Chapter 5

RELIGIOUS SOCIALIZATION AND THOUGHT IN ADOLESCENCE AND YOUNG ADULTHOOD

> Adolescence is a crisis of faith.
>
> Adults appear to seriously underestimate the interest teens have in religion.
>
> [Doubt] is altogether a pernicious companion which has its origins not in the good creation of God but in the *Nihil*—the power of destruction . . .
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> . . . doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith.
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> [The churches] are engaged in perpetuating attitudes and beliefs which are going to cause suffering, conflict, and disillusionment to all those young people intelligent enough to respond to modern culture. It is not that the moral principles are wrong, but that the developing adolescent will consider them wrong when he finds they are tied to positively childish dogma.[1]

RELIGIOUS SOCIALIZATION

Why do people believe what they do? Some people think that their religious beliefs arose from a careful consideration of different perspectives and their own thinking about religious issues. And they may feel that they would hold those beliefs regardless of their family upbringing, education, friends, cultural context, and so on. They feel that because they have reasoned things through, they have reached the best possible conclusions about religion, and because of the kind of people they are, they would have arrived at these same beliefs had they been raised in any family or culture. Others may feel that through divine revelation or historical precedent, they have special access to the "truth"—that God has singled them out to believe in the "one true religion."

The empirical evidence, of course, argues against such views. Study after study has shown the importance of the socialization process in determining people's present religious beliefs. In other words, your environment has played a major role in shaping your religious and other attitudes. If you had been born into a devout Muslim family, today you would probably be bowing toward Mecca. If you had been raised as a Pentecostal, you would probably sometimes speak in tongues. If your parents had been confirmed atheists, you would probably *not* believe in God today. If you had grown up in a particular native culture, you would probably believe in many gods.

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[1] These quotations come, respectively, from the following sources: Campbell (1969, p. 852); Bergman (2001, p. 46); Barth (1963, p. 131); Tillich (1957, p. 116); and Cattell (1938,p. 189).

In earlier chapters, we have discussed various potential explanations for why people are religious. Similarly, a number of reasons have been proposed for people's underlying level of religious commitment, since the environment can influence individuals in many different ways. For example, deprivation theory, often associated with the work of Glock and Stark (1966; Stark, 1972), suggests that religious commitment may compensate for other deprivations in life. Status theory proposes that religious commitment may be socially useful by increasing one's social status (see, e.g., Goode, 1968). Localism theory suggests that local communities may have well-defined standards that encourage religious commitment; people living in more cosmopolitan contexts tend to be relatively free of such "local" expectations and may therefore be less involved in religion. It has also been argued that beliefs at least partly determine religious involvement and commitment. Finally, the socialization approach emphasizes the role of the culture in teaching children and adolescents religious beliefs and behaviors.

Other specific factors have been suggested as determinants of religious commitment. For example, Ryan, Rigby, and King (1993) have argued that guilt and fear determine religiousness; Burris, Batson, Altstaedten, and Stephens (1994) have found that loneliness predicts religiousness; and Erikson (1958) has linked religion to the "identity crisis" that supposedly occurs during adolescence. These various approaches have been useful in helping to explain religious commitment. However, in this chapter we focus on the socialization explanation of religiousness—an approach that has marshaled a considerable body of empirical support, and one that offers specific plausible explanations of religious influence, which have been studied in some detail.

"Socialization," as the term is used here, refers to the process by which a culture (usually through its primary agents, such as parents) encourages individuals to accept beliefs and behaviors that are normative and expected within that culture. Such socialization often involves a process of internalization, as noted by Ryan et al. (1993), "through which an individual transforms a formerly externally prescribed regulation or value into an internal one" (p. 586). Johnstone (1988) has argued that people internalize the religion of their family or culture in essentially the same way that they learn their sex role, their language, or the lifestyle appropriate to their socioeconomic status. This is not to deny that people can become religious in other ways (e.g., see Chapter 11 on conversion); rather, it is suggested that socialization serves as the usual basis for religiosity in adolescence and adulthood.

There is no single "socialization theory." Different theoretical traditions in the social sciences have influenced the study of socialization processes, including psychoanalytic, social learning, cognitive-developmental, and symbolic-interactionist/role-learning perspectives (see Slaughter-Defoe, 1995). All of these have made contributions to our understanding of socialization, though we would argue that social learning theory has particular relevance for our consideration of the religious socialization process. As proposed by Bandura (1977), social learning theory emphasizes the importance of observing and imitating others, as well as the role of reinforcement. An important implication of this approach is that religiousness is typically strongly influenced by one's immediate environment (especially parents), through both modeling and reinforcement processes.

Some people find it difficult to accept the fact that, had they been born into a different cultural context, their religious beliefs would almost certainly be very different. And yet that is what the evidence regarding socialization suggests. There are exceptions to the rule, and these require our attention. However, we first need to examine the childhood and adolescent religious socialization process; this then leads us to a discussion of adolescent and young adult thinking about religion, especially religious questions and doubts, and their resolution. Then we consider the processes involved in leaving the family religion (apostasy), which at first blush might seem to contradict socialization theory. Finally, we explore ways in which adolescent religiousness may be related to ego identity development. But first, how and why does socialization exert such a strong influence on religiousness?

INFLUENCES ON RELIGIOUSNESS IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

Many external influences have the potential to affect people's religiousness: parents, peers, schools, religious institutions, books, the mass media, and so on. They can affect individuals directly through, for example, explicit religious teachings or family practices. They can also affect people indirectly in many ways—for example, by influencing school, marital, and career choices, or through cultural assumptions, subtle modeling, or lack of exposure to alternative positions. People may be conscious of some religious socialization influences, but quite unaware of others. Cornwall (1988) has noted that the religious socialization literature has traditionally focused on three "agents" of socialization: parents, peers, and church. We examine each of these in turn, but consider church (or any other religious institution) simply as one of a number of "other factors" that have been suggested to affect the religious socialization process. We also examine an additional factor that has been studied, education.

Our coverage of these potential influencing factors is largely restricted to the empirical work on religious socialization. There exists a rich body of literature in the psychodynamic and object relations traditions, especially with respect to the role of parents in the socialization process. The reader may wish to consult other sources for differing perspectives on these issues (see, e.g., Coles, 1990; Rizzuto, 1979, 2001).

The Influence of Parents

Parents have both direct and indirect effects on the socialization of their children, who in turn may or may not be aware of their parents' influence. Of the many different possible socialization influences, parents have typically been found to be the most important. There is copious evidence that parents have considerable impact on the religiosity of their children, both when their offspring are younger and also when they are adolescents and young adults.

Some social scientists (e.g., Cornwall & Thomas, 1990) believe that parental influence occurs within the family as a "personal religious community" that may exist quite independently of institutionalized religion. This small community, of which the parents are an integral part, influences religiousness indirectly by affecting the "personal community relationship" (Cornwall, 1987, p. 44). It is possible that this focus on personal religious communities may be most applicable in such groups as the Mormons, which served as the empirical basis for Cornwall's (e.g., 1987) conclusions about the religious socialization process. Of course, one's family of origin is potentially very important in affecting one's socialization and functioning in a number of systems, not just religion (Friedman, 1985; Slaughter-Defoe, 1995). Also, in this chapter we consider various avenues of parental socialization influence, not just that within "personal religious communities."

To some extent, children lead sheltered lives in terms of religion; they may not be aware that there *are* other religions, or even that there are people whose beliefs differ from their own. Parents often have a "captive audience" for their religious and other teachings, at least when their children are younger. Social learning theory would predict that children will be strongly influenced by these powerful and important parental models, as well as by the reinforcement contingencies controlled by the parents (Bandura, 1977). Much evidence is consistent with this prediction, and social learning theory may be viewed as the theoretical underpinning of the socialization process.

It is not a straightforward matter to tap parental influence in studies of religious socialization. Some investigators simply focus on "keeping the faith"—the extent to which children identify with the family religion as they grow older. These investigations typically assume that keeping the family faith must result in large part from parental influence. Other researchers focus on parent–child attitudinal agreement regarding religious and other matters, assuming that greater agreement indicates more effective parental influence. Still others rely on direct self-reports of influence, asking children or adolescents about the extent to which parents influence their religiousness. Similarly, some investigators have asked older adolescents and adults to reflect back on their lives and consider to what extent parents (and other factors) influenced their religion.

All of these approaches have their problems. For example, identification with a religious group may mean different things for different denominations, and it may not always be a good indicator of parental influence. Parent–child attitudinal agreement does not necessarily mean that parental influence was strong, and people's self-reports and memories may be faulty. But, collectively, these different approaches offer insight into parental religious socialization influence.

Studies of "Keeping the Faith"

Hunsberger (1976) studied several hundred university students from Catholic, United Church ("liberal Protestant"), and Mennonite ("conservative Protestant") families in Canada. These students were asked about the extent to which they accepted earlier religious teachings, as well as the strength of the emphasis placed on religion in their homes. The correlation between these measures was +.44, indicating that a self-reported tendency for greater emphasis on religion in one's childhood home was linked with acceptance of religious teachings during the university years. However, a significant tendency remained for Mennonite students to be more accepting of religious teachings than United Church students (with Catholics being intermediate), even after differential emphasis on religious teachings in these groups was controlled for. This suggests that other factors unique to specific religious groups may also be important.

A social-cognitive model of religious change in adolescence (Ozorak, 1989; see Research Box 5.1) predicts that both social factors (such as parental or peer influence) and cognitive variables (such as intellectual aptitude and existential questioning) influence adolescent religiousness. Ozorak's (1989) data supported the social-cognitive model, especially with respect to the positive link between parental and adolescent religiousness, and she concluded

Research Box 5.1. Influences on Religious Beliefs and Commitment in Adolescence (Ozorak, 1989)

Elizabeth Ozorak noted that various explanations exist for adolescent change in religious beliefs and practices. For example, it has been proposed that influence from parents, peers, or others may be powerful factors; that "existential anxiety" may be an initiating factor; or (as we have seen in Chapter 4) that cognitive development can serve as the stimulus for such change. Ozorak sought to test a variety of possible effects within a social-cognitive model of religious change. She proposed that social influences, especially parents, are the most powerful factors affecting adolescent religiousness; that there is a gradual polarization of religious beliefs in the direction established relatively early in people's lives; and that such cognitive factors as "existential questioning" are associated with decreased religious commitment.

After pilot-testing her materials on 9th and 11th graders, Ozorak studied 390 high school students and high school alumni from the Boston area. The subjects included 106 students in 9th grade, 150 students in 11th or 12th grade, and 134 alumni who had graduated 3 years earlier from two of the three high schools involved. Each participant completed a questionnaire including a wide variety of items and scales tapping religious affiliation, participation, beliefs, experiences, existential questioning, social "connectedness," family and peer influences, and religious change.

The data indicated that "middle adolescence is a period of [religious] readjustment for many individuals" (p. 455), with the average age of change being about 14.5 years. Social factors, especially parents, were powerful predictors of religiousness. For example, parents' religious affiliation and participation were positively related to children's religiousness. The influence of peers (discussed later in this chapter) was not so straightforward, though the data suggested that it too was related to adolescent religiosity. Cognitive factors also played a role; more existential questioning and higher intellectual aptitude were associated with religious change, but only for the oldest age group (high school alumni). In addition, there was support for a "polarization" interpretation of the data, such that the most religious participants tended to report greater change in a proreligious direction and the least religious participants reported decreasing religiosity over time.

Ozorak concluded that "parents' affiliation and their faith in that affiliation act as cognitive anchors from which the child's beliefs evolve over time. Family cohesion seems to limit modification of religious practices but exerts less pressure on beliefs, which become increasingly individual with maturation" (p. 460). This study is important because it reminds us of the powerful influence of *both* social and cognitive factors with respect to religious socialization. Furthermore, it emphasizes the critical role of parents in influencing religiousness and religious change in their offspring.

that parents are especially powerful influences in the religious socialization process. However, the influence of parents seemed more prominent for high school students than for college-age respondents, suggesting that parental influence may decrease as adolescents make the transition to adulthood.

Other studies have also indicated that parental religiousness is a good predictor of adolescents' and even adult children's religiousness. A survey investigation of Catholic high school seniors led to the conclusion that the three main factors predicting adolescent religiousness were perceptions of the importance of religion for the parents, positive family environment, and home religious activity (Benson, Yaeger, Wood, Guerra, & Manno, 1986). A national probability sample of more than 1,000 U.S. adolescents revealed that parental religiosity was a significant predictor of adolescent religious practice (Potvin & Sloane, 1985). The religious participation of Jewish parents was a powerful predictor of the religious beliefs and practices of their adolescent children (Parker & Gaier, 1980). Such influence may even extend into adulthood; a study of college teachers indicated that their parents' church attendance constituted the best predictor of their own religiousness (Hoge & Keeter, 1976).

Similarly, numerous studies have noted a strong tendency for children raised within a specific familial religious denomination to continue to identify with that denomination from childhood through adolescence and young adulthood (e.g., Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1997; Bibby, 2001; Hadaway, 1980; Kluegel, 1980; see also Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997; Benson, Donahue, & Erickson, 1989). In general, several different parental religion variables seem to be reasonable predictors of the extent to which adolescents and young adults maintain the family religion.

Parent–Child Agreement Studies

During the 1960s and 1970s, the mass media and social scientists were very interested in a possible "generation gap"—"a kind of organized rebellion against parents by their teenagers, one component of which supposedly involves considerable discrepancy between teenagers' attitudes and those of their parents" (Hunsberger, 1985a, p. 314). Some researchers concluded that there was indeed a generation gap (Friedenberg, 1969; Thomas, 1974); others contended that parent–adolescent attitudinal differences were relatively minor (Lerner & Spanier, 1980) or virtually nonexistent (Coopersmith, Regan, & Dick, 1975; Nelsen, 1981b). Also, parent–child attitudinal agreement may vary from one issue to another, and religious attitudes in particular may involve more parent–child agreement than some other domains (Bengtson & Troll, 1978).

