The Religiosity of Young Adults
The Determinants of the Religiosity of Young Adults
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Abstract

This study focused on how parental religiosity affects young adult children's religiosity. Parental religiosity was compared with their young adult children's religiosity. The type of parent-child relationship (if the young adult was securely or insecurely attached to their parents) was analyzed to determine its effects on the young adult's acceptance or rejection of his parent's beliefs. The hypothesis of this study was that children who have parents who are highly religious and are securely attached to their parents would be highly religious as young adults. A total of 70 people participated in this study; the participants were 35 introductory psychology students and 35 of their parents. Each participant was given a background questionnaire, a Religious Orientation Scale, an Intrinsic Religious Motivation Scale, a Quest Scale, and an Adult Attachment Scale. The hypothesis was supported because it was found that parental religiosity does affect young adult religiosity. The security of attachment of young adults does not affect their religiosity, but the security of parental attachment does. In other words, the level of security parents attached in their overall relationships is related to whether or not their children held the same religious beliefs as the parents.

Religiosity can be an important part of the lives of many young adults. Some young adults are highly religious while others are not religious at all. There are many factors that influence young adults to become religious. Those factors include uncertainty and anxiety, the need for meaning and control, the quest for knowledge and truth, and tradition (Spilka, Hood, & Gorsuch, 1985).

Are all these factors enough to influence a young adult into becoming religious or are there other underlying factors? What has the greatest influence on a young adult's decision to become religious? Many studies have attempted to explain religiosity in young adults (Stolzenberg, Blair-Loy, & Waite, 1995; Wilson & Sherkat, 1994). However, most of these studies focus on the young adults' experiences in high school and college. They also look to young adults' experiences in marriage.

While these experiences are significant and certainly do contribute to the development of religiosity, a young adults' religious inheritance is also of great importance. If a young adult's parents are not religious, it would seem that the child would be less likely to be religious. On the other hand, if the young adult's parents are highly religious, it would seem that child would be more likely to be religious. To what extent does parents' religiosity influence their children?

Families provide children with their initial religious identity (Myers, 1996). Parental religiosity has been shown to have great influence on the religiosity of their young children. Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi's 1975 study (as cited in Spilka et al., 1985) reports that 40 to 90 percent of children affiliate themselves with their parents' religious affiliation; the figure of 40 percent was attributed to religious denominations that do not highly stress participation in their denomination. The religiosity of parents is usually passed on to their children.

According to De Vaus (1983), research has shown that parental religiosity is a strong determinant of religiosity in adolescence. During adolescence, peers play a very important role and have great influence over one another. Peers influence what music is listened to, what clothing is worn, what movies are seen, and even what actions are taken by adolescents. One would think that adolescents' peers would have greater influence on their religiosity than their parents. This is not the case. De Vaus (1983) & Erickson (1992) found that parents have a greater impact on their adolescents' religiosity than their peers. When it comes to the religiosity of adolescents, parents are the dominant influence.

The question that remains to be answered is, how much influence does parents' religiosity have on their young adult children? Researchers looked into the influence that a young adult's experiences in high school, college, and marriage have on the religiosity of young adults (Stolzenberg et al., 1995; Wilson & Sherkat, 1994). Other research has shown which young adults are more likely to join religious organizations. Carroll & Roozen's 1975 study (as cited in Stolzenberg et al, 1995) shows that young adults who are married and those young adults who have entered parenthood are more likely to participate in religious activity. It has also been shown that higher levels of young adult women participate in religious activity (Cornwall, 1989).

Some research studies have shown that parental religiosity does not influence their young adult children's religiosity; Francis & Brown (1991) found that parental religiosity does not determine the religiosity of their
young adult children. Willits & Crider (1989) found that the relationship between parent's religiosity and their children's religiosity decreases with age. From these studies, it seems that parents' religiosity does not have an affect on their young adults' religiosity. However, when examining how these studies were conducted, it is found that the studies have the children measure their parents' religiosity. The studies measured the young adults' perceptions of their parents' religiosity. They did not measure the parents directly.

