

The Psychology of Religion

Fourth Edition



An Empirical Approach

RALPH W. HOOD, JR.

PETER C. HILL

BERNARD SPILKA

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To Emery Grace Jorgensen

—Ralph

To Carol. It just keeps getting better.

—Peter

To Ellen, for 55 years of love, support, and guidance.

My love for you continually grows.

—Bernie

About the Authors

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IN MEMORIAM

Bruce E. Hunsberger (1946–2003)

The fourth edition of *The Psychology of Religion* is dedicated to Bruce E. Hunsberger, whose considerable contributions to the second and third editions are present in this volume. It is a notable fact about this remarkable scholar that he continued to make major contributions to the psychology of religion during the entire period of his chronic illness. His work on authoritarianism, much of it with Bob Altemeyer, continues to define what for many is a darker side to religious belief. His last work, *Atheists: A Groundbreaking Study of America's Nonbelievers* (written with Bob Altemeyer), appeared posthumously and is the first contemporary empirical study of the psychology of atheism. Bruce's anticipation of the importance of varieties of unbelief for the psychology of religion anticipated the present attention to atheism, an area of study in which he remains one of its foremost experts. He was a thoroughgoing empiricist, marvelously adept at both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Never an apologist for religion, Bruce was a compassionate scholar of the range of religious beliefs and ruthlessly fair in assessing the empirical consequences of both belief and unbelief.

In 1991, Bruce was the only Canadian to receive the William James Award from the Psychology of Religion division of the American Psychological Association for outstanding and sustained contributions to the psychology of religion. When we sought an additional author for the second and third editions, we simply wanted a foremost psychologist of religion. Bruce was our first and only choice. He proved to be not only up to the task, but also a wonderful colleague and friend. He is sorely missed. We are sad about his passing, but privileged to have known and worked with this most humane scholar.

RALPH W. HOOD, JR.
PETER C. HILL
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Preface to the Fourth Edition

At the beginning of the 20th century, those who were to become highly esteemed figures in the history of psychology and its sister disciplines focused much of their interest and attention on religion. In academic psychology, scholars such as William James and G. Stanley Hall not only helped to found psychology, but manifested a great interest in the psychological study of religion. In psychoanalysis, a new field was created outside of academic psychology that nevertheless immensely influenced psychology. One cannot read Freud or Jung for long without encountering extensive discussions of religion.

The second quarter of the 20th century saw a rapid decline in the study of religion among psychologists. Behaviorism was indifferent to the topic, while psychoanalysts relegated it to the province of psychopathology. The net effect was that research in this area remained on the periphery of scientific respectability. The mid-1950s, however, saw a renaissance in the study of religion. Perhaps as psychology became more secure as a science, it could once again look with some interest into the serious investigation of religion. This time the study was less speculative, not as concerned with grand theory, and focused on issues other than the origin of religion. In a word, an *empirical* psychology of religion emerged. This was a more limited view, to be sure, but it demanded that statements about religion be formulated as hypotheses capable of empirical verification or falsification.

In rapid succession, journals devoted to the empirical study of religion emerged in the middle of the last century. Among these are the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, the *Journal of Religion & Health*, the *Review of Religious Research*, as well as three journals with specific religious interests: the *Journal of Psychology Theology*, the *Journal of Psychology & Christianity*, and *The Psychology of Judaism*. More recently, additional journals and annuals have appeared, including *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*; *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*; *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*; and (most recently) *Spirituality and Health International*. In 1988, the *Annual Review of Psychology* included, for the first time, a summary of the psychology of religion, affirming by its presence that a significant body of empirical research in the area is now available. In 2003, a second *Annual Review of Psychology* article on the psychology of religion was published.

Likewise, the *Archiv für Religionspsychologie* (*Archives for the Psychology of Religion*), the yearbook of the Internationale Gesellschaft für Religionspsychologie (International Association for the Psychology of Religion), founded in 1914, has been revived; this indicates that the psychology of religion has proven to be a topic of truly international interest. The pertinent literature continues to grow at a rapid rate across the globe. Specialty journals such as *The Journal of Muslim Mental Health* address religious traditions other than Christianity, long dominant in the work of American scholars of the psychology of religion. The domination of interpretative and conceptual discussions of religion in psychology is gradually yielding to data-based research and writing that are pulling the psychology of religion into the mainstream of academic psychology. The evidence for this as we go to press is that the Psychology of Religion division of the American Psychological Association has just published the first issue of a new journal, *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*. Likewise, several general and specialty handbooks largely focused on empirical studies of religion and spirituality have been published. The appearance of the fourth edition of this text is itself an indication of the vigor of our field.

Our aim remains the same in the fourth edition as in the first three: to present a comprehensive evaluation of the psychology of religion from an empirical perspective. We are not concerned with purely conceptual or philosophical discussions of religion or with theories that have little empirical support. Interesting as these approaches may be, they generate few, if any, hard data of relevance to their evaluation. We do not, however, ignore these theories when meaningful empirical predictions follow from their claims. When this occurs, they are considered, as are other hypotheses, tentative claims to be judged by the facts. We have not imposed a single theoretical perspective across all the chapters. However, we do see the issue of meaning and control as the single most general theme that runs through each of the chapters. We avoid siding unequivocally with any of the emerging grand theories, such as evolutionary psychology, that have been proposed to integrate the psychology of religion. Likewise, we do not give exclusive dominance to a single empirical approach, such as cognitive science, nor do we unequivocally endorse emerging areas of psychology such as positive psychology. Instead, these theories, approaches, and areas are integrated where relevant throughout the text. We simply approach the field from an empirical perspective, broadly conceived to include any studies in which either quantitative or qualitative data are germane to establishing and/or resolving questions of fact. Although we are sensitive to the difficulties and limitations of a purely empirical approach, we have not abandoned the commitment to empiricism as the single most fruitful avenue to understanding the psychology of religion. However, as several of the chapters also reveal, the same empirical data can lend credence to radically different ontological claims. Since the work of William James, texts on the psychology of religion have suggested various metaphysical options under which the same empirical data can be viewed with radically different consequences. All we ask is that one not lose sight of the empirical data, so that various theoretical interpretations can be recognized and evaluated in terms of their relationship to these data.

While we retain the basic structure of the third edition, we have reduced the number of chapters from 17 to 14, which allows for a more condensed text, while covering the same range of material. However, as with the third edition, many chapters can be read independently, so the instructor can reduce the range of material assigned on the basis of his or her own class needs. The rich variety of empirical research that continues to be published is itself a testimony to the vitality of the field.

We briefly acknowledge three major cultural influences that have affected our field. The first is the growth of spirituality outside of organized religion. A glance at the references for the fourth edition reveals numerous titles that reference spirituality, not simply religion. In some areas, such as health, few studies refer to religion alone, and many titles reference both religion and spirituality. How this growth of spirituality has occurred, and why, is addressed throughout the text.

The second is the role of the John Templeton Foundation in funding projects concerned with the psychology of religion and spirituality. Various splinter foundations established as offshoots have also heavily funded the scientific study of religion and spirituality. We simply acknowledge, although not without criticism, that the availability of such funding sources often guides the direction and prominence of research agendas.

Finally, September 11, 2001, remains a crucial date for psychologists who study religion. Fundamentalism in all its forms has become a major issue. Even those who thought religion could be ignored as a topic of study have recognized that religion is a powerful force that continues to influence the course of history. It is sad that one of the foremost scholars of the scientific study of religious fundamentalism, our colleague Bruce E. Hunsberger, could not continue to provide insights into a phenomenon for which his expertise is sorely missed.

Our hope is not only that this new edition fairly represents the research and scholarly literature, but also that it will encourage young psychologists to participate in the empirical study of religion, regardless of how they otherwise identify their own psychological expertise.

Acknowledgments

The fourth edition of a book represents a long history of searching for information, as well as support and direction, from others. We have relied strongly on guidance from scholars who convey to us points of view we might otherwise have overlooked. Despite our best efforts, we can never thank all who deserve recognition.

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Peter C. Hill: It is indeed an honor to have my name associated with Ralph W. Hood and Bernie Spilka, who have been wonderful mentors and colleagues throughout the years. I am grateful to Pat Pike, Dean at the Rosemead School of Psychology, for her support. I appreciate the opportunity to learn much from my colleagues at the Institute for Research in Psychology and Spirituality (IRPS), where ideas are discussed freely and openly. Thanks also to Fraser Watts and Nicholas Gibson for both the experience and the knowledge gained as a visiting research scholar at Cambridge University.

Bernard Spilka: Special thanks to the editorial team at The Guilford Press. Editor-in-Chief Seymour Weingarten has always been highly supportive of our efforts. Senior Editor Jim Nageotte provided much needed guidance. Above all, we were blessed with a copy editor, Marie Sprayberry, whose proficiency and exactitude were truly exceptional. She has certainly taught all of us much about writing. I must also recognize the amazing ability and positive attitudes of the University of Denver, Penrose Library staff in finding essential information plus obtaining articles and books that were unknown to me. Specifically, I thank Christopher Brown whose skill at finding the obscure and hidden is truly outstanding. Last, the cooperation, helpfulness, and warmth of my colleagues in this venture made it a true labor of love.

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Chapter 1

The Psychological Nature and Functions of Religion

There is only one religion, though there are a hundred versions of it.

I assert that the cosmic religious experience is the strongest and the noblest driving force behind scientific research.

I am an atheist still, thank God.

The intractable mystery that was religion is now just another set of difficult but manageable problems.

Things have come to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade the sphere of private life.¹

THE WHY, WHAT, AND HOW OF THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

Why Should We Study Religion Psychologically?

There is a surprisingly simple answer to the question of why psychologists should study religion. Religion is of the utmost importance to many people, and many fascinating behaviors are performed in its name. Religion is an integral part of many aspects of our human existence. We surround ourselves with spiritual references, creating a context in which the sacred is invoked to convey the significance of major life events. Birth is sanctified by christening or circumcision. Marriages are solemnized by clergy, who readily interpret the roles of husband and wife in religious terms. Weekly religious meetings guide the faithful throughout life. Religion also helps people deal with death by associating it with gratifying images of an afterlife where only good and justice prevail. For others, images of hell and damnation can exacerbate the fear of death. Even the end of time is touched upon in some religions, where the faithful are assured of an ultimate resurrection.

¹These quotations come, respectively, from the following sources: Shaw (1931, p. 378); Einstein (1931, p. 357); Luis Buñuel, quoted in Rogers (1983, p. 175); Boyer (2001, p. 2); Lord Melbourne, quoted in Cecil (1966, p. 181).

Of course, religion is also intimately tied to everyday life, including a wide variety of beliefs and behaviors. In some parts of the Islamic world, prayers are offered on loudspeakers throughout a city multiple times each day. In some cultures, it is not unusual to see people on their knees praying in the middle of a busy sidewalk. Even in more secular societies, religion is commonly found—whether it be in private meditation and prayer, or the practice of attending church or temple services. Regardless of time or place, religion is omnipresent and affects people's lives.

As we describe throughout this book, religion, including spirituality (we discuss the distinction between these two terms later in this chapter and throughout the text), has the capacity to bring out the best—and worst—in people. Every day, the mass media report instances of religious conflict throughout the world among those who adhere to different faiths. Many social problems stem from conflicts between religious groups. In recent history alone, we have witnessed tragedies in the name of religion in such places as Rwanda, Bosnia, Sudan, Northern Ireland, Afghanistan, Indonesia, and Iraq, among others. The events of September 11, 2001, and July 7, 2005, have brought this reality closer to home for those of us who live in the United States and the United Kingdom—supposedly more religiously pluralistic and tolerant societies, until we remind ourselves of abortion clinic bombings and the many cases of arsonists targeting church property. And how often have we heard about tragic cult practices that resulted in mass suicides and other inhuman actions?

Such tragedies might make us think that best-selling author Sam Harris (2004) is right when he claims that more evil is done in the name of religion than in anything else. But such events, as tragic and seemingly senseless as they are, are only part of the story. Religion is also inextricably tied to altruistic and helping behavior. Those in dire straits commonly call upon their gods when they desperately need aid, and most feel strengthened by their faith. In addition, church, temple, or mosque members often help each other or organize to aid a community when disaster strikes. Often such efforts transcend differences in religious beliefs, and people of different faiths come together for the sake of the common good. The highly respected personality and social psychologist Gordon Allport, who was also a leading scholar in the psychological study of religion, once said, "The role of religion is paradoxical. It makes prejudice and it unmakes prejudice" (1954, p. 444). Religion thus has both a bright and a dark side.

In the United States in particular, few human concerns are taken more seriously than religion. Research tells us that about 97% of U.S. residents believe in God, and that about 90% pray (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999; Poloma & Gallup, 1991). Simply put, most Americans see their religious faith as part and parcel of the larger picture of living their lives. Our role is to keep this larger picture before us as we attempt to understand the psychological role of faith in the individual personality. However, we are also cognizant that in many European countries religions is of much less significance. Religion is more salient in some cultures than in others.

The preceding discussion answers another fundamental question: "Why has religion attained such status?" This is a problem not only for both the social sciences and psychology; it is also one for religion, particularly for the theologians who justify and support each faith. Though we may not directly deal with theology, the topics and issues discussed in these pages are central to both psychology and religion, and therefore to religious people everywhere. Particularly in Western civilization, and especially in the North American milieu (for which psychologists have the most reliable empirical data), religion is an ever-present and extremely important aspect of our collective heritage.

Clearly, it is incumbent upon us to understand the role religion plays in our personal and social lives. This is the task of the psychology of religion.

What Is the Psychology of Religion?

Psychologists of religion want to know what religion is *psychologically*. Our job is to comprehend the many ways in which a person's faith operates in his or her particular world. Religion is thus functional: It expresses and serves many individual, social, and cultural needs. Even though the approach employed here examines the person in the sociocultural context, it focuses primarily on the individual; this distinguishes psychological analysis from sociology and anthropology, which examine religion in society and culture—though sometimes the distinction is difficult to make. We accept the call by Emmons and Paloutzian (2003, p. 395; emphasis in original) for “a new *multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm*” for the study of religion. We also accept Roth's (1987) argument that psychology is best advanced by a commitment to a methodological pluralism.

The basic goal of psychology is to understand people. Psychologists attempt to do this by studying human motivation, cognition, and behavior. The psychology of religion is but one of many applications of this rather broad definition of psychology; in fact, over 50 specialties have been designated divisions of the American Psychological Association. These divisions represent not only such basic psychological topics as personality, coping/adjustment, clinical psychology, psychological development, and social psychology, but also such specific domains as health psychology, psychology of women, gay and lesbian issues, and peace psychology. For us, the most pertinent one is Division 36, Psychology of Religion, which has approximately 1,600 members. Although these psychologists are also involved in many if not all of the other divisions, they concern themselves with the application of their other specialties to religion, or at least to the ways in which people relate to their faith. The reader may be surprised to learn that there are no graduate programs in the United States designed to offer a degree in the psychology of religion. Rather, most graduate students in psychology get their degrees in a more general domain, such as clinical or social psychology, and then apply that field of study to religious experience. The members of Division 36 both conduct research on the role of religion in life and apply what they learn to the problems people confront in the course of living. This requires that psychologists of religion learn about religious motivation, religious cognition, and religious behavior—the topics that are discussed in these pages.

Understanding Our Limits

We must always keep in mind that there is a major difference between religion per se and religious behavior, motivation, perception, and cognition. We study these human considerations, not religion as such. It is important, therefore, that psychologists of religion recognize their limits. The psychological study of religion cannot directly answer questions about the truth claims of any religion; attempting to do so is beyond its scope. A psychologist of religion may offer insights into why a person holds a specific belief or engages in a particular religious behavior, but this says nothing directly about the truth claim itself that may underlie the specific belief or behavior. Psychologists have no privileged calling to challenge religious institutions and their doctrines. God or any other divine being is not our domain; neither is the world vision of churches. We do not enter into debates of faith versus reason, of one theology versus another, or of religion versus science. In addition, it is not our place to question any

religion's revelations, traditions, or scriptures. Psychology as a social and behavioral science is our resource, and we expend our energies at this level of understanding. However, having said this, we also acknowledge that psychology has implications affecting all of the domains just discussed.

The Psychology of Religion in Context

By now, it should be clear that our approach emphasizes the empirical and scientific; we go where theory and data take us. Since most psychological research has been conducted within the Judeo-Christian framework, this material provides us with the overwhelming majority of our citations (Gorsuch, 1984). Where information is available outside the Judeo-Christian realm, however, we pursue it. Our role is to search in mind, society, and culture for the nature of religious thinking and behavior. The sociocultural context is the external foundation for religious beliefs, attitudes, values, behavior, and experience. Again, the essential psychological point here is that psychologists of religion do not study religion per se; they study people in relation to their faith, and examine how this faith may influence other facets of their lives.

Whereas sociologists and anthropologists look to the external setting in which religion exists, we psychologists focus on the individual. Ours is an internal perspective. Even while we adopt the psychological stance, we must never lose sight of the fact that people cannot really be separated from their personal and social histories, and that these exist in relation to group and institutional life. Families, schools, and work are part of the "big picture," and we cannot abstract a person from these influences. They constitute a large part of what we discuss in the following chapters, in light of the call noted earlier for a multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm.

How Should We Study Religion Psychologically?

We have already provided the short answer to the question of how to study religion psychologically: We advocate an empirical, scientific approach. Now we'll explain. From a scientific perspective, a psychologist desires to gather objective data—that is, information that is both public and capable of being reproduced. Even though there is contention in scientific circles about how to go about collecting such information, the problem of the empirical scientist is to carry out research without letting his or her biases affect the outcome (Roth, 1987). The sociologist C. Wright Mills is reported to have declared, "I will make every effort to be objective, but I do not claim to be detached." As we will see, it is often not easy to remain either "detached" or "objective."

Perhaps the challenge of objectivity is even greater when the object of study is something about which people have strong opinions, such as religion. A fair question to ask is this: "Can a psychologist of religion who is also devoutly religious be objective?" From the standard scientific perspective, an individual who is both a believer and a scientist may experience a conflicting struggle for definitive answers, and thus may be less able or less qualified to be objective. One should note, however, that theological conviction is a problem not just for a religious psychologist, but for any psychologist who takes a stand regarding religion. The agnostic and the atheist likewise must constantly seek to avoid prejudices that may jeopardize objectivity.

Though it is certainly true that extreme positions exacerbate conflicts (Reich, 2000), “extreme” is in the eye of the beholder; that is, what is reasonable to either a committed believer or a committed scientist may seem unreasonable and extreme to the other. Examination of the “objective” realm may necessitate parallel examination of one’s “subjective” commitments. Self-examination is a prerequisite to self-understanding and to the avoidance of short-sighted prejudices. At the very least, all researchers should acknowledge their own vulnerabilities to bias, and should resolve to prevent (as much as possible) those biases from driving their research and conclusions.

A scientific treatment of religion may be subject to the criticism that science is usurping religious prerogatives—something we have already stated we are trying to avoid. There are several ways to consider the relationship. First, in order to accomplish this goal, one might want to adopt an approach described by the late Stephen Jay Gould (1999). Gould argued that there is no inherent conflict between religion and science, insofar as science deals with facts and religion with values. Thus religion and science are nonoverlapping domains of teaching authority. This is a version of “giving to God that which is God’s, and to Caesar that which is Caesar’s.” However, Gould’s dichotomy is unsatisfactory to many faith traditions, which insist on the historical accuracy of what others see as myths, and which also accept as fact events (e.g., miracles) that are unacceptable to science. A second approach available to the religiously committed scholar is to consider science as an avenue to God. This implies that God primarily works through natural law and processes. Another religious judgment might claim that a religious psychologist gains insight into God’s way in the world, and that humanity may possibly be endowed with a naturalistic awareness of God’s existence. As interesting as these perspectives may be, if we are to be true psychologists of religion, we must wear the scientific mantle when we conduct our research and formulate our theories about faith in the life of the individual.

Let’s Be Realistic

We have stated our hopes and ideals. The problem is the way people, including psychologists, tend to think and behave in real life. Professional psychologists are quite as subject to prejudices against religion as their religious peers have been to prejudices against psychology. Some clinicians perceive religion as inducing mental pathology and countering constructive thinking and behavior (Cortes, 1999). At times in this book, we will see that religion creates problems and can be “hazardous to one’s health.” We will also see that religion functions in a much more constructive manner for the majority of people. We further show that the kinds of religion being judged and the standards used to judge religion have an impact on any evaluation of the usefulness of personal faith. Indeed, anyone can selectively employ psychological research to make a case either for or against religion. The better quest is to understand religion in its manifold varieties.

