of research to consider the role media communication technologies play in changing these dynamics. For the most part, *which* media communication technologies emerging adults use to stay in contact with their childhood families is not a significant factor in emerging adults' approach to the preaffiliation stage of conversion. For example, media communication with family shows virtually no influence on any measure of openness and willingness to explore new religious ideas. On other variables, a few media communication technologies sometimes will show an influence, but few consistent patterns

about the technologies emerge. However, the data do seem to support three conclusions independent of which communication media are being used.

First, the data show a recurring pattern (described in more detail in the appropriate sections of Chapter Four) of family communication through a particular medium significantly predicting some aspect of an emerging adult's approach to religiosity and spirituality when all respondents are considered, but then returning a nonsignificant result once the sample is restricted to respondents who communicate with their families through that medium at least once in a typical week. That is, emerging adults who actually use a particular communication medium with their families show no significant differences based on *how often* such communication occurs, but significant differences do emerge in models that also include emerging adults who *never* (in a typical week) use such communication media with their families. This pattern occurs across most measures of the importance of religion to the emerging adult, attachment to the childhood religion, and perceived support from a new group or community associated with the childhood religion. Thus, contact with the childhood family through media seems to influence an emerging adult's religiosity or spirituality in a black-and-white way: *whether* such media communication occurs is significant, *how much* it occurs is not. More nuanced statistical analysis of the data, such as models with binary dependent variables or terms to model a curvilinear relationship that would be invisible to OLS regression, could confirm whether and where such an effect is occurring.

Second, the data consistently show the influence of the frequency of using communication media to discuss religious or spiritual topics with family. To tweak a cliché, while the medium might not matter, the message does. The more an emerging adult uses communication media to discuss religious or spiritual subjects with parents, the more likely he or

she is to consider religion important, self-identify as a religious person or a spiritual person, feel attachment to the childhood religion, take a college class on a religious or spiritual subject, perceive that a class reinforced his or her religious or spiritual beliefs, perceive social support from a group or community associated with the childhood religion, and continue to identify with the childhood religion. In short, an emerging adult's use of media communication technologies to continue discussing religious or spiritual subjects with parents once the emerging adult has left the childhood home for higher education probably is this study's most consistent predictor of attitudes and behaviors regarding the preaffiliation stage of conversion. The influence of such communication is consistently in a conversion-inhibiting direction. However, given the generally low proportions of variance explained by each of these findings (the largest is the 12% explained variance in the Santa Clara scale), future research should investigate how powerful the influence of such communication is: perhaps its consistent pull for the childhood religion is, like a branch stuck in the wheel of a runaway boxcar, a definite presence but one with too little power in the face of stronger forces urging conversion. Such research also might ask how honest emerging adults are in such communication. "Discussing" religious or spiritual subjects can carry a variety of meanings, including assenting to the family's religious orthodoxy while withholding the true extent of an emerging adult's exploration of new religious beliefs, practices, and identities.

Third, the failure of media communication with family to predict social support from a group or community of a new religion, or openness to new ideas, or taking coursework about religious or spiritual topics, provides still further evidence that media communication with family is generally a conversion-inhibiting force whose effect is to maintain the status quo. Media communication with family, the childhood religious social network, shows no evidence of being a force that would support conversion or even religious exploration. This finding is not

terribly surprising, but it is important. Theories of conversion typically assume that the impetus for conversion will come from outside the childhood family, but, given the history in this area of research of flawed and biased assumptions about how conversion proceeds, testing such conventional wisdom is especially necessary. In this case, the data do support conceptualizing conversion-promoting influences as arising from outside the family religious network.