A study of university students and their mothers and fathers confirmed this latter tendency (Hunsberger, 1985a). In general, there was moderately strong agreement on core elements of religiousness, including scores on a scale measuring the orthodoxy of Christian beliefs (correlations were .43 between students and their mothers, and .48 between students and their fathers), and reports of frequency of church attendance (correlations were .58 and .57, respectively). Furthermore, there tended to be stronger parent–child agreement on religious matters than there was on some other issues (e.g., self-rated happiness, personal adjustment, political radicalism).

Other investigations of mother–father–adolescent triads have led to similar conclusions, though relationships are sometimes weak. A study of triads from Catholic, Baptist, and Methodist homes showed weak to moderate correspondence between parents and their offspring on religious measures (higher for mothers than for fathers), with endorsement of a specific creed revealing stronger relationships (Hoge, Petrillo, & Smith, 1982). These relationships remained significant when the effects of denomination, family income, and father's occupation were partialed out, though Hoge et al. emphasized that extrafamilial influences (e.g., denomination) were also important in religious socialization. In a study of mother–father–child triads from Seventh-Day Adventist homes, modest agreement emerged across a series of religious and nonreligious values, with generally stronger relationships between offspring and mothers than between offspring and fathers (Dudley &

Dudley, 1986). Glass, Bengtson, and Dunham (1986) carried out a study of three generations of family members, the youngest generation being between the ages of 16 and 26. They concluded that there was substantial agreement on religious and political issues for *both* child–parent and parent–grandparent dyads, suggesting that parental influence in these areas may persist into adulthood.

Such findings of weak to moderately strong parent–adolescent agreement on religious issues do not "prove" that parents are important influences in their children's religious lives, of course. But such results are consistent with the data obtained through other approaches, which suggest that parents are indeed influential in this regard. Certainly, if parents play an important role in their children's religious development, one would expect to find at least modest correlations between measures of adolescent and parental religiousness. Interestingly, in Hunsberger's (1985a) study, parents were reasonably accurate estimators of the religious beliefs and practices of their college-age children, *unless* those children had drifted away from the family religious teachings. When the children had become apostates (i.e., had abandoned the home religion), parents were significantly poorer predictors of their children's religious attitudes than when they had remained in the family religion. This might suggest that parents are relatively unaware of adolescent shifts away from the family religion when they occur—or, as argued by Bengtson and Troll (1978), that parents tend to minimize differences between themselves and their adolescent children.

There also seems to be a tendency for adolescents to perceive that their parents are more conservative or traditional than the parents report themselves to be (Acock & Bengtson, 1980). Adolescents also perceive more attitudinal agreement between their parents than in fact exists. Thus there seems to be a tendency for youths to view their parents as more conservative and in closer agreement than they really are; the impact of these misperceptions on the socialization process is unknown.

It should be noted that the findings of these parent–adolescent agreement studies are generally consistent with recent conceptualizations of adolescence as a time of reasonably stable development and socialization, and a time when there is considerable similarity in values and attitudes between parents and their adolescent offspring. This is in contrast to earlier conceptualizations of adolescence as a time of turmoil and rebellion, resulting in a sizeable "generation gap." This shift in our view of adolescence is reflected, for example, in Petersen's (1988) review of the adolescent development literature, and in recent textbooks on adolescence (e.g., Cobb, 2001).

Self-Reports of Religious Influence

A pioneering study carried out in the 1940s found that about two-thirds of a Harvard and Radcliffe student sample reported having reacted against parental and cultural teaching (Allport, Gillespie, & Young, 1948). However, these students indicated that the influences underlying their sense of need for religious sentiment included the following (with the percentage of respondents mentioning each influence shown in parentheses): parents (67%), other people (57%), fear (52%), church (40%), and gratitude (37%). Clearly, parents were perceived to play a primary role in the development of religious sentiment.

More recent studies involving a wide variety of age groups in North America and elsewhere have confirmed that parents are perceived to be the most important influence on religiosity. Hunsberger and Brown (1984) asked 878 introductory psychology students at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia to identify the three people who had the greatest influence on their religious beliefs. Parents were clearly the "winners," being designated as the most important influence by 44% of all respondents (friends came next at 15%). In subsequent studies, Hunsberger asked several hundred students at a Canadian university (Hunsberger, 1983b) and 85 older Canadians (aged 65–88 years; Hunsberger, 1985b) to rate the extent of religious influence that 10 possible sources of influence had exerted in their lives. Both the students and the older persons ranked their mothers and fathers first and third, respectively. Church received the second highest ranking.

One striking thing about these two studies (Hunsberger, 1983b, 1985b) was the extent to which the students and senior citizens agreed in their rankings. Also, the senior citizens generally reported stronger absolute proreligious influence in their lives than did the students; this was consistent with findings from other cross-sectional studies (Benson, 1992a; Hunsberger, 1985a) and a panel study of Swedes (Hamberg, 1991), which all showed a general increase in religiosity across the adult years. Furthermore, the rankings for the Canadian university students were quite similar to those given by the Australian university students (Hunsberger & Brown, 1984).

Francis and Gibson (1993) explored parental influence on religious attitudes and practices of 3,414 secondary school students in Scotland (ages 11–12 and 15–16), with approximately equal numbers of males and females in each age category. Primary dependent measures included self-report of frequency of church attendance, and scores on a 24-item Likert-type scale[2] measuring attitude toward Christianity (Francis, 1989a). The authors concluded that parental influence was generally important with respect to church attendance, and there was a tendency for this influence to *increase* from the younger to the older age groups. Consistent with some of Hunsberger's (1983b, 1985a) and Acock and Bengtson's (1978, 1980; see also Dudley & Dudley, 1986) findings, they also concluded that mothers had more influence on children's religion than fathers overall, but that there was some tendency toward stronger same-sex influence for both mothers and fathers. Also, parental influence was greater for overt religiosity (i.e., church attendance) than it was for more covert religiosity (i.e., attitudes toward Christianity).

In two studies of attitudinal predispositions to pray, described in Research Box 5.2, Francis and Brown (1990, 1991) concluded that parental influence was of primary importance with respect to church attendance for adolescents attending Roman Catholic, Anglican, and nondenominational schools in England. Church attendance in turn was positively related to attitudes toward prayer. Also, as in the Francis and Gibson (1993) study, they found that mothers seemed to exert more influence than fathers, although parental influence was stronger when both parents attended church.

Influence of Mother versus Father

As noted above, some findings suggest that mothers are more influential than fathers in the religious development of their offspring; however, not all studies confirm this generalization. Kieren and Munro (1987) concluded that fathers were more influential than mothers overall. And the findings of some other studies have been equivocal in this regard (Baker-Sperry, 2001; Benson, Williams, & Johnson, 1987; Hoge & Petrillo, 1978a; Nelsen, 1980). But the

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[2] A "Likert-type scale" invites respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with attitude statements. It might range, for example, from +3 ("strongly agree") to –3 ("strongly disagree").

Research Box 5.2. Social Influences on the Predisposition to Pray (Francis & Brown, 1990, 1991)

These two studies focused on predispositions to pray, as well as the practice of prayer, among two age levels of English adolescents. The first investigation involved almost 5,000 students aged 11, and the second about 700 students aged 16; all students attended Roman Catholic, Church of England, or nondenominational state-maintained schools. As well as self-reports of their own and their parents' religious behavior, participants completed a six-item scale assessing attitudes toward prayer (e.g., "Saying my prayers helps me a lot").

Results confirmed that the parents were powerful factors with respect to children's church attendance at both age levels, though mothers consistently exerted more influence than fathers. However, there were indications that parental impact on children's prayer had decreased somewhat, and that church influences (e.g., attendance) had increased, for the 16-year-olds. Attendance at Roman Catholic or Church of England schools did not seem to affect adolescent *practice* of prayer, after other factors had been controlled for; however, there was a slightly negative impact of Church of England schools on *attitudes* toward prayer.

The authors concluded their 1991 paper by stating that their findings "support the importance of taking seriously social learning or modeling interpretations of prayer. Children and adolescents who pray seem more likely to do so as a consequence of explicit teaching or implicit example from their family and church community than as a spontaneous consequence of developmental dynamics or needs" (p. 120).

weight of the evidence suggests that mothers are more influential than fathers (e.g., Hertel & Donahue, 1995; see also Benson, Masters, & Larson, 1997). Mothers may serve a primary nurturing role for religious socialization, since in Western cultures women are on average more religious than men (e.g., Donelson, 1999; Francis & Wilcox, 1998), and women also tend to assume more child-rearing responsibilities (Smith & Mackie, 1995). They may, for example, assume primary responsibility for taking children to church and teaching them basic religious views. Because of this, it is not surprising that people typically perceive that their mothers exerted the stronger influence on their religiousness.

However, it is quite possible that fathers also play an important role, especially to the extent that their religious views are consistent or inconsistent with those of mothers and the church. Fathers might serve as role models for continued religiousness, or for rejection of religion after initial religious socialization. Thus mothers and fathers may play somewhat different roles, and have influence in different ways or at different periods, in their children's socialization. For example, a study of more than 400 families in rural areas of Iowa found that the roles of both mothers and fathers were important in religious transmission to their offspring (Bao, Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Conger, 1999). But when adolescents perceived that their parents were generally accepting of their adolescent children, mothers' influence was reportedly stronger, especially for sons. Such subtle nuances could well contribute to seemingly contradictory conclusions in the literature concerning the relative importance of mothers and fathers in religious socialization.

Other Aspects of Parenting

Consistent with the Bao et al. (1999) investigation, a number of studies have suggested that the *quality* of young people's relationships with parents can also affect religious socialization. For example, in a panel investigation spanning the years 1965–1982, children who reported while in high school that they had a warm, close relationship with their parents were less likely to rebel against religious teachings (Wilson & Sherkat, 1994). Furthermore, longitudinal data led Wilson and Sherkat to conclude that "Lack of closeness and contact have created a religious gap between parents and children rather than religious differences creating a distant relationship" (p. 155). Others have come to similar conclusions regarding the importance of the emotional relationship between parents and adolescents (e.g., Dudley, 1978; Herzbrun, 1993; Hoge, Petrillo, & Smith, 1982; Nelsen, 1980; Okagaki & Bevis, 1999). Myers (1996) interviewed parents and their adult offspring, and concluded that the main determinants of offspring religiosity were parental religiosity, the quality of the family relationship, and traditional family structure.

Cause and effect are not always clear, however. Most authors seem to assume that higher quality of family relationships "causes" increased religiosity in offspring. Of course, if the parents are themselves nonreligious, the higher quality of family relationships may then "cause" decreased religiosity in offspring. But Brody, Stoneman, and Flor (1996) concluded that causality was in the opposite direction in their study of 9- to 12-year-old African American young people and their parents living in the rural southern United States. That is, Brody et al. felt that when the parents were more religious, this contributed to a closer, more cohesive family, as well as to less conflict between the parents. Additional research is needed to address the direction of cause-and-effect relationships in this area.

Similarly, more general parental values and behavior may affect some aspects of the religious socialization process. Research has shown that parental valuation of obedience is associated with theological positions of Biblical literalism, the belief that human nature is sinful, and punitive attitudes toward sinners (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993). Also, parental disharmony (e.g., arguing and fighting) seems to inhibit the transmission of religiosity across successive generations (Nelsen, 1981a). Moreover, as suggested in Chapter 4, adult parenting values, goals, and practices may have important implications for children's subsequent religious orientation (e.g., Danso, Hunsberger, & Pratt, 1997; see also Flor & Knapp, 2001).

Although it is clear that parents play an important role in the religious socialization process, the relationship is not always a simple one. The behavior, parenting style, goals, attitudes, and values of the parents, as well as the quality of their relationship with their children, may facilitate or inhibit their children's religious socialization. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of research on the subtle interplay between family life and religion (Cornwall & Thomas, 1990; D'Antonio, Newman, & Wright, 1982).

Parental Influence: Summary

All of the different approaches to studying parental influence in the religious socialization process converge on a single conclusion: Parents play an extremely important role in the developing religious attitudes and practices of their offspring. In fact, few researchers would quarrel with the conclusion that parents are *the* most important influence in this regard. Other reviewers of the related literature have come to similar conclusions (e.g., Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993; Benson et al., 1997; Brown, 1987; Cornwall, 1989). However, it has been pointed out that parental influence can sometimes be more indirect than direct (Erickson, 1992; Cornwall, 1988; Cornwall & Thomas, 1990). For example, parents to some extent are "managers" who control which "other influences" their children are exposed to (e.g., through church attendance, or selection of religious vs. secular schooling), and these in turn may have some influence on young people's religion. Furthermore, different aspects of the mother–father and parent–adolescent relationships can affect the strength of parental influence on young people's religion, and mother–father consistency and agreement also seems to enhance acceptance of the parental religious teachings (Benson et al., 1989).

The Influence of Peers

Some authors have concluded that peer groups play an important role in influencing adolescents generally (Allport, 1950; Balk, 1995; Sprinthall & Collins, 1995), but relatively few studies have investigated peer influence on religiousness. Those that have done so tend to report some relatively weak peer group effects. Such studies almost always rely on self-reports of peer influence, and the direction of the influence (positive or negative) is not always specified.

The impact of parents and peers were compared in a study of 375 Australian youths aged 16–18 (de Vaus, 1983). Consistent with some previous research (Bengtson & Troll, 1978), it was concluded that parents were more influential for religious beliefs, and that peers tended to have more influence outside of the religious realm (e.g., with respect to self-concept); however, de Vaus found that peers also influenced religious practice to some extent (see also Hoge & Petrillo, 1978a). Erickson (1992) similarly found that peer influence was relatively unimportant in adolescent religiousness. But he pointed out that peer influence might be hidden because of the way in which effects were measured, and also because it was difficult to separate peer influence from religious education, which itself involved "a social/friendship setting" (p. 151) that might constitute a kind of peer influence.

Similarly, Hunsberger's (1983b, 1985b) studies involving self-ratings of religious influences suggested that friends were well down the list of 10 potential influences for both university students (fifth) and older Canadians (ninth). Ozorak (1989) concluded that peers do influence adolescent religiousness, though this relationship is rather complex and is overshadowed by more important parental influences. Other researchers have confirmed the primary importance of parents in religious socialization, but have also found evidence that the religiosity of college students' current friends offers a kind of supplementary reinforcing effect (Roberts, Koch, & Johnson, 2001). In another investigation, both peer and family influences predicted adolescent religiousness (King, Furrow, & Roth, 2002).