It is obvious that a scientific, empirical approach is the one favored in this volume, but we do not take this in the narrow sense of focusing only upon laboratory-based experimental research. Any empirical method that helps us understand religion is accepted, including qualitative methods. By taking this perspective, we intend to note the potential for biased views to enter the picture and to reduce such bias, even as we admit our own vulnerability to bias. Indeed, we three authors have varied faith commitments, and we hold varying values.

The Necessity of Theory

Knowledge has to be meaningfully ordered, and theories can provide that necessary order. Theory is therefore central to an empirical approach. The noted social psychologist Kurt Lewin is reported to have said that “there is nothing as practical as a good theory.” Theories are the ways we have of organizing our thoughts and ideas, so that the data we collect make sense because all of the relevant variables have been studied. Without theories, we have little more than a random and confusing collection of research results. So we need to develop theories to tell us what factors or variables may or may not be pertinent when certain problems and issues are examined. Theories should first be formulated in interaction with any available data, and then should be used to guide research.

But where do these theories come from? The prime source for the psychology of religion has usually been mainstream psychology—primarily personality and social psychology, though clinical, developmental, and cognitive psychology have also provided theoretical foundations. Let us consider what Hill and Gibson (2008) have identified as three theories of continuing promise for the psychology of religion. First, attribution theory has been instrumental in guiding research in the psychology of religion and has been a central guiding theory in what is now the fourth edition of this book. Second, many issues in the study of personal faith involve personality, mental disorder, and adjustment; hence coping theory is of great importance. Third, there is much concern about how personal religion develops in early life and changes over the lifespan. As these examples suggest, psychology is a complex field with a large number of subdisciplines. All have the potential to provide theories for the psychology of religion.

Even though we usually look to the main body of psychological knowledge to guide us theoretically, there is no reason why the psychology of religion itself may not eventually provide us with new and constructive directions. Indeed, some of its findings do not fit well with other parts of psychology; this implies that these other subareas may be able to benefit from the psychological study of religion. For example, the recent positive psychology movement, particularly with its focus on human flourishing and the development of virtue, may draw many insights and ideas from the psychology of religion (Hill, 1999).

Clearly, we are not confined to psychology and its subdisciplines for theoretical guidance. Sociology, anthropology, and biology cannot be ignored. Indeed, because the significance of religion is of such breadth and magnitude, we cannot deny the possibility that fruitful ideas will come from other scientific and nonscientific sources. Even theologies themselves can serve as psychological theories (Spilka, 1970, 1976). But to say that we take ideas from such other areas does not mean that the ideas remain unchanged. They may be altered because the psychology of religion has somewhat different interests or because modifications are necessary to enhance their fit with our data. The theories we hold are “open”; they are always amenable to new information. To close our minds is the most impractical thing we can do. Our approach is therefore both theoretical and empirical, because neither aspect by itself is meaningful.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

To this point, we have tried to answer the “why,” “what,” and “how” questions about the psychology of religion. Before we go any further, maybe we need to step back and ask an even

more fundamental question: The psychological study of religion requires that we understand what religion is in the first place. For thousands of years, scholars have been writing and talking about religion. Chances are that more books have been written on religion, or some aspect of religion, than any other topic in the history of humanity. With such impressive evidence of concern, who would have the temerity to ask, “Just what is it you are talking about?” Boldness notwithstanding, this is a very good question to pose to anyone.

There may be a tendency for some to disregard such questions as unnecessarily pedantic—one of those exercises that interests academics, but in which few others see value. “I know religion when I see it” is a common (but vague) response, and indeed there may be considerable agreement on some aspects of being religious, at least within a given culture. Such a response, however, not only fails to satisfy scientific and intellectual curiosity; it leaves any observation open to the phenomenon that social psychologists refer to as the *false-consensus effect* (Ross, Greene, & House, 1977)—the tendency to overestimate the extent to which others hold one’s own opinions or views. There is no reason to think that religious perceptions and beliefs are uniquely immune from such cognitive bias. Hence what one person is sure to call religious may be far removed from another person’s understanding, especially when we begin to analyze religion across traditions and cultures.

Is Defining Religion Even Possible?

Any attempt to define religion therefore immediately runs into trouble. We feel quite confident that we can come to a meeting of the minds if we deal with the Judeo-Christian heritage and the Islamic tradition, but once we go beyond these to the religions of eastern Asia, Africa, Polynesia, and a host of other localities that are not well known in North America and Europe—or even to the Native religious traditions of the United States and Canada—we find ourselves in great difficulty. Religion may encompass the supernatural, the non-natural, theism, deism, atheism, monotheism, polytheism, and both finite and infinite deities; it may also include practices, beliefs, and rituals that almost totally defy circumscription and definition.

The best efforts of anthropologists to define “religion” are frustrated at every turn. Guthrie (1996) claims that “the term religion is a misleading reification, labeling a probabilistic aggregate of similar, but not identical ideas in individual heads” (p. 162). In other words, we select a number of ideas and observations that we think belong together and call it religion. The fact that we use one word to describe a complex of beliefs, behaviors, and experiences as “religious” is often enough for us to believe that religion is really one entity, and that we can expect to find the same or similar phenomena anywhere else in the world.

The assumption that the term “religion” really represents one entity leads to a second question: “On what basis do we group the components we now call ‘religion’?” The evident answer is that we call upon our experiences, obviously in our own society and culture, and then uncritically generalize these to other peoples. For example, if idols are found, they are often considered representations of the Judeo-Christian God; rituals are frequently viewed as religious ceremonies; and trances are commonly termed “mystical religious states.” We distinguish religion from other aspects of our culture, but such a distinction may be invalid elsewhere, and our interpretations can be very wrong. The noted anthropologist Murray Wax (1984) affirms “that in most non-Western societies the natives do not distinguish religion as we do” (p. 16).

The sociologist J. Milton Yinger (1967) maintained that “any definition of religion is likely to be satisfactory only to its author” (p. 18), and a noted early psychologist of religion, George Coe (1916), said that he would “purposely refrain from giving a formal definition of religion . . . partly because definitions carry so little information as to facts” (p. 13). The situation has changed little in the past 90-plus years. However, another early psychologist of religion (Dresser, 1929) suggested that “religion, like poetry and most other living things, cannot be defined. But some characteristic marks may be given” (p. 441). Following Dresser’s advice, we avoid the pitfalls of unproductive, far-ranging, grandly theoretical definitions of religion. Quite simply, we are not ready for them, nor may we ever be. Many are available in the literature, but the highly general, vague, and abstract manner in which they are usually stated reduces their usefulness either for illuminating the concept of religion or for undertaking empirical research. Our purpose is to enable our readers to understand the variety of ways in which psychologists have defined religion by identifying, in the words of Dresser, its “characteristic marks.”

However, we admit that we are in a quandary. We deal largely in this book with the Western religious tradition (because that is where most research has been conducted), but we are saying that religion performs many functions for many different people. The extent to which research findings generalize to other religious traditions has been largely unexamined. Surely some of these functions may vary greatly in terms of their surface appearance; however, we feel that at their core they represent the same elemental human needs and roles, about which we will have more to say.

Spirituality and/or Religion?

“Spirit” and “spiritual” are words which are constantly used and easily taken for granted by all writers upon religion—more constantly and easily, perhaps, than any of the other terms in the mysterious currency of faith. (Underhill, 1933, p. 1)

This observation is perhaps even more applicable today than it was over 75 years ago. In the past two decades, “spirituality” has become a popular word. It is now common to refer to “spirituality” instead of “religion,” but without drawing any clear distinction between them. Furthermore, much of Western society seems captivated by the notion of spirituality. It is not uncommon to see the topic as the cover story of popular newspapers such as *USA Today*, or news magazines such as *Newsweek*. After reviewing the available literature on spirituality in the early 1990s, Spilka (1993), in his frustration, claimed that spirituality is so “fuzzy” that it has become “a word that embraces obscurity with passion” (p. 1). However, Hood (2003b) has argued that “spirituality” is a fluid term often used in opposition to the clearly defined commitments of the religiously faithful. Though Daniel Helminiak (1987, 1996a, 1996b) has written a number of impressive scholarly psychological/philosophical treatises on spirituality, psychologists of religion have not taken his theoretical guidance and provided the kind of objective assessment we are stressing here. On the other hand, Gorsuch and Miller (1999) have suggested that the term “spirituality” can have meaning in the psychology of religion if clear operational definitions are made. As we will see throughout this text, progress is being made to allow clearer empirical distinctions between those who primarily define themselves as “both religious and spiritual” and those who define themselves as “more spiritual than religious” (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005).

The Spirituality–Religion Debate

The last few years have witnessed a growing response to the question of spirituality that draws some distinctions between spirituality and religion. It is as if a “critical mass” of vague definitions has been reached. This has stimulated a new concern with the conceptualization of spirituality that directs our thinking toward its objective assessment and application through research (Hill et al., 2000; Hood, 2000b; W. R. Miller, 1999; Pargament, 1999; Pargament & Mahoney, 2002; Zinnbauer et al., 1997; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). Many current thinkers are therefore attempting to create theoretical and operational definitions of spirituality that either distinguish it from personal religiosity or show how the two concepts are related.

A traditional distinction exists between being “spiritual” and being “religious” that can be used to enhance our use of both terms (Gorsuch, 1993). The connotations of “spirituality” are more personal and psychological than institutional, whereas the connotations of “religion” are more institutional and sociological. In this usage, the two terms are not synonymous, but distinct: Spirituality involves a person’s beliefs, values, and behavior, while religiousness denotes the person’s involvement with a religious tradition and institution.

Psychologists seem to be embracing this distinction. It should be noted that only a minority of psychologists are religious in the classical sense of being affiliated with religious organizations, but many more see themselves as spiritual (Shafranske & Malony, 1985). Despite the negative reaction “religion” engenders in most psychologists, aspects of it have become recognized as important for major areas of life. These include the benefits of meditation (Benson, 1975; Benson & Stark, 1996), as well as the evidence that religious people are less likely to use illegal substances, abuse alcohol, or be sexually promiscuous (Gorsuch, 1988, 1995; Gorsuch & Butler, 1976). As a result, religious persons possess better physical health than those engaging in these actions (e.g., Larson et al., 1989).

To some people, wanting only what is good from spirituality without the institutional baggage of religion is an “easy religion” or “cheap grace”; to others, it is “separating the valuable from the superstitious.” Clearly, there is considerable debate regarding the potential separation of these concepts. Donahue (1998) forcefully claims in the title of a paper that “there is no true spirituality apart from religion.” Pargament (1999) views the separatist trend with ambivalence, and offers guidance to prevent a polarization of these realms. Regardless of how the professionals debate this issue, the distinction may be sharpening on the popular level with spirituality the favored notion (Roof, 1993).

It is still an open question whether the practice of spirituality outside religion can be adequately defined. Hood (2003b) argues that it can be, and we have considerable discussion of empirical data supporting this claim throughout this text. If it can, will it then be found to relate to the same variables as religion? The proponents of Transcendental Meditation provide support that some effects of meditation are separate from those of religion (see Chapter 10), but this is a difficult area to research, for training people in a meditation style independent of a religion does not mean that they practice meditation apart from their faith. No one knows at this point whether spirituality will be a more viable psychological construct than religion once it is operationally distinguished from religion. However, the spirituality–religion distinction is gaining considerable empirical support. Distinctions are emerging that show religion to be associated with conservatism, while spirituality is associated with openness to change (Fontaine, Duriez, Luyten, Corveleyn, & Hutsebaut, 2005). Likewise, in a

meta-analysis of several studies using the Schwartz *Value Scale* (Schwartz, 1992), Saroglou, Delpierre and Dernelle (2004) found that religious persons scored higher on Conformity and Tradition subscales. They also scored low on subscales assessing values associated with spirituality, such as Universalism. Thus religion may be an institutional expression of particular (but clearly not all) aspects of spirituality. Furthermore, as we shall discuss later in this text, spirituality is associated with many paranormal phenomena (see Chapters 10 and 11)—phenomena that both religion and science tend to reject.

Can We Distinguish Spirituality from Religion?

Defining “spirituality” in a manner distinct from “religion” can start from the past meanings of the ancient and complex term “spirituality.” In Western thought, it has been a part of classical dualistic thinking that pits the material world against the spiritual world. Some things we can see, hear, smell, or touch, whereas elements that exist in the mental world can at best only be inferred from the material world. Non-Western thinkers have seen these two areas as more closely intertwined, but “spirit” still has the sense of being immaterial. For example, in Thailand a house must be provided for the spirits of a parcel of land before it can be used (many Thai restaurants in the United States have such houses); although the spirits themselves dwell outside of ordinary experience by the human senses, they must still be appeased by a physical dwelling.

A contemporary illustration of setting spirituality apart can be seen in the way many Christian Protestant denominations and churches practice church governance. In these congregations, there are two governing bodies, often called the “deacons” and the “elders” (as they are defined in the New Testament). The deacons are concerned with the material aspects of congregational life, including maintaining a church’s physical property and taking food to the needy. The elders are responsible for the spiritual welfare of the church. This includes taking the comforts of the faith to the sick and grieving, and encouraging activities that enhance the members’ relationships to God. In other words, the elders are concerned with the inner being of the church members, and the deacons with the more physical aspects of the members’ and the church’s existence. Rarely do members have trouble defining the “physical” and “spiritual” matters of the congregation. But what these church members know, the psychology of religion (including the psychology of spirituality) needs to spell out—that is, to define operationally.

Another approach to defining spirituality from classical usage is to identify it with “spiritual disciplines.” These include not only such acts as prayer and meditation, but have also included fasting and doing penance for sins. For example, monks retire to a monastery to practice such disciplines in order to lead a more spiritual life than is commonly possible outside the monastery. With the traditional Christian Protestant usage noted above and the set of spiritual disciplines, we could just divide the psychology of religion into personal practices (the spiritual) and communal practices (the religious). That is, we could employ both terms, but would not use them synonymously.

There are other ways of defining spirituality that shift the construct to new grounds, and so allow testing of whether “religion” and “spirituality” are just interchangeable terms. Here is one: “Spirituality is the quest for understanding ourselves in relationship to our view of ultimate reality, and to live in accordance with that understanding” (Gorsuch, 2002, p. 8). Some differences between this definition of spirituality and a definition of religion include the following:

- Spirituality is personal and subjective.
- Spirituality does not require an institutional framework. Its authenticity requires no consensus or “meeting of the minds.”
- A spiritual person is deeply concerned about value commitments.
- A person can be spiritual without a deity (although some would say that the “view of ultimate reality” always includes what Alcoholics Anonymous refers to as a “higher power”).
- Religiousness is a subset of spirituality, which means that religiousness invariably involves spirituality, but that there may be nonreligious spirituality as well.

There appears to be a growing consensus that these views are useful in distinguishing religion from spirituality; however, this consensus is still far from being unanimous. We do not intend to force any distinction on the profession—and, in fact, it is safe to say that even we three authors of this text do not fully agree with each other about the meaning of these terms. These are highly ambiguous terms, and the astute consumer of research needs to check carefully what is actually being measured, rather than to rely exclusively on any researcher’s use of the term “religious” or “spiritual.”

Defining Religion Operationally

From an empirical perspective, what is used to measure religion or spirituality in research is therefore the crucial element. “Operational definitions” literally focus on “operations”—the methods and procedures used to assess something. They are the experimental manipulations plus the measures and instruments employed. With respect to religion, what does it mean to be religious? How do we indicate religiousness? Operationally, we often identify people as religious if they are members of a church or other congregation, attend religious services, read the Bible or other sacred writings, contribute money to religious causes, observe religious holidays or days of fasting, pray frequently, say grace before meals, and accept religiously based diet restrictions, among other possibilities. Many psychologists also look to the beliefs that the devout express, as well as the experiences they report. Frequently, respondents fill out questionnaires about these expressions, and the questions they answer are the operational definitions for that study. There are a great many such operations that illustrate commitment to one’s faith.

Basically, operational definitions tell us what a researcher means when religious language is used. For example, suppose we desire to evaluate the degree to which individuals believe in “fundamentalist” doctrines. We might then administer a questionnaire specifically designed to obtain agreement or disagreement with such principles. The Altemeyer and Hunsberger (2004) Religious Fundamentalism Scale might be selected, and we could report its scores for the sample tested. Fundamentalism is thus operationally defined by this measuring instrument. Of course, the scale itself is based on a conceptualization of fundamentalism that needs to be reasonable and testable. However, Williamson, Hood, Ahmad, Sadiq, and Hill (in press) have developed another measure of fundamentalism based on the theory of intratextuality developed by Hood, Hill, and Williamson (2005). Fulton, Gorsuch, and Maynard (1999) have used yet another scale that they call Fundamentalism. Finally, Streib (2008, pp. 58–59) and his colleagues have created a subscale of the Religious Schema Scale named Truth in Text and Teachings, which is also a measure of fundamentalism. This leaves us with at least four different operational measures of fundamentalism. It is important to examine the measures

(as well as their underlying conceptual development) closely, to determine how similar and how different their items are. Throughout this volume, we emphasize operational definitions of different aspects or forms of faith. This is the only way we can understand religion from a scientific standpoint. Not all measures of religion are created equal; some are better than others, in that they conform more closely to certain standards of good measurement. We investigate those standards more thoroughly in Chapter 2.

THE NEED FOR MEANING AS A FRAMEWORK FOR THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

In the successful 2007 movie *The Bucket List*, two men, drawn together by a hospital stay where they each learn they have less than a year to live, decide to spend that last year doing all the exciting and wonderful things they have always wanted to do: skydive, climb the Himalayas, go on a hunting safari in Africa, and (of course) chase after beautiful women. Such fast living is the norm for one of the men, a wealthy corporate executive (who bankrolls all of the planned flings) played by Jack Nicholson; the executive has been married four times and produced but one child, from whom he is now estranged and whom he has not seen for years. The other man, a car mechanic played by Morgan Freeman, has lived a simple life where faith and family have been given highest priorities, though admittedly his marriage of 45 years to the one woman to whom he has always remained faithful no longer has the luster it once had. As the list is being checked off and the year inevitably moves toward what both men know to be the end of their lives, their thoughts begin to shift toward more permanent values. The man with the simple life recognizes his wife as the faithful gem that he has always known her to be, but has failed to appreciate. The stubborn jet setter, through some painful but teachable lessons learned from his cohort, now decides that it is finally time to get to know his daughter and young granddaughter (whom he has never seen), allowing him to tick off one more item on the list: “to kiss the most beautiful woman in the world.” Both men have finally discovered what they believe really matters in life.

The assumptions forming the fundamental framework for this book are that the search for meaning is of central importance to human functioning, and that religion is uniquely capable of helping in that search. *The Bucket List* is not an overtly religious film, but it does deal with the question of what people find meaningful in life. Religion plays a significant role in the life of one of the two main characters. (Truth be told, it would have been hard for the screenwriter not to touch at least tangentially on religion, given the film’s intention to deal realistically with questions and values of ultimate concern.) The answers to these two characters’ search for meaning and significance fit neatly into three psychological realms—cognition, motivation, and social living. These are broad, general realms that psychologists have long recognized as centrally important to human existence, and through which many human characteristics are universally applicable. We explore how religion meets the need for meaning for many individuals through each of these realms. Our framework suggests that the cognitive, motivational, and social aspects of finding meaning in life offer us the directions necessary for a rather “grand” psychological theory for understanding the role of religion in human life. When we look to cognition, we discover that people are active meaning-making creatures through whose efforts some sense of global meaning is achieved. The study of motivation in finding meaning focuses us on the need of people to exercise control over themselves and their environment. Social life, which we encapsulate in the concept of “soci-

ality,” recognizes that people necessarily exist within relationships. Not only must they relate to others to survive and prosper, but it is often through their relational selves that meaning is discovered. In short, people need people, and it is through others that a sense of meaning is often most fully experienced. We now turn our attention to each of these realms.

The Cognitive Search for Meaning

It is safe to assume that all mentally capable people, not just those who are religious, struggle at some point or another to comprehend what life is all about. People need to find their particular niche in the world. It is hardly surprising that pastor Rick Warren’s (2002) book *The Purpose-Driven Life* is reported to be the best-selling book of all time, except for the Bible. Viktor Frankl, a survivor of the Auschwitz and Dachau concentration camps in World War II, wrote a book called *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Frankl, 1962), which was identified in 1991 by *The New York Times* as among the 10 most influential books in the United States. The struggle with existential questions and the corresponding search for answers sometimes lead individuals to religion. Though there is a kind of scientific vagueness to the idea of “meaning”—and thus psychologists sometimes prefer to use other overlapping terms, such as “cognitive structure”—no other word seems to capture as well its inherent significance, and thus we employ the term without concern.