Beliefs About the Appropriateness of Using Online Media for Religious or Spiritual

Purposes

Whether an emerging adult considers online media appropriate to use in one's religious or spiritual practice depends on precisely what religious or spiritual use is proposed, a remarkable finding that shows how nuanced a culture has emerged around even relatively recent media technologies. In general, belief in the appropriateness of using online media for religious purposes predicts the importance an emerging adult places on religion in general, his or her likelihood of self-identifying as a religious person or a spiritual person, and greater sense of attachment to the childhood religion. With regard to religious or spiritual groups encountered in college, attitudes toward the appropriateness of online media in religion that are significant predict greater perceived support from groups associated with the childhood religion and lesser perceived support from groups associated with new religions. It seems that either the conceptualization emerging adults hold of online media in religion or their actual practice in using such media is linked in their minds to the childhood religion.

Further investigation is warranted on this point, because it supplies evidence that online media used for religion, despite their potential to expose emerging adults to new religions, are in fact functioning as conversion-inhibiting adjuncts of the childhood religion. Alternatively, this finding might indicate that religions generally are not effective in presenting their messages, or

are more effective in addressing existing members than in persuading potential converts to join the religion. Rational-choice scholars, in particular, have argued that religions today have “maxed out” their ability to promise otherworldly, supernatural benefits to a skeptical public (Iannaccone, 1992) and thus must rely on ever-more-finely tuned messages about the social and psychological benefits of membership (Ellison, 1995; Pickard, 2005; Pritchard & Fudge, 2012; Stolz, 2006) to recruit converts. Whether one of these explanations is the case (meaning the finding is not merely an artifact of this sample), and whether this pattern continues in later emerging adulthood and into the mature adult years, will reveal a great deal about how attitudes regarding religious or spiritual practice limit the influence religious media can be said to possess in an abstract vacuum.

It becomes important to remember that statistical regression, despite couching its findings in the language of “prediction,” does not truly establish causation between variables. In some cases, causation can be inferred, such as when family communication patterns that occurred at an earlier point in time are used to predict attitudes and behaviors that must occur later in time; causation, if it is present, can only follow chronological time (Locke, 1689/1959). Given this study’s cross-sectional design, however, respondents’ attitudes toward religion and toward the appropriateness of using online media for that purpose are occurring simultaneously. Different research designs will be needed to test whether religiosity predicts attitudes toward media in religion or vice versa.

Attitudes about the appropriateness of using online media for religious or spiritual purposes do not appear to show consistent patterns in *which* media attitudes predict greater openness to new religious or spiritual ideas, taking college classes about religion, or perceiving greater social support from a group or community associated with either the childhood religion

or a new religion. However, at least some attitudes toward the appropriateness of online media in religion do predict each of these approaches to the preaffiliation stage of conversion. Thus, the principal finding here must be simply that attitudes toward the use of online media in religion are a promising subject for fruitful research endeavors. In particular, two avenues of inquiry seem supported by this study's findings.

First, future research should seek common characteristics that make some religious uses of online media such unmistakable (typically, $p = .000$) predictors of belief in the importance of religion, personal religious identity, and attachment to the childhood religion, while several other religious uses of online media show no predictive power. What makes some media uses salient to the religiously or spiritually inclined, while other receive, apparently, indifference? One explanation might be that the significant predictors are uses of online media generally consistent with one's existing religious practice, such as offering prayers, listening to music, or reading a religious text. Uses of online media that tend toward interreligious exploration — such as expressing a desire to explore new religion or change religions, or to talk with a practitioner of a different religion (i.e., practices that tread further into the preaffiliation stage of conversion and in some cases up the frontier with the stage of affiliating with a new religion) — tend to not be significant predictors of the importance of religion or attachment to a childhood religion. Additionally, while watching rituals or ceremonies online is a significant predictor of these outcomes, participating virtually in rituals or obtaining virtual certification that a ritual has been performed were not, perhaps indicating that respondents place little importance on the ability to actually practice a religion online. (Studies of religious minorities who have no ready access to physical gathering places and fellow believers could make for illuminating comparisons.)