Along with parental religiosity, the child's attachment style may also be important in regards to the amount of influence parental religiosity has on his/her religiosity. Bowlby's 1969 study (as cited in Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999) reports that there are three types of attachment styles: secure, insecure/avoidant, and insecure ambivalent. Research has shown that secure individuals have higher levels of religiousness than insecure individuals (Granqvist, 2002). Those who are insecurely attached are more likely to have religious conversions and changes in their religious beliefs (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999). It would seem that the religiosity of securely attached young adults will positively correspond with that of their parents. Also, the religiosity of insecure/avoidant and insecure/ambivalent attached young adults will negatively correspond with the religiosity of their parents.

There was a need for a study in which both parent's and child's religiosity were measured. This provided a clear representation of both levels of religiosity. This study surveyed at least one parent directly concerning his/her religiosity. The young adult child of that parent was also surveyed on his/her religiosity. Researchers analyzed the surveys to see if a relationship is present. Also, both parent and child received an attachment survey to determine if they were securely or insecurely attached.

Moreover, if children have highly religious parents and are securely attached they will be highly likely to be religious as young adults. If children have non-religious parents and are insecurely attached they will most likely be religious as adults. The closer that children are to their parents the more likely there is a high acceptance of their parents' beliefs. Children who have parents who are highly religious and are securely attached will be highly religious as young adults.

**Method**

**Participants**

A total of 70 individuals participated in this study. Data was collected from 35 introductory psychology students (11 men, 24 women) from a medium size midwestern university. They were between the ages of 18 and 34 (M=22.57) and can be described as being from lower-middle to upper socioeconomic status. All young adult participants had some level of college education. Thirty-five parents of the introductory psychology students also participated (8 were fathers, and 27 mothers). They were between the ages of 34 and 71 (M=49.94). Parental education level ranged from below high school to graduate level. Young adult participants were recruited through their Introductory Psychology classes. Young adult participants received 10 extra credit points when they and one of their parents completed the study.

**Materials**

The religiosity of the subjects was measured on three different scales. The first scale used was the Religious Orientation Scale (ROS; Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989). The ROS is a 14-item scale measured on a 5-point "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5) Likert scale. The ROS measures intrinsic and extrinsic religious motivation. An example question from this scale asked participants to rate was how much they enjoyed reading about their religion.

The second scale used was the Intrinsic Religious Motivation Scale (IRMS; Hoge, 1972). The items used in the scale are applicable to a variety of religious groups. The scale measures the motivations behind religious activity. The scale contains ten items in a Likert format ranging from (1) "strongly agree" to (4) "strongly disagree." A low overall score indicates intrinsicness. Intrinsicness is a natural tendency to be religious, it is something inside a person that causes them to search for or believe in a higher power. A high score indicates extrinsicness. Extrinsicness is being religious in order to gain things such as comfort or peace. This scale asked participants to respond to statements such as "My faith involves all of my life."

The third scale used was the Quest Scale (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991). This scale measures extrinsic and intrinsic religious orientation. The Quest Scale consists of twelve items. The scale ranges from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5) in a Likert format. This scale asked participants to rate if they agreed with statements such as "As I grow and change, I expect my religion to grow and change."

A fourth scale was used to measure attachment. The Adult Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1990) was given to the participants. Participants scored themselves on a Likert scale ranging from "not at all" (1) to
"very" (5). The scale assessed if the respondent was securely attached, avoidantly attached, or anxious-ambivantly attached. This scale asked participants to rate statements such as “I find it difficult to depend on other people.”

Participants were also given a background questionnaire to fill out. The questionnaire included questions relating to the participant’s age, sex, and educational level. They were also asked their religious and political affiliation.