Of course, peer influence may be stronger in some religion areas than in others. For example, peers may have little influence for core religion measures such as frequency of church attendance, but may be more important with respect to youth group participation and enjoyment of that participation (Hoge & Petrillo, 1978a). Also, peer influence is probably complex, especially with respect to dating and heterosexual friendships. For example, particularly for adolescents of minority religions, religiously based attitudes toward interfaith dating may initiate a kind of filtering process in partner selection (Marshall & Markstrom-Adams, 1995). This filtering may in turn affect dating partners' interactions and reciprocal influence regarding religion (i.e., a type of peer influence).

In an exception to the usual self-report studies in this area, an unusual field experiment (Carey, 1971) involved randomly assigning 102 Catholic school students in seventh grade to one of three groups: proreligion, antireligion, or no influence (control group). Confederates (boys who were "leaders" in the same classes as the other participants) urged their classmates to comply or not to comply with a nun's talk on "Why a Catholic should go to daily Mass." Actual attendance at Mass was then monitored, and an effect did emerge for the position taken by the male confederates to influence their peers, but only for girls. Of course, the peer influence assessed in this study was very specific and short-term; we should be careful not to confuse such transitory impact with more general, long-term, and complex peer effects.

Finally, we should not assume that peer influence is relevant only to child and adolescent religion. Olson (1989) found that in five Baptist congregations, the number and quality of friendships were important predictors of adults' decisions to join or leave a denomination. And Putnam (2000) has pointed out that people who belong to religious groups tend to have more social commitments and contacts in their lives; this increased social interaction may allow for greater peer influence. Unfortunately, there has been little investigation of possible peer influence on religiousness in adulthood, beyond friendship networks.

Does Education Make a Difference?

The Impact of College

The extent to which education affects religious socialization has been a controversial topic. Early studies generally concluded that education, especially college, tended to "liberalize" religious beliefs of students. For example, a review of more than 40 investigations led Feldman (1969) to conclude that these studies

> generally show mean changes indicating that seniors, compared with freshmen, are somewhat less orthodox, fundamentalistic, or conventional in religious orientation, somewhat more sceptical about the existence and influence of a Supreme Being, somewhat more likely to conceive of God in impersonal terms, and somewhat less favorable toward the church as an institution. Although the trend across studies does exist, the mean changes are not always large, and in about a third of the cases showing decreasing favorability toward religion, differences are not statistically significant. (p. 23)

Other reviewers (e.g., Parker, 1971) have similarly concluded that religious change may be considerable during the college years, especially in the first year. However, we should be cautious about such (average) trends toward decreased religiousness, because they may mask substantial change in the opposite direction for *some* students (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969). In addition, if change occurs, education itself is not necessarily the cause of the change. Shifts away from orthodox religion may be part of maturational or developmental change, or may result from the fact that some students are effectively away from parental control for the first time. Such shifts may also reflect peer influence or a tendency for less religious (or more questioning) students to attend (and not to drop out of) college, or at least to avoid campus religious involvement. Madsen and Vernon (1983) found a (not surprising) tendency for more religious students to be more likely to participate in campus religious activities. More importantly, those students who participated in campus religious groups tended to increase in religious orthodoxy, but nonparticipants became less orthodox at college. It is also possible that apparent effects of college are actually due to other factors, such as religious background (Hoge & Keeter, 1976). For example, Sieben (2001) found in a Dutch study that the influence of education on a variety of variables, including orthodox religious belief and church attendance, was considerably overestimated when the impact of family background was not controlled for.

Furthermore, studies began to appear in the 1970s that were not always consistent with Feldman's conclusion that there is a general shift away from traditional religion. For example, Hunsberger (1978) reported a cross-sectional study of more than 450 Canadian university students, and a separate longitudinal investigation of more than 200 students from their first to their third university years, including an interim assessment of about half of this longitudinal sample during their second year. His data offered little support for the proposal that students generally become less religious over their university years. The only consistent finding across both studies was that third- and fourth-year students reported attending church less frequently than did first-year students. Thus there was limited support for a decrease in religious practices across the college years, but this change did not generalize to some other practices (e.g., frequency of prayer), or to scores on a series of religious belief measures. Finally, measures of "average change" did *not* mask frequent or dramatic individual religious change in different directions.

Hunsberger speculated that college-related religious change may have been more characteristic of the 1960s, since other subsequent studies (e.g., Hastings & Hoge, 1976; Pilkington, Poppleton, Gould, & McCourt, 1976) also found little or no change. In fact, Moberg and Hoge (1986) concluded that the decade 1961–1971 had seen considerable shifts toward liberalism in college students, but that the following decade (1971–1982) involved a slight change in the opposite direction (toward conservatism and traditional moral attitudes). Finally, Hunsberger (1978) suggested that religious change may be more likely to happen in the high school years, and may be relatively complete by the time students reach college—a suggestion supported by the research of others (Francis, 1982; Sutherland, 1988). However, some authors have continued to conclude that higher education has at least indirect effects on young people's religiousness—by, for example, encouraging skepticism and a sense of religious and moral relativity (e.g., Hadaway & Roof, 1988).

Parochial School Attendance

Some investigations have compared public with parochial schools regarding the religiousness of their students. These investigations have generated rather muddy findings, possibly because of methodological shortcomings (Benson et al., 1989; Hyde, 1990). Although some early researchers (e.g., Lenski, 1961; Greeley, 1967) concluded that parochial school attenders were more strongly religious in some ways than their public school counterparts, the relevant research sometimes failed to take background factors into account. Some investigators apparently assumed that differences between parochial and public school students were *caused* by the environments of the schools involved, and they ignored possible self-selection factors. More than 30 years ago, Mueller (1967) found that when he held religious background constant, he could find no differences in the religious orthodoxy and institutional involvement of college students. He concluded that "high orthodoxy is a direct function of a strong religious background rather than specifically of parochial school attendance" (p. 51).

Other research has supported this finding, including studies of fundamentalists (Erickson, 1964), Jews (Parker & Gaier, 1980), Lutherans (Johnstone, 1966), Mennonites (Kraybill, 1977), and Catholics and Church of England adherents (Francis & Brown, 1991). For example, Francis and Brown (1991) argued that a positive relationship between Roman Catholic school attendance and positive attitudes toward prayer was really a result of "the influence of home and church rather than that of the school itself" (p. 119). Furthermore, as indicated in Research Box 5.2, their investigation even detected a small *negative* influence of Church of England schools on attitudes toward prayer, after other factors were controlled for (gender, home, church, private practice of prayer). This finding was consistent with Francis's (1980, 1986) previous work with younger children.

More recently, a study in the United Kingdom (Francis & Lankshear, 2001) similarly revealed very little impact of church-related primary schools on religiousness or religious activity in the local community. There was a tendency toward higher rates of religious confirmation in the preteen years (for voluntarily aided but not for controlled schools), but apparently no influence on older persons. However, these "minimal-impact" conclusions have been challenged by some authors (e.g., Greeley & Gockel, 1971; Greeley & Rossi, 1966), and Himmelfarb (1979) argued that church-related schools do indeed have a direct positive influence on the religiousness of their students.

In the end, there is probably variation across individual schools, different age groups (elementary, high school, and postsecondary students), and different religious denominations. Self-selection factors probably occur at many parochial schools, such that more religious students (or at least students with more religious parents) are likely to attend such schools. Findings may differ across studies, depending on whether they focus on religious beliefs or practices (Hunsberger, 1977). Effects may be unique to specific studies, or may depend on combinations of factors. For example, Benson et al. (1986) found that Catholic high schools with a high proportion of students from low-income families tended to have a positive influence on religiousness *if* those schools stressed academics and religion, had high student morale, and also focused on the importance of religion and the development of a "community of faith." There may also be effects for some specific measures of religiousness, such as an increase in religious *knowledge* (Johnstone, 1966). It is often very difficult to separate the influence of parochial schools from the effects of parents and the family generally (Benson et al., 1989).

In light of the findings available, and their many qualifications, we are led to this conclusion: The bulk of the evidence suggests that church-related school attendance has little direct influence on adolescent religiousness per se. The issue is not clear-cut, and the reader may wish to consult more comprehensive reviews of the relevant literature (e.g., Hyde, 1990).

Other Influences

Parents, peers, and education are not the only potential sources of influence on religiousness. Some studies have suggested that the particular church (or other religious institution) or denomination, as well as socioeconomic status, sibling configuration, city size, the mass media, reading, and so on, can also have some effect on the religious socialization process (see, e.g., Benson et al., 1989). For example, rural youths tend to be more religious than nonrural young people (King, Elder, & Whitbeck, 1997). However, self-reported ratings of influence (Hunsberger, 1983b, 1985b) and more indirect inferences (Francis & Brown, 1991; Erickson, 1992) suggest that factors related to the church (or to religious education, broadly defined) are the most important of various possible "other" influences on the religious socialization process. Francis and Brown (1991) have observed that church becomes a more important influence in middle adolescence, at roughly the time when young people are becoming less susceptible to parental influence with respect to religion.

Erickson (1992) reported that religious education was of "overwhelming influence" (p. 151) in adolescent religious socialization. However, religious education was very broadly defined in Erickson's study, including involvement in religious activities, knowledge gained from religious instruction, and perceptions of religious education programs. In fact, as defined by Erickson and some others, religious education apparently has little to do with formal (school) education or educational institutions, but is more a measure of church involvement and activity. In this sense, church-related involvement clearly can be an important contributor to the religious socialization process.

But the term "religious education" is sometimes used to describe this area where church and education boundaries blur. In this context, articles that appeared in a special issue of the *Review of Religious Research* on adolescent religious socialization in the context of religious education (Hoge, Hefferman, et al., 1982; Hoge & Thompson, 1982; Nelsen, 1982; Philibert & Hoge, 1982) are helpful.

In general, however, the various "other factors" discussed above have received scant empirical attention. There is a need for further investigation of attitudes toward the church, the role of the clergy, the influence of church-related peers compared to non-church-related friends, mass media effects, and so on, as well as the subtle interplay among these and other religious socialization factors.

The Polarization Hypothesis

Earlier we have mentioned Ozorak's (1989) social-cognitive model of religious socialization processes, which allows for the possibility of a "polarization" effect in religious development. That is, Ozorak noted a tendency for more religious adolescents to report change in the direction of greater religiosity, whereas less religious adolescents reported a shift away from religion (see Research Box 5.1). Tamminen (1991) found a similar religious polarization tendency among Finnish adolescents. This is consistent with the observation that more religious college students join campus religious groups, and also increase in religious orthodoxy while at college, but less religious students who do not join campus religious groups decrease in orthodoxy (Madsen & Vernon, 1983). In other words, the religious "distance" between these two groups increases at college. Similar self-reported polarization tendencies have been found among the most and least religious participants in a study of older Canadians (Hunsberger, 1985b). Reflecting back over their lives and "graphing" their religiosity across the decades, these senior citizens indicated that they had gradually become more religious across their lives since childhood if they were highly religious at the time of the study. However, senior citizens who were relatively less religious indicated that they had become progressively *less* religious across their lives, compared to their more religious counterparts.

These studies are limited by the retrospective, cross-sectional, and self-report nature of the data, as well as by the possibility that we are learning more about people's perceptions of reality than we are about reality itself. However, the findings are consistent with the possibility that general trends toward greater or lesser religiosity may be established quite early in life, and that these trends may continue long after early developmental and socialization influences have had their immediate effects.

Gender Issues

Social influences (especially the influence of parents) in the religious socialization process can help to explain some important gender differences in adolescent and adult religiosity. For example, women have typically been found to be "more religious" than men (see Donelson, 1999; Francis & Wilcox, 1998). That is, they attend worship services more often, pray more often, express stronger agreement with traditional beliefs, are more interested in religion, and report that religion is more important in their lives. Batson et al. (1993) have proposed that such gender differences are probably attributable to social influence processes in sex role training, either through sex differences that have implications for religiousness (e.g., women are taught to be more submissive and nurturing—traits associated with greater religiosity), or through direct expectations that women should be more religious than men. Similar "socialization" interpretations have come from others (e.g., Nelsen & Potvin, 1981), though these are not the only possible interpretations of gender differences in religion (see Miller & Hoffman, 1995).

It is likely that religious socialization processes have important gender implications for other areas of people's lives, such as (nonreligious) attitudes, careers, and education. For example, national survey data from 19,000 U.S. women led to the conclusion that religious identification affects educational attainment more strongly than do other sociodemographic variables (Keysar & Kosmin, 1995). Women from more conservative, traditional, or fundamentalist backgrounds achieved less postsecondary education than did women from more liberal or modern religious backgrounds, on average. That is, "some gender inequality is indeed socially created by the influence of religion" (Keysar & Kosmin, 1995, p. 61). Although this was a correlational study, it does raise the possibility that religious socialization can ultimately affect "nonreligious" aspects of one's life.

There is also evidence that young men and women differ in their perceptions of God and in how they would react to a male versus female God. Foster and Babcock (2001) asked university students to write a story about a fictional interaction with a male or female God. Men's stories involved more action, whereas women were more concerned with feelings. There was also more skepticism, criticality, and surprise in reaction to a female God than to a male God. Such gender differences may well develop during childhood as part of the socialization process—an issue ripe for future research.

Influences on Religiousness: Summary and Implications

We must be cautious in drawing conclusions about religious socialization influences, since it is often difficult to isolate parental, church, educational, and other influences and their possible interactions. Many researchers simply ask people to report on the factors that influenced their, or their children's, religiousness. This approach assumes that (1) people do have a basic understanding and accurate memory of the forces that shape religiosity, and (2) they can clearly and honestly articulate these influences in a research context. However, these assumptions may be faulty. Also, relevant studies sometimes investigate very different samples. Some include a broad range of participants; others draw their samples from church or other religious sources; and still others focus on members of one specific religious group. Measures and data analysis techniques differ widely from one study to another, and the direction of influence (e.g., toward or away from religion) is not always assessed. However, given the large numbers of relevant studies and the convergence of some findings, we are able to offer some general conclusions.