A second promising area of exploration would involve the approaches to the preaffiliation stage of conversion for which no clear predictive pattern emerges among attitudes toward online media in religion. Several such attitudes significantly predict a “quest” orientation toward religion, complexity of religious thinking, willingness to doubt, and likelihood of taking a college class on a religious or spiritual subject, but, at first blush, attitudes toward online media in religion seem to form no consistent predictive pattern with regard to these markers of openness to exploring religious beliefs, practices, and identities. Paired with the finding that, aside from offering or requesting prayers, attitudes about the appropriateness of online media in religion do not predict anything about the likelihood of an emerging adult continuing to identify with the childhood religion, fertile ground emerges for making sense of these data. A first step might be applying exploratory factor analysis to establish empirically, rather than merely conceptually, the categories into which online media activities are grouped in the minds of religious practitioners considering the appropriateness of engaging in them.

Consuming Media From the Childhood Religion and From New Religions

This study’s data seem to justify four observations about the influence of media content from religions themselves, whether from an emerging adult’s childhood religion or a newly encountered religious or spiritual orientation. First, as a source of strength for the social network connections tethering the emerging adult to the childhood religion, media products by or related to that religion pale in comparison to the influence of face-to-face or mediated communication with the actual family religious network in which an emerging adult was first integrated into that religion. Though media related to that religion in general do predict how an emerging adult thinks about and engages with new religious possibilities in the preaffiliation stage of conversion, these influences do not match the strength and consistency of family communication

patterns (especially conversation orientation) or using communication media to discuss religious or spiritual subjects with parents. This disparity adds to the already considerable body of evidence that it is not merely communication with a religious social network, but rather the combination of communication and substantive bonds of affection toward the people in that network with whom one communicates, that are most determinative of that network's influence on the individual religious practitioner. As an aside, this fact might do much to explain why the fervent Millennial ambitions held out for religious periodicals for most of the nineteenth century and religious broadcasting for virtually all of the twentieth (Schultze, 2003) have been largely disappointed.

Second, the limits on the power of a particular religion's media products, at least when treated in isolation from other factors, are even more apparent in this study's data regarding media from new religions. All tested media formats from an emerging adult's childhood religion predict greater "strength" on the Santa Clara faith instrument and greater likelihood of identifying oneself as religious or spiritual; few media formats from a new religion did so. Several media formats, when used by an emerging adult's childhood religion, predicted greater attachment to that religion; no media did so for a new religion. No media formats, regardless of religion, predicted any variation in "quest" orientation toward religion or its components. However, several forms of media from an emerging adult's childhood religion predicted taking classes on religious subjects, finding them to reinforce or challenge existing beliefs, and rejecting the idea that coursework has no connection to religiosity or spirituality; few forms of media from a new religion did so. Some forms of media from the childhood religion predicted greater likelihood of receiving support in college from a group or community associated with that religion; very little such influence, from media of either religion, is shown on perceived support

from a group or community associated with a new religion. Finally, while most media formats, regardless of religion, showed no effect on the likelihood of an emerging adult continuing to identify with the childhood religion, the two that did were media formats produced by the childhood religion (TV programs and websites).

Third, the effects of media consumption here show the same pattern identified above with regard to using communication technologies to communicate with one's childhood family. Almost without exception, the forms of religious media that show significant predictive value do so only when the regression models are based on respondents who do not consume such media as well as respondents who consume a particular format of religious media at least once in a typical week. The predictive power of these media formats vanishes when analysis is restricted to only respondents who actually consume each format. Thus, the observation made about media communication with family applies equally to consumption of media products from or about religions: the crucial variable seems to be whether an emerging adult consumes such media at all; attitudes or behavior in the preaffiliation stage of conversion are not predicted with any greater accuracy by knowing *how much* the emerging adult consumes each media format.