The first two editions of this book used attribution theory, a staple of social psychology for decades, as a framework for understanding the psychology of religion (see Spilka, Shaver, & Kirkpatrick, 1985, for a full explication of the application of this theory to religious experience). Attribution theory is concerned with explanations of behavior—primarily causal explanations about people, things, and events—and is therefore a theory of meaning making. Such explanations are expressed in ideas that assign roles and influences to various situational and dispositional factors. For instance, we might attribute a person’s lung cancer to being exposed to the smoking of coworkers, to his or her own smoking, or to the view that “God works in mysterious ways.” All of these are attributions. Research examining such meanings and their ramifications became the cornerstone of cognitive social psychology, and attributional approaches were soon extended to explain how people understand emotional states and much of what happens to them and to others (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Among the factors that may be involved in understanding the kinds of attributions people make are situational and personal-dispositional influences; the nature of the event to be explained (whether it is positive, negative, or neutral); and the event domain (e.g., medical, social, economic). We will also want to know what cues are present in the situation. For example, does the event take place in a church, on a mountaintop, or in a business office? Similarly, when we turn to personal-dispositional concerns, we may need to get information on the attributor’s background, personality, attitudes, language strengths and weaknesses, cognitive inclinations, and other biases. Research Box 1.1 presents a representative attributional study in the psychology of religion.

All of this is well and good. Attribution theory has been extremely useful to social psychology, and Hill and Gibson (2008) have suggested that it has been underutilized by researchers in the psychology of religion. As an effort to acquire new knowledge, the attributional process appears to be a first step in making things meaningful (Kruglanski, Hasmel, Maides, & Schwartz, 1978). Making attributions, however, is only the first step and is therefore only a small part of the total process. People (whether religious or not) do not talk about their attributions. They talk about what makes life meaningful. Rick Warren’s book would

RESEARCH BOX 1.1. General Attribution Theory for the Psychology of Religion:
The Influence of Event Character on Attributions to God (Spilka & Schmidt, 1983a)

This research focused on the components of events that occur to people. When seeking explanations, is a person influenced by (1) whether the event happens to oneself or others; (2) how important it is; (3) whether it is positive or negative; and (4) what its domain is (economic, social, or medical)? Given these possible influences, the emphasis of this study was on the degree to which attributions are made to God.

A total of 135 youths from introductory psychology classes and from a church participated in the study. Twelve short stories were written to depict various social, economic, and medical occurrences. Of the four stories in each of these domains, two described incidents of minor to moderate significance, and two described important happenings. One of each pair was positive, and one was negative. In half of the stories, the referent person was the responder; the other half of the stories referred to someone else. The participants were thus dealing with variations in incident domain, plus the dimensions of how important the incident was, whether the occurrence was positive or negative, and whether it was personal or impersonal. In addition, each participant was able to make attributions to (1) the characteristics of the person in the story; (2) possible others, even if not present in the story; (3) the role of chance; (4) God; or (5) the personal faith of the individual in the story. Lastly, two experiments were constructed. In the first, all of the participants filled out the forms in a school setting; in the second study, half the participants were in a church and half in school. This was an attempt to determine situational influences.

No situational differences were found, but all of the other conditions yielded significance. Attributions to God were mostly made for occurrences that were medical, positive, and important. Many significant interactions among these factors occurred, and though the personal-impersonal factor per se was not statistically significant, it was in its relationships to the other effects. Other research on attributions to God has revealed similar influences (Gorsuch & Smith, 1983).

hardly have sold if it had been titled *The Attribution-Driven Life*! In the third edition, and now (even more so) in the fourth edition of this text, we have therefore attempted to provide a more inclusive framework. Scientists, of course, may not have the luxury of deriving and testing specific empirical hypotheses from such a broad construct as “meaning.” For them, more specific theories such as attribution theory are better capable of providing the framework necessary for conducting empirical studies. For us, though, it is more helpful to consider this research in terms of the big picture. In essence, people need to make sense out of the world in order to live; it must be made meaningful. When we turn to religion, we focus on higher-level cognitions and some understanding of ourselves and our relationship to others and the world. The result is meaning—the cognitive significance of sensory and perceptual stimulation and information to us.

Religion and the Search for Meaning

Contemporary forms of Aristotle’s dictum “All men by nature desire to know” (McKeon, 1941, p. 689) include Argyle’s (1959) claim that “a major mechanism behind religious beliefs is a

purely cognitive desire to understand” (p. 57), or Budd’s (1973) view that “religion as a form of knowledge . . . answers preexistent and eternal problems of meaning” (p. 79). Clark (1958) maintained that “religion more than any other human function satisfies the need for meaning in life” (p. 419). Why? What is it specifically about religion that entices so many people to look to it to find meaning? For some religious people, the answer is simple: It speaks truth, so they believe, and for some the truth it speaks is so exclusive that no other claims of truth can even compete. Others, of course, find such claims preposterous, even though they too may find meaning through religion. Religion fills in the blanks in our knowledge of life and the world, and offers us a sense of security. This is especially true when we are confronted with crisis and death. Religion is therefore a normal, natural, functional development whereby “persons are prepared intellectually and emotionally to meet the non-manipulable aspects of existence positively by means of a reinterpretation of the total situation” (Bernhardt, 1958, p. 157).

Park (2005) provides an important distinction between what she calls “global meaning,” which refers to a general life meaning that involves beliefs, goals, and subjective feelings, and “meaning making,” which occurs during times of crisis or difficult circumstances. The two concepts are not independent of each other, and religion is invoked in both senses of the term. “Meaning making” is “a *process* of working to restore global life meaning when it has been disrupted or violated, typically by some major or unpleasant life event” (Park, 2005, p. 299; emphasis in original), and we focus on this throughout many chapters in this book. In this introductory chapter, however, we wish to focus on global meaning, which in Park’s model is important to everyday life.

Why Turn to Religion for Meaning?

Why is religion the framework to which so many people turn in their quest to find meaning? First, it must be acknowledged that not all people attempt to find the meaning of life through religion. For many, including those who have tried religion and found it unfulfilling, a subjective sense of meaning is often successfully found through means other than religion. We live, in the words of the social philosopher Charles Taylor (2007), in a “secular age,” where the roles and functions of religion in society have changed. Taylor argues not so much that religion has been replaced, but that it has been transformed through an ever-continuing change of options. Each option becomes a new departure point through which new spiritual landscapes are explored; in some cases, people have traveled so far that the old religious mooring can no longer even be identified. So we have gone from a world where belief in God was a given to a world where even atheism is a legitimate option, as we discuss in Chapter 9. One set of continuous changes described by Taylor has resulted in a redefined understanding of meaning or fullness from something that comes totally from “beyond” human life to something that can come from “within” human life. Thus, in our secular age, a sense of “transcendence” (something that goes beyond our usual limits) is no longer a necessary requirement for meaning; fullness or meaning in life may also be found in the “immanent” (the state of being within) order of nature, such as in our sense of human flourishing.

For many people, however, religion continues to serve well as a provider of meaning. Hood et al. (2005) have identified four criteria by which religion is *uniquely* capable of providing global meaning: “comprehensiveness,” “accessibility,” transcendence,” and “direct claims.” Let us consider each criterion. First, religion is the most comprehensive of all meaning systems in that it can subsume many other sources of meaning, such as work, family, achievement, personal relationships, and enduring values and ideals. Silberman (2005a)

demonstrates religion's comprehensiveness by pointing out the extensive range of issues that religion addresses at both descriptive and prescriptive levels: beliefs about the world and self (e.g., about human nature, the social and natural environment, the afterlife), contingencies and expectations (e.g., rewards for righteousness and punishment for doing evil), goals (e.g., benevolence, altruism, supremacy), actions (e.g., compassion, charity, violence), and emotions (e.g., love, joy, peace). Religion's special meaning-making power is due, in part, to its comprehensive nature.

The second major reason for religion's success as a meaning maker is that it is so accessible (Hood et al., 2005). Many conservative religious groups often stress the importance of a religious world view—a religious belief that contributes to global meaning. The accessibility of such a view is often promoted through doctrinal teachings and creeds, religious education, and sometimes even rules of acceptable and unacceptable behavioral practices—often in the name of developing a system of values compatible with the religious tradition. Such people are what Robert Wuthnow (1998) refers to as “religious dwellers.” Religious dwellers, as the term implies, are comfortable in establishing and living by the “rules of the house”; they find great comfort in a religion that is not only comprehensive, but also comprehensible. However, not all religious people are dwellers, and some may find religion useful as a different avenue of meaning making. Viktor Frankl (2000) maintained that “the more comprehensive the meaning, the less comprehensible it is” (p. 143), and indeed it is precisely religion's or spirituality's elusive character that makes it so attractive for many people. In contrast to the religious dwellers, Wuthnow (1998) calls these individuals “spiritual seekers”—people who are willing to explore “new spiritual vistas” and are comfortable negotiating “among complex and confusing meanings of spirituality” (p. 5). Such individuals may be more fascinated with the questions than the answers, and may enjoy the freedom from what are otherwise perceived to be the restraints of a religious community connection. Such individuals may still find meaning through their religion, but this meaning is often found more in the process of the search itself than in the answers uncovered or derived.

Religion, by its very nature for many, involves a sense of transcendence—the third reason identified by Hood et al. (2005) for religion's success as a meaning provider. As stated earlier, S. M. Taylor (2007) persuasively argues that transcendence should not be insisted upon as a necessary criterion for a sense of significance and fullness. Nevertheless, a belief in a transcendent and authoritative being, especially when complete sovereignty is attributed to that being (as in the case of Western monotheistic religion), is the basis of the most convincing and fulfilling sense of meaning for many (Wong, 1998). Perhaps more than any other system of meaning, religion provides a focus on that which is “beyond me.” Thus many people have “ultimate concerns” (Emmons, 1999) that require some belief in an ultimate authority, be it God or some other conception of transcendence in which higher meaning is found. Walter Houston Clark (1958) put it this way: “At the end of the road lies God, the Beyond, the final essence of the Cosmos, yet so secretly hidden with the soul that no man is able to persuade another that he has fulfilled the quest” (p. 419).

Finally, no other system of meaning is so bold in its proclaimed ability to provide a sense of significance. Meaning is embedded within religion's sacred character, so that it points to humanity's ultimate purpose—in the Judeo-Christian tradition, for example, to love and worship God. As S. M. Taylor (2007) notes, for the committed Christian, devotion to a loving or even judgmental God (as in the injunction “Thy will be done”) is contingent on nothing else. Christ's sacrificial love for humans, a staple of Christian theology, caused the well-known

18th-century Christian hymn writer Isaac Watts (1707) to put it this way: “Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.” For some, such bold and sometimes exclusive claims are perhaps reason enough for suspicion. Others find these claims so convincing that religion demands their “all.”

The Motivational Search for Meaning: The Need for Control

Why is personal meaning so important in the first place? Philosophers and theologians have long debated the underlying causes of the search for meaning and significance. Of the myriad of possibilities, one that is particularly intriguing and of heuristic value to psychologists of religion is that meaning helps meet perhaps an even greater underlying need for control—an idea that also has a long history in both philosophy and psychology. Control in the sense of power is central in the philosophies of Hobbes and Nietzsche. Reid (1969) spoke of power as one of the basic human desires. Adler termed it “an intrinsic ‘necessity of life’” (quoted in Vyse, 1997, p. 131). Though the ideal in life is *actual* control, the need to perceive personal mastery is often so great that the *illusion* of control will suffice. Lefcourt (1973) even suggests that this illusion “may be the bedrock on which life flourishes” (p. 425). Baumeister (1991) believes the subjective sense of personal efficacy to be the essence of control.

The attribution process described earlier represents not just a need for meaning, but also for mastery and control. Especially when threatened with harm or pain, all higher organisms seek to predict and/or control the outcomes of the events that affect them (Seligman, 1975). This fact has been linked by attribution theorists and researchers with novelty, frustration or failure, lack of control, and restriction of personal freedom (Berlyne, 1960; Wong, 1979; Wong & Weiner, 1981; Wortman, 1976). It may be that people gain a sense of control by making sense out of what is happening and being able to predict what will occur, even if the result is undesirable. Hence we sometimes hear of people who, after being given a bad health prognosis, still feel relieved because they at least now know something and are no longer left wondering.

Early attribution research demonstrated individual-difference patterns in identifying causes of events: themselves, luck/chance, or powerful other individuals (Levenson, 1974; Rotter, 1966, 1990). Religious populations appear to downplay the role of luck or fate (Gabbard, Howard, & Tageson, 1986). Welton, Adkins, Ingle, and Dixon (1996) argued that God control represented an additional control construct to those observed by Levenson (1974). They found not only that God control was independent of belief in chance and powerful others, but that it was also positively related to well-being—benefits normally only associated with internal control (Myers & Diener, 1995). So much current research exploring the connections between religion and health (see Chapter 13) utilizes such newly created measures as the God Locus of Health Control Scale (Wallston et al., 1999).

Religion and the Need for Control

Religion’s ability to offer meaning for virtually every life situation—particularly those that are most distressing, such as death and dying—also provides a measure of control over life’s vast uncertainties. Various techniques strengthen a person’s feeling of mastery, such as prayer and participation in religious rituals and ceremonies. An argument can be made that religious ritual and prayer are mechanisms for enhancing the sense of self-control and control

of one's world. Gibbs (1994) claims that supernaturalism arises when secular control efforts fail. Vyse (1997) further shows how lack of control relates to the development of and belief in superstition and magic. Indeed, the historic interplay of magic and religion has often been viewed as a response to uncertainty and helplessness. When other attempts at control are limited (e.g., when a death is impending), religious faith alone may provide an illusory, subjective sense of control to help people regain the feeling that they are doing something that may work. This enhanced subjective feeling of control is often capable of offering people the strength they need to succeed.

Religion and Self-Control

Yet another important sense of control addressed by religion is self-control. "Self-control" can be defined as the active inhibition of unwanted responses that might interfere with desired achievement (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007). Self-control, as an internal restraining mechanism, is a core psychological function underlying many of the virtues addressed by religion: compassion, justice, wisdom, humility, and so forth. Baumeister and Exline (1999) point out that a life of virtue frequently necessitates putting the collective interests of society and community above pure self-interest. In their estimation, the natural proclivity toward self-interest and personal gratification (the very definition in some religions of sin or personal evil), often at the expense of others, requires the necessity of self-regulation for the good of society. Self-control can thus be viewed as personality's "moral muscle," and therefore in some sense as a master virtue. Suggesting that "virtues seem based on the positive exercise of self-control, whereas sin and vice often revolve around failures of self-control" (p. 1175), Baumeister and Exline (1999) maintain that the seven deadly sins in traditional Christianity (gluttony, sloth, greed, lust, envy, anger, and pride) can best be thought of as the absence of self-regulation in overcoming excessive desire or striving toward inappropriate goals.

At the heart of the "self-control as a master virtue" argument is a view that human nature's general tendency is toward self-interest, and that the development of virtue must counteract this tendency. But this counteraction will require work. If indeed self-control is like a muscle, we should see evidence of both fatigue and eventual strengthening after continued use. Ironically, religion may be a contributor to both moral fatigue and moral fortitude. Consider, for example, both the person who feels defeated because of an inability to live according to the ideal expectations of the religious teachings, and the person who has developed healthy spiritual disciplines that provide a sense of meaning and joy.

The Social Embeddedness of Meaning: The Need for Relationships

Our emphasis on the cognitive and motivational aspects of the search for meaning should not be taken to mean that the search itself is conducted in isolation from others. Though it is perhaps true that the search for significance for those who profess to be "spiritual but not religious" does not, at first glance, require that the search receive validation and support from an identifiable group of people (Hill et al., 2000), the *need to belong* is a powerful human drive (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). A truly fundamental principle is that we humans cannot live without others. We are conceived and born in relationship and interdependence, and connections and interactions with others are indispensable throughout our entire lives.

Defining Sociality

“Sociality” refers to behaviors that relate organisms to one another, and that keep an individual identified with a group (Brewer, 1997). Included here are expressions of social support, cooperation, adherence to group standards, attachment to others, altruism, and many other actions that maintain effectively functioning groups. Faith systems accomplish these goals for many people, and in return the cultural order embraces religion.

Religion and Sociality

Religion connects individuals to each other and their groups; it socializes members into a community, and concurrently suppresses deviant behavior. As Lumsden and Wilson (1983) put it, religion is a “powerful device by which people are absorbed into a tribe and psychologically strengthened” (p. 7). In this way, both religious bodies and the societies of which they are components strengthen themselves in numbers and importance.

There is a circular pattern in this linking of social life to faith. Religion fosters social group unity, which further strengthens religious sentiments. Current data show that church members possess larger social support networks than nonmembers do; in addition, there is more positive involvement in intrafamily relationships among the religiously committed than among their less religious peers (Pargament, 1997). Many of these observations have been attributed to enhanced feelings of social belonging and integration into a community of like-minded thinkers. This may mean that church members and those reared in churchgoing families also join more social groups than nonmembers do in later life. Data support this inference (Graves, Wang, Mead, Johnson, & Klag, 1998).

Moreover, the importance of marriage and reproduction is invariably stressed by religious traditions (Hoult, 1958). Expectations to marry and have children probably influence reproductive success in couples where both spouses attend the same church, as such couples generally show high birth rates (Moberg, 1962). There is a strong need for new research in this area, as there may be much variation across different religious bodies. It does seem to be true of some growing conservative groups, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (also known as the Mormons). This mutually reinforcing pattern is also likely to limit access to those whose religious beliefs differ, and could contribute to relatively high divorce rates plus low marital satisfaction when people of diverse religious affiliations marry (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Levinger, 1979; Shortz & Worthington, 1994).

We may thus view religious faith as strengthening group bonds, welfare, and positive social evaluation. In addition, religion appears to eventuate in heightened reproductive and genetic potential. Obviously, religious affiliation opens important social channels for interpersonal approval and integration into society on many levels.

OVERVIEW

In this introductory chapter, we have tried to present some broad contours of our field, and have done so in a rather condensed manner. We have proposed that the search for meaning provides a useful and integrating theoretical framework for investigating the psychology of religion. We have also stressed the importance of theory and objectivity. We seek knowledge that is both public and reproducible. Our aim is to achieve a scientific circumscription

of the psychology of religion and to convey the importance of such a framework. The next chapter describes this approach in further detail. When this effort has been completed, we show how religion relates to biology, as well as to individual development throughout the lifespan; describe the experiential expressions of religion; and finally discuss the significance of faith in social life, coping, adjustment, and mental disorder. Simply put, religion is a central feature of human existence, the psychological appreciation of which we try to communicate in these pages.

From a scientific point of view, the most important feature of our integrating framework is that it is testable. In brief, religious commitment should relate positively to measures tapping the cognitive, motivational, and social needs for meaning. Yet we must admit that such findings cannot prove that religion totally originates from the needs specified here. Religious and spiritual experiences are far too complex to be reduced to single sets of psychological principles, as compelling as they might be. However, many of the research findings reviewed in this book speak strongly to the idea that religion is a powerful factor in meeting human needs for meaning making, control, and sociality.

Foundations for an Empirical Psychology of Religion

Without knowledge of self there is no knowledge of God.

That's God's signature. God's signature is never a forgery.

... like most Americans, my faith consists in believing in every religion, including my own, but without ill-will toward anybody, no matter what he believes or disbelieves.

Religion is different from everything else; because in religion seeking is finding.

Man without religion is the creature of circumstances.¹

THE EMPIRICAL STUDY OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Psychology's status as a science is based largely on its methodology—that is, its use of scientific methods to study the phenomena of interest. The psychology of religion is no different from the psychological study of anything else. The problem is that religion and spirituality are exceedingly complex phenomena—so complex, as we have seen in Chapter 1, that they are difficult even to define. In this chapter, we demonstrate that they are also elusive to capture by standard scientific methods. On top of this, many people see religion and science as opposites that are in some type of conflict, and therefore see the use of one to help investigate the other as somehow problematic or at least inappropriate. Some religious people may even feel threatened by the scientific study of religion, for fear that it may somehow explain away something held as sacred. We attempt to dispel many of these concerns in this chapter. Still, the field is fraught with dangerous mines, and both the scientific investigator and student must be careful as they overturn each rock in their exploration.

¹These quotations come, respectively, from the following sources: John Calvin, quoted in Kunkel, Cook, Meshel, Daughtry, and Hauenstein (1999, p. 193); Eddie Joe Lloyd, quoted in the online version of *The New York Times* (August 26, 2002); Saroyan (1937, p. 130); Cather (1926/1990, p. 94); and Julian Charles Hare and Augustus William Hare, quoted in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (1959, p. 237, No. 19).