Parents are potentially the most powerful influences on child and adolescent religion, though their impact becomes weaker as adolescents grow into adulthood, and some of their influence may be indirect. Mothers are often found to be more influential than fathers, though there is not complete agreement on this issue. Beyond parental impact, church is most often found to be a significant contributor to religious socialization, but there has been little investigation of the specific components of this relationship. Education, parochial school environment, the mass media, and reading have *not* been found to affect religious socialization to any great degree. It has been suggested, however, that when the parents and other potential influential agents (e.g., the church) reinforce the same religious perspective, the resulting combined religious socialization effects may be especially strong (Hyde, 1990). Furthermore, trends established early in life for people to become more or less religious may continue into adulthood (as predicted by the polarization hypothesis).

Finally, it is important that we not lose sight of possible implications of religious socialization for other aspects of people's lives. We have seen that religious growth processes can have a potentially powerful impact on gender issues. No doubt the effects of religious socialization extend into many other aspects of people's lives as well, as discussed throughout this book.

HOW RELIGIOUS ARE ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS?

Findings have usually confirmed that in general, adolescents and young adults are less religious than middle and older adults in North America and Europe (Dudley & Dudley, 1986; Hamberg, 1991). Moreover, religiousness is typically found to decrease during the 10- to 18-year-old period (Benson et al., 1989), at least for adolescents in mainstream religious groups. However, this should not be construed to mean that adolescents are nonreligious, or that religion has little impact on their lives.

In Allport et al.'s (1948) study of religion among college students, they found that approximately 7 out of every 10 students sampled felt they needed religion in their own lives (82% of the women and 68% of the men). Furthermore, only 6% of the men and 10% of the women reported a total absence of religious training. As might be expected, students trained in a religion reported that they needed religion more often than others, leading Allport et al. (1948) to conclude that early training is likely to be the principal psychological influence upon an individual's later religious life. Overall, 15% of Allport et al.'s sample denied engaging in any religious practices or experiencing any religious states of mind during the preceding 6-month period.

Other early studies also point to the importance of religion in the lives of university students. A 1962 study revealed that at entrance to college, about 90% of National Merit Scholarship winners felt a need to believe in a religion (Webster, Freedman, & Heist, 1962). At about the same time, it was noted that about 12% of college students had a critical concern about, or even an acute crisis because of, their religious conflicts (Havens, 1963). And Havighurst and Keating (1971) concluded: "The data indicate most youth are honestly and at times somewhat desperately trying to 'make sense' of their religious beliefs" (p. 714).

But these studies were carried out more than 30 years ago. Have times changed? Some countries have apparently experienced broad-based and substantial decreases in church attendance and religious belief in the last 50 years or so. For example, Bibby (1987, 1993) has estimated that about 6 in 10 Canadians were weekly church attenders in the 1940s. However, this figure dropped steadily until the early 1990s, when the comparable figure was just over 2 in 10 people. This 20% rate has continued to the year 2000 (Bibby, 2001), and is similar for Canada's teens and adults. Furthermore, the tendency toward decreased religious involvement has brought Canada more in line with Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries. Typically, in these European countries less than 10% of the population is involved in the churches (Bibby, 1993, p. 111), and regular attendance is correspondingly low (Campbell & Curtis, 1994). Francis (1989b) noted a progressive trend in the 1970s and 1980s for British adolescents to have less positive attitudes toward Christianity, and a general trend toward decreasing religious belief for British adults continued into the 1990s (Gill, Hadaway, & Marler, 1998). Also, religious involvement is much lower in Australia and Japan than in the United States (Campbell & Curtis, 1994).

This does not mean that young people do not care about the meaning of life. For example, although only 20% of Canadian teenagers are highly involved in religion, 75% of them identify with a religious group, and a similar percentage wonder "often" or "sometimes" about the purpose of life and what happens after death (Bibby, 2001, p. 120).

Figures for the United States suggest that there has *not* been a general disengagement from religion, at least not to the extent that has occurred elsewhere in the developed world. Religious involvement remains relatively high in the United States for both adults and adolescents, unlike the trends for many other Western countries. Some researchers have argued that self-reported church attendance may be substantially inflated, at least in the United States (Chaves & Cavendish, 1994; Hadaway, Marler, & Chaves, 1993; Marcum, 1999). However, other studies involving comparable data sources suggest that, relatively speaking, regular church attendance in the United States tends to be quite high, even when other factors are controlled for (see Campbell & Curtis, 1994). Overall, U.S. attendance rates for adults have remained relatively stable across recent decades (Chaves, 1989, 1991; Firebaugh & Harley, 1991; Inglehart & Baker, 2000), though the interpretation of this stability has been a source of some disagreement (see, e.g., Chaves, 1989, 1990, 1991; Firebaugh & Harley, 1991; Hout & Greeley, 1990). Similarly, belief in an afterlife was high (about 80%) and stable from 1973 to 1991, according to General Social Survey data from the United States (Harley & Firebaugh, 1993).

However, there have been some shifts for adolescents. Smith, Lundquist Denton, Faris, and Regnerus (2002) have provided a broad pricture of the religious participation of U.S. adolescents, based on data from three separate major national survey organizations. Longitudinal data indicate that between 1976 and 1996 weekly religious service attendance for twelfth graders decreased by about 8% (from approximately 40% to 32%) and those "never" or "rarely" attending grew by about 4%. Just 44% of twelfth graders report *ever* being involved in religious youth group activities during their four years at high school.

Overall, it seems fair to conclude that "religious beliefs are an important aspect of adolescents' lives" (Cobb, 2001, p. 495) in the United States, and also that religion has a powerful impact on adolescents and their development (Benson et al., 1989). It is not clear why the United States should be a "more religious" society than other advanced industrial democracies (e.g., Inglehart & Baker, 2000). However, it has been suggested (Bibby, 1993; Finke & Stark, 1992) that cultural differences are important, particularly with respect to the role that religious groups have played in U.S. society over time. Perhaps it is the successful tendency for U.S. religious groups to "service the spiritual needs of Americans" (Bibby, 1993, p. 113). Perhaps in the United States disaffiliation is not simply indicative of a shift in religiousness; rather, disaffiliation is also symbolic in an important way, representing "a deep shift in outlook and lifestyles" (Hadaway & Roof, 1988, p. 31).

DOES RELIGIOUS SOCIALIZATION INFLUENCE ADJUSTMENT AND NONRELIGIOUS BEHAVIOR IN ADOLESCENCE?

So far in this chapter, we have examined the development of religion in adolescents' and young adults' lives, and have looked at how religion is a part of those lives. But to what extent does religion affect other aspects of young people's lives? A review of the literature on adolescence and religion led Benson et al. (1989) to conclude that religion has a powerful impact on adolescents and their development, and some research seems to confirm this assessment.

For example, adolescents who say that religion is important in their lives are more likely to do volunteer work in the community than are young people who say that religion is not important (Youniss, McLellan, Su, & Yates, 1999; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1999). Also, it has been suggested that churches may serve a function of initiating youths into volunteer activity, and then sustaining this involvement (Pancer & Pratt, 1999). Some of this volunteering may result from church teachings about helping others and doing good. It is also possible that family religiousness is more generally linked to other group involvement, and that such effects may persist well into adulthood (see Putnam, 2000). For example, one study revealed that medical students' reports of family church involvement were positively associated with the number of group memberships they had some 39 years later (Graves, Wang, Mead, Johnson, & Klag, 1998).

Links have been found between stronger religiousness and decreased delinquent behavior for adolescents (e.g., Johnson, Jang, Larson, & Li, 2001), including lower rates of drug and alcohol use (e.g., Bahr, Maughan, Marcos, & Li, 1998; Corwyn & Benda, 2000; Francis, 1997; Lee, Rice, & Gillespie, 1997; see also Donahue & Benson, 1995) and less deviant behavior in general (Litchfield, Thomas, & Li, 1997). Also, religiousness seems to be associated with delayed onset of sexual activity (e.g., Benda & Corwyn, 1999; Lammers, Ireland, Resnick, & Blum, 2000; Miller et al., 1997; Paul, Fitzjohn, Eberhart-Phillips, Herbison, & Dickson, 2000), and less sexual activity but also less condom use in adolescents (Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000). Some of these links are explored in greater detail in Chapter 13 on morality. For our purposes here, however, it is important to note that such associations between religiousness and decreased substance use, deviant behavior, and sexuality are relatively common in studies of adolescents and young adults.

Other research has investigated possible links between religion and personal adjustment. For example, Blaine, Trivedi, and Eshleman (1998) concluded that there is "a large research literature that has established that measures of religious commitment, devotion, or belief strength are associated with a range of positive mental health indicators, such as decreased anxiety and depression, and increased self-esteem, tolerance, and self-control" (p. 1040). Others have come to similar conclusions (see Koenig & Larson, 2001; Maton & Wells, 1998; Seybold & Hill, 2001), including some studies that have focused on adolescents (e.g., Moore & Glei, 1995; Wright, Frost, & Wisecarver, 1993), although some authors have pointed out that religion may be associated with maladjustment as well (see Booth, 1991; Ellis, 1986; Shafranske, 1992). This literature is discussed in more detail in Chapters 15 and 16.

Some authors are inclined to conclude that in light of the relevant research, religion must *cause* improved mental health, decreased deviance, more prosocial behavior, and the like, especially during the adolescent years. This is indeed plausible, but one must also consider other causal possibilities. For example, young people who live more moral and mentally healthy lives may be more inclined to attend church, where they may find other like-minded persons who have similar behavioral inclinations. Causality is difficult to study in this area, and possibly as a consequence, few researchers have tackled the issue head-on.

Furthermore, if there are indeed connections between religion and adolescent behavior and adjustment, we might wonder about the processes that could explain such connections. There is no shortage of potential explanations, and many of them rely on the socialization literature. Religion may aid adjustment by providing social support, assisting in value and identity formation, and teaching social control (Wallace & Williams, 1997). Forliti and Benson (1986) have emphasized the importance of value development in early religious socialization. Religious socialization may also teach children and adolescents coping techniques such as praying when anxious, or may show them how to choose alternate activities instead of engaging in delinquency or substance use (see Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 2001b). Religious training may contribute to a more positive self-concept (Blaine et al., 1998), which in turn may have benefits for adjustment and behavior. These types of suggestions imply that the religious socialization process either directly or indirectly produces the desirable outcomes related to adjustment and behavior.

Two studies were carried out by Hunsberger et al. (2001b) to test this possibility. They compared university students (Study 1) and high school students (Study 2) who were raised in "no religion" with three other groups—those raised in mainline Protestant, conservative Protestant, and Catholic homes—on various adjustment measures. But the students from nonreligious backgrounds did not differ from those from religious backgrounds on any of the main measures (scales assessing depression, self-esteem, dispositional optimism, and social support). Also, these adjustment-related scales were not related to scores on a more general measure of religious socialization (the Religious Emphasis scale). The authors also controlled for other variables that might have complicated the issue, such as family socioeconomic status and students' current religiosity, but this did not change the results.

These studies leave us scratching our heads a bit. Of course, other measures, or students from different geographical locations or of different ages, or the like, might have drawn out differences where Hunsberger et al. (2001b) found none. Or possibly religion's socialization impact is too subtle or complex for these rather broad investigations to detect. The researchers pointed out that most studies on related issues focus on degree of religiosity or extent of specific religious orientation, and that people with no religious background might either be excluded from such research or simply lumped in with weakly religious people. They recommended that more attention be devoted to the specifically nonreligious and those raised in nonreligious environments.

There is a need for researchers to refocus their efforts in this area. There is no shortage of studies of adolescents and young adults that reveal correlations between religiousness variables and (decreased) destructive behaviors such as substance use, as well as improved personal adjustment. We now need investigations of the mechanisms and underlying causal patterns that generate such correlations.

RELIGIOUS THINKING AND REASONING IN ADOLESCENCE AND YOUNG ADULTHOOD

Religious socialization processes clearly involve powerful influences during childhood and adolescence. In the past, these factors were characterized as affecting beliefs and practices, but little attention was devoted to the possibility that they might also alter *styles* of thinking about religion. In terms of Ozorak's (1989) social-cognitive model of religious development in adolescence, previous research has emphasized social aspects. Here we focus on cognitive change. It seems plausible that when individuals are being taught (directly and indirectly) about religion, they may be learning much more than simply what to believe and how to practice their faith. They may also be learning unique ways of thinking about religion and even about nonreligious issues.

As we have seen in Chapter 4, a developmental shift in thinking about religious (and other) issues occurs as young people move from childhood to adolescence. In Piagetian terms, this shift is from concrete to formal operations, which (especially for religious concepts) involves a move away from the literal toward more abstract thinking. It has also been suggested that this trend toward abstract religious thought may be linked with decreased religiousness, and possibly with a tendency to reject religion in adolescence. Possibly adolescents' emerging abstract thinking capability "complicates" their religious thought, and may even stimulate new styles of thinking in order to deal with "difficult-to-explain" religious concepts and existential issues.

Reich's Complementarity Reasoning

Reich (1991) has pointed out that there are "many perceived contradictions and paradoxes that characterize religious life" (pp. 87–88; see also Reich, 1989, 1992, 1994). He has suggested that "complementarity reasoning" may develop in order to deal with such religious contradictions. That is, people may develop rational explanations for specific perceived contradictions, which make the contradictions seem more apparent than real. Reich gives the example of a 20-year-old who attempted to explain the seeming conflict between creationist and evolutionary explanations of humans' origins and development as a species: "The possibility of evolution was contained in God's 'kick-off' at the origin . . . but God probably did not interfere with evolution itself . . . and perhaps so far not all of the initial potential has yet come to fruition" (Reich, 1991, p. 78). Reich has suggested that complementarity reasoning is crucial to religious development, though it does not emerge in fully developed form until relatively late in life, and sometimes not at all.

Reich proposes that five different levels of complementarity reasoning appear in developmental sequence. Essentially, these levels evolve from a very simplified (true–false) resolution of different explanations, through careful consideration of various competing explanations, to possible links between competing explanations and possibly even the use of an overarching theory or synopsis to assess complex relationships among the different factors. This analysis bears some resemblance to the "integrative complexity" analysis of religious and other thinking (see below), and the complexity approach has the advantage of an established scoring system tapping different levels of thinking. Possible links between religious orientation and complexity of thinking processes have been investigated in several studies of university students.