Fourth, these data seem to compel the conclusion that media produced by or about religions themselves are more potent tools for an emerging adult's existing religion to inhibit conversion than they are for a new religion to facilitate entrance into preaffiliation with that religion (the importance of such media products in the later stages of conversion, of course, would almost certainly be greater). The inability, for example, of media from new religions to affect an emerging adult's sense of attachment to the childhood religion, while several forms of media from the childhood religion were able to increase attachment to it, shows how much more than increasingly well-crafted messaging appeals (McGraw, Schwartz, & Tetlock, 2012;

Pritchard & Fudge, 2012; Sengers, 2010) is required even to advance an emerging adult within the preaffiliation stage of conversion. The same might be said about the inability of new religions' media to influence an emerging adult's likelihood of identifying with the childhood religion; or to produce greater openness, complexity, willingness to doubt, or acceptance of tentativeness in religious thinking — seemingly necessary conditions for remaining in the preaffiliation stage with a newly encountered religion rather than rejecting it out of hand. (The only exception in this study, the finding that visiting a new religion's website predicted greater complexity of religious thinking, involved one of the most passive of media formats, with which contact must be affirmatively initiated by a potential convert already disposed to seek out the new religion.)

All this being said, comparison of these media variables to each other and to the influence of communication with the childhood family religious network should not obscure the finding that consuming media from and about religions does have some influence on an emerging adult's approach to the preaffiliation stage of conversion. This influence is not as consistent as scientists of religion might prefer, nor as monolithic as many theorists of both religion and media have assumed, but it is an influence nonetheless. Future conversion research should account for the influence of religious media consumption among the panoply of factors affecting the process. The best research in this vein also will deploy measures of how frequently potential converts consume religious media, and in which formats they receive it. The broader trend of fragmentation in the media environment (see pp. 40-41) means research into religion cannot assume all respondents consume similar media diets, or that a potential convert who partakes of one form of media from a religion is exploring other media forms in the same manner.

Notable Patterns Across the Dependent Variables

Although this disquisition's purpose was to test the influence of the communication-related predictor variables, a few interesting patterns not discussed elsewhere appear when looking across the dependent variables and shed further light on the influences studied. First, the consistency with which both axes of family communication pattern predict openness to new religious or spiritual ideas stands in significant contrast to the media-related variables, which predicted openness inconsistently or not at all. The most obvious difference between the independent variables is that media attitudes and use are occurring now, while family communication patterns wielded their most powerful influence in the past, when emerging adults were firmly embedded in the family religious social network during childhood and adolescence (see pp. 36-37). These data suggest that an emerging adult's openness to exploring new religious possibilities depends more on the family communication environment from which emerging adult comes than on the religious media environment in which he or she currently operates. Whether such openness to religious or spiritual exploration is a fixed feature of an adult's personality or is subject to change as one acquires a greater sense of independence and self-efficacy in adulthood is an important question for future conversion research. More detailed comparison of religious or spiritual openness at the beginning and end of emerging adulthood (ages 18 and 25) also seem warranted. Longitudinal studies of whether religious media consumption produces greater openness over these years also would be enlightening. An extensive body of useful findings also could be created by incorporating broader measures of personality, such as the "Big Five" personality inventory (BFI-44; John & Srivastava, 1999; McCrae & John, 1992) that has linked enduring characteristics of individual personality to a host of life events and outcomes.

A second dependent variable of interest, one that has for several decades been caught up in the popular and political “culture wars,” is emerging adults’ selection of religiously or spiritually oriented college coursework, and whether such coursework undermines once-devout children’s religious beliefs. Every predictor variable in this study showed at least some influence on an emerging adult’s college coursework and perceptions of such classes. Taking a college class on a religious or spiritual subject is made more likely by higher conformity orientation in the childhood family (though not by higher conversation orientation), by using communication media to discuss religious or spiritual topics with parents, by some measures of belief in the appropriateness of using online media for religion, and by numerous measures of consuming media from the childhood religion (compared with only a few measures of consuming media from a new religion). Perceptions that a college class has reinforced or undermined one’s religious beliefs are, paradoxically, often predicted by the same variables: both axes of family communication pattern, using media to discuss religious or spiritual subjects with parents, two measures of belief in the appropriateness of using online media for religion, and most measures of consuming media from the childhood religion predict both responses.