These are serious and legitimate concerns that deserve special care. The psychologist of religion should not blindly enter the minefield without an understanding of the risks involved. But, as we shall see, there are useful tools to help us in our scientific study, and so we need not be timid. In fact, since its earliest days, psychology has examined religion with confidence. In 1902, William James—a U.S. philosopher and one of the founders of our field—gave his famous Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh. These were soon published in book form as *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (James, 1902/1985), a book continuously in print for over 100 years—a rare feat indeed.

The success of James's *Varieties* lies in several features that guide our discussions in this book, now more than a century later. James explored questions about the nature of religion, already touched upon in Chapter 1, and compared religion to such concepts as psychic phenomena and superstition. James also asked whether religion is a help or a hindrance; that is, does the good it brings outweigh the harm that can be associated with it? In addition, he wanted to know the conditions under which religious conversion was likely to occur and the role that emotions play in religious experience. These questions are as much a part of the scientific study of religion today as they were in 1902, and we explore them throughout this book. Before we get to such substantive issues, however, we need to understand the empirical foundations of the psychological study of religion. Let us first do so by avoiding what is perhaps one of the most dangerous mines in the field—the temptation to reduce the richness and complexity of religious experience to a favorite psychological construct.

By beginning our discussion with the issue of reductionism, we are highlighting an important but sensitive philosophical shift in the psychology of religion—represented by Emmons and Paloutzian's (2003) call for a new multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm, which we have mentioned in Chapter 1. The new paradigm (which means, for our purposes, a generally accepted perspective among a community of scholars in a given discipline) proposed is one that values multiple methods as legitimate and complementary in providing a more complete understanding of religious and spiritual phenomena. It also emphasizes interdisciplinary approaches, as the boundaries between such disciplines as sociology, psychology, and anthropology are becoming less rigid. As we shall see, in no way does this call for a paradigm shift lessen the discipline's resolve to be scientific. It does represent, however, an understanding of what constitutes legitimate science that may be somewhat different from the traditionally received view. In any case, part of the call for a new paradigm is to value nonreductive assumptions about the nature of religion and spirituality.

REDUCTIONISM IN CONCEPTUALIZING RELIGIOUS ISSUES

“Reductionism” is an attempt at explanation. It involves explaining a topic by variables independent of the topic itself, usually in the form of understanding the nature of complex things by *reducing* them to simpler, more fundamental phenomena. There are various types of reductionism (methodological, theoretical, ontological), and some may be more appropriate to understanding than others. We wish to avoid getting mired in the details of this philosophical debate, for the issues underlying reductionism are complex. Some defend reductionism as necessary to science, while others suggest that such a view involves a flawed understanding of science. It is safe to say, however, that as we attempt to scientifically explain broader and more complex issues (such as religious experience), we should greet reductionism with greater reservation. So, for example, when we utilize the need for meaning and purpose as

a general framework for the study of religion, we should not assume that religion is *only* a useful device for finding meaning. Religion is much more than a meaning-making device. Reducing a complex concept may sometimes be appropriate, such as reducing a preschool child's church attendance to parental religiousness, and at times it may even be necessary for conceptualization purposes. In general, however, we caution against reductionistic tendencies in the psychology of religion.

Examples of Reductionism in the Psychology of Religion

Three traditions in the psychology of religion are selected here to illustrate reductionism: those of Sigmund Freud, Raymond B. Cattell, and William James. In each of these traditions, many of the reasons people give for being religious—primarily, beliefs—are ignored. The beliefs themselves are assumed only to reflect some psychological issue.

Freud assumed that religion is false, in the sense that its primary object (i.e., God) is not real. He was intrigued as to why people are religious when it is irrational to be so; since they believe in nothing that is real, there must be other foundations for these beliefs. In the introduction to *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud (1927/1961b) stated:

... in past ages in spite of their incontrovertible lack of authenticity, religious ideas have exercised the strongest possible influence on mankind. This is a fresh psychological problem. We must ask where the inner force of those doctrines lies and to what they owe their efficacy, independent as it is, of the acknowledgement of reason. (p. 51)

Freud maintained that the inner force to which religion is reduced is infantile projection of the parental figure, a form of neuroticism. Other psychologists endorsed variants of this theme (e.g., Faber, 1972; Suttie, 1952; Symonds, 1946). In this view, the substance of religion—*what* a person believes, or the reasons behind certain religious behavior and practices—does not matter. If this is so, there can be nothing of importance to religious beliefs, so why measure them?

Raymond Cattell (1938, 1950) represents another tradition of reductionistic research. It started with the fact that Cattell himself was a behaviorist who literally could not think in terms of beliefs. His stance ended with his personal view of religion as just “silly superstition” (Gorsuch, 2002). Like Freud, Cattell did give credit to religion for being a powerful force in people's lives. Given this beginning, Cattell posited motivational bases for being religious. Cattell and Child (1975) reported that religion is a function of strong needs to avoid fear, to be nurtured, and to nurture others. Others working in this tradition explained religion as a result of being deprived and therefore turning to a belief in life after death to meet currently unmet needs (Dewey, 1929). People thus create religious beliefs to resolve various problems. Again, since there can be nothing of importance to religious beliefs per se, why measure them?

William James (1902/1985), a founder of the psychology of religion, treated religion with much greater respect than did Freud or Cattell. Why people hold religious beliefs to be true was not an issue for James, since he approached religion pragmatically: Does it help people live? To this he resoundingly answered, “Yes.” Others have continued in this mode, and a major part of the increased attention given to spirituality (see below) stems from religion's having been shown to be beneficial (e.g., Gorsuch, 1976, 1988; Larson et al., 1989; Pargament, 1997).

James's form of reductionism is more subtle than that of Freud or Cattell since James did not clearly take an atheistic position. In his view, nothing religionists claim in and of themselves as a basis for their religious faith needs to be examined; such beliefs are relevant only to the extent that they are functionally important—that they are of some benefit to the persons who hold them. For James, religious beliefs are reduced to their pragmatic value.

Religion as “Nothing but” Superstition

One common form of reductionism applied to religious experience is that such experience is “nothing but” some related concept. So, for example, one might believe that religion is nothing but superstition, and that if one can understand the basis of this superstition, then religious experience is explained. Let's consider this example in more detail.

A “superstition” has been defined as “any belief or attitude, based on fear or ignorance, that is inconsistent with the known laws of science or with what is generally considered in the particular society as true and rational; esp., such a belief in charms, omens, the supernatural, etc.” (Guralnik, 1986, p. 1430). A superstitious person is one who acts on such beliefs. Examples of superstitious actions include walking under a ladder, avoiding the number 13, and tugging on one's cap before throwing a pitch in a baseball game.

These examples of superstition contain nothing that is called religious or spiritual. But can the “superstition” label be properly extended to religion as studied by psychology? *The Oxford Universal Dictionary on Historical Principles* (Onions, 1955) includes in its definition of superstition: “esp. in connection with religion” (p. 2084). This definition explicitly links the two concepts, but it also distinguishes between superstition and religion, since the two realms are not equated with each other.

One basis of superstition can be found in learning research. Though this type of research was originally conducted on animals by the noted psychologist B. F. Skinner (1948, 1969), superstition is obviously present in humans and may occur in one-trial learning, particularly with strong negative reinforcement (Morris & Maisto, 1998). Primarily when threat, pain, or much emotion is present, and is then resolved, irrelevant stimuli present in the situation become meaningful. For example, let us suppose that Joe, an athlete, was wearing a specific pair of socks when a problem was alleviated; hence they become his “lucky socks,” which he wears just in case they might make a difference in future similar circumstances. Joe knows full well that there is no rational basis for the lucky socks to affect the game, but he just feels better when wearing them. Of course, if success occurs, the incident will be cited as proof of the superstition's truth.

It is not surprising that some religious behaviors are also superstitious for a particular person. They meet the twin conditions of being nonrational and of avoiding a major negative outcome (i.e., being based in fear). We must, however, ask whether religion is *just* superstition.

Most religious beliefs and behavior do not meet the conditions of superstition. Religions usually have well-developed theologies that make religious behaviors rational, at least to those who hold them. The threat of avoiding a major negative outcome also seldom enters into daily religious behavior. Furthermore, the promise of hell is unlikely to take hold after one-trial learning. The idea of hell requires much complex social learning, plus both cognitive and motivational inputs. Later we will show that the subculture in which one is raised is a major determinant of religious behavior in general. Although religion includes conditioned responses, it is far more than just these responses; much social learning may be involved, and

genetic and evolutionary factors may even play indirect roles. These factors are detailed in Chapter 3.

What do the data say? Can scientific investigation itself help answer whether religion is just superstition? If both religion and superstition involve the same psychological processes, then one should expect either (1) positive correlations between measures of religiousness and measures of superstition (i.e., those who are most superstitious are also the most religious), in that the two are functionally the same; or (2) negative correlations between religion and superstition, in that one serves as a substitute for the other.

Studies are few in this area, and further work is necessary. Using the statistical technique called “factor analysis,” Johnston, de Groot, and Spanos (1995) found separate factors for beliefs involving the paranormal, superstition, extraordinary life forms, and religion; these results counter the “functionally the same” hypothesis. Sparks’s (2001) review of work in this area confirms the distinctiveness noted by Johnston et al. (1995). Goode (2000), however, claims that there may be paranormal elements in certain religious concepts (e.g., creationism, angels, the Devil), and provides data to this effect. We discuss the empirical research relating to paranormal and religious experiences, including mysticism, in Chapters 10 and 11. Contrary to the “substitution” hypothesis is Hynam’s (1970) finding that superstition was correlated positively with a lack of clear social norms or rules, while both religiousness and scientific training were negatively related.

The data are not conclusive, but they seem to suggest that religion and superstition should be treated as independent constructs. Thus we can tentatively say that a definition of either religion or superstition is more accurate if it does not include the other. To be sure, most psychologists of religion do not investigate superstition or psychic phenomenon *per se*. Of course, superstition and psychic reports occur in almost all areas of life and among religious people as well the nonreligious. They are, however, peripheral to the psychology of religion.

Reductionism: Conclusions

The empirical study of religiousness has many great challenges. The first of these challenges considered here is how to maintain the scientific standards of good empirical work, always the goal of science, without sacrificing the richness and depth of the object of study. We have gone to considerable lengths to make the case that religious experience should not be reduced to specific psychological processes. It is tempting to do so when one adopts the naturalistic perspective that underlies scientific investigation, and to ignore the meaning system of the people being studied. What is needed is some nonreductionistic accounting of the phenomena of interest, but without abandoning scientific methodology and thus not reaping the benefits that it provides.

QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

One way to avoid reductionism is to treat the individual as a holistic entity, instead of the typical psychological research approach of fractionating the individual into traits, attitudes, beliefs, values, habits, responses, and underlying physiology. This holistic–atomistic distinction is not a sharp dichotomy, and many levels exist between these endpoints. However, some researchers maintain that by breaking the individual into such concepts as traits or attitudes

and then abstracting these by an “objective” analysis, only a false and incomplete picture of the person is attained—a partial interpretation with a grain of truth to it. Instead, these researchers argue that a holistic, phenomenological, clinical approach is better. The challenge, of course, is whether such an approach can meet standard scientific criteria.

Idiothetic and Nomothetic Approaches to Research

This challenge is not unique to the psychology of religion. Indeed, one of the great classical issues in psychology is the distinction between “idiothetic” and “nomothetic” approaches to investigating the issue of interest (Gorsuch, 2008). In essence, the idiothetic approach relies largely on the judgment of an expert, usually (in the psychology of religion) one steeped in clinical or pastoral methods—possibly a cleric, pastoral counselor, or therapist. The bases for expert judgment are covert and not readily available for public analysis or understanding. In contrast, the nomothetic orientation seeks to obtain information that is empirical, public, reproducible, and reliable. It is the main traditional scientific avenue to demonstrating valid knowledge. The major characteristics of these concepts are listed in Table 2.1.

It should be evident that the approach espoused in this text is essentially nomothetic. Harsh as it may sound to advocates of an idiothetic approach, those seeking scientific answers will find validity in the judgment of Paul Meehl (1954): “Always . . . the shadow of the statistician hovers in the background. Always the actuary will have the final word” (p. 138). We do believe that those who utilize holistic, idiothetic techniques have much to offer; their applied contributions cannot be overestimated. However, idiothetic research is not frequently utilized in the psychology of religion for good reason: Its methods do not meet standard scientific criteria. Therefore, idiothetic approaches should best be thought of as supplementary to nomothetic methods—both as sources of hypotheses and as means by which to more fully grasp the richness of the more general nomothetic findings.

The Complementary Nature of Qualitative and Quantitative Research

The distinction between “qualitative” and “quantitative” research is somewhat related to the idiographic–nomothetic difference, but the two distinctions should not be confused. Qualita-

TABLE 2.1. Two Major Approaches
to the Psychological Study of Religion

Idiothetic	Nomothetic
Individual-behavioral	General-behavioral
Qualitative	Quantitative
Concern with depth	Attention to the surface
European origin	American origin
Clinical	Experimental
Intuitive (subjective)	Objective
Holistic	Atomistic
Phenomenological	Positivistic
Source: Medicine	Source: Physical science

tive data collection ranges from writing the biography of a religious person to chatting with several people about a religious topic, conducting interviews with open-ended questions, or having people tell a story about a picture they are given. Central to this process is how experience is interpreted. In short, it is “the interpretative study of a specified issue or problem in which the researcher is central to the sense that is made” (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994, p. 2), and is thus “(a) an attempt to capture the sense that lies within, and that structures what we say about what we do; (b) an exploration, elaboration and systematization of the significance of the identified phenomenon; and (c) the illuminative representation of the meaning of a delimited issue or problem” (Banister et al., 1994, p. 3).

The use of qualitative methods often allows researchers to “get behind” the quantitative data to uncover specific issues of meaning. People may have specific reasons—sometimes common and sometimes uncommon—for responding, for example, with a 4 on a 7-point scale as a statement of moderate agreement on a religious belief statement. Without qualitative methodologies to unpack what a 4 actually means, we have limited understanding of the phenomena of interest. At issue is the fact that many of our quantitative measures involve “arbitrary metrics” (Blanton & Jaccard, 2006), which do not tell us the absolute standing of an individual or group on an underlying psychological construct. For example, a score of 68 on a 100-point measure of depression does not tell us how depressed a person actually is. Such arbitrariness, of course, is not a death sentence for research, in that quantitative measures are used to test ideas and theories; therefore, the relative standing of scores is useful. We can say that a score of 68 on a measure of depression is more than a score of 38, and this difference, for example, may support or not support a hypothesis. However, what the score means in terms of the actual experience of depression is limited.

Therefore, several researchers in the psychology of religion have called for a greater role for qualitative methods (e.g., Belzen, 1996; Belzen & Hood, 2006). This call is especially relevant to an understanding of religion as a meaning system—the approach taken in this text. It also resonates well with the earlier-noted call by Emmons and Paloutzian (2003) for a new multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm that values multiple levels of analysis and nonreductive assumptions regarding the nature of religious and spiritual experience.

Qualitative methods are the methods of choice in idiothetic research, but many such methods are used in nomothetic research as well. Therefore, it is an error to equate qualitative methods with idiographic research and quantitative methods with nomothetic research, as is frequently done. For example, determining what religious behaviors people perform in certain specific settings may call for a novel procedure. This could include observing missionary activity in a Third World village undergoing cultural change, or the behavior of congregants during a church service (Wolcott, 1994). In contrast, quantitative data collection techniques might ask people to rate how strongly they agree with a particular statement or to report how often they attend worship services. The major distinction is that quantitative measures give scores directly, but qualitative data must be processed by a rater or by a computer program for information.

A similar distinction can be made between qualitative and quantitative analyses of data. Qualitative treatment can involve a more or less subjective review that enables a scholar to make sense of the information and draw conclusions. A researcher employing quantitative analysis uses statistics such as means, standard deviations, significance levels, and correlations in order to draw conclusions.

Although quantitative methods have been typical of data collection and analysis in the sciences as well as in the psychology of religion, there is no doubt that they miss something.

A description of a sunset in terms of physics is quantitative, but none would argue that a painting of that sunset is replaced by the physical description. Physics has never claimed to contain the whole of human experience regarding physical phenomena; nor does the psychology of religion claim to contain the whole of human experience regarding religion. Just as a personal experience with a sunset is meaningful in addition to the physics of a sunset, so a personal religious experience cannot be replaced by the psychology of that experience. Similarly, psychology does not directly cover the history of religions, the biographies of religious leaders, or the anthropology of religions, although they may be considered within the new paradigm insofar as interdisciplinary considerations provide a broader context within which to understand psychological findings (Hood & Williamson, 2008a, b). The psychology of religion is an application of scientific methods to enhance our psychological understanding of religion.

Reliability and Validity

The acceptability of both quantitative and qualitative methods within the psychology of religion depends on whether they can be shown to meet the scientific criteria of reliability and validity. For example, when Ponton and Gorsuch (1988) used an instrument called the Quest Scale in Venezuela, its reliability was low, so the authors were hesitant to draw any conclusions from it. Qualitative measures also need to demonstrate reliability. Do different persons or judges agree in their observations and/or interpretations? If they reach different conclusions as to whether a person feels God's presence during meditation, for example, then there is no reliability in their measure.

Once it has been shown that the qualitative or quantitative method is reliable, validity must then be established. Usually "content validity" is used, as noted earlier. This means that psychologists examining the method agree that the items or interview or rating criteria are appropriate for whatever descriptive term is employed.

Since both qualitative and quantitative methods are acceptable if they meet the standards of being reliable and valid, why are quantitative methods so popular? One important problem is that reliable qualitative methods are rather expensive to use. Consider the question of how a victim becomes a forgiving person after major harm has been done to that person. Using an interview-based qualitative approach, a researcher might ask each of 100 people to describe a time when a person harmed them, and then, in their own words, to explain how they forgave that person and how their religious faith was a part of that process. The interviewing would take about 300 hours (including setting up the interviews, doing the interviews, finding new people to reduce the "no-shows," transcribing the interviews, etc.). Then the interviews would need to be rated by two people trained to use the same language to describe the processes that were reported, and differences would need to be reconciled with the help of a third rater (all this would take another 300 hours). At this point, a total of 600 hours would be needed for collecting and scoring the data.

By contrast, in quantitative measurement utilizing a questionnaire, a group of 100 people might take 2 hours to fill out the questionnaire. Scoring these responses would take another 4 hours. The quantitative approach would thus take an estimated 6 hours, versus 600 hours for the qualitative approach. Which procedure would you rather use in a research project?

In some cases, qualitative methods are the only ones we currently have to tap into the psychological processes being studied. It is, for example, difficult to understand children's

concepts of God without using their drawings of God, which are then rated. And in models where a person makes a choice, it is also a problem to find out what options *spontaneously* occur to that person without utilizing at least somewhat qualitative methods. Throughout this text, we report many studies that use qualitative research methods, provided that those methods demonstrate sufficient reliability and validity. When they do meet adequate psychometric criteria, we can be just as confident in reporting the results of qualitative research as those of quantitative research.

An Example of a Qualitative Approach

There is no single qualitative method. Though a common element of virtually all qualitative methods is that they take an interpretive approach to their subject matter, the methods vary considerably in terms of their goals and aims. Some methods, such as discourse analysis or participant observation, may only produce descriptive information. Other techniques, such as interviewing and ethnography, may likewise be descriptive, but may also involve an explanatory interpretation by the coinvestigators (the researcher and the person being studied). Here we provide a single brief example of the use of qualitative techniques that is particularly relevant and applicable to the overall theoretical framework of religion as a meaning system used in this text.

“Narrative analysis” is a qualitative technique used to investigate the means by which individuals utilize the language of their culture to construct a story of their experience. Hood and Belzen (2005) suggest that this is a particularly useful technique to test ideas drawn from psychoanalytic theory. They recommend using archives of taped interviews, and point to effective uses of this technique in studying a serpent-handling sect in Appalachia (Hood, 1998, 2005a) and the Word of Life congregation in Turku, Finland (Hovi, 2004). Let us consider the serpent-handling example. Williamson and Pollio (1999) analyzed the narrative form of serpent-handling sermons, while Hood (2005a) utilized an oral narrative of a handler. This team of researchers (Williamson, Pollio, & Hood, 2000) has also creatively used “phenomenological” methods to identify, from the snake handlers’ perspective, the actual experience of handling a snake, especially in the context of religious commitment.

Sixteen open-ended interviews (Williamson, 2000) were then subjected to interpretations based upon a “hermeneutical methodology” developed by Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997) involving a group interaction by researchers trained in dialogical procedures (see Hood & Williamson, 2008a, for a more complete description). From this analysis, four fundamental beliefs of serpent handlers were identified: (1) Handling serpents is a biblical mandate based on Mark 16:17–18; (2) handling serpents is a sign of enablement or power bestowed by God in response to obedience; (3) handling serpents is a sign of God’s protection (handlers thereby acknowledge the danger of handling); and (4) the experience of handling serpents is a confirmation of God’s power and blessing (Hood, Hill, & Williamson, 2005).