Integrative Complexity of Thought

Defining and Scoring Complexity

"Integrative complexity" is defined by two cognitive stylistic variables. "Differentiation" involves the acknowledgment and tolerance of different perspectives or dimensions of an issue, and "integration" deals with the extent to which differentiated perspectives or dimensions are linked. A manual for scoring integrative complexity (Baker-Brown et al., 1992) describes how such complexity is typically scored on a 1–7 scale. Lower scores indicate a person's tendency not to reveal (1) or reveal (3) differentiation; higher scores (4–7) indicate the extent to which people integrate these differentiated concepts into broader structures. Research Box 5.3 gives examples of responses receiving different complexity scores.

Are Religion and Complexity of Thought Related?

Batson and Raynor-Prince (1983) found that a measure of religious orthodoxy was significantly negatively correlated (–.37) with the integrative complexity of sentence completions dealing with existential^3 religious issues (e.g., "When I consider my own death . . ."). That is, people with a more orthodox religious orientation tended to think more simply about existential religious issues, as indicated by the sentence completion task. Also, the Quest religious orientation was significantly positively correlated (.43) with complexity scores for thinking

Research Box 5.3. Religious Fundamentalism and Complexity of Religious Doubts (Hunsberger, Alisat, Pancer, & Pratt, 1996)

This interview study of university students provided examples of the integrative complexity anchor scores for content dealing with religious doubts. Students were asked questions about their religious doubts, and their responses were then scored for complexity of thought.

One question asked, "What would you say is the most serious doubt about religion or religious beliefs that you have had in the last few years?" The following response received a score of 1 (no differentiation), since it reveals just one dimension of religious doubt: "My only real doubt is why God could allow people to suffer so much in this world" (p. 207). Full differentiation (a score of 3) is illustrated by the following response, which outlines two different dimensions of doubt: "I have doubted why God allowed me to become seriously ill a few years ago. What was His purpose? Also, I could never understand why there is war and famine in the world if there is a God" (p. 207).

An example of a response showing integration of differentiated doubts (score of 5) is as follows:

> Over the years I have had various "little doubts." For example, I was bothered by the hypocrisy of some "religious" people, and the Bible seemed to not be very relevant to a lot of things happening today. After a while I sort of sat down and put all of these little things together and realized that in combination they made me doubt organized religion in general. (p. 207)

Scores of 7 are rare in this type of research, and no such score was found in this study. Scores of 2, 4, and 6 represent transition points between the odd-numbered anchor scores.

Results revealed a weak but significant correlation between the extent of one's religious doubts and the integrative complexity of thinking about those doubts. This finding is consistent with previous conclusions that complexity–religion relationships are restricted to domains involving existential religious content (Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 1994).

about existential content. For both orthodoxy and quest, comparable correlations invo ing *non*religious sentence completions were not statistically significant.

In a series of investigations, Hunsberger and his colleagues further specified the relationship between religious orientation and complexity of thinking about religious and nonreligious issues (Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 1994; Hunsberger, Alisat, et al., 1996; Hunsberger, Lea, Pancer, Pratt, & McKenzie, 1992; Hunsberger, McKenzie, Pratt, & Pancer, 1993; Pancer, Jackson, Hunsberger, Pratt, & Lea, 1995; Pratt, Hunsberger, Pancer, & Roth, 1992). They had their participants write brief essays on issues, or interviewed people to allow them to give full expression to their ideas. Although at first glance there appears to be som inconsistency in the findings of the various related studies, Hunsberger et al. (1994) reviewe the relevant investigations and concluded that

> religiosity does not seem to have a general (negative) relationship with integrative complexity across various domains. Rather, such relationships are restricted to content dealing with existential issues. . . . Further, religious fundamentalism and orthodoxy measures are apparently equally predictive of integrative complexity. (p. 345)

These authors also concluded that the unique relationship found between religious orientation and integrative complexity of thought about *existential* material adds substance to previous work suggesting that dealing with (or avoiding) existential questions does indeed have important implications for religion (see Batson et al., 1993; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1982). However, although we have apparently begun to fit together the jigsaw puzzle of how thought processes and religiouness may be linked, the issue of *why* the complexity–religion relationship is restricted to existential content must be left to future research.

Most of the research cited above involved adolescent and young adult populations, but it seems reasonable to expect that the obtained relationship between religious orientation or beliefs and the complexity of adolescent thought about existential issues would hold for adult samples as well. To date, there have been few investigations of this possibility for people in middle or older adulthood. The findings of one study (Pratt et al., 1992), involving integrative complexity in middle and older adults, are consistent with our speculation here. In a different context, somewhat similar findings were obtained by van der Lans (1991), who concluded that adults who were inclined to a literal interpretation of religious material also "gave evidence of a low developed structure of religious judgment" (p. 107).

Of course, the observed relationships between religiousness and complexity of thinking about existential religious issues are correlational, and one must be cautious in spec lating about cause and effect. Thus, although our preferred interpretation is that the re gious socialization process contributes to differential thought processes in dealing with existential content, other interpretations are possible.

There has also been interest in self-complexity theory (Linville, 1985) as it relates to religion. Self-complexity analyses focus on the various roles, activities, or other aspects of the self that are used in a self-description. Using this approach, Nielsen and Fultz (1997) found greater self-complexity in the religious domain when religion was important to people, and self-complexity was positively correlated with both Intrinsic and Quest scores. This might seem to conflict with Batson and Raynor-Prince's (1983) finding of a negative relationship

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3. The term "existential" is defined by Batson et al. (1993) as involving "questions that confront us because are aware that we and others like us are alive and that we will die" (p. 8).

etween complexity and Intrinsic scores. However, as Nielsen and Fultz (1997) have pointed ut, we must be careful not to confuse self-complexity and integrative complexity of thought; ey are quite different, both conceptually and in their operationalization.

RELIGIOUS DOUBTS

Clearly, not all individuals simply copy their parents when it comes to religion. If the socialization process is as efficient as outlined previously in this chapter, how do people who grow up in religious families come to change their religious beliefs, or to reject religion entirely? Here we consider the origins, characteristics, and effects of religious doubting. In the subsequent section, we consider the factors involved in apostasy (i.e., abandoning one's religion entirely).

Of course, people are not completely passive recipients of social influence when it comes to the religious socialization process. They think about religious issues, and they may not be willing to accept all that they are taught. Almost everyone has questions related to religious teachings at some time. Questions may range from the relatively inconsequential (e.g., "Why does my minister insist that there be a long Bible reading to begin each worship service?") to the important (e.g., "Does God really exist?", "Should I abandon my religious faith?"). Many people apparently resolve their questions to their own satisfaction, and their underlying religious beliefs are not substantially altered. Others, however, may not resolve their questions so easily, and their questions may grow into serious doubts and concerns about religious beliefs. These doubts may eventually lead them to abandon some or all of their beliefs. Let us examine this process in greater detail.

Questions and doubts about religion seem especially common in adolescence. Nipkow and Schweitzer (1991) analyzed 16- to 21-year-old German students' written reflections about God, and concluded that most of their respondents had "challenging questions" about God. These primarily involved unfulfilled expectations of God; whether or not the students continued to believe in God was determined by the extent to which their expectations were fulfilled. Similarly, Tamminen (1991, 1994) noted an increase in early adolescence in doubts about God's existence and whether prayers were answered, among his Finnish students. Few psychological investigators ask about the religious questions and doubts of middle-aged and older adults, so until we have better comparative data, we should not conclude that such doubts are less prevalent in adulthood than in adolescence.[4]

Doubt: "Good or Bad"?

The personal tension, distress, and conflict implied by religious doubt were noted by numerous early authors (e.g., Allport, 1950; Clark, 1958; Pratt, 1920). Pratt (1920) further claimed that "The great cause for adolescent doubt is the inner discord aroused by some newly discovered fact which fails to harmonize with beliefs previously accepted and revered" (p. 116). Possibly because of the "distress" that sometimes accompanies doubt, but also because doubt has usually been perceived as antireligious, religious doubt has traditionally been considered

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[4] Bob Altemeyer (personal communication, October 31, 1995) gathered some unpublished data that support our conjecture. On a 20-item scale assessing religious doubts, 163 parents of university students reported doubt levels ($M = 39.4$) almost identical to those of over 1,000 students ($M = 41.8$).

"bad." "The official church attitude is that it is to be deplored as an obstacle to faith, at the worst a temptation of the Devil, at the best a sign of weakness" (Clark, 1958, p. 138). In this vein, Helfaer (1972) equated religious doubt with suffering, pain, and maladjustment, claiming that "religious doubt is in fact an example of the lack . . . of an integrated wholeness within the ego" (p. 10).

There is some empirical support for this stance, at least in terms of personal adjustment. An investigation of students making the transition to university revealed that the extent to which students reported doubting religious teachings was related to several adjustment variables (Hunsberger, Pancer, Pratt, & Alisat, 1996). Doubting was positively related to measures of stress, depression, and daily hassles, and negatively related to self-esteem, good relationships with parents, optimism, and adjustment to university life. These relationships were typically weak (ranging from .10 to .24) but statistically significant. A Religious Fundamentalism measure was significantly related (positively) to just one of these measures (optimism). Thus there seemed to be something unique about religious doubting that was weakly but consistently associated with poorer adjustment in first-year university students.

However, Batson's conceptualization of the Quest religious orientation (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991a, 1991b; Batson et al., 1993) as an open-ended, questioning approach to religion has cast religious doubting in a somewhat more positive light. Perception of doubt as positive is seen as one of three core characteristics of the Quest orientation, the others being complexity and openness to change (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991b). Furthermore, the Quest orientation is linked with some characteristics that many people feel should be encouraged, such as greater openness, lower prejudice, a tendency to help others in need, and some aspects of mental health (see Batson et al., 1993). Therefore, judgments about religious doubts' being "good or bad" depend on how one defines these terms, and probably also on one's personal religious orientation.

Doubts: Independent or a "Syndrome"?

Hunsberger et al. (1993) reported three studies in which they investigated the kinds of religious doubts that people have. The researchers suggested that previous authors had tended to characterize doubt as involving unique events or situations. That is, one person might doubt the existence of God because of certain educational influences; someone else might doubt the validity of religious teachings because of the despicable behavior of a previously respected religious person. However, Hunsberger et al. (1993) concluded that a series of doubts, having different sources, could often be found in the same people.

Initially, they categorized different kinds of doubting by building on Allport's (1950) and Clark's (1958) analyses of religious doubting as follows:

1. *Reactive and negativistic doubt.* There is a general reaction against religion, with anything religious being viewed negatively.
2. *Violation of self-interest.* Self-centered expectations have not been fulfilled (e.g., unanswered prayer).
3. *Shortcomings of organized religion.* The person questions such things as wars fought in God's name, commercialism, hypocrisy, dubious morality of some religious persons.
4. *God as a projection.* The person feels that God does not exist in reality and must be a "projection," since God's image changes across time and cultures.

5. [redacted]. Religion is seen as fooling people—for example, serving merely to ease their fears and anxieties.

6. *Scientific doubt.* The person feels a need to verify statements before accepting them (a religion–science conflict).

7. *Ritual doubt.* This category involves questioning based on the apparent ineffectiveness of some religious rites (e.g., failure of faith healing in curing someone may lead to doubts bout God's ability to cure people).

These categories were not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to represent a starting point for the investigation of religious doubting. Subsequent investigation of university students suggested that more orthodox religious persons reported lower absolute levels of religious doubting, and that doubting was associated with "apostasy, decreased church attendance, less agreement with religious teachings, and less family emphasis on religion" (Hunsberger et al., 1993, p. 431). That is, religious doubting seemed to be characteristic of disengagement from religion (see also Brinkerhoff & Mackie, 1993), rather than being an integral part of ongoing faith, as claimed by some (Allport, 1950; Tillich, 1957). Furthermore, varieties of doubting were moderately intercorrelated, leading to the conclusion that doubting typically did not involve just one or more independent doubts. Rather, Hunsberger et al. (1993) suggested that doubts "tended to 'hang together' quite reliably in a general 'doubt syndrome'" (p. 47). Finally, there was a correlation between integrative complexity of thinking about religious doubts on the one hand, and the extent of religious doubting on the other; this correlation suggests some relationship between ways of thinking about religious doubts, and the content and extent of those doubts.

Levels and Correlates of Doubt

The mass media's depiction of young people as rebellious and questioning of parental values might suggest that adolescents are boiling cauldrons of bubbling religious doubts. The evidence does not support this picture. Canadian studies of nearly 2,000 university students (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1997) and almost 1,000 high school students (Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 2002) revealed that average self-reported religious doubts were about 2 (a "mild amount" of doubt) on a 0–6 response scale. The greatest doubts in both studies were linked to (1) the perception that religion is associated with intolerance; (2) unappreciated pressure tactics of religions; and (3) other ways that religion seemed to be associated with negative human qualities, rather than making people "better." But even for these issues, the average doubt was less than 3 (a "moderate amount") on the 0–6 scale used. This mild to moderate level of doubt is not surprising, in light of evidence that adolescents' "reasoning is systematically biased to protect and promote their preexisting [religious] beliefs" (Klaczynski & Gordon, 1996, p. 317).

Is religious doubt unique to adolescents and young adults? One study did reveal a slight decline with age in scores on Batson's Quest measure ($r = -.19$), suggesting a decreased tendency among older adults to doubt, insofar as the Quest scale taps doubting (Watson, Howard, Hood, & Morris, 1988). However, we should be careful not to conclude that doubt is virtually nonexistent among older adults, as mentioned previously. For example, Nielsen (1998) reported that about two-thirds of his adult sample provided written descriptions of "religious conflict" in their lives, although it is not clear how many of these descriptions would be classified as religious doubts.