Thus, whether emerging adults take college classes on religious or spiritual subjects, and their degree of sensitivity to the implications of the material in those courses for their own religious or spiritual belief systems, is largely influenced by the religion-related communication in the family religious network and the emerging adult’s continued engagement with the childhood religion. While higher education is not absolved of whatever effects its curriculum has on religiosity and spirituality, the data indicate that this responsibility is shared with the family religious network and the childhood religion more generally. It is worth noting, as well, that regional differences in the degree of hostility students perceive between their religious beliefs

and the broader culture represented in the college setting — or by higher education itself — could be considerable.

Finally, it is worthwhile to look at patterns within a variable that points directly to how far the respondents in this sample have progressed through the preaffiliation stage of conversion: whether these emerging adults continue to identify with their childhood religions, and which communication variables predict this outcome. Family conversation orientation (though not conformity orientation) predicts greater likelihood of continuing to identify with the childhood religion. However, continuing to communicate with family through media technologies shows little influence, except when religious or spiritual topics are discussed. Of attitudes toward online media, only greater belief in the appropriateness of offering or requesting prayers predicting greater likelihood of remaining in the childhood religion; of media consumption from the childhood religion, only television programs and websites were significant predictors. No media consumption from a new religion was significant, nor did any predictors point to significantly *lesser* likelihood of identifying with the childhood religion. These findings suggest, first, additional evidence for the status-quo bias in emerging adults' family communication and media consumption as they relate to religion. Second, and closely related, these findings raise the possibility that the influence of family communication and media in the conversion process might be solidly on the side of the existing religious social network, and that the forces promoting conversion might be more likely to be sociological, psychological, quasi-economic, or other types of communication interactions. Especially when supported by other findings about emerging adults' attitudes toward online media in religion and the lack of influence of media from new religions, this finding regarding continued identification with the childhood religion points to considerable limits on the ability of religions to gain converts by media products alone.

Limitations of the Sample and Analysis

The findings and conclusions drawn from this sample are presented with several caveats that deserve to be noted when these data are interpreted. The first and most significant is that the sample is unrepresentative of the U.S. population in some important ways. Its composition is too white and too Christian to allow the present study's findings to be extrapolated wholesale to the general emerging-adult population. The racial composition of the sample is not fatal to analysis, since profound differences in the religious experiences of white and non-white populations have long led researchers to analyze their religious communities and practices separately. However, where race indicates that respondents are thoroughly embedded into American culture and have ready access to and ability to understand a variety of media available in American society, the sample's racial makeup points to an experience of religion and the preaffiliation stage of conversion that will differ from that of religious practitioners in immigrant communities or the increasing numbers of Americans who practice non-Christian religions. Replication of this study's variables in other cultures and religions within the unique American religious environment will be required before drawing more sweeping conclusions.

Additionally, the regional limitation of the sample should be noted. Religiosity, religious attitudes, and ideas regarding conversion and religious identity can be expected to vary greatly in, for example, the West Coast region, the "Bible belt" South, or New England as compared to this study's largely Midwestern sample. Replication in other regions of the country is clearly desirable. It is particularly noteworthy that the sample reflects the Midwest region overall in having Catholics and Lutherans as its largest denominational groups, and it thus is heavily skewed in the direction of structured, traditional understandings of Christianity. Even in other heavily Christian parts of the United States, the prevalence of a more congregational attitude

toward religious organizations or a more experiential style of religious practice could alter emerging adults' interaction with the preaffiliation stage of conversion.

A third limitation inherent in the sample is that this study, like many other inquiries into emerging adulthood, is limited to emerging adults who enter higher education. Studying such emerging adults separately is justified, because those who attend an institution of higher education, even for a year, show different patterns of religiosity and spirituality than those who do not (see pp. 33-35). Nonetheless, a complete picture of the phenomena studied should include the experiences of emerging adults who do not enter higher education, as well as older emerging adults after graduating from or otherwise leaving a college or university.