The point here is that what seems to outsiders a bizarre and pointless activity that is dangerous and even life-threatening (11 of the 16 interviewees had been bitten, and all knew of someone who had died from snake bite) carries great meaning for the serpent handlers through its Biblical justification. Understanding the richness of serpent handling as a religious meaning system could not have been attained through quantitative techniques only. Rather, what is necessary is the use of multiple techniques (including historical methodologies). Although qualitative techniques are fraught with potential bias and possible misuse and

should therefore be used only according to strict guidelines, they serve as a useful complement that will greatly profit the psychology of religion.

Spirituality: From an Idiographic to a Nomothetic Concept

In Chapter 1, we have attempted to circumscribe the concept of “spirituality”; now we confront it as an issue in the idiographic–nomothetic controversy. As noted in the preceding chapter, we have to be careful in dealing with spirituality. It is not a word to be easily substituted for “religiosity”; nor is it really meaningful when those who have left an organized, formal religious body define themselves as “spiritual.” We confront the empirical distinctions between religion and spirituality more fully in Chapters 10 and 11. Here we focus upon methodological considerations in the study of spirituality as opposed to religion.

Holistic versus Atomistic Considerations

Even though there are problems with understanding what spirituality is, most commonly it is viewed holistically/idiographically—that is, as a characteristic of a person *in toto*. As soon as we question its nature within the individual, we start to move away from that idiographic ideal. Initially, many efforts have been made to distinguish between religiosity and spirituality (Hood, 2000b; Pargament, 1999; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). Next, various spiritualities are described, such as “world-oriented,” “people-oriented,” “God-oriented,” and “nature-oriented” spiritualities, among other possibilities (Spilka, 1993). One controversial issue is whether spirituality can be separated from religion. Each side of this debate has presented its views without resolving the matter (Emmons & Crumpler, 1999; Hill et al., 2000; Pargament, 1999; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Hood (2000b) further points out that there is evident overlap between religion and spirituality. This problem holds for the various other forms of spirituality noted above. They may overlap with each other or with religion *per se*. Again, these distinctions are treated more fully in Chapters 10 and 11.

A holistic, personal approach is still possible; however, once the foregoing distinctions are made, attention becomes directed toward the criteria that identify spirituality *per se*. This again raises the question of whether we are dealing with a feature of the entire person or with some cognitive or motivational aspect of the individual, such as experience.

Spirituality as a General Characteristic

With regard to spirituality as a general characteristic of a person, two overlapping systems have been proposed (Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, & Saunders, 1988; LaPierre, 1994). Table 2.2 illustrates these two schemes. First, these systems are related; LaPierre used the Elkins et al. framework when he developed his own. Second, Elkins et al. attempted a broad stance not exclusively wedded to religion, while LaPierre remained solidly within the religious tradition.

The Elkins et al. (1988) and LaPierre (1994) criteria suggest directions for operationalizing spirituality, but still possess an idyllic quality that remains unclear and ethereal. They also strongly suggest that it will be difficult if not impossible to assess spirituality in a holistic manner. The equation of spirituality with “authenticity” by Helminiak (1996a, 1996b) could holistically subsume these criteria, but authenticity itself needs to be anchored in a defining

TABLE 2.2. Some Suggested Dimensions of Spirituality

Elkins et al. (1988)

Transcendental dimension	“Experientially based belief [in] a transcendent dimension to life” (p. 10).
Meaning and purpose to life	Authentic sense that life has purpose and meaning.
Mission in life	Sense that one has a calling, a mission.
Sacredness of life	Belief that “all of life is holy” (p. 11).
Material values	Sense that material things do not satisfy spiritual needs.
Altruism	Belief that we are all part of humanity.
Idealism	Being committed to ideals and life’s potential.
Awareness of the tragic	Awareness of and sensitivity to pain and tragedy in life.
Spiritual fruits	Sense that life is infused with spiritual benefits and experience.

LaPierre (1994)

Journey	Belief that life has meaning and purpose.
Transcendent encounters	As above, belief in a higher level of reality.
Community	Belief that personal growth should occur within a loving community.
Religion	Beliefs and practices relating one to a supreme being.
Mystery of creation	Sense of connection to an environment, its creation and creator.
Transformation	Sense of personal change in relation to social involvement—of becoming.

and assessing methodology—something Helminiak, in a most scholarly manner, has been working on for some time.

Spirituality as Experience

Implying that spiritual experience is at the heart of spirituality, if not almost the whole of spirituality, Hardy (1979) continued the movement from a holistic, phenomenological perspective to an objective, nomothetic analysis (see also Chapter 10 on religious and spiritual experience). Offering “a provisional classification” (p. 25) of reported experiential elements, Hardy grouped the elements into 12 major categories, each with further subdivisions until a total of 90 components were given. An exhaustive questionnaire treatment could undoubtedly result in many more items than this last number suggests.

Following an in-depth review of the religion–spirituality issue, Hood (2000b) focused on a core component in spirituality—namely, mystical experience. Researching the matter, he found that mystical experience often ties religion and spirituality together. This is detailed in the later chapters on religious experience (Chapter 10) and mysticism (Chapter 11).

Sometimes things aren’t what they seem to be. After presenting an impressive list of 12 criteria for a spiritually mature faith, Genia (1997) developed what she termed a Spiritual

Experience Index. Even though the instrument yielded good reliability, “support[ing] its use as a unitary measure” (p. 345), she factor-analyzed the items and obtained two factors, which she labeled Spiritual Support and Spiritual Openness. In terms of our earlier discussion, these scales overwhelmingly assess beliefs and explicitly have little to do with experience. They appear to be useful as preliminary instruments for the assessment of spirituality per se, but not for spiritual experience. Correlations above .80 (which is very strong) were obtained between Spiritual Support and Allport’s Intrinsic religious orientation (to be discussed below), implying the identity of these two concepts. Much more work is necessary relative to the initial criteria proposed in order to understand what Genia seems to have accomplished with regard to spirituality.

The Current State of Spirituality Assessment

The last two decades have witnessed a flurry of efforts to evaluate spirituality. The term seems to have become more popular than “religion,” as we have noted in Chapter 1. Despite extensive lists of characteristics associated with spirituality, the holistic–atomistic problem remains unresolved. Gorsuch and Miller (1999) indicate the many qualifications researchers should consider in their assessment attempts, but few have been taken seriously. Still, there has been no dearth of efforts to measure spirituality, many since 2000 (Hill, 2005).

To illustrate the kind of work undertaken by researchers concerned with the measurement of spirituality, a few examples in addition to Genia’s work should be noted. Hall and Edwards (1996) have published a Spiritual Assessment Inventory that focuses on one’s relationship with God. Despite the singular implication of its name, this instrument has been shown to be multidimensional. The Armstrong (1995) Measure of Spirituality has four subscales, reduced from an original nine. The latter constitute the criteria for spirituality that Armstrong utilized. Considering the nature of the items in the scales, we suspect that their correlations with standard indices of religiosity might show this approach to be strongly associated with widely used religiosity scales. Such tendencies have been noted above between the Genia (1997) instrument and Allport’s Intrinsic religiousness, and have also been reported with the Elkins et al. (1988) Spiritual Orientation Inventory (Scioli et al., 1997). The same appears to be true of another measure in this area, the Spiritual Transcendence Index (Seidlitz et al., 2002). Tightly developed and comprising only eight items, this index seems to overlap with religion, but when a measure is constructed with such care, there is need for further study in order to understand what it is actually assessing.

Emphasizing research on African Americans, Taylor and his coworkers have developed a multidimensional framework with supporting scales to assess spirituality. Their higher-order dimensions are termed Integrative and Disintegrative, each of which possesses three subscales (Taylor, Rogers, Jackson-Lowman, Zhang, & Zhao, 1995). Conceptually, this work is in line with the multiform criteria offered by Genia (1997), Elkins et al. (1988), and LaPierre (1994). These items seem to have face validity (see the discussion of validity below) and may be quite useful in a broad range of populations.

Probably the most well-known concept in this area is that of “spiritual well-being.” Originally advanced by Moberg (1971, 1979), and further developed in questionnaire form by Ellison (1983), it is closely affiliated with religion and primarily stresses personal well-being in relationship to one’s deity. This is also termed “transcendence” and includes a search for purpose and meaning in life. A fair amount of research with Ellison’s instrument suggests

its utility, though it seems to overlap considerably with indices of religious involvement and commitment (Ellison, 1983; Bufford, Paloutzian, & Ellison, 1991).

The foregoing review of the literature on both the concept of spirituality and its operationalization demonstrates very clearly how a notion that was originally idiographically conceived necessarily found nomothetic expression. As it was analyzed and measured, various beliefs and values of people entered the realm of scientific knowledge, and became useful both for research and for application to real-life problems.

THE MANY VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

In our effort to avoid a reductionistic approach to the study of religious and spiritual experience, we have cautioned against the “nothing but” argument—that religion is nothing but, for example, superstition. In so doing, we have made the claim that religious experience can and should be distinguished from other concepts, such as superstition. But there is another, perhaps more subtle message about the dangers of reductionism: One can easily fall prey to believing that all forms of religious experience reflect what one has directly and personally experienced. Thus, for example, one raised in a religious tradition that emphasizes the importance of what one believes, which is typical in much of Protestantism, may be surprised to learn that in some religious traditions what one believes is not as important as one’s heritage or sense of social connectedness (Cohen & Hill, 2007). Morris (1996) has distinguished these two types as religions of “assent” versus religions of “descent.” Indeed, religious and spiritual experience has many varieties, as William James (1902/1985) noted in the title of his classic book.

Dimensional Approaches to Religion

The human passion to be efficient—to summarize the complex, to wrap it all up in “25 words or less”—is often an enemy to real understanding. Words are symbols that place many things under one heading, and the term “religion” is an excellent example of this tendency. When psychologists first began research in this area, they simply constructed measures of religiousness or religiosity. Sophisticated thinkers, however, soon put aside notions that people simply vary along a single dimension with antireligious sentiments at one end and orthodox views at the other end. These proved unsatisfactory, and many new sets of dimensions—some covering a broad range, some narrower in their focus—began to appear in the research literature. Examples of these dimensions are listed in Table 2.3.

When we examine the many dimensional schemes that have been proposed, we see that some stress the purpose of faith, whereas others look to the possible personal and social origins of religion. Although some appear to mix psychology and religion, there are also those that take their cues exclusively from psychology and focus on motivation or cognition. However, two real problems exist: the presence of a “hidden” value agenda that implies “good” and “bad” religion, and a lack of conceptual and theoretical clarity. There is also great overlap among the various proposals, with essentially the same idea being phrased in different words—testimony to the excellent vocabularies of some social scientists. There is, however, one point on which all agree: Even though there is only one word for “religion,” there may be a hundred possible ways of being “religious.”

TABLE 2.3. Some Logically and Empirically Derived Dimensional Approaches to the Study of Individual Religion

Allen and Spilka (1967)

Committed religion	“Utilizes an abstract philosophical perspective: multiplex religious ideas are relatively clear in meaning and an open and flexible framework of commitment relates religious to daily activities” (p. 205).
Consensual religions	“Vague, nondifferentiated, ifurcated, neutralized” (p. 205). A cognitively simplified and personally convenient faith.

Batson and Ventis (1982)

Means religion	“Religion is a means to other self-serving ends than religion itself” (p. 151).
End religion	“Religion is an ultimate end in itself” (p. 151).

Clark (1958)

Primary religious behavior	“An authentic inner experience of the divine combined with whatever efforts the individual may make to harmonize his life with the divine” (p. 23).
Secondary religious behavior	“A very routine and uninspired carrying out . . . of an obligation” (p. 24).
Tertiary religious behavior	“A matter of religious routine or convention accepted on the authority of someone else” (p. 25).

Fromm (1950)

Authoritarian religion	“The main virtue of this type of religion is obedience, its cardinal sin is disobedience” (p. 35).
Humanistic religion	“This type of religion is centered around man and his strength . . . virtue is self-realization, not obedience” (p. 37).

Hunt (1972)

Literal religion	Taking “at face value any religious statement without in any way questioning it” (p. 43).
Antiliteral religion	A simple rejection of literalist religious statements.
Mythological religion	A reinterpretation of religious statements to seek their deeper symbolic meanings.

James (1902/1985)

Healthy-mindedness	An optimistic, happy, extroverted, social faith: “the tendency that looks on all things and sees that they are good” (p. 78).
Sick souls	“The way that takes all this experience of evil as something essential” (p. 36). A faith of pessimism, sorrow, suffering, and introverted reflection.

Lenski (1961)

Doctrinal orthodoxy	“Stresses intellectual assent [to] prescribed doctrines” (p. 23).
Devotionalism	“Emphasizes the importance of private, or personal communion with God” (p. 23).

McConahay and Hough (1973)

Guilt-oriented, extrapunitive	“Religious belief . . . centered on the wrath of God as it is related to other people . . . emphasizes punishment for wrong-doers” (p. 55).
Guilt-oriented intropunitive	“A sense of one’s own unworthiness and badness . . . a manifest need for punishment and a conviction that it will inevitably come” (p. 56).
Love-oriented, self-centered	“Oriented toward the forgiveness of one’s own sins” (p. 56).
Love-oriented, other-centered	“Emphasizes the common humanity of all persons as creatures of God, and God’s love . . . related to the redemption of the whole world” (p. 56).
Culture-oriented, conventional	“Values . . . are more culturally than theologically oriented” (p. 56).

Logical Approaches

Some dimensional approaches to religiousness are logically derived; that is, they are based on concepts and ideas derived from induction. In other words, some theorists have observed and thought logically about religion, and from their many observations, they suggest what its multifaceted essence is. One particularly wide-ranging, comprehensive logical system of understanding religion is that proposed by Glock (1962), a well-known sociologist of religion. This system identifies and measures the following areas of religion (all quotes are from Glock, 1962, p. S99):

- *Experiential dimension*: “Religious people will . . . achieve direct knowledge of ultimate reality or will experience religious emotion.”
- *Ideological dimension*: “The religious person will hold to certain beliefs.”
- *Ritualistic dimension*: “Specifically religious practices [are] expected of religious adherents.”
- *Intellectual dimension*: “The religious person will be informed and knowledgeable about the basic tenets of his faith and its sacred scriptures.”
- *Consequential dimension*: This covers “what people ought to do and the attitudes they ought to hold as a consequence of their religion.”

In addition to Glock’s dimensions, it is possible to develop sets of logically derived psychological categories for understanding religion. One system for doing so would separate the personal from the interpersonal. This system is narrower in its focus than that of Glock, but it can be highly useful when detail on religious practices is desired. Because religion is at the same time unique to each person and yet part of a community, religion can be subdivided within each of these two areas. Here is one possible breakdown of religious practices:

- Personal
 - Prayer
 - Reading of scriptures
 - Meditation
- Interpersonal
 - Worshiping with others
 - Committee participation
 - Receiving and providing social support

Examining Logical Systems Empirically

Logical systems such as Glock’s (1962) and our categories of religious practices help to organize our thinking and research. Although they are obviously useful, how they relate to each other is an empirical question. Proponents of a more empirical approach note that logical approaches to understanding religion may have poor psychometric properties. Glock’s dimensions as described above are a good example. Although the *logic* distinguishing Experiential from Consequential is clear, *empirically* the two are strongly related (Faulkner & DeJong, 1966; Weigert & Thomas, 1969). This is true of all the categories: They correlate highly with each other. Statistically, then, one only needs to measure one or two, because the same

conclusions will be reached regardless of which dimension is used. For instance, a person who has a religious experience is therefore likely to be concerned with the consequences of adhering to the faith.

Similar objections can be raised to the logically derived system of religious practices we have described. If a person engages in one personal category of religious behavior, it is quite likely that this person utilizes the other personal practices. And if the person engages in an interpersonal category of religious behavior, he or she probably also employs other interpersonal practices.

Logical approaches can evolve into systems that blend the logical and the empirical. This is what happened to a system proposed by Gordon Allport (1959, 1966). In attempting to understand prejudice, he noted that some Christians, in keeping with the Christian tenets of love toward all, are less prejudiced than non-Christians. He also noted, however, that some Christians are more prejudiced than other Christians even though this is in violation of Christian doctrines of love. To explain this difference, Allport suggested that some are Christian for the sake of the faith itself, and thus are “intrinsically” committed; they try to live in accordance with Christian doctrines. Others are Christian for what they can personally get out of it; these “extrinsically” committed Christians pick what they need and ignore the rest, such as the teachings on loving others. Allport called these “religious orientations” and saw them as opposite ends of an Intrinsic–Extrinsic (abbreviated from here on in this chapter as I–E) continuum. Others developed similar constructs, including Allen and Spilka’s (1967) Committed versus Consensual scales, and Batson’s Internal versus External scales (Batson & Ventis, 1982).

It turns out that there are some problems with Allport’s conception of I and E as opposites. For our purposes now, however, we should simply note that in the attempt to *measure* I and E, it was found that E items did not correlate strongly negatively with I items, which they should do if I and E are opposites. Allport and Ross (1967) then modified their stance from I versus E as the ends of a single dimension, to I and E as two distinct dimensions, each with its own separate set of items. Although there was (and generally continues to be) a low negative correlation between the I and E scales, I and E religious orientations are empirically distinct; thus, some people are high (or low) on both. This is an example where empirical research helped modify a logically derived system. Our ideas need to be empirically tested, and the quality of empirical research depends greatly on our capability to measure the constructs of interest accurately.

MEASUREMENT IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

To illustrate the importance of good measurement, we borrow an example from Hill, Kopp, and Bollinger (2007) involving Chicago’s Lakeshore Marathon in 2005. This race was not one for the record books. In fact, the runners were perplexed by their unusually slow times and perhaps woke up the next morning to find themselves more sore than usual. The problem? It was discovered *afterward* that the course had been wrongly charted and they had actually run 27.2 miles—a full mile further than the usual grueling distance for a marathon. Indeed, accurate measurement is very much a relevant issue. Imagine that after you had already run 26.2 miles and your body was excruciatingly telling you that you should be finished, you had yet another full mile to run!

Without good measurement in research, the data that are collected in the process of doing a research study are of little if any value. Most measures in the psychology of religion are self-report scales. Participants completing such measures are asked to respond to multiple items designed to assess the many varieties of religious and spiritual experience. Fortunately, psychologists of religion have long recognized the importance of good measurement and have placed a high priority on it. As early as 1984, Gorsuch pronounced measurement to be the current “paradigm” (i.e., the dominant perspective or concern of psychologists of religion). By the end of the 1990s, Hill and Hood (1999a) identified over 125 measurement scales available to psychologists of religion, and many more have been developed in the past decade (Hill, 2005; Hill et al., 2007). To be sure, there is a well-developed measurement literature in the psychology of religion. But what makes one scale better than another? Both theoretical and technical issues must be considered in determining the best measure.

Theoretical Considerations

Any attempt to measure a concept such as religiousness or spirituality requires that the concept be specified in measurable terms. Such an “operational definition” is especially important when applied to religiousness and spirituality, because, as we have seen in Chapter 1, there is considerable variety in how these terms are conceptualized. The importance of theoretical clarity extends beyond how the constructs are conceptualized; good theory is necessary in providing a framework for testable hypotheses as well. Furthermore, researchers must consider the various dimensions of religious and spiritual experience (a topic that we consider shortly) to help determine the appropriateness of potential measures.

Technical Considerations

A scale’s reliability and validity are the two most important technical issues to consider. The more reliable and valid a measure is, the more useful it is for conducting scientific research. Though brief scales (sometimes just one-item scales) may be appealing because they are time-saving and convenient, they also tend to be less reliable and perhaps less valid.

“Reliability” refers to the consistency of a measure and is usually assessed in terms of either (1) “consistency across time” or (2) “internal consistency.” When assessing consistency of a measure over time, better known as “test–retest reliability,” the reliability coefficient is a correlation between the test scores of a group of individuals who are administered the scale on two different occasions (usually at least 2 weeks apart). More common is the use of internal consistency as a reliability indicator. The better multiple scale items fit together (as determined statistically by factor analysis), the higher the internal consistency. Internal consistency is most often measured by a statistic called Cronbach’s alpha, which ranges from 0 to 1.00, with a higher value indicating greater consistency. Alpha levels of religious and spiritual constructs are preferably above .80, but frequently are acceptable at about .70.