Also, although absolute levels of doubting tend to be mild to moderate, religious doubting is apparently related to religious, personal, and social variables. Quite consistently, higher levels of doubt have been moderately to strongly associated with reduced religiousness, such as lower Christian orthodoxy (Altemeyer, 1988; Hunsberger, Alisat, et al., 1996; Hunsberger et al., 1993); with lower religious fundamentalism and less religious emphasis in the family home, and less acceptance of religious teachings (Hunsberger, Alisat, et al., 1996); and with lower Intrinsic religion scores and an inclination toward apostasy (Hunsberger et al., 1993). Moreover, religious doubting has been linked with such personality characteristics as greater openness to experience (Shermer, 2000), lower right-wing authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1988; Hunsberger et al., 1993), and less dogmatism (Hunsberger, Alisat, et al., 1996). Finally, it has been associated with some aspects of social activism (Begue, 2000), increased complexity of thought about religious issues (Hunsberger et al., 1993), and some aspects of ego identity development (Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 2001a) as discussed later in this chapter.

Doubt and Personal Adjustment

Research has also suggested that religious doubting is related to personal adjustment. As noted earlier, doubts were weakly but significantly positively related to perceived stress, depression, and self-reported life hassles for college students, and significantly negatively related to adjustment to college and relationships with parents, during students' first year in college (Hunsberger, Alisat, et al., 1996). Similarly, religious doubting has been associated with more psychological distress and decreased feelings of personal well-being in adult Presbyterians (Krause, Ingersoll-Dayton, Ellison, & Wulff, 1999). Krause et al. concluded that younger adults have greater difficulty with religious doubt than do older persons, since the association between doubt and depression scores was strongest at age 20 and decreased as age increased. These findings seem to support claims that religious doubt has negative implications for personal mental health, as suggested by earlier writers on the subject (e.g., Allport, 1950; Clark, 1958; Helfaer, 1972; Pratt, 1920), although supportive findings have not always been clear-cut (Kooistra & Pargament, 1999).

Why would religious doubting be associated with negative personal consequences? Several possibilities have been advanced (see Hunsberger et al., 2002; Krause et al., 1999). It has been claimed that there are positive mental health and adjustment benefits that derive from religiousness, possibly through coping mechanisms that are associated with religion (e.g., prayer, religious social support; Pargament, 1997). Because doubt is associated with decreased religious faith, it may be that the resulting decreased religiousness detracts from one's coping ability, resulting in a less well-adjusted life. Also, doubt may be associated with feelings of shame or guilt, which in turn may adversely affect self-esteem (Krause et al., 1999). Doubt itself may be seen as a particular manifestation of Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance, and such dissonance is sometimes associated with psychological distress and negative affect (e.g., Burris, Harmon-Jones, & Tarpley, 1997).

Furthermore, Kooistra and Pargament (1999) found some (mixed) evidence that doubting may be linked to conflictual family patterns. They suggested that this might result from the general negative consequences that family difficulties seem to have for children's and adolescents' religiousness, such as negative God images, alienation from and negative feelings about religion, and decreased religiousness. However, Kooistra and Pargament studied only parochial high school students in the U.S. midwest, and doubt was associated with conflictual families only for students at a Dutch Reformed school, not those at a Catholic school. Hunsberger et al. (2001a) were unable to replicate this difference between fundamentalist and Catholic students in Canada; rather, when they broke their findings down by major denominational groupings, relationships between doubt and poorer adjustment occurred only for mainstream Protestants.

Doubting may also have some positive associations. As noted earlier, religious doubting is an important component in the conceptualization of the Quest religious orientation (Batson et al., 1993), which has been linked with less prejudice, a tendency to help others in need, and some aspects of mental health (e.g., personal competence/control, self-acceptance, and open-mindedness/flexibility). Furthermore, Krause et al. (1999) have pointed out that doubt may be an important part of positive psychological development; this suggestion is consistent with research showing that doubt and uncertainty more generally might stimulate cognitive development (e.g., Acredolo & O'Connor, 1991).

Dealing with Doubt

Hunsberger et al. (2002) investigated ways in which young people attempt to deal with their religious questions and doubts, using two scales developed by Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1997). First, a 6-item Belief-Confirming Consultation (BCC) scale measured the extent to which their senior high school students consulted people and resources that were likely to push them in a proreligious direction (e.g., talking with one's parents, reading religious publications). Second, a 6-item Belief-Threatening Consultation (BTC) scale assessed the extent to which people consulted resources that would be more likely to give them nonreligious or antireligious answers to their questions (e.g., talking with friends with no religious beliefs, reading materials that go against one's religious beliefs). BCC scores significantly predicted increased religiousness 2 years later, beyond the variance accounted for by BCC scores in the original questionnaire and by the amount of doubt reported originally. Similarly, BTC scores significantly predicted reduced religiousness 2 years later. That is, people's inclination to seek "belief-confirming" or "belief-threatening" sources of information in dealing with doubts successfully predicted religiousness 2 years later.

Also, Hunsberger, Alisat, et al. (1996) found qualitative differences with respect to the nature of doubting, for respondents who were high and low in religious fundamentalism. "High fundamentalists" did not typically doubt God or religion per se; rather, their doubts were focused on others' failure to live up to religious ideals, or relatively minor adjustments that they felt should be made within the church (e.g., improving the role of women in the church). "Low fundamentalists," on the other hand, were more likely to be concerned about the underpinnings of religion, such as the existence of God, the lack of proof for religious claims, or the unbelievability of the creation account of human origins. Again, there was some evidence that people who reported more religious doubts tended to think more complexly about such doubts, and about existential material more generally. The results of this study suggested that

> high and low fundamentalists may actually perceive and deal with their own (and others') religious experiences in different ways. Our findings seem consistent with the possibility that religious cognitive processing is convergent among high fundamentalists, tending to confirm and reinforce religious teachings. Any divergence (e.g., active questioning of God or religion) seems to be resolved by interpreting information as consistent with one's beliefs, or at least by accepting the religious explanation for the doubt or concern. Low fundamentalists, on the other hand,

> seem to respond to divergent thinking (i.e., critical questioning and considering alternatives to their beliefs) by changing their religious beliefs. . . . Overall, a picture emerges of low fundamentalists and high doubters as being more complex and critical processors of information related to religion. (Hunsberger, Alisat, et al., 1996, p. 218)

Little empirical work has been done to extend these findings, though it is important that we further clarify the nature of doubt and factors affecting it. There does seem to be a link between religious doubting and apostasy or religious defection, though it is possible that this link is moderated by other factors, such as developmental level or cognitive stage.

Secret Doubts

Altemeyer (1988) developed a "secret survey" technique that assures anonymity, allows people to respond in very private circumstances chosen by themselves, and encourages respondents to be especially truthful about themselves in a way analogous to the "hidden observer" technique used by Hilgard (1973, 1986) in studying hypnosis (see Research Box 5.4). Using this approach, Altemeyer was surprised to find that about one-third of his participants who were high in right-wing authoritarianism admitted that they had *secret* doubts about God's existence—doubts that they had *never* shared with anyone else. This suggests that many routine studies of doubting may not be tapping actual levels of doubt, but only what people are willing to admit to others.

We need more investigations of the frequency, nature, and implications of religious doubting, but we also need to be sensitive to the possible "secret" nature of some people's doubts. At least in some cases, doubt seems to be a precursor to abandoning one's religion. We turn next to an examination of this disengagement process, which is most likely to occur during late adolescence.

APOSTASY

Caplovitz and Sherrow (1977) concluded that apostasy (abandonment of one's religious faith) could be caused by secularization, alienation/rebellion, and/or commitment to the modern values of universalism/achievement. They proposed that four "germs" somehow infect young people, and that these germs predispose their "hosts" to become apostates. The germs were said to be (1) poor parental relations, (2) symptoms of maladjustment or neurosis, (3) a radical or leftist political orientation, and (4) commitment to intellectualism. Underlying all of these processes was the apparent assumption that apostasy represents a deliberate rejection of previous identification, and a conscious acceptance of a new identification. In fact, Caplovitz and Sherrow (1977) concluded that apostasy represents rebellion against parents and other aspects of society, as a result of familial strain. This thesis that apostasy results from adolescent rebellion against parents has also been suggested by other researchers (e.g., Putney & Middleton, 1961; Wuthnow & Glock, 1973).

The Caplovitz and Sherrow (1977) work has been criticized on theoretical, methodological, and data-interpretational grounds (see Hunsberger, 1980). Earlier findings (e.g., Johnson, 1973; Hunsberger, 1976) had suggested that religious socialization tends to follow a "straight line," such that lower levels of religiousness are related to lower levels of emphasis on reli-

Research Box 5.4. Religion and Right-Wing Authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1988)

Altemeyer's book reports an extensive program of research on right-wing authoritarianism (RWA). Our interest here is in some aspects of the research involving religion. Altemeyer was intrigued by the fact that believing in an almighty God is a cornerstone of the belief system of high-RWA people. He suspected that doubts about God's existence probably arise for those high in RWA as they do for others, but that possibly because of the strong anxiety that these doubts arouse, high-RWA people do not acknowledge them. But if doubts do exist in the mind of a "true believer," how can we possibly discover them when the person involved does not want to admit to them?

Altemeyer decided to probe these doubts by using a variation of Hilgard's (1973, 1986) "hidden observer" research on hypnosis. Hilgard had found that even people who endure pain without seemingly noticing it while under hypnosis will admit that they did feel pain when they are cued to allow a sort of "inner self" to discuss these experiences. This supposedly involves a part of the person that knows things that are not available to the person's consciousness.

So Altemeyer gave some students the following instructions in a survey study, after they had heard about Hilgard's research in their previous introductory psychology classes:

> You may recall the lecture on hypnosis dealing with Hilgard's research on the "Hidden Observer." Suppose there is a Hidden Observer in you, which knows your every thought and deed, but which only speaks when it is safe to do so, and when directly spoken to. This question is for your Hidden Observer: Does this person (that is, you) have doubts that (s)he was created by an Almighty God who will judge each person and take some into heaven for eternity while casting others into hell forever? (pp. 152–153)

Five alternatives followed, allowing respondents to indicate the type and extent of secret doubts they had experienced. About half of the high-RWA students in this study indicated that they had *no* doubts about God's existence. But, remarkably, about one-third of these students said that they did have *secret* doubts, which they had never shared with anyone else.

We cannot be sure that Altemeyer's participants were being truthful about their hidden religious doubts; however, this investigation raises important questions about the meaning of responses in survey research. It also suggests that creativity may be required to tap into very personal information about such topics as religious doubting.

gion in the childhood home. That is, **apostasy seems to represent** *consistency* with a lack of parental emphasis on religion, rather than rebellion against parents and society, as characterized by Caplovitz and Sherrow.

This consistency may exist in spite of seemingly contradictory findings. One study reported that some people prefer to describe the development of their religious beliefs in terms of rejection of, rather than acceptance of, a belief system (Scobie, 1999); another found that a history of religious rigidity is linked with disaffiliation from the parental religion (Hansen, 1998). However, this does not necessarily tell us anything about rebellion against parents or society. That is, rejection of beliefs might or might not be accompanied by more general rebellion.

Three studies of university students, described in Research Box 5.5, were carried out to investigate this issue (Hunsberger, 1980, 1983a; Hunsberger & Brown, 1984). These investigations, from two different corners of the world, were consistent in finding that apostasy is most strongly associated with weak emphasis on religion in the home. Although this work involved Canadian and Australian university students, the essential findings have been replicated elsewhere in studies of Mormons (Albrecht, Cornwall, & Cunningham, 1988; Bahr & Albrecht, 1989) and Roman Catholics (Kotre, 1971), as well as in studies of more representative U.S. samples (Nelsen, 1981c; Wuthnow & Mellinger, 1978).

In Hunsberger's studies, no support was found for two of Caplovitz and Sherrow's hypothesized predisposing "germs"—symptoms of maladjustment, and a radical or leftist political orientation. In a study of more than 600 U.S. and Canadian college students, Brinkerhoff and Mackie (1993) found that apostates reported being less happy in their lives than did "converts" (people who grew up with no religious affiliation but who now identified with a religious group), "religious stalwarts" (people who maintained the same denominational affiliation from childhood to young adulthood), and "denominational switchers" (people who had changed denominational affiliation since childhood). However, apostates typically did not differ significantly from these other groups on measures of self-esteem or life satisfaction.[5] Although Brinkerhoff and Mackie (1993) concluded that apostates "are less satisfied in life, less happy and have lower self-esteem" (p. 252), the statistical evidence supports this conclusion only for the general happiness item mentioned above. Apostates did report a more liberal world view, in the sense that they were "less traditional" than the stalwarts.

Also, Hunsberger found weak evidence that apostates have poorer relationships with their parents; he suggested that the poorer relationships could be *either* a cause or a result of apostasy. However, others have argued that their data suggest that poor relationships with parents are more likely to precede disengagement from religion (Burris, Jackson, Tarpley, & Smith, 1996; Wilson & Sherkat, 1994). Therefore, it may be that such poor relationships contribute to disengagement, rather than vice versa. In a similar vein, there is some evidence that parental divorce (and possibly the accompanying poor family relationships) may make offspring more inclined to change religious identity or to leave religion altogether (Lawton & Bures, 2001).

One might wonder how apostates would respond if asked directly about the reasons for their disengagement. A large survey of Australian adults (Hughes, Bellamy, Black, & Kaldor, 2000) asked respondents to rate the impact of 17 factors that might discourage them from attending church. The top 5 choices of nonattenders (not necessarily apostates) were boring church services (42% indicated that this discouraged attendance), church beliefs (41%), "no need to go to church" (38%), church moral views (37%), and "prefer to do other things" (37%). In addition to the fact that there was no direct measure of apostasy, these participants were not asked about emphasis on religion in childhood, maladjustment, or intellectualism. Therefore, it is difficult to compare Hughes et al.'s (2000) findings with the literature on apostasy.

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[5] The only pairwise comparison between apostates and each of the other three groupings that was statistically significant for either the life satisfaction or self-esteem measures indicated that apostates were lower in life satisfaction than were denominational switchers.

Research Box 5.5. Three Studies of the Antecedents and Correlates of Apostasy (Hunsberger, 1980, 1983a; Hunsberger & Brown, 1984)

In the first of his three investigations, Hunsberger screened about 600 Canadian introductory psychology students. He found 51 apostates (students who were raised in a religious denomination, but who currently were not affiliated with any denomination) who could be paired with 51 "matched controls" (people who came from the same religious background, and who were the same sex, approximate age, and year in university, but who continued to identify with the family religion). As one would expect, apostates obtained significantly "less religious" scores on a series of measures, including frequency of church attendance and prayer, and belief in God. But the two groups did not differ on a number of nonreligious measures, such as self-reports of parental acceptance, personal happiness and adjustment, and grade point average (contrary to what Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977, would apparently have predicted). There was some tendency for apostates to report poorer relationships with their parents. Emphasis placed on religion in the childhood home significantly predicted apostate versus matched control status, but factors related to parental relationships and rebellion did *not* add to the explained variance in a factor analysis and subsequent multiple-regression analysis.