Procedure

After participants signed the informed consent form, they were asked if they had any questions. They were then told to fill out the credit slip, followed by the background questionnaire. After filling out the background questionnaire, researchers asked participants to complete each survey individually. After the surveys were completed and turned in, participants were given a debriefing form. They were then given a packet for one of their parents to complete. The packet contained an informed consent form, background questionnaire, four surveys, a debriefing form, and an envelope in which to return the questionnaire and surveys.

Results

To understand whether or not young adult religiosity is related to parental religiosity, three Stepwise Multiple Regressions were computed on the dependent variables of young adult intrinsic, young adult intrinsic/extrinsic, and young adult quest. The variables of young adult quest, and young adult attachment were also put into the regression. See Table 1. The first predictor for young adult intrinsic was parent intrinsic. The second predictor for young adult intrinsic was parent attachment. The first predictor for young adult intrinsic/extrinsic was parent intrinsic. The second predictor for young adult intrinsic/extrinsic was parent attachment. The only predictor for young adult quest was parent intrinsic. See Table 2 for means and standard deviations.

Discussion

This study found that parental religiosity does in fact play a role in the religiosity of young adults. The results of the study support part of the hypothesis. The hypothesis states that children who form secure attachments and have highly religious parents will be highly religious as young adults. It was found that parental religiosity does influence their young adult children’s religiosity. However, it was found that the security of the attachment of young adults did not influence their religiosity.

A young adult’s attachment style is shown to have no influence in determining his/her religiosity. This may be because the attachment scale did not measure the relationship they had with their parent(s), but their attachment style overall. The young adults surveyed may in fact not have a close relationship with her parent(s), while with other people he/she exhibits secure attachment. On the other hand, the young adults may have a close relationship with her parent(s) while exhibiting insecure attachment elsewhere.

Parental attachment was shown to have an effect on their young adult children’s religiosity. Parents’ security or insecurity of attachment in overall relationships affected their children’s religiosity. It was a surprising finding and could have occurred for a few reasons. Parents who are securely attached most likely have healthier, closer relationships with their children. This enables them to more effectively pass on their beliefs to their children. Children are most likely more receptive to parents’ ideals when they feel love and warmth from that parent.

There are different methodological factors that could have affected the outcome of this study. The attachment scale used was a scale that measures adult attachment and not necessarily a child’s relationship with his/her parents. A scale that measures the parent-child relationship directly would probably give more accurate and helpful results. It would be more evident if a child had a close relationship with his/her parents. Also, surveying both parents would be beneficial. If both parents were surveyed, a more accurate picture of the affects of parental religiosity could be drawn.

In addition, there was some overlap in regards to the religiosity surveys. Some of the questions in one survey were similar to those in another. It would be more beneficial in future studies to use surveys that cover broader aspects of religiosity. If researchers used different surveys, more could be known about more or different aspects of religiosity.

However, parents and society can greatly benefit from these findings. Parents who are concerned about passing their religious beliefs on to their children will understand that they do have influence on their children. This may cause parents to be more concerned or serious in their presentation of their beliefs to their children. Also, parents can see that they do have continued influence in their children’s lives—even when those children become adults. This can encourage parents to maintain an active role as their children age.

Society will benefit from a greater understanding of why young adults are, or are not, religious. If religion is an
important part to certain members of society, those members can ensure the growth of religiosity by encouraging parents to play an active role in their children’s lives. Children are important to every society and their upbringing is often of great interest to the members of society. The findings of this study demonstrate that parents play a vital role in the lives of their children—even into adulthood.

References


### Summary of Regression Analysis For Predicting Young Adult Religiosity

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<td>Parent Attachment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young Adult Quest</td>
<td>Parent Intrinsic</td>
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**Young Adult Children and Parent Means for Religiosity and Attachment Questionnaires**

Note: Standard Deviations are in parentheses.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Variable</th>
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<th>Parent Means</th>
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<td>2.41 (.46)</td>
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