Consideration of the scale’s “validity,” or the extent to which a test measures what it purports to measure, is also essential to good measurement. There are many different ways to think of and measure validity. For example, though it may be tempting to do so, we cannot rely simply on our subjective sense of whether or not the scale appears to measure what it is supposed to be measuring, referred to as “face validity.” Face validity is subject to all sorts of human bias and is therefore not scientifically useful. “Content validity” refers to whether

or not a representative sample of the domain is being covered. For example, perhaps you are working with a measure of spiritual disciplines. If your measure inquires about prayer, fasting, and tithing, but does not address reading sacred texts or service, content validity is sacrificed—because the entire behavioral domain has not been included in your measure. “Construct validity” examines the agreement between a specific theoretical construct and a measurement device, and may rely heavily on what is already known about a construct. “Convergent validity” and “discriminant validity” are both subdomains of construct validity and can be considered together. Convergent validity asks, “How well does this measure correspond to similar measures of the same or similar constructs?”; discriminant validity asks, “How is this test unrelated to measures of different constructs?” Those who develop scales try to demonstrate as much reliability and validity as possible, though it is highly unlikely that any single measure will be perfectly reliable or score high on all types of validity just discussed.

Sample Representativeness

There are many measurement scales in the psychology of religion that adequately meet these technical criteria, but care must still be taken in their use. Why? Because these scales were developed on a rather limited sample that may not reflect the population of interest under investigation. The most common form of such limitation is that many of the scales were initially developed for a Christian population, but now many researchers wish to investigate religious and spiritual experience outside the confines of Christianity, or perhaps even outside the context of any formal religious tradition (Hill, 2005). Even more problematic is that many of the scales were initially developed among white, young, middle-class, American (and, to a lesser extent, British) college students (Hill & Pargament, 2003). Four variables known to be strongly correlated with religious experience are age, socioeconomic status, race, and educational level (Hill, 2005); therefore, caution is necessary if one should choose to use such a scale for a population with a different demographic profile or outside the Judeo-Christian context.

Scales created on the basis of either unrepresentative samples or samples representing a narrow population (e.g., a single denomination) are usually insensitive or inapplicable to broader groups (Chatters, Taylor, & Lincoln, 2002). For example, Protestant African Americans—among the most religious of all ethnic groups in the United States—emphasize community service (Ellison & Taylor, 1996), as well as the notion of reciprocal blessings with God (Black, 1999). Both of these characteristics are ignored in virtually all measures of religiousness or spirituality, in favor of other issues that may be irrelevant to African Americans.

Hill and Dwiwardani (in press) provided a fascinating example of how difficult it is to transport the study of religious experience to other world religions when they attempted to apply Allport’s I-E distinction to Indonesian Muslims. In order to make the scale that measures both I and E religious orientations applicable to the Muslim context, more than just the language of the scale needed to be changed (e.g., changing the word “church” to “mosque”). Because Islam is such a strong pillar of the overall collectivistic culture in Indonesia, the concept of the social basis of the E religious orientation as a form of immature religion is simply not as applicable to Muslims as it is to Christians. Fortunately, however, another group of researchers has provided the Muslim-Christian Religious Orientation Scale (Ghorbani, Watson, Ghramaleki, Morris, & Hood, 2002), which takes into account a social dimension in relation to the broader community and culture rather than to the mosque. It is important that we recognize the limits of our measures and seek to improve them for more diverse settings.

Measurement Domains

Because religiousness is a highly complex and varied human experience, good measurement must reflect this complexity. This does not mean that any single measure must reflect all of this complexity, for many times the topic of interest is but a piece of the religion pie—for example, religious beliefs or specific religious behaviors. Psychologists, especially social psychologists, frequently discuss the totality of human experience in three domains: “cognition,” or how the ideological aspect of (in our case) religion is conceptualized; “affect,” or the emotional, “like–dislike” facet of belief or behavior (which frequently includes attitudes and values); and “behavior,” or what people do and how they act. It is important that measures reflect these individual domains. Mixing these domains often leads to confusing research. So, for example, of about 125 measures identified by Hill and Hood (1999a), there was a cluster of measures stressing religious beliefs, another cluster emphasizing religious attitudes, and so forth. Sometimes it is desirable to have a single multidimensional measure, but even then there will usually be subscales (often determined by factor analysis) tapping more specific domains.

Table 2.4, adapted from Hill (2005), provides a summary of 12 common categories of measures that have been developed, with examples of measures from the literature that fit each category. One might be surprised by the number of measures available, especially since the measures and their respective categories in the table are not exhaustive. In fact, the table includes only a small percentage of measures, though Hill (2005) maintains that they represent some of the better measures in the psychology of religion. Notice that the first four categories cover what Tsang and McCullough (2003) refer to as “Level I” measures, which represent “higher levels of organization reflecting broad individual differences among persons in highly abstracted, trait-like qualities” (p. 349). Level I measures may help assess how religious or spiritual a person is, and here we refer to this as “dispositional religiousness.” The final eight categories of measures represent “Level II” measures, which get at how religion or spirituality functions in a person’s life, referred to here as “functional religiousness.” For example, highly religious people may use their religion in different ways to help cope with life’s stressful agents. More scales and more detailed discussions of scales can be found in a number of resources: Hill (2005), Hill and Hood (1999a), MacDonald (2000), and MacDonald, LeClair, Holland, Alter, and Friedman (1995).

Gorsuch’s (1984) claim that the psychology of religion had been dominated by issues of measurement up to that time led him to conclude that measurement scales were “reasonably effective” and “available in sufficient varieties for most any task in the psychology of religion” (p. 234). Now, a quarter of a century later, we can say that Gorsuch was both correct and incorrect. Within the psychology of religion proper, and especially at Level I dispositional measurement, Gorsuch was clearly correct. Researchers have a sufficient arsenal of measurement instruments at hand to adequately assess a person’s level of religiousness or spirituality, even given the complexities of what it means to be religious or spiritual. The one caveat, however, is that measures within the psychology of religion will need to become increasingly pluralistic, to better represent (1) religious traditions other than Christianity and (2) those forms of spirituality that do not conform to any formal religious tradition.

However, Gorsuch (or anyone else, for that matter) was, quite understandably, unable in 1984 to envision the direction the field would take, particularly the move toward examining the many functional varieties of religiousness (Level II measurement) that would require further scale development. So, for example, in reviewing the significant association between

TABLE 2.4. Specific Measures of Religion and Spirituality in 12 Categories

Level I: Measures of Dispositional Religiousness or Spirituality*General Religiousness or Spirituality*

- Mysticism Scale (Hood, 1975)
- Religiosity Measure (Rohrbaugh & Jessor, 1975)
- Spiritual Transcendence Scale (Piedmont, 1999)
- Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982)

Religious or Spiritual Commitment

- Dimensions of Religious Commitment Scale (Glock & Stark, 1966)
- Religious Commitment Scale (Pfeifer & Waelty, 1995)
- Religious Commitment Inventory—10 (Worthington et al., 2003)
- Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire (Plante, Vallaeys, Sherman, & Wallston, 2002)

Religious or Spiritual Development

- Faith Development Interview Guide (Fowler, 1981)
- Faith Development Scale (Leak, Loucks, & Bowlin, 1999)
- Faith Maturity Scale (Benson, Donahue, & Erickson, 1993)
- Religious Maturity Scale (Leak & Fish, 1999)
- Spiritual Assessment Inventory (Hall & Edwards, 1996)

Religious or Spiritual History

- The SPIRITual History (Maugans, 1996)
- Spiritual History Scale (Hayes, Meador, Branch, & George, 2001)

Level II: Measures of Functional Religiousness or Spirituality*Religious or Spiritual Social Participation*

- Attitude Toward the Church Scale (Thurstone & Chave, 1929)
- Attitude Toward Church and Religious Practices (Dynes, 1955)
- Religious Involvement Inventory (Hilty & Morgan, 1985)

Religious or Spiritual Private Practices

- Buddhist Beliefs and Practices Scale (Emavardhana & Tori, 1997)
- Religious Background and Behavior (Connors, Tonigan, & Miller, 1996)
- Types of Prayer Scale (Poloma & Pendleton, 1989)

Religious or Spiritual Support

- Religious Pressures Scale (Altemeyer, 1988)
- Religious Support (Krause, 1999)
- Religious Support Scale (Fiala, Bjorck, & Gorsuch, 2002)

Religious or Spiritual Coping

- Religious Coping Scale (Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000)
- Religious Coping Activities Scale (Pargament et al., 1990)
- Religious Problem-Solving Scale (Pargament et al., 1988)

Religious or Spiritual Beliefs and Values

- Christian Orthodoxy Scale (Fullerton & Hunsberger, 1982)
- Love and Guilt Oriented Dimensions of Christian Belief (McConahay & Hough, 1973)
- Loving and Controlling God Scale (Benson & Spilka, 1973)
- Religious Fundamentalism Scale (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992)
- Spiritual Belief Inventory (Holland et al., 1998)
- Spiritual Belief Scale (Schaler, 1996)

(cont.)

TABLE 2.4. (cont.)

Religion or Spirituality as Motivating Forces

- Intrinsic–Extrinsic Scale—Revised (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989)
- Quest Scale (Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993)
- Religious Orientation Scale (Allport & Ross, 1967)
- Religious Internalization Scale (Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993)

Religious/Spiritual Techniques for Regulating and Reconciling Relationships

- Forgiveness Scale (S. W. Brown, Gorsuch, Rosik, & Ridley, 2001)
- Tendency to Forgive Measure (Brown, 2003)
- Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (McCullough et al., 1998)

Religious or Spiritual Experiences

- Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale (Underwood, 1999)
- Index of Core Spiritual Experiences (Kass, Friedman, Leserman, Zuttermeister, & Benson, 1991)
- Religious Experiences Episode Measure (Hood, 1970)
- Religious Strain (Exline, Yali, & Sanderson, 2000)
- Spiritual Experience Index—Revised (Genia, 1997)
- Spiritual Orientation Inventory (Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, & Saunders, 1988)

Note. Adapted from Hill (2005). Copyright 2005 by The Guilford Press. Adapted by permission. The scales are grouped by nine domains of religion and spirituality, as outlined by the Fetzer Institute/National Institute of Aging Working Group (1999). Three domains (General Religiousness or Spirituality, Spiritual Development, and Religion or Spirituality as a Motivating Force) have been added.

religion and both mental and physical health (to be discussed in considerable detail in Chapter 13), Hill and Pargament (2003) have highlighted ongoing advances in measurement (e.g., measuring perceived closeness to God, religious struggle) that help delineate *why* religiousness and spirituality seems to contribute (mostly positively, but sometimes negatively) to health and well-being. It is safe to say that measurement issues, particularly of the Level II functional variety, will continue to be of great interest and concern to psychologists of religion.

Implicit Measures

The final measurement issue we wish to discuss is an issue that plagues all of psychology—the field’s overreliance on self-report measures. Every measure (including qualitative measures) discussed thus far in this section relies on self-reports, which of course may be biased for a number of reasons: intentional deception, impression management, personal bias, and many more. The accuracy of self-reports is especially suspect when the topic being investigated is personal and sensitive in nature (Dovidio & Fazio, 1992), which religion and spirituality often are. As a result, there has been an increasing interest in developing other measurement techniques (such as physiological measures, better behavioral measures, etc.), including the use of “implicit” measures, particularly as measures of attitudes. Greenwald and colleagues (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) have defined implicit attitudes as unconscious, automatic evaluations that influence thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Probably the most common implicit measure is the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald et al., 1998) which uses response latency as a marker of one’s unconscious and automatic attitudes. The IAT was first developed as an implicit measure of racial attitudes, whereby an associative strength between two concepts (e.g., objects and evaluative adjectives)

tives) is measured by the amount of time (measured in milliseconds) it takes to determine whether the concepts go together. Thus it may be easier for a racially prejudiced white person to categorize two objects that are congruent (and hence take less time to determine that the two concepts go together) in his or her thinking (e.g., white and good; black and bad) than objects that are incongruent (e.g., white and bad; black and good). Though there are many assumptions underlying the IAT (and the notion of implicit measurement in general), social-psychological research has shown it to be psychometrically adequate in terms of its internal consistency, temporal reliability, and validity (Rowatt & Franklin, 2004).

Only recently has research in the psychology of religion utilized implicit measures. Some of these studies have investigated explicit (i.e., self-report) measures of religiousness or spirituality in relation to some implicit measure, such as race attitudes (Rowatt & Franklin, 2004), humility (Powers, Nam, Rowatt, & Hill, 2007; Rowatt, Powers, et al., 2006), attitudes toward homosexuals (Rowatt, Tsang, et al., 2006; Tsang & Rowatt, 2007), or attitudes toward other religious groups (Rowatt, Franklin, & Cotton, 2005). The results of much of this research are covered later in this book, particularly in Chapter 12. Others (e.g., Hill, 1994; Wenger, 2004), however, have made the case that religion itself may be a topic that can be implicitly measured, and several notable attempts have now been made (Bassett et al., 2004; Cohen, Shariff, & Hill, 2008; Gibson, 2006; Wenger, 2004). This research is still in its earliest stages, with the implicit measures themselves needing more frequent testing before any judgment of their utility can be made. These attempts do represent, however, important efforts at getting beyond reliance on self-report measures.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Many people perhaps do not recognize that much of the psychology of religion falls primarily within social psychology (though other subdisciplines, particularly clinical and developmental psychology, are well represented) in general, and within the domain of individual differences in particular (Dittes, 1969). Social psychology studies the person in the social context. Because religiousness varies from one person to another, the psychology of religion stresses the individual-variability aspect of social psychology. Most research (and hence most measures used in the research) in the psychology of religion stresses individual differences. That is, the person's own attitudes and behavior are studied as dependent and independent variables. Social psychology further examines how independent variables, such as religiousness, affect people and their relationships with others. Much of this research is devoted to social-cognitive processes.

As noted earlier, individual differences in social psychology are typically accounted for in three domains that are easily applied to religious experience: cognition, affect, and behavior. To these three, we perhaps should add habit, since there are important habitual components in religious experience. Cognition is primarily concerned with beliefs and how they are learned—in other words, how the ideological aspect of religion is conceptualized. The affective realm emphasizes feelings and attitudes—the emotional, “like–dislike” facet of belief or behavior. The attitude concept is especially important to the psychology of religion, since attitudes are often important predictors of behavior. Behavior, of course, consists of what people do, how they act. Finally, habit involves what people do regularly, consistently, and often automatically. The psychology of religion looks at individual religious differences within each of these areas.

For our current purposes, the important point to note is that because each domain has a separate purpose, these domains should be kept distinct in measurement. Items representing these domains are exemplified in Table 2.5. The first and third illustrations in the cognitive area use a response format that emphasizes the definition of the domain, mostly here belief. The second and fourth illustrations use a common response format that emphasizes belief but includes an element of affect—namely, value. This distinction is not made for the other domains.

Because each domain has a different purpose, it is important to keep them distinct. Research can then identify the conditions under which they relate to each other. For exam-

TABLE 2.5. Illustrations of Items Assessing Aspects of Cognition, Affect, Habit, and Behavior

<u>Cognition</u>	
<i>Belief</i>	
1. Rate what you feel are the “odds” (%) that God exists.	
There is no God	0 25 50 75 100 God definitely exists
<i>Value</i>	
2. God exists.	
Strongly disagree	1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree
<i>Belief</i>	
3. Rate how important attending church weekly is.	
Unimportant	1 2 3 4 5 Important
<i>Value</i>	
4. Everyone should attend church each week.	
Strongly disagree	1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree
<u>Affect (attitudes)</u>	
5. Rate how much you enjoy worship services.	
Not at all	1 2 3 4 5 Very much
6. I enjoy worship services.	
Strongly disagree	1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree
<u>Habit</u>	
7. How long have you had your current pattern of church attendance?	
a. 1 year or less	
b. 1–2 years	
c. 3–4 years	
d. 5 years or more	
<u>Behavior</u>	
8. How often do you attend church?	
a. Never	
b. A couple of times a year	
c. Once a month	
d. Several times a month	
e. Once a week	
f. More than once a week	

ple, Allport (1959) was interested in total religiousness, based on both the I and E scores of religious orientation (Allport & Ross, 1967). He stressed affect or motivation in these orientations, and he ignored cognition. The original scale, however, included behavioral items, which created conceptual confusion. Later versions of the I and E scales dropped the behavioral items, and the measure of I and E became clearer.

The research reported throughout this text cuts across these different domains. It is important to keep in mind whether we are talking about beliefs, values, motivations, and so forth. Because each of the areas functions differently, it is often important to distinguish among them. Still, at other times we may wish to investigate some overriding concern, and to do so we measure across several of these areas. As noted throughout this book, religiousness and spirituality are complex, multidimensional phenomena, and this includes the fact that they incorporate each of these domains as part of the complete experience.

ATTRIBUTION IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

We have identified in Chapter 1 the search for meaning as the core theme in our framework for the psychology of religion. People are meaning-driven creatures, and religion is uniquely capable of providing meaning, even sometimes when applied to ordinary everyday events and experiences. There is, however, a problem with this framework for psychologists who empirically study religious experience: “Meaning” and “purpose” are broad and elusive concepts that are difficult to investigate empirically. What psychologists need are more specific theories capable of producing testable hypotheses within the larger framework of the search for meaning. In the first chapter, we have described attribution theory as one such possibility. There are other approaches to studying religion as a meaning system, of course, and utilizing the search for meaning as an overall conceptual framework is but one of many ways in which the psychology of religion can be approached. Nevertheless, as we shall soon see, attribution processes are at work in how we find meaning in life (Kruglanski, Hasmel, Maides, & Schwartz, 1978), even though they are only part of the story, and we believe that attribution theory is indeed a useful framework for the empirical study of religious experience. We now look more specifically at how attribution processes are part of how people use religion.

As we have noted in Chapter 1, attribution is primarily concerned with causal explanations about people, things, and events. Such explanations are couched in ideas and statements that assign certain powers and positions to various situational and dispositional factors. By examining such meanings and their ramifications, attributional research became a major cornerstone of cognitive social psychology, and it was soon extended to explain how people understand their emotional states and many of the things that happen to them and to others (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Hewstone, 1983a). It may also help explain much religious experience.

Motivational Bases of Attributions: Needs for Meaning, Control, and Esteem

The question of why people make attributions returns us to some basic motivational themes that underlie much religious thinking and behavior—namely, to needs for meaning, control, and esteem. Here we define “esteem” as a personal sense of capability and adequacy, which is a central part of sociality (as defined in Chapter 1) and is reflected in our relationships with others. Though other activating elements are important, depending on the topic and

situation, we see meaning, control, and esteem as central concerns for the psychology of religion.

Forms of personal faith—for example, Allport's I, E, and Quest orientations—can be viewed as motivationally concerned with meaning, control, and esteem. Allport's (1966) idea of I faith as a sentiment flooding “the whole life with motivation and meaning” (p. 455), and as a search for truth, is explicitly directed toward the attainment of ultimate meaning. Quest is a similar effort to attain answers to basic questions. Further analyses of these religious orientations easily yield connections with these motivations.

In addition to a “need to know,” a “need for mastery and control” enters the picture, as Kelley (1967) and other central figures in attribution theory and research have noted. Bulman and Wortman (1977) suggested yet another motivational source of attributions, which has been buttressed by much research—namely, that “people assign causality in order to maintain or enhance their self-esteem” (p. 351). Self-esteem is also likely to be a consequence of the presence of meaning and a sense of control.

Our theoretical position asserts that attributions are triggered when meanings are unclear, control is in doubt, and self-esteem is challenged. There is, as suggested, much evidence that these three factors are interrelated.

Naturalistic and Religious Attributions

Given these three sources of motivations for attributions, an individual may attribute the causes of events to a wide variety of possible referents (oneself, others, chance, God, etc.). For the psychologist of religion, these referents may be classified into two broad categories: “naturalistic” and “religious.” The evidence is that most people in most circumstances initially employ naturalistic explanations and attributions, such as references to people, natural events, accidents, or chance (Lupfer, Brock, & DePaola, 1992). Depending on a wide variety of situational and personal characteristics, there is a good likelihood of shifting to religious attributions when naturalistic ones do not satisfactorily meet the needs for meaning, control, and esteem (Hewstone, 1983b; Spilka, Shaver, & Kirkpatrick, 1985). The task is to identify and comprehend those influences that contribute to the making of religious attributions. For example, we already know that the attributions of intrinsically religious individuals differ from those who are extrinsically oriented (Watson, Morris, & Hood, 1990). In addition, Gorsuch and Smith (1983) have examined the bases of attributions to God. Spilka and Schmidt (1983a) and Lupfer et al. (1992) have also looked at a number of personal and situational possibilities that affect religious and secular attributions. Hunsberger (1983c) has focused on biases that enter this process. Even though there is much potential in this theoretical framework, it has only been applied in a few areas.