These findings were essentially replicated in a second study of 78 Canadian apostates and their matched controls, identified from a group of introductory psychology students. Again, the religious socialization process was the most important influence in determining apostate versus nonapostate status, with apostates reporting considerably less emphasis on religion in the childhood home than did their matched controls. The findings from these two studies of apostasy were interpreted as being consistent with social learning theory, such that increased parental modeling and teaching of religion were associated with increased acceptance of the family religion. Factors that did *not* seem to predict apostasy included political orientation, intellectualism, academic orientation, adjustment/happiness in life, scores on Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) subscales, and general rebellion against parents. There was a weak tendency for poor relationships with parents to be associated with apostasy, but Hunsberger suggested that this could be a result rather than a cause of apostasy.

The third study in this series involved more than 800 Australian university students, for whom the apostasy rate (36%) was higher than in the Canadian studies (10–20%). This investigation confirmed the tendency for apostates to obtain much "less religious" scores on various measures, and to report considerably less emphasis on religion in the childhood home. However, these apostates also reported that they had a more intellectual orientation in their lives, consistent with Caplovitz and Sherrow's prediction.

In the end, these three studies all revealed that apostasy was most strongly related to weak emphasis on religion in the home. Caplovitz and Sherrow's claim that symptoms of maladjustment and a radical or leftist political orientation are related to apostasy was not supported. Nor was there any indication that apostasy represents rebellion against parents and society. Weak support was found for two other "germs" suggested by Caplovitz and Sherrow (poor relationships with parents and an intellectual orientation), though these were clearly weaker predictors of apostasy than was emphasis on religion in the childhood home.

How to Raise an Apostate

It would seem that if parents want their children to abandon the family religion, they can best encourage this by generally ignoring religion, or at least by communicating (through teaching or through example) that religion is unimportant. Recent research has confirmed the centrality of home influences in young people's decision to remain committed to the family faith or to abandon the home religion (e.g., Dudley, 1999). This is just what a socialization explanation of religious development would predict: Homes that emphasize the importance of religion and model religious behavior will generally produce children who remain religious later in their lives, whereas homes that pay little attention to faith and that model nonreligious behavior will generally produce children who pay no more attention to religion than their parents did. The concept of "drift" has sometimes been used to describe the tendency for apostates to have been only marginally involved with a religious denomination before defection (see Bahr & Albrecht, 1989).

This is not to deny the involvement of cognitive factors. Hunsberger and Brown's (1984) Australian study suggested that people who say they have an intellectual approach to life, enjoy debating or arguing with others about religious issues, and so on are more likely to be apostates. And, as discussed in the section on religious doubts, apostasy has been associated with questioning and doubting religious teachings. For example, Brinkerhoff and Mackie (1993) found that apostates reported more and earlier religious doubts in their lives than did nonapostates.

When does apostasy typically occur? Broad-based survey studies suggest that disengagement from religion is most common for people in their late teens and early twenties. For example, it has been estimated that about two-thirds of all dropping out among Catholics occurs between the ages of 16 and 25 (Hoge, with McGuire & Stratman, 1981)—essentially the same peak "dropping-out" years reported for Mormons (Albrecht et al., 1988), Presbyterians (Hoge, Johnson, & Liudens, 1993), and broader religious groupings (Albrecht & Cornwall, 1989; Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977; Hadaway & Roof, 1988; see also Schweitzer, 2000).

Types of Apostasy

Some authors have attempted to define types of apostates, though the resulting groupings tend to focus on social and other characteristics of apostates (and some other disaffiliated individuals) rather than the underlying apostasy process itself. For example, Hadaway (1989) used cluster analysis to derive five characteristic groups of apostates: (1) "successful swinging singles" (single young people who apparently were experiencing social and financial success); (2) "sidetracked singles" (single people who tended to be pessimistic and had not obtained the benefits of the "good life"); (3) "young settled liberals" (those who were dissatisfied with traditional values but who had a very positive outlook on life); (4) "young libertarians" (people who rejected religious labels more than religious beliefs); and (5) "irreligious traditionalists" (somewhat older, conservative, married people who maintained some religious moral traditions in spite of their nonattendance and nonaffiliation).

Others have offered different typologies (Bahr & Albrecht, 1989; Brinkerhoff & Burke, 1980; Condran & Tamney, 1985; Hadaway & Roof, 1988; Hoge et al., 1981; Perry, Davis, Doyle, & Dyble, 1980; Roozen, 1980). But no generally accepted categorization has appeared. These studies do indicate that we should not assume that apostates constitute a homogeneous group. The social characteristics of apostates may vary considerably, and the underlying processes of disengagement are not uniform.

Problems in Definition and Measurement

Caution is necessary when one is comparing the results of different investigations of apostasy. The terminology used to describe disengagement from religion varies considerably from study to study, involving such terms as "dropping out," "exiting," "disidentification," "leave taking," "defecting," "apostasy," "disaffiliation," and "disengagement" (Bromley, 1988). Furthermore, operational definitions of these terms have varied from one study to the next. Some authors (e.g., Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977; Hunsberger, 1980, 1983a) have studied people who say they grew up with a religious identification or family religious background, but who no longer identify with any religious group. Others have focused on cessation of church attendance for a specified period of time (e.g., Hoge, 1981, 1988); have incorporated elements of loss of faith, as well as disidentification (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1997); or have focused on aspects of the organizational structure of the religious group a person is leaving (Bromley, 1998).

Such differences could potentially lead to divergent findings. It is important in relevant investigations to be clear about the criteria used to define apostasy operationally, and also to be sensitive to how this definition will affect the findings. For example, it has been estimated that in the United States, about 46% of people discontinue church participation at some point in their lives (Roozen, 1980). Whether this estimate is accurate or not, there are many reasons for cessation of church attendance that do not necessarily involve loss of personal faith (Albrecht et al., 1988). Studying all nonattenders could seriously inflate the seeming number of apostates. On the other hand, early studies may have underestimated rates of religious defection because of the wording of survey items (Wuthnow & Glock, 1973). And as we have noted earlier in this chapter, there may be differences in religiousness across countries, and these could have implications for apostasy (e.g., apostasy probably has different meanings in the "religious" United States vs. "less religious" European countries).

"Switching" religious denominations is apparently relatively common, especially in mainstream religious groups (Roof, 1989). Switching usually occurs across relatively similar denominations—for example as outlined by Kelley's "exclusive–ecumenical" continuum, described in Chapter 12 (Hadoway & Marler, 1993)—and it is often instigated by other life changes, such as marriage or moving to a new community (Babchuk & Whitt, 1990). In short, switching should not be confused with abandonment of religious faith and identification (Albrecht & Cornwall, 1989; Brinkerhoff & Mackie, 1993; Sandomirsky & Wilson, 1990). Greeley (1981) has referred to the switching process as "religious musical chairs" (p. 101)—a very different phenomenon from apostasy. Indeed, switchers tend to be more religiously involved than even people who simply remain in the same denomination (Hoge, Johnson, & Luidens, 1995).

We need greater precision and standardization of definition and measurement in research on apostasy, as well as careful consideration and integration of results of studies using different approaches and samples.

Is Apostasy Temporary?

Surveys often show that adolescents and college students are less religious than older persons. However, the disengagement from religion that is more common among adolescents and young adults is often characterized as a temporary phenomenon. Some "dropping out" may simply represent youthful exploration of alternative ideas and religions (e.g., alternate philosophies or belief systems, sects, cults) for a relatively short period in young people's lives. Gordon Allport (1950) suggested that after youthful disaffection with traditional religious values, many people return to religion by the time they are in their 30s. They may have children of their own and be concerned that their offspring should have some religious upbringing, or they may more generally have lost their rebellious tendencies and be settling down. In fact, longitudinal survey research has reported a significant tendency for religiosity to increase with age; the largest such increase occurs in young adulthood, between the ages of 18 and 30 (Argue, Johnson, & White, 1999). However, age-related increases in religiousness do not speak directly to the issue of whether or not apostates return to religion.

Some other evidence argues in favor of a "return to religion" tendency. Bibby (1993) claimed that many people who rejected religion in their teens eventually return to institutionalized religion, even if primarily to avail themselves of "rites of passage" (e.g., marriage or funerals), or to obtain some religious instruction for their children. Bibby showed that the percentage of Canadians claiming no religion was highest among younger adults aged 18–34. Furthermore, a cohort analysis suggested that almost half of the 16% of people aged 18–34 who claimed to have no religion in 1975 were reabsorbed into the religious realm, since in 1990 just 9% of the 35- to 54-year-olds (apparently many of the same people in the 1975 statistics) claimed to have no religion. This evidence suggests (albeit indirectly) that some people do return to religion after claiming "no religion" when they were younger. But of course we do not know how many of the 9% were the same people who claimed no religion 15 years earlier; individuals could not be followed longitudinally, and we do not know, for example, how many people might also have become apostates in the interim.

This is an important point: High church membership turnover may prevent a clear view of apostasy and "return to religion" trends. For example, the British Methodist Church experienced a net loss of 375,279 members from 1960 to 1998. However, this occurred within more than 1 million gains and more than 1.4 million departures from the church (Field, 2000). Such statistics, by themselves, tell us nothing about apostasy and return rates.

Not all research findings are consistent with the "return to religion" tendency. One study asked young people in rural Pennsylvania questions about religion when they were high school students in 1970, and again in 1981 when they were about 27 years old (Willits & Crider, 1989). Focusing on the 331 respondents who were married by 1981, the researchers concluded that these people were in fact *less* frequent church attenders at 27 than they had been in their middle teens. However, this study involved a relatively short-term follow-up, and it could be argued that the timing of the surveys (at ages 16 and 27, on average) might account for the unique findings. For example, a shift away from religion might well have occurred soon after the age of 16. Another follow-up when these people are in their 30s or 40s might be more informative.

An extensive longitudinal study of a U.S. national probability sample suggested that most religious dropping out probably occurs after age 16. Wilson and Sherkat (1994) followed the religious identification and other trends of people from 1965, when they were seniors in high school, to 1973 and again to 1983. In the third wave of their study, they managed to retain more than two-thirds of the original 1,562 participants. They focused their attention on those who reported a religious preference in 1965, but then reported no preference in 1973. For these dropouts, they found few differences between those who retained their apostate status in 1983 and those who had returned to religion. The returnees did report closer relationships with their parents in high school than did the continuing apostates. Furthermore, there was a tendency for early marriage and forming a family to be related to returning to religion, though this relationship was found only for men. Women were less likely to become apostates than were men, but women apostates were also less likely to return to the fold than were men. The researchers speculated that men are more likely to be religiously affected by transitions to marriage and parenthood: "Given the cultural understanding that the religious role is primarily allocated to women in the family, dropping out of the church is a stronger statement for women to make than for men, especially in a society where denominational affiliation of some kind is normative" (Wilson & Sherkat, 1994, p. 156).

The finding that marriage and parenthood are important factors in returning to the fold has been replicated elsewhere (Chaves, 1991; Hoge et al., 1993). This is consistent with our conclusion that parental religious socialization effects tend to weaken, and that other factors become more important as people move on through the life cycle and begin to live independent adult lives themselves. However, this does not necessarily imply that marriage and parenthood therefore are important contributors to stronger religiousness, generally speaking.

A methodical analysis of General Social Survey data from the United States from 1972 to 1991 revealed a trend toward increased religiousness with increasing age (Ploch & Hastings, 1994). However, there was no indication in these correlational data that either marriage or childbearing was associated with an increase in church attendance. According to Ploch and Hastings, researchers who have concluded that family formation is positively related to church attendance may have confused a long-term trend toward an age-related increase in religiousness with short-term events such as marriage and childbearing. The debate has continued, however, with other researchers finding that "family life cycle" attitudes and events (marriage, cohabitation, parenthood, divorce, etc.) *do* affect religion, though they may interact with age in complex ways (Stolzenberg, Blair-Loy, & Waite, 1995). This issue is a complicated one. However, we should be careful not to assume that church attendance and membership are ideal, accurate indicators of personal religiousness.

In conclusion, it seems likely that a substantial portion of apostates remain nonreligious for the rest of their lives. But evidence also suggests that some young apostates do return to religion later in their lives. We need additional data before we can make accurate estimates of the numbers of lifelong versus temporary apostates in different countries. It does seem clear that in most developed countries, the proportion of people claiming to have no religious affiliation increased steadily and sometimes dramatically in the 20th century. Even in the comparatively religious United States, the percentage of people saying that they have "no religion" jumped from 2% in 1967 to 11% in the 1990s (Putnam, 2000), and it is likely that a substantial part of this rise involved apostates.

Going against the Flow: "Amazing Apostates" and "Amazing Believers"

There is strong evidence that most people who become religious believers or apostates are behaving quite consistently with socialization theory predictions. That is, most apostates come from homes where religion was only weakly emphasized and parental modeling of religion was not strong. And most religious believers come from homes were religion was relatively strongly emphasized and modeling was readily available. There are exceptions to the rule, although they are rare. For example, just 2% of Canadian weekly church attenders in 1991 were going to church "seldom or never" as youngsters (Bibby, 1993), and just 10 of 631 Canadian and U.S. college students (1.6%) identified with a religious denomination after reporting that they grew up with no religion (Brinkerhoff & Mackie, 1993).

This is consistent with research on "amazing believers" and "amazing apostates"—people who seem to contradict socialization predictions (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1997; see also Hunsberger, 2000). Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1997) established strict criteria in an attempt to capture the exceptions to the socialization rule. Amazing believers scored in the top quarter of a scale that tapped the extent to which they now held orthodox Christian beliefs, but in the lower quarter of a scale that tapped the extent to which religion had been emphasized in the childhood home. That is, the amazing believers had come from relatively nonreligious backgrounds but now held orthodox Christian beliefs. Amazing apostates scored in the bottom quarter of the orthodoxy scale and the top quarter of the emphasis scale, indicating that they had come from highly religious backgrounds but no longer believed the basic tenets of their home religion.