A fourth limitation of the sample is that it was collected at a public university. Religious attitudes and practices, as well as related communication patterns and uses of media, could vary considerably between emerging adults who choose a religiously affiliated institution of higher education and those who do not.

An additional limitation should be noted with regard to the variables studied. For the sake of expanding research on the influence of communication and media on conversion, this disquisition deliberately omitted the one communication-related variable that has received a notable amount of attention in existing research: face-to-face communication with members of a newly encountered religion. The evidence this study provides for the minimal influence of media from new religions should not be interpreted as dismissing all communication variables related to a new religion as influences on conversion. For example, emerging adults who already have face-to-face contacts with at least one person in a new religion might show different patterns than others of consuming media from the new religion and being influenced by them.

Conclusion

In the tug-of-war among religions competing for emerging adults in the preaffiliation stage of conversion, patterns of family communication, attitudes toward using media for religious or spiritual purposes, and consumption of religious or spiritual media are among the forces determining the strength of a religious social network's ties to a member or potential convert. Especially significant factors include greater degrees of conversation orientation and conformity orientation in an emerging adult's childhood family, whether the emerging adult now out of the childhood home still discusses religious and spiritual subjects with his or her parents, and whether the emerging adult watches television programs or visits websites associated with his or her childhood religion. In addition to the sociological, psychological, quasi-economic, and theological factors identified in previous research, these face-to-face and media-driven communication variables must be considered to provide a full account of the crucial initial stage of the process of religious or spiritual conversion.

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APPENDIX. SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Demographics

1. Biological Sex
 - Male
 - Female
2. Age (number)
3. Place of residence
 - On-campus (sorority/fraternity, residence hall, living/learning community, etc.)
 - Off-campus (just me; with roommates; with significant other, etc.)
 - With parents/childhood family
4. Ethnicity
 - White/Caucasian
 - Hispanic/Latino
 - Asian-American
 - African-American
 - American Indian/Alaska Native/Pacific Islander
 - Multi-racial
 - International student (from outside the U.S.)
 - Other
5. Are you the first person in your immediate family to attend college?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Not sure
6. About how many hours does it take you to travel from NDSU to your hometown? (Please put "0" if it takes less than an hour.)
 - [Number]
7. How often do you see your parents and other members of your immediate family in person?
 - A few times a week
 - Once a week
 - A few times month
 - Once a month
 - A few times a semester
 - Only during breaks from school
 - Rarely or never
8. In what religion were you raised?
 - Buddhist
 - Catholic
 - Episcopalian
 - Hindu
 - Jewish
 - Lutheran
 - Methodist

- Muslim
 - Nondenominational Christian
 - Orthodox Christian
 - Presbyterian
 - Southern Baptist
 - Other Protestant
 - Other or multiple religions (please specify which religion(s))
 - I was not raised in any religion.
9. What do you consider your religion now?
- Buddhist
 - Catholic
 - Episcopalian
 - Hindu
 - Jewish
 - Lutheran
 - Methodist
 - Muslim
 - Nondenominational Christian
 - Orthodox Christian
 - Presbyterian
 - Southern Baptist
 - Other Protestant
 - Other or multiple religions (please specify which religion(s))
 - I do not believe in any religion.
 - I'm not sure what I believe about religion.
10. How strongly would you say you identify with this religion?
[seven-point Likert-type from “not very strongly” to “very strongly”]

Family Communication Patterns

Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of these statements. [7-point Likert-type scales from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”]

11. In our family we often talk about topics like politics and religion where some persons disagree with others.
12. My parents/guardians encourage me to challenge their ideas and beliefs.
13. My parents/guardians often say something like, “You should always look at both sides of an issue.”
14. I usually tell my parents/guardians what I am thinking about things.
15. I can tell my parents/guardians almost anything.
16. In our family we often talk about our feelings and emotions.
17. My parents/guardians and I often have long, relaxed conversations about nothing in particular.
18. I really enjoy talking with my parents/guardians, even when we disagree.
19. My parents/guardians like to hear my opinions, even when they don't agree with me.
20. My parents/guardians encourage me to express my feelings.