Extending Attribution Theory

Theories usually become more useful when they are combined with other theoretical speculations, and Wikstrom (1987) has added to an attributional framework with Sundén's role theory of religion. Sundén's theory proposes that religion, “psychologically speaking, seem[s] to provide models and roles for a certain kind of perceptual ‘set’” (Wikstrom, 1987, p. 391). A frame of reference is established in which the person's actions and cognitions are now structured by a religious role. Wikstrom further tells us that “when the frame of reference is activated, stimuli which would otherwise be left unnoticed are not only observed but also

combined and attributed to a living and acting ‘other,’ to God” (1987, p. 393). Moreover, “as a condition and as a result of the feedback from the role-taking experience ... [the self-perception] ... can be seen as something that provides meaning and a feeling of identity, and strengthens self-esteem” (1987, p. 396). Control is also brought into the picture, showing how role and attribution approaches seem to parallel each other. There is unexplored potential here: van der Lans (1987) shows how this kind of role theory predicts various aspects of religious experience. Unfortunately, this approach has not stimulated much research.

Our contention is that these two cornerstones of social psychology—the attributional process and role taking—are products of interactions between external situational factors and internal dispositional factors (Magnusson, 1981). In other words, all thinking and behavior take place in an interpersonal and sociocultural context in which situations are elements. We now identify some of these influences that contribute to the making of religious attributions.

Situational Influences

For many years, social psychology in general and attribution research in particular have emphasized the role of immediate environmental factors in the determination of thinking and behavior (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). This implies that much religious experience, belief, and behavior are subject to the vagaries of current circumstances. In other words, the information we researchers obtain may largely be a function of the settings in which people are studied and data collected. There is evidence to support this idea. Schachter (1964) claims that an individual “will label his feelings in terms of his knowledge of the immediate situation” (p. 54). Dienstbier (1979) has referred to this labeling as “emotion attribution theory,” in order to explain how people define the causes of emotional states when ambiguity exists. Proudfoot and Shaver (1975) used the same basic idea to denote the bases of religious experience. Research suggests that up to three-quarters of intense religious experiences occur when individuals are engaged in religious activities or are in religious settings (Spilka & Schmidt, 1983a). Still, one must be cautious, for some studies have not shown the influence of religious situations on religious attributions (Lupfer et al., 1992). There is also reason to believe that personal factors need to be considered (Epstein & O’Brien, 1985). Since we want to understand attributions in general, rather than those that involve only emotion or ambiguity, we have called our approach “general attribution theory” (Spilka et al., 1985).

Situational influences fall into two broad categories: “contextual factors” and “event character factors.” The first category is concerned with the degree to which situations are religiously structured, while the latter stresses the nature of the event being explained.

Contextual Factors

Situations may be religiously structured by the locale in which activities or their evaluation take place (e.g., church or nonchurch surroundings; the presence of others who are known to be religious, such as clergy; or participation in religious activities, such as prayer or worship). The presence of such circumstances should elicit religious attributions, and, as noted above, this is obviously true when religious mystical or intense religious experiences occur. Certainly if other people are present and are religiously involved, their actions should aid in the selection of a religious interpretation. We might say that the likelihood of religious explanations is heightened by such factors. Work by Hood (1977) has further demonstrated

the importance of situational influences in the creation of nature-related and spiritual experiences. Contextual elements apparently increase the chances that those affected will attribute what occurs to the intervention of God. The *salience* of religion seems to be the key influence here. That is, the more important, noticeable, or conspicuous religion is in a situation, the more probable it is that religious attributions will be offered. This suggests what has been called the “availability hypothesis” or “availability heuristic.” Religious influences in situations increase the probability of making religious associations or arousing religious ideas (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). One may argue that church settings in which religious attributions are not made may not be salient for religion. For example, research has shown that simply being present in a religious institution may not be enough (Spilka & Schmidt, 1983a).

Event Character Factors

Religious attributions may also be affected by the nature or character of the event being explained. A number of such influences are possible: (1) the importance of what takes place; (2) whether the event is positive or negative; (3) the domain of the event (social, political, economic, medical, etc.); and (4) whether the event occurs to the attributing person or to someone else. These factors have been shown to affect the intensity and frequency of religious attributions, and we feel that they are influential to the extent that they enhance meaning, control, and esteem.

Lupfer et al. (1992) speak of “meaning belief systems” (p. 491). This concept emphasizes the adequacy of naturalistic versus religious explanations. As one set proves to be satisfactory, the alternative set may be ignored, at least in terms of what the relative availability of explanations suggests. Another possibility that reintroduces questions of meaning and control concerns the degree of ambiguity and threat that events convey. For example, medical problems may be least understood and have the greatest potential for threatening life. In contrast, as serious as economic disasters are, they seem to be understood more easily; they also leave the individual the possibility of starting over again. In other words, we hypothesize that situations involving high ambiguity and high threat may have the greatest likelihood of calling forth religious explanations. One problem is to determine the relative degrees of threat for the different domains.

EVENT IMPORTANCE

Considering the awe with which the power of God is regarded, one might perceive a role for the deity only when events of the greatest significance are involved. A disaster takes place, and the insurance company defines it as an “act of God.” A young person unexpectedly dies, and it is said to be an expression of “God’s will.” People who win millions of dollars in lotteries commonly see the “hand of God” in their success. The unanticipated is often explained by such phrases as “God works in mysterious ways.” Despite the fact that science has provided detailed naturalistic interpretations of birth and death, as well as reasons for good fortune and victory or failure and defeat, for most people there still remains a sense of the miraculous about the rare and unique events that can greatly change their lives. From a personal perspective, science and common sense often do not satisfactorily answer such questions as “Why now?”, “Why me?”, or “Why here?” If someone is suffering from a severe illness or a terminal condition, attributions and pleas to God seem quite appropriate. Instances of remission when all appeared hopeless are frequently regarded as signs of God’s mercy, compassion, favor, or

forgiveness. Research confirms this view that God becomes part of the “big picture” for the significant things that happen (Spilka & Schmidt, 1983a). Defining what is important has a very individual quality: Sports teams may pray for extra achievement in the “big” game, or gamblers may plead for divine intervention on a roll of the dice (Hoffman, 1992). Attributions therefore are a function of event importance—a subjectively determined concept.

THE VALENCE (POSITIVITY–NEGATIVITY) OF AN EVENT

If there is one tendency in making attributions to God, it is that people rarely blame God for the bad things that happen to them. Attributions to God are overwhelmingly positive (Bulman & Wortman, 1977; Johnson & Spilka, 1991; Lupfer et al., 1992). Bulman and Wortman (1977) studied the reasons given by young people who became paraplegic because of serious accidents. They saw a benevolent divine purpose in what happened to them. As one such youth put it, “God’s trying to put me in situations, help me learn about Him and myself and also how I can help other people” (quoted in Bulman & Wortman, 1977, p. 358). In another study, a patient with cancer told one of the authors, “God does not cause cancer . . . illness and grief do not come from God. God does give me the strength to cope with any and all problems” (quoted in Johnson & Spilka, 1991, p. 30). Rabbi Harold Kushner’s (1981) well-known book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* supports this idea that bad things should not be attributed to God.

Even though positive attributions to God prevail, some people feel that they are being punished for their sins and may make negative attributions, but this is relatively rare. Clearly, the valence of events influences religious attributions, but we need to know more about why and under what circumstances positive or negative attributions are made to the deity.

EVENT DOMAIN

Certain domains appear “ready-made” for the application of secular understandings, while others seem more appropriate for invoking religious possibilities. We know that medical situations elicit more religious attributions than either social or economic circumstances, and it may be that, historically and culturally, the latter realms have largely been associated with naturalistic explanations (Spilka & Schmidt, 1983a). In addition, religious institutions have been quite averse to glorifying money and wealth. References in the Bible to “filthy lucre” and the difficulty the rich will encounter in attempting to enter heaven leave little doubt that economic and spiritual matters are not regarded as harmonious.

Without question, when people are in dire straits in any domain, it is not uncommon to seek divine help. The issue may, however, revolve around the clarity of meanings and the sense of control a person has in various situations. Religion may best fill the void when the person cannot understand why things are as they are, and control is lacking—in other words, when ambiguity is great and threat is high.

THE PERSONAL RELEVANCE OF EVENTS

Personal relevance is one of those variables that overlaps the broad categories of situational and dispositional influences (see “Dispositional Influences,” below). It is part of both realms. There is little doubt that when events occur to us, they are much more personally important than when they happen to others. We can be deeply moved when we hear about a friend’s

or relative's serious illness, but when we suffer from such a condition ourselves, the question "Why me?" is suddenly of the greatest significance, and attributions to God are commonly made. If something particularly good happens to someone else, such as the winning of a great deal of money, we might say "That's luck for you," and feel happy for that person. The one benefited is more likely to claim that "God was looking out for me." The idea that personal relevance may elicit more religious attributions has gained support, but not consistently. It does seem to be involved in interactions with other variables, so additional research is called for to resolve these ambiguities (Lupfer et al., 1992; Spilka & Schmidt, 1983a).

SITUATIONAL COMPLEXITY AND EVENT SIGNIFICANCE

Reality tells us not only that any particular event includes all of the dimensions described above—importance, valence, domain, and personal relevance—but also that event contexts vary greatly. It is also quite probable that event characteristics interact differently in different settings. It may be contended that each situation is a unique, one-time occurrence, and without question this is true. Still, there are commonalities across events and situations that need to be abstracted and categorized. Even within-situation dimensions remain to be discovered. An empirical scientific approach must keep these considerations in mind when theories such as the one proposed here are employed to direct research.

Though we somewhat arbitrarily distinguish situations and people, in life this really makes little sense. There are no situations or events that are meaningful without people to create such meanings. In the last analysis, person and situation are in "transaction." It is a conceptual convenience to separate the two with the word "interaction" when in actuality they are inseparable. To many psychologists, the ultimate purpose of our discipline is to develop a psychology that treats the situation and the individual as a unit (Magnusson, 1981; Rowe, 1987). Though this is a goal to which we may aspire, we are forced to consider the individual in the same way that we look at the situation.

Dispositional Influences

The Individual in Context

The strong emphasis on individualism in North American society causes us to look at people as if they act independently of their surroundings. Just as events take place in contexts, persons always exist in their individual life spaces, which vary with time and place. It may make a big difference if someone reacts in the morning before breakfast, or in the evening after supper. A religious experience that takes place in a church may have different repercussions than one that occurs when the individual is alone on a mountaintop does. Personal response is surprisingly situationally dependent.

Personal Factors

Individual characteristics may be termed "dispositional," and these fall into three overlapping categories: "background," "cognitive/linguistic," and (for lack of a better term) "personality/attitudinal." Since we are not in a position to denote constitutional and genetic influences or their effects, these three realms imply that people pattern their attributions regarding the causes and nature of events so that some explanations are much more congenial (meaning

more “available” and/or “better-fitting”) than other possibilities. This would hold true for the selection of naturalistic as opposed to religious referents. Specifically, it would be true for their decisions as to whether positive or negative event outcomes are a result of their own actions or those of others; are due to fate, luck, or chance; or are attributable to the involvement of God. Research in this area is still needed, and slowly the challenge is being taken up (Bains, 1983; Lupfer et al., 1992; Schaefer & Gorsuch, 1991).

BACKGROUND FACTORS

It is a psychological truism to state that people are largely products of their environment as far as most behavior is concerned. The overwhelming majority of us are exposed early in life to religious teachings at home and by our peers and adults in schools, churches, and communities. These childhood lessons often follow us throughout life and are expressed by the use of religious concepts in a wide variety of circumstances. A common observation suggests that the stronger a person’s spiritual background, the greater the chance that the person will report intense religious experiences and undergo conversion (Clark, 1929; Coe, 1900). Frequency of church attendance, knowledge of one’s faith, importance of religious beliefs, and the persistence of religious ideas over many decades are correlates of early religious socialization (McGuire, 1992; Shand, 1990). In other words, the more conservatively religious or orthodox the home and family in which a person was reared, the greater the person’s likelihood of using religious attributions later in life.

COGNITIVE/LINGUISTIC FACTORS

Attributions depend on having available a language that both permits and supports thinking along certain lines. Bernstein (1964) tells us that “Language marks out what is relevant, affectively, cognitively, and socially, and experience is transformed by what is made relevant” (quoted in Bourque & Back, 1971, p. 3).

Such relevance is well demonstrated by studies showing that religious persons possess a religious language and use it to describe their experience. There is reason to believe that the presence of such a language designates an experience as religious instead of aesthetic or some other possibility (Bourque, 1969; Bourque & Back, 1971). Meaning to the experiencing individual appears in part to be a function of the language and vocabulary available to the person, and this clearly relates to the individual’s background and interests. There is much in the idea that thought is a slave of language, and the thoughts that breed attributions are clearly influenced by the language the attributor is set to use (Carroll, 1956).

PERSONALITY/ATTITUDINAL FACTORS

The broad heading of “personality/attitudinal factors” includes a wide variety of dispositional factors that almost seem to defy classification. The language of personality is both difficult and complex, and different thinkers often employ different concepts to cover the same psychological territory. Schaefer and Gorsuch (1991) propose a “multivariate belief–motivation theory of religiousness” in an effort to integrate the often scattered ideas and research notions that associate traits and attitudes with religion. These scholars first recognize what they term a “superordinate domain” of religiousness, which comprises a number of subdomains. Their

intention is to define the components of these latter spheres. The three they select for study are religious motivation, religious beliefs, and religious problem-solving style. Depending on the variables chosen to represent these subdomains, there may be room for argument as to whether one is looking at a cognitive or a motivational factor. Unhappily, most workers in the field have not been as rigorous as Gorsuch and his students where definition of variables is concerned. For example, many “personality” factors have been examined in relation to religiousness. Among these are self-esteem, locus of control, the concept of a just world, and form of personal faith. All four seem to possess a motivational quality, yet the last two strongly involve belief systems. The Schaefer–Gorsuch theory implies a need to distinguish motivational from belief components, or to identify a third, overlapping domain (Schaefer & Gorsuch, 1991). Obviously, this work is in its infancy, but it suggests a potentially fruitful way of organizing a mass of piecemeal findings into a coherent framework.

To illustrate the meanings of personality/attitudinal dispositions relative to the making of religious attributions, let us look briefly at what we know about two well-researched factors: self-esteem and locus of control.

Self-Esteem. Research on self-conceptions has been conducted for almost 60 years. For more than 30 years, many psychologists have focused on self-esteem—the regard people have for themselves (Wylie, 1979). The evidence suggests that this variable is quite basic to personality. One view is that attributions are often made to validate and enhance self-esteem; they perform a self-protective function (Hewstone, 1983b).

Needless to say, a fair number of researchers have examined self-esteem relative to religiosity. In general, high self-esteem relates to positive and loving images of God, and similarly to Allport’s I religious orientation (Benson & Spilka, 1973; Hood, 1992c; Masters & Bergin, 1992). There may be a need here for consistency; this suggests that those who have negative self-views perceive God as unloving and punitive (Benson & Spilka, 1973). In other words, the person with a negative opinion of the self may think, “I am unlovable; hence God can’t love me.” Consistency further implies that favorable attributions to God ought to be associated with positive event outcomes as opposed to negative occurrences. This hypothesis has been supported (Lupfer et al., 1992; Spilka & Schmidt, 1983a).

Self-esteem does not stand by itself. It is enmeshed in a complex of overlapping personality traits and religious concepts and measures, such as sin and guilt, as well as the nature of the religious tradition with which one is identified (Hood, 1992c). This work indicates that different patterns of self-esteem and God attributions may be a function of one’s religious heritage and its doctrines. If a prime role of attributions is to buttress self-esteem, we need to ask how religion performs such a function—especially in traditions such as fundamentalism, which may seem quite harsh on an individual’s effort to express positive self-regard.

Locus of Control. Locus of control was initially conceptualized as a tendency to see events as either internally determined by the person or externally produced by factors beyond the control of the individual. This formulation has been extended and refined a number of times. External control was originally viewed as fate, luck, and chance until Levenson (1973) added control by powerful others, and Kopplin (1976) brought in control by God. Pargament et al. (1988) recognized the complexity of control relationships relative to the deity, and developed measures to assess what they termed a “deferring” mode (an active God and a passive person), a “collaborative” mode (both an active God and an active person), and a

“self-directive” mode (an active person and a passive God). These notions illustrate different patterns of attribution for control to the self and God. In the deferring mode, individuals may pray and, having done that, attribute all the power to God: “It’s in the hands of God.” Those with a collaborative style are basically saying that both they and God have control: “God helps those who help themselves.” Utilizing these coping styles relates to further attributions to the nature of God. Though the associations are stronger with the collaborative than with the deferring mode, the tendency for persons who adopt such control perspectives is to attribute generally positive qualities to the deity, along with their recognition of God’s power (Schaefer & Gorsuch, 1991).

Although belief in supernaturalism affiliates with external control, Shrauger and Silverman (1971) found that “people who are more involved in religious activities perceive themselves as having more control over what happens to them” (p. 15; see also Randall & Desrosiers, 1980). This sounds like intrinsic religion, or at least orthodoxy, for this relationship is strongest among religious conservatives (Furnham, 1982; Silvestri, 1979; Tipton, Harrison, & Mahoney, 1980). Studying highly religious people, Hunsberger and Watson (1986) found that attributions of control and responsibility are made to God when outcomes are positive—a well-confirmed finding—but that when the result is negative, the tendency is to attribute the blame to Satan (“The Devil made me do it”). Issues of control, and questions of to whom or what control is attributed, have been extensively studied both within and outside the psychology of religion. These are concerns that should be kept in mind throughout this book.

Summary

In keeping with our theme that religion helps provide a sense of meaning, we have proposed attribution theory as a useful midlevel theoretical framework from which testable hypotheses about religion and religious experience are derived. How people attribute the causes of behavior both reflects and influences meaning systems, whether religious or otherwise. By drawing from mainstream social psychology, not only are we able to utilize theoretically well-grounded psychological notions that have stood the test of time; as we apply such theories as attribution to the psychology of religion, we may foster new insights into and understandings of the theories themselves, thus offering something back to the field (Hill, 1999; Hill & Gibson, 2008).

OVERVIEW

In this chapter, we have first attempted to distinguish what psychologists of religion study from similar concepts that have possible overlaps with religion but that are nevertheless different, such as superstition. We have then directed our attention toward the operationalization of religious concepts. To this end, we have examined various dimensions of religiousness, both logical and logical-empirical, in order to make our thinking clear about how we construct the instruments we employ.

Our long-term goal is to keep the psychology of religion integrated with the mainstream of psychology itself. Since the study of personal faith is largely regarded as part of social psychology, we have shown how various basic ideas in social psychology are realized in our work. We must clearly know the details and parameters of what we are talking

about; hence our emphasis on cognition, affect, habit, and behavior, as well as on attribution theory.

Recognizing that the psychology of religion shares in (and is often plagued by) the same issues that the overall field of psychology continually confronts, we have also looked at questions concerning reductionism and the idiographic–nomothetic controversy, which overlaps with the issue of holistic versus atomistic analysis. Maintaining our inclination toward the scientific, with its concern for making information public, reproducible, reliable, and valid, we have illustrated the idiographic–nomothetic and holistic–atomistic issues by returning to the problem of spirituality, first discussed in Chapter 1. In the last two decades, this has become a “hot” topic. Psychologists have heretofore avoided spirituality, because it was (and still is) so much easier to assess religiosity in its various forms. We have shown how spirituality, which has usually been conceptualized as holistic, rapidly becomes multiform in both conceptual and psychometric analyses. We are thus forced to return to Meehl’s (1954) conclusion that “the actuary will have the final word” (p. 138). We see no scientific alternative at the present time.

Chapter 3

Religion and Biology

Probably in no other area has the encounter between Christianity and science generated so much misunderstanding or left such deep scars as in that of biological science.

Man is by constitution a religious animal.

Biology has nothing directly to do with religion, and by no possibility can religion, such as we know, be based on biology.

Darwin was a most careful observer . . . there was great truth in the theory and there was nothing atheistic in it if properly understood.

If you are a Darwinist, I pity you, for it is impossible to be a Darwinist and a Christian at the same time.

Truly, he who unfolds to us the way in which God works through the world of phenomena may well be called the best of religious teachers.¹

THE PSYCHOBIOLOGY OF RELIGION

Two topics that must seem miles apart are biology and religion. The psychology of religion, however, permits us to bring these broad realms together into a psychobiology of religion—an interdisciplinary field that is rapidly growing in complexity and potential. Insofar as religion is a human venture, we know that it has a rich psychology, and in today's heavily scientific world the new fields of evolutionary psychology, neuropsychology, and cognitive science are developing rapidly. Theory is ahead of objective research and is fast becoming the foundation for investigation into phenomena that were unknown even a few years ago.