The two researchers then interviewed as many amazing apostates (1.4% of the overall sample) and amazing believers (0.8%) they could find at their respective Canadian universities, after screening several thousand students across two separate academic years. The 46 amazing apostates who were interviewed confirmed that they had generally rejected family religious teachings, in spite of strong socialization pressures to accept religious beliefs. They were unique people whose "search for truth" had led them to question many things, especially religious teachings, often from an early age. Many of these people reported initial guilt and fear about dropping their religious beliefs (consistent with the findings of Etxebarria, 1992), but in retrospect they believed that the benefits of leaving their religion far outweighed any costs involved. Also, they held very tolerant, nonauthoritarian attitudes toward others, in contrast to more authoritarian views apparent among their highly religious counterparts.

Why did these people reject religious teachings when the majority of their peers accepted their religious backgrounds? The interviewees' own explanations typically revolved around their need to ask questions and get answers, their intellectual curiosity, and their unwillingness to accept responses that they felt did not really answer their questions. Most of these people had experienced conflict over their beliefs, and had spent considerable time and effort weighing different arguments for and against religious beliefs. In the end, they decided that the religious arguments and evidence simply did not make sense to them, and they very deliberately chose a nonreligious path for their lives. Clearly, these apostates were "amazing" in that they seemed to reverse socialization influences through an intellectual search for truth in their own lives.

But as rare as these amazing apostates were, they were still twice as common as amazing believers. And the 24 amazing believers interviewed by Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1997) did not take the same carefully considered route to their newfound religiousness. Rather, they were more likely to have had *some* religious training early in their lives (in spite of a general lack of religiousness in the home), to be influenced by friends or significant others, and to have "found religion" in an attempt to deal with crises in their lives. Emotional issues such as fear, loneliness, and depression seemed to drive their amazing conversion. For example, some were attempting to escape from a dependence on drugs, alcohol, or sex; others were grappling with serious illness or tragedy in their lives (e.g., one woman who became an amazing believer had had four close relatives and friends die tragically in 1 year).

In spite of the relatively small samples in this study, the findings are fairly clear and intriguing. A small percentage of people do seem to "go against the flow" and reject religion in spite of strong childhood religious emphasis and training; a smaller percentage of others become strongly religious in spite of having mostly nonreligious backgrounds. These exceptional cases do not necessarily fly in the face of socialization theory. Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1997) speculated that their amazing apostates may simply have acted on an important religious teaching from early in their lives: "Believe the truth." However, they pursued the truth in a critical, questioning way that led them away from their home religious teachings. Further research is needed to assess this interpretation. And the amazing believers usually did report some modeling of religion in their upbringing. In the end, as rare as these amazing apostates are, such "exceptions to the rule" can potentially help our general understanding of the religious socialization process.

RELIGION AND IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN ADOLESCENCE

In the past decade, some promising research has linked adolescent identity development with religion. Identity development has roots in Erikson's (1968, 1969) theory of psychosocial development, especially the importance of the appearance of a secure identity in adolescence (vs. the danger of role confusion). In theory, religion can be an important contributor to the process of establishing a secure identity (e.g., Erikson, 1964, 1965)—for example, by helping to explain existential issues, by providing a sense of belonging, and by offering an institutionalized opportunity for individuals to commit to a (religious) world view ("fidelity"). Four identity statuses have been proposed by Marcia (1966; Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, & Orlofsky, 1993), based on the extent to which crisis (exploring alternatives) and commitment (investment in a particular identity) are apparent in adolescent lives (see Table 5.1).

Evidence confirms that the emergence of identity is a progressive developmental process, with "foreclosed" and "diffused" statuses the least developed, and relatively immature. The most advanced or mature status is "achieved," with "moratorium" being intermediate (e.g., Waterman, 1985). That is, a "diffused" young person (who has done little or no exploring in the religious realm, and who has not made any firm religious commitments) would be considered to be relatively immature in terms of religious identity development. But someone who has done a lot of thinking about (exploring) religious issues and conflicts, and as a result has decided to accept (commit to) a particular religious ideology, would be accorded the more mature "achieved" identity status.

TABLE 5.1. Marcia's Classification of Identity Status Based on Crisis and Commitment

	Commitment	
Crisis	Present	Not present
Present	Achieved	Moratorium
Not present	Foreclosed	Diffused

It is surprising that in light of the theoretical intertwining of religious and identity development, there has been little research on this issue until the 1990s. Studies have indicated that more religious commitment, as measured by church attendance, tends to be linked with more general identity achievement and foreclosure—the identity statuses that involve ideological commitment (Markstrom-Adams, Hofstra, & Dougher, 1994; Tzuriel, 1984). But these findings have not always been clear cut, possibly because self-reported church attendance is not necessarily a good measure of religious ideological commitment (see, e.g., Markstrom, 1999). Also, since women are more likely than men to make a commitment in the religious realm (Pastorino, Dunham, Kidwell, Bacho, & Lamborn, 1997), failure to control for gender could contaminate results (see also Alberts, 2000). In spite of such gender differences in commitment, however, some evidence indicates that both genders use the identity process similarly in the religious domain (e.g., Archer, 1989).

Some studies have examined links between religious *orientation* measures and identity status. Markstrom-Adams and Smith (1996) found that the Intrinsic religious orientation was associated with achievement status (apparently because of the greater religious commitment of intrinsically oriented persons), and that the Extrinsic orientation was linked with diffusion identity status (apparently because of the lack of religious commitment and the lack of crisis or exploration for extrinsically oriented people). However, measurement of religious commitment and crisis was limited to the Intrinsic and Extrinsic religious orientation scales (Allport & Ross, 1967), and these might not be good measures of the extent of religious commitment and, especially, crisis.

In a study of college students, Fulton (1997) also found that Intrinsic orientation scores were linked with identity achievement (and Extrinsic orientation scores with foreclosure), as expected. In addition, scores on the Quest scale (see Batson et al., 1993) were associated with moratorium status, apparently because of the doubt exploration inherent in the Quest measure. However, a more recent investigation found no link between identity status and Quest scores (Klassen & McDonald, 2002).

Hunsberger et al. (2001a) attempted to improve on previous studies' limited measures of religious commitment, and especially of religious exploration/crisis. They carried out two studies, one of high school students before and after they finished high school, and another of university students. Their results generally confirmed the expected links between identity status and religion. For example, religious commitment was stronger for more achieved and foreclosed people, and commitment was weaker for more diffused and moratorium students. Also, religious crisis was positively correlated with moratorium (but not achievement) scores, and negatively related to foreclosure and diffusion scores. Finally, this research indicated that specific styles of religious crisis (belief-confirming vs. belief-threatening consultation for religious doubts) were also usually linked with identity status, as predicted (see Research Box 5.6).

In summary, recent findings suggest that the ego identity status is relevant to the study of religion and could help us to understand religious development, especially during adolescence. It is possible that variables such as right-wing authoritarianism affect both religious development and more general identity development in this regard, since high right-wing authoritarianism is linked with both greater religiousness (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996) and foreclosed identity status (Peterson & Lane, 2001); however, the exploration of such relationships is left to future studies. Also, because the resolution of religious doubt is potentially an important task in the development of a secure identity in adolescence and young adulthood, it is possible that information-processing styles contribute to young people's approaches to religious doubts, and ultimately to the ways in which such doubts are resolved.

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the extent to which identity status measures are "contaminated" by content that asks explicitly about religion, since one-third of the content of some identity status measures (e.g., Adams et al., 1989) is in the religious domain. That is, to what extent are the links reported between identity status and religion a result of common religious content in measures of these two supposedly different concepts? In this regard, it may be inappropriate to think in terms of overall identity status, since there is some indication that identity development can be quite uneven in different content domains. For

Research Box 5.6. Adolescent Identity Formation: Religious Exploration and Commitment (Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 2001a)

These researchers used a Religious Doubts scale (Altemeyer, 1988) in order to tap religious "crisis" (see McAdams, Booth, & Selvik, 1981) more directly than had been done in previous studies. They also included several ways of looking at religious commitment (e.g., self-reported current religiousness, church attendance), to insure that any relationships found were not unique to a specific measure of commitment. Using the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (Adams, Bennion, & Huh, 1989) in two studies, they found that high school and university students revealed links between broadly defined identity status, and religious crisis and exploration generally, as expected. More achieved and foreclosed people did score higher, and more diffused and moratorium individuals did score lower, on measures of religious commitment. Also, moratorium status was related to more religious doubting, as expected, but achievement status was (surprisingly) not linked with doubting. The authors speculated that religious doubting may have occurred earlier in more achieved people's lives, and therefore may not have been adequately detected by the measures used. Finally, lower levels of doubting ("religious crisis") should be evident among more foreclosed and diffused people, but this was true only for foreclosed identity status. To summarize, these two studies then offer general (but not complete) support for hypothesized links between religion and identity status.

These same studies also investigated the ways in which people dealt with religious doubts by means of the Belief-Confirming Consultation (BCC) and Belief-Threatening Consultation (BTC) scales, discussed earlier in this chapter. The authors suggested that BCC and BTC scores would be related to identity status, based on Berzonsky and Kuk's (2000) finding that identity status is related to the ways in which people process information. The evidence generally supported their hypotheses. For example, higher achievement scores were linked with both higher BCC and higher BTC scores, and diffusion was associated with both lower BCC and lower BTC scores. Finally, longitudinal data in the second study allowed Hunsberger et al. to assess relationships over time. Again, relationships were generally (though not always) as expected. For example, foreclosure scores significantly predicted reduced BTC scores and less overall religious doubting 2 years later. These findings have been interpreted as partially supporting Berzonsky and Kuk's (2000) suggestion that identity status is linked with social-cognitive information-processing styles within the religious realm.

example, De Haan and Schulenberg (1997) concluded that covariation between religious and political identity was low and inconsistent. Skorikov and Vondracek (1998) found that religious identity development lagged behind vocational identity development. Possibly researchers should focus on *religious* identity development, with purer (religious identity) measures that are not complicated by content from other domains (e.g., politics, career).

OVERVIEW

In this chapter we have focused on a socialization approach to the development of adolescent and young adult religiousness. There are certainly other ways of conceptualizing religious development as children move into adolescence; as we have seen, however, much evidence is consistent with a socialization perspective, especially one based on social learning theory. Empirical work confirms that parents are the strongest influences on adolescent religiousness, though their influence seems to decrease as young people grow older. It is not entirely clear whether mothers or fathers exert the stronger influence on religious development, though the weight of the evidence suggests that mothers are more powerful. Certainly both mothers and fathers have some influence, and interactive factors also play a role (e.g., warmth of the family environment, mother–father consistency in religiousness). Other religious socialization agents have sometimes been presumed to be active, such as the church, peer groups, and education. However, with the possible exception of specific effects of religious education (e.g., increases in religious knowledge) and the church, these other variables apparently exert relatively weak effects on adolescent religiosity.

Some studies have suggested that early tendencies for children or adolescents to increase or decrease in religiosity may continue into adulthood. This "polarization" tendency needs to be explored further.

Generational effects occur, such that adolescents and young adults are "less religious" than older adults. However, although religiosity has apparently decreased substantially in many parts of the world, religion itself is hardly on the verge of disappearing. The United States seems to be an exception to the "decreasing religiousness" rule, since rates of regular church attendance have been relatively stable, with about 30–40% of high school seniors reportedly attending weekly.

Some evidence suggests that the religious socialization process may affect the ways in which people think about existential religious issues. Research on integrative complexity has indicated that more orthodox and fundamentalist persons think less complexly about such issues. Possibly these stylistic thought differences are related to the ways in which people resolve conflicts, questions, and doubts concerning religious teachings. The evidence suggests that questions and doubts about religion are common (though certainly not intense, on average) during adolescence and early adulthood, and that those with more doubts tend to think in more complex terms about religious doubts and conflicts. There is some tendency for more fundamentalist persons to resolve their questions and doubts in ways that support their religious beliefs, whereas less fundamentalist persons are more likely to achieve resolutions that change their religious beliefs.

Work on apostasy has suggested that leaving the family religion is generally consistent with socialization explanations of religious development. People who abandon the family faith tend to come from homes where religion was either ignored or only weakly emphasized. Thus apostates often simply "drift" a bit further away from a religion that was not important to the family in the first place. Apostates tend to have poorer relationships with their parents, and cognitive factors are probably involved in apostasy to some extent, since apostates are more likely to question, doubt, and debate religious issues earlier in their lives than nonapostates. This critical questioning approach to religion seems especially true of "amazing apostates"—people who become apostates in spite of considerable socialization pressure in their childhood to accept religious teachings. Finally, some apostates apparently return to religion in adulthood, but others become "apostates for life."

Recent research has linked ego identity status with religious exploration/crisis and commitment in predicted ways. Apparently religious development is associated with Erikson's hypothesized establishment of a secure identity, as opposed to role confusion, in adolescence. Moreover, evidence suggests that identity status can be moderately successful in predicting religious doubt levels and ways of dealing with doubts 2 years later; this is consistent with the suggestion that unique information processing styles may characterize different identity statuses.

The research reviewed in this chapter constitutes a considerable body of knowledge concerning religious socialization processes. We continue to learn more about how young people become religious, how they think about religion, and why they sometimes leave a religious background. However, research has tended to focus on description rather than explanation. It *is* important to understand the integral role of parents (and the relative unimportance of some other factors) in the religious socialization process. It *is* valuable to gain insight into the thought processes and correlates of religious doubt and apostasy. It *is* worthwhile to devise typologies of apostates. And so on. But it is also important that we generate testable explanations concerning *why* these processes occur as they do, and what the causative factors are with respect to religious development. Too much attention has been devoted to the social correlates of religious socialization and religious change, and not enough attention has focused on factors within individuals (e.g., styles of thinking, ways in which people approach and resolve information that challenges their beliefs). Correlational studies, which are the norm in this area, can help us to understand the processes involved, but do little to clarify cause-and-effect relationships. The issues discussed in this chapter therefore have considerable potential for future research.