21. My parents/guardians tend to be very open about their emotions.
22. We often talk as a family about things we have done during the day.
23. In our family we often talk about our plans and hopes for the future.
24. My parents/guardians often say something like, "You'll know better when you grow up."
25. In our family we often talk about our plans and hopes for the future.
26. My parents/guardians often say something like "Every member of the family should have some say in family decisions."
27. My parents/guardians often ask my opinion when the family is talking about something.
28. My parents/guardians often say something like, "My ideas are right and you should not question them."
29. My parents/guardians often say something like, "A child should not argue with adults.
30. My parents/guardians often say something like, "There are some things that just shouldn't be talked about."
31. My parents/guardians often say something like, "You should give in on arguments rather than risk making people mad."
32. When anything really important is involved, my parents/guardians expect me to obey without question.
33. In our home, my parents/guardians usually have the last word.
34. My parents/guardians feel that it is important to be the boss.
35. My parents/guardians sometimes become irritated with my views if they are different from theirs.
36. If my parents/guardians don't approve of it, they don't want to know about it.
37. When I am at home, I am expected to obey my parents'/guardians' rules.

Family Communication Through Media Technologies

38. How many times in a typical week do you and your parents/guardians post on each other's Facebook feeds? [number]
39. How many times in a typical week do you and your parents/guardians send each other tweets? [number]
40. How many times in a typical week do you and your parents/guardians interact through online social media *other than* Facebook or Twitter? [number]
41. How many times in a typical week do you and your parents/guardians talk on the phone? [number]
42. How many times in a typical week do you and your parents/guardians send each other a text message? [number]
43. How many times in a typical week do you and your parents/guardians send each other an email? [number]
44. Considering all forms of media, how many times in a typical week do you discuss religious or spiritual topics with your parents/guardians *other than* in face-to-face conversations? [number]
45. In the next year, how often do you expect to attend a religious service or ceremony with your parents? [number]

Use and Appropriateness of Using Media Technologies in Religion

46. In a typical week, how often do you: [number]
- Watch TV programs from the religious tradition in which you were raised?
 - Watch TV programs from a religious tradition *other than* the one in which you were raised?
 - Listen to listen to radio programs from the religious tradition in which you were raised?
 - Listen to listen to radio programs from a religious tradition *other than* the one in which you were raised?
 - Visit a website about the religious tradition in which you were raised?
 - Visit a website about a religious tradition *other than* the one in which you were raised?
 - Participate in an online discussion forum about the religious tradition in which you were raised?
 - Participate in an online discussion forum about religious traditions *other than* the one in which you were raised?
 - Watch online videos about the religious tradition in which you were raised?
 - Watch online videos about a religious tradition *other than* the one in which you were raised?
 - Read an article online about the religious tradition in which you were raised?
 - Read an article online about a religious tradition *other than* the one in which you were raised?
 - Read a blog about the religious tradition in which you were raised?
 - Read a blog about a religious tradition *other than* the one in which you were raised?
 - Comment on a blog about the religious tradition in which you were raised?
 - Comment on a blog about a religious tradition *other than* the one in which you were raised?
 - Receive a link from someone you know to online media about the religion in which you were raised?
 - Receive a link from someone you know to online media about a religion *other than* the one in which you were raised?
47. How appropriate or acceptable do you think it would be for someone to do each of these activities through online media? [each a 7-point Likert-type scale from “entirely unacceptable/inappropriate” to “entirely acceptable/appropriate”]
- Read a religious text
 - View sacred images or icons
 - Listen to religious music
 - Discuss a religious topic
 - Offer prayers or ask for prayers
 - Learn about the history or teachings of a religion
 - Ask for help with personal spiritual doubts or questions
 - Express a desire to explore new religious beliefs and rituals
 - Express a desire to change religions