In this chapter, we explore psychobiological arguments and theories regarding the origins of religion. Ideas and information from cognitive science, neuroscience, evolutionary theory, and genetics are examined. In addition, some long-known relationships between spe-

¹These quotations come, respectively, from the following sources: Hearn (1968, p. 199); Burke (1790/1909, p. 239); Haldane (1931, p. 43); McCosh (1890, p. vii); Russell (1935, p. 76), quoting his boyhood tutor; and Fiske (1883, p. 369), speaking of Darwin.

cific religious groups and diseases are discussed. Finally, the role of biology in three particular aspects of religion (ritual, prayer, and forgiveness) is examined.

Unfortunately, when a new area grips people's imaginations, enthusiasm often leaps ahead of those necessary sobering second thoughts. Possible relationships between religion and biology currently fall into this category. Many psychologists are calling for evolutionary psychology to become the overriding theoretical framework for all psychology, not simply the psychology of religion (Kirkpatrick, 2005, 2006b). Others have become almost iconoclastic with respect to evolutionary theories that purportedly "explain" what Dawkins (2006) refers to in a book title as *The God Delusion*. It is therefore important for us to recognize the complexity of the field, and to become aware of the many cautions that should be observed.

EARLY THEORIES OF THE ORIGINS OF RELIGION

Early Psychological Views

Social scientists have offered their views about possible human origins of religion for well over a century. In the late 1800s, notions about human consciousness, human limitations, and the existence of suffering, disease, and death were the preferred explanations for the creation of religion. Mythologies were often judged to be the antecedents of religion, especially nature myths (Caird, 1893/1969; Hopkins, 1923; Muller, 1879, 1889; Tylor, 1896). A potential precursor to religion, "animism," became one of the social-scientific "truths" in this area. Animism is the belief that inanimate things possess life or spirit, even intention and motive. Such views were attributed to prehistoric peoples or existing groups once labeled "primitive savages" (Hopkins, 1923, p. 11).

When we look more closely at the possible characteristics of animism, one of these is "anthropomorphism," the explicit assignment of human traits to that which is impersonal and usually not alive. A person might see divine anger in lightning and thunder. When a car breaks down, the driver sometimes responds as if it did it on purpose. When things go wrong, people often act as if a malign intelligence is behind what has happened. During World War II, if some equipment failed, a popular notion was to say in mock seriousness that "gremlins," mythical beings, did it.

A variation on animism is to see patterns where none are present. We invariably organize the stimuli that affect us so that they become meaningful in the holistic sense of a Gestalt psychology. We make out faces in clouds, and random sounds may be perceived as muffled voices (Guthrie, 1993). Haldane (2006) cites an instance where "a 10-year-old grilled cheese sandwich" was said to look like "the Virgin Mary" (p. 8A). Anthropologist Stewart Guthrie (1993) has written an impressive book detailing such examples. He offers this principle as a way of explaining the origins of religion. Others have argued for the naturalness of religious ideas and for the power of evolutionary ideas to explain religion.

All of these theories are part of the currently emerging cognitive science approach to understanding religion. The provocative nature of such views requires that they be cautiously evaluated. Not only do many aspects of religion escape the evolutionary net, but religion may have evolved from other biological and cognitive mechanisms that serve adaptive functions (Hinde, 1999; Kirkpatrick, 2006b).

John Dewey (1929) suggested one classic psychological reason for the existence of religion. The opening line of his book *The Quest for Certainty* declares that "Man who lives in a world of hazards is compelled to seek for security" (p. 3). Because this "world of hazards"

creates insecurity and fear, Dewey saw the fundamental problem of human beings as uncertainty and “being unable to cope with the world in which [they] lived. . . . Religion was, in its origin, an expression of this endeavor” (p. 292). The greatest uncertainty, death, is often regarded as a major stimulus for the origin of religion (Burkert, 1996; Caird, 1893/1969; Young, 1991). In a similar mode, Joad (1930) inferred that

primitive religion is the offspring of human fear and human conceit; it springs from the desire to propitiate the alien forces of nature, to invest human life with significance in the face of the vast indifference of the universe, and to secure the support of an immensely powerful and ferocious personage for the individual, the tribe, or the nation. (p. 145)

None of these theorists explicitly referred to biology, but some modern-day thinkers are trying to provide evolutionary and neurological underpinnings for such notions (Newberg & d’Aquili, 2001). As we will see, a number of current views associated with cognitive science stress cognition and the way the brain processes information.

Early Biological Views

Early scholars concerned with biological possibilities regarding the nature and origins of religion proposed two avenues. Muller (1879) stated that “all our knowledge begins with the senses, and that out of the material, supplied by the senses, reason builds up its marvelous structure” (p. 33). He also asserted that “the sense of the infinite is derived from the senses” (p. 35). Since the senses transmit information from the world to the brain, the way was opened for Muller to develop a biological basis for religion; however, this possibility would not be explored for over a century to come. In addition, his focus on sensory information implied perceptual and cognitive paths to religion, which he also did not follow. These paths are popular in current thinking on this topic (Boyer, 2001; Kirkpatrick, 2005).

A second possibility was generated by Darwin’s theory of evolution. From 1859, when it was proposed, religionists and scientists began lining up on both sides of the issue. An early conservative cleric-psychologist, James McCosh (1890), whose first axiom was that “all things [are] from God” (p. 1), saw no reason for a war between science and religion. Evolution was quite acceptable to him. He and other clerics who were favorably disposed toward science applied evolution to changes in religion over time, but not to questions of their possible physical origins (Jastrow, 1901). Such matters were assigned to the deity. It is worth noting that even Darwin (1859/1972) did not attempt to explain the origins of life, but rather the origins of variations in forms of life (e.g., species).

The next step in this process was to connect evolution to the creation of religion. There was little progress toward this goal until the 1970s, when sociobiology, evolutionary psychology, and contemporary cognitive science were developed, and new devices for conducting brain scans were invented.

Another academic, E. Washburn Hopkins of Yale University, opened his 1923 book with the definitive statement that “Every religion is a product of human evolution and has been conditioned by social environment. . . . man is not a mere animal but differs from the beast in having an immortal soul and a religious instinct” (p. 1). The key for biology is in that undefined phrase “religious instinct.” Once it was offered, Hopkins assumed that nothing more need be said. The inference is that religion is naturally built into humans. Instincts

were regarded as innate patterns of both motivation and behavior that made religion fully biological (Bristol, 1904). This view had earlier been rejected by Muller (1879), who correctly argued that it did nothing more than substitute one unknown for another. Many endorsed the idea of a religious instinct until L. L. Bernard (1924) sounded its death knell when he reported that there were 83 “religious instincts” in the literature.

All of the approaches described above advocated a central role for the brain and nervous system in the origins, development, and manifestation of religious belief, experience, and behavior. This neurobiological emphasis has been termed in some quarters “neurotheology” (d’Aquili & Newberg, 1999). However, we must always keep in mind that there is much more involved in explaining religion than simply identifying the biological correlates of religious experience and cognition through neuroimaging studies (Azari & Slor, 2007).

CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOBIOLOGICAL THINKING AND RESEARCH

Many social scientists might argue that psychology in general is becoming increasingly biological. Evolutionary psychology and neuropsychology seem to be taking center stage, as noted earlier. Psychology, the psychology of religion, and religion per se are slowly becoming involved in this movement (Kirkpatrick, 2006b; Pinker, 1997). Instinct hovers in the background, but since the term has never really been satisfactorily defined, thinkers in this area studiously avoid it. Biology enters the picture through the activation of sensory and motivational processes.

No sharp distinction can now be made between biology and environment. Cues from the world turn genes on and off and arouse an underlying biology for behavior. Nature and nurture are so dependent on each other that the convenient approach of looking at them as totally distinct and separate is now known to create a false dichotomy (Ridley, 2003). There are, of course, some extreme instances where genes will have their way independent of environment, and vice versa. For example, certain genetic disorders will develop if both parents are carriers of the DNA defects that cause the disorders. Similarly, if you are born in an isolated community in, say, Finland, you will learn the language and customs of that people. Though there is room for nature or nurture per se, in most instances they are inseparably associated.

Evolutionary and Genetic Possibilities

A few basics must be discussed before we can go further. The core principle of evolution is “natural selection.” A very simple explanation of natural selection is as follows: (1) There is variation in traits; (2) “differential reproduction” exists (i.e., more individuals with trait A survive and reproduce than those with trait B); (3) there is heredity (i.e., trait A is passed on to the offspring of individuals with trait A because it is genetically based); and (4) trait A therefore becomes more common in the population. Natural selection sounds simple on the surface, but is far more complex than is usually understood. One needs to explore closely the various properties assigned to natural selection, and to question seriously whether these truly further the likelihood of having descendants. The main implication of evolution and natural selection is that whatever is passed on is adaptive. This is not invariably true. Likewise, to restrict evolution to the sole criterion of reproductive success has long been recognized as

limiting the role of a biologically based science to explain the range of religious phenomena (James, 1902/1985).

Natural selection has been going on for over 3 billion years, and has involved primates and their later human descendants for about 30 million years. People as we know them have been changing for approximately for 50,000 to 200,000 years, and signs of religion have existed for about 100,000 years (Burkert, 1996; Pfeiffer, 1982; Rice, 2007; Young, 1991). We need to ask why and how religion might have appeared; natural selection could be one answer. We must keep in mind that “natural selection” is a broad concept, and that many who reject this argument for religion define the term rather narrowly. Moreover, other possibilities exist through the normal operation of cognitive processes that developed via natural selection (Begley, 2007; Bering, 2006).

Sociobiology

The first major contemporary development to focus attention on possible relationships between biology and religion was E. O. Wilson’s “Sociobiology,” which he first proposed in 1971 (see Wilson, 1978). In essence, sociobiology is the study of how evolution affects social behavior in animals and humans. Religion thus began to be viewed as an evolutionary product that confers genetic advantage on people. According to Wilson, religion suppresses people’s own individual interests in favor of the groups with which they are affiliated. Survival and reproduction are enhanced via submission to the social body. This is further accomplished by teaching various beliefs and having the persons participate in established rituals and ceremonies. The proposed outcome is that genes contributing to conformity should increase in frequency over time, and those that counter acquiescence and obedience should slowly be eliminated. Especially in the past, failure to follow the rules presumably not only threatened survival but made one less acceptable as a mate, lessening the likelihood of passing on certain genes to following generations. The same tendencies, though varying in their expression, are thought to exist today. Unconventional and noncompliant behavior can lead to ostracism and in many societies to exile, imprisonment, or even death. In sum, Austin (1980) has stated that “genes favoring readiness to be indoctrinated were selected for” (p. 197). He concluded that “religious beliefs are enabling mechanisms for survival” (p. 193).

Not all scholars agree with this interpretation, and it must be considered controversial (Kirkpatrick, 2006b). When evolutionary explanations stress “adaptive group social behavior,” meaning behavior that aids the group’s survival, we get into the idea of group selection as opposed to Darwinian individual selection. Group selection is highly debatable, with advocates and opponents establishing well-defined battle lines (Dawkins, 1976, 1986, 2006; Gould, 2002; Sober, 1984; Williams, 1966). Religion is often in the “no man’s land” between enemy positions. As reasonable as group selection for religion sounds, it has not thus far been more easily accepted than its individualistic Darwinian alternative (Wilson, 2002).

Other Adaptive Possibilities

Bering (2006) asks whether evolutionary adaptation might produce a belief in God in order to make life meaningful. Natural selection would thus reduce the psychologically distressing role of simple chance. New protective mechanisms would thus develop for everyone. For example, the idea that earthly threats could be averted by sharing religious outlooks with

others would unite people and increase chances of survival and reproduction. Without resort to the social implications of “the God experience,” Persinger (1987) has accepted biology and natural selection as underlying belief in and the personal experience of God.

BIOLOGY AND BELIEF

Since religion, in part, constitutes a belief system, could the genetic component involve beliefs and attitudes?

Hardy (1979) wondered whether a “capacity for belief” (p. 66), as well as the idea and experience of God, might be inherited. He struggled with what biological mechanisms might be involved, but offered none. He did, however, open a door to biological speculation regarding religion before such speculation became popular.

Though many evolutionary psychologists either ignore or make light of the comforting role of religious beliefs as biologically adaptive, others leave the evolutionary door open to such a role (Wolpert, 2006). Probably of greater biological importance is recognition of the tie between beliefs and causal processes. Psychologically, this brings to mind “attributions,” which basically are beliefs. Attributions are assignments of cause for events or the stable characteristics of people (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Shultz (1982) claims that “it is quite conceivable that natural selective pressures have, over the course of evolution, established some genetic basis for this kind of thinking” (p. 48). Since causality is found in young infants, Wolpert (2006) feels that such attributions are “programmed into our brains” (p. 27).

Other theorists have tried to follow this avenue to actual brain functioning. For example, Shermer (2000) speaks of a hypothetical “belief engine” that makes us seek meaningful patterns implying that we are “hardwired to think magically” (p. 35). d’Aquili (1978) suggested that “belief in supernatural powers . . . like all universal human behaviors . . . derives its source from the functioning of neural structures” (p. 258). He termed these organized neural tissues “neurognostic structures” and “neural operators” (p. 258) in the brain. Six of the latter are posited, one of which he called the “causal operator” (p. 259). d’Aquili and Newberg (1999) claimed that the joint functioning of causal and binary operators creates the need for powerful supernatural beings. Unfortunately, these operators are theoretical; though they seem potentially useful, they are not identified with observable referents in the brain. The present state of brain research points to relatively broad but unfocused neural indicators, especially for religious beliefs and experiences.

Despite all such biological thinking, let us not lose sight of the fact that children are usually born into homes that are religious to some degree, and that these homes are situated in communities in which faith usually constitutes a strong value system. Obviously, the involvement of cultural learning cannot be discounted. d’Aquili and Newberg (1999) have minimized such concerns and claimed that “God or pure consciousness is generated by the machinery of the brain” (p. 18). There is, of course, disagreement with this view. Considering our present state of knowledge, we feel that brain activities may be correlated with religious actions, beliefs, and experiences, but correlation should not be confused with causation.

ASSESSING GENETIC INFLUENCE

Evolution works through genetics, and if one studies identical and fraternal twins, it is possible to determine the degree to which any characteristic is a result of heredity or environ-

ment. Where data are present on twins who were separated early in life, the influence of shared and unshared environments can also be evaluated (Falconer, 1981).² A fair amount of research utilizing this approach has been conducted on the heritability of religion. Though thousands of sets of twins have been studied, serious questions can often be asked about the measures employed. Research Box 3.1 provides an example of one of the better studies of this type (Waller, Kojetin, Bouchard, Lykken, & Tellegen, 1990). In this investigation, 49% of the variation in religious indicators was referred to heredity; however, the different studies show a range from essentially 0% to about 50% (D'Onofrio, Eaves, Murrelle, Maes, & Spilka, 1999).

Regardless of the percentage of any trait affiliated with heredity or environment, such findings pertain to people “on the average” and do not apply to any specific person. In other words, they tell us about people in general. An individual may fall anywhere between 0% and 100% in terms of possible genetic influence.

If something evolved that made religion a natural adaptive phenomenon, what might it be? Alister Hardy (1975) eliminated all the standard institutional possibilities, such as denominations or the rules and practices of any specific faith. He then stressed religious experience, and despite his careful attention to scientific caution, he showed an ever-present readiness to imply a potential divine influence. The breadth of Hardy's approach suggests that he viewed biology as directed more toward individually created spiritualities than toward a group-selected culturally based religion. Unfortunately, he did not follow this avenue further. Hardy was very circumspect and only dealt with possibilities and generalities rather than specific evolutionary products.

RESEARCH BOX 3.1. Genetic and Environmental Influences on Religious Interests, Attitudes, and Values: A Study of Twins Reared Apart and Together
(Waller, Kojetin, Bouchard, Lykken, & Tellegen, 1990).

Utilizing respondents from the famous Minnesota Twin Study, Waller and colleagues were able to obtain data on five measures of religious attitudes, interests, and values. These were well-known and highly regarded scales. The participants were 53 pairs of monozygotic (identical) twins and 31 pairs of dizygotic (fraternal) twins who had been reared apart. The measures were also given to 458 pairs of identical and 363 pairs of fraternal twins who had been raised together. Data analyses suggested that 49% of the variation in the scores on the religious measures was a function of genetic influences. In other words, in this study, genetic and environmental factors were almost equal in their effects regarding the origins of personal faith.

²These analyses start with correlations between the twins. The correlation coefficient squared (r^2) indicates the proportion of the variance that is explained such as when predicting from one twin to the other. Since identical twins, have the same genetics, the variance due to heredity (h^2) is 100% accounted for. Similarly, they share the same environment (e^2) if reared together. Fraternal twins, like regular siblings, if brought up in the same home, only share 50% of the genetic variance. Since $r^2 = h^2 + e^2$ for identical twins and $r^2 = \frac{1}{2}h^2 + e^2$ for fraternal twins, one can determine the proportion of the total variance for heredity and environment for any measured characteristics.

Among other theoretical possibilities is the notion of an “evolutionary by-product.” This means that something that has been passed down through the generations along with a characteristic of greater significance for which natural selection was operative (Gould, 2002). It is a kind of genetic hitchhiker. Recently, a number of scholars have suggested that religion is such a by-product (Dawkins, 2006), or a combination of several by-products. Kirkpatrick (2006b) offers an impressive multiple-by-products theory for religion. Another significant thinker in this area holds a similar view of religion as a probable “by-product of the normal operation of human cognition” (Boyer, 2003, p. 123).

If natural selection is used to explain religion, religious people should have an advantage in life’s struggle and should be more likely than their less committed peers to produce offspring. Mahoney and Tarakeshwar (2005) summarize work suggesting that this may be true. As church attendance increases, so do birth rates. Other factors are of course part of this picture, such as marital satisfaction and commitment, which also accompany religiosity. Shared religious views between spouses could further inhibit marital conflict and provide means to resolve conflict. In addition, parental effectiveness is associated with increased religiousness, and it is possible that this might encourage better mental and physical health on the part of children. These observations tell us that religion is a potentially positive influence in both marriage and parenting, and could therefore be biologically adaptive. Speculation about religion’s biological utility suggests that it does unite people of similar mind, enhancing mutual support and group solidarity and defense.

Dean Hamer (2004), a noted geneticist, called one of his books *The God Gene*—a title that even he has subsequently acknowledged was in error. Still, he has reported research identifying a specific gene that he argues relates to self-transcendence, a theorized component of spirituality.

Although the elements that make up spirituality are in contention, most of the writing on spirituality focuses on religious and mystical experience. Transcendence, in the sense of going beyond oneself, is commonly regarded as a component of spiritual experience. Hamer (2004) feels that more than one gene is likely to be part of the religion–spirituality complex, and he is convinced that the tendency to be spiritual is genetic in origin. The particular gene he identifies is involved in mood control and expression, another facet of the popular tie between religious experience and spirituality. Hamer (2004) further shows that this gene relates to an objective measure of self-transcendence. However, even though his research suggests that this tendency is largely genetic, the gene he studied actually makes a rather small contribution to the objective measure of self-transcendence. Hamer’s work and writing have stirred up a storm of controversy and criticism, but he has opened another research door to a very complex area (Broadway, 2004; Langone, 2004; Mohler, 2004; Zimmer, 2004).

Since religion appears to be universal, relevant mutations must have occurred in the fairly distant human past for it to be genetically mediated. Crisler (1994) speaks in the abstract of a religious gene that resulted from a mutation very early in humanity’s family tree. This probably occurred in Africa, before humans split into different groups and began populating Europe and Asia. The implication is that religion will continue until natural selection works to produce genetic changes that eliminate the gene or genes in question. How and why natural selection would work toward such an end remain unspecified.

There is more than a little vagueness when evolution is applied to religion and spirituality. The search is for some definite genetic component, and theory and hypothesis abound in this endeavor.

RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND THE BRAIN

Research on Religion and Epilepsy

It is obvious that evolution and genetics must work through the brain in their relationships with religion and spirituality. One idea that initially implied this association goes back almost three millennia. It involved epilepsy, which by the 5th century B.C. was known as “the sacred disease.” Hippocrates rejected the religious identification, noting that it appeared to him “to be nowise more divine nor more sacred than other diseases” (Hippocrates, 1952, p. 154). He dealt with epilepsy as solely a medical condition (Simon, 1978).

This notion of an association between religion and epilepsy has