- Talk with someone from a different religion to find out what that religion is about
- See whether others feel the same way about religion
- Take a virtual pilgrimage or tour through sacred sites
- Watch a religion's rituals or ceremonies
- Participate virtually in a ritual or ceremony
- Obtain certification that a religious ritual has been performed

Importance of Religion and Spirituality

Please tell us how well each statement describes you. [7-point Likert-type scales from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”]

48. My religious faith is important to me.
49. I pray daily.
50. I look to my faith as a source of inspiration.
51. I look to my faith as providing meaning and purpose in my life.
52. I consider myself active in my faith or church.
53. My faith is an important part of who I am as a person.
54. My relationship with God is extremely important to me.
55. I enjoy being around others who share my faith.
56. I look to my faith as a source of comfort.
57. My faith impacts many of my decisions.
58. To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person? [7-point Likert-type scale from “very religious” to “not religious at all”]
59. To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person? [7-point Likert-type scale from “very spiritual” to “not spiritual at all”]

Attachment to Childhood Religion

60. How well do you feel that you fit into the church or other religious community you were raised in? [7-point Likert-type scale from “do not fit in at all” to “fit in extremely well”]
61. If I could not return to the church or other religious community I was raised in, I would feel a great sense of loss. [7-point Likert-type scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”]
62. I feel at home in the church or other religious community I was raised in. [7-point Likert-type scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”]
63. The church or other religious community in which I was raised matters a great deal to me. [7-point Likert-type scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”]
64. In the church or other religious community I was raised in, I felt pressured by my parents/guardians to engage in religious activities that meant little to me. [7-point Likert-type scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”]

Openness and Willingness to Explore

Please tell us how well each of these statements describes you. [7-point Likert-type scales from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”]

65. I was not very interested in religion or spirituality until I began to ask questions about the meaning and purpose of my life.
66. I have been driven to ask religious or spiritual questions out of a growing awareness of the tensions in my world and in my relation to my world.
67. My life experiences have led me to rethink my religious or spiritual convictions.
68. Religion and spirituality weren't very important to me until I began to ask questions about the meaning of my own life.
69. You might say I value my religious and spiritual doubts and uncertainties.
70. For me, doubting is an important part of what it means to be religious or spiritual.
71. I find religious or spiritual doubts upsetting. [reverse coded]
72. In my religious or spiritual experience, questions are more central than answers.
73. As I grow and change, I expect my religion or spirituality to also grow and change.
74. I am constantly questioning my religious or spiritual beliefs.
75. I expect my religious or spiritual convictions to change in the next few years.
76. There are many religious or spiritual issues on which my views are still changing.
77. I have taken classes that explored spiritual or religious topics.
78. I have taken a class that reinforced my religious or spiritual beliefs.
79. I have taken a class that seemed to challenge or contradict my religious or spiritual beliefs.
80. My religious or spiritual beliefs have nothing to do with my college coursework. [reverse coded]

Social Support From a Religious Group or Community

Please tell us how well each of these statements describes you. [7-point Likert-type scales from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”]

81. Since coming to college, I have found a religious or spiritual group or community that makes me feel loved and cared for.
82. Since coming to college, I have found a religious or spiritual group or community to listen to me talk about my private problems and concerns.
83. Since coming to college, I have found a religious or spiritual group or community in which people frequently express interest and concern with my well-being.
84. Since coming to college, I have found a religious or spiritual group or community that would help me if I were sick.
85. Since coming to college, I have found a religious or spiritual group or community that would give me comfort if I faced a difficult situation.
86. Since coming to college, I have found a religious or spiritual group or community that would help me find places to get help with a problem.
87. Is this group or community part of the same religious tradition you were raised in? (Think of the most important group if there is more than one.) [Yes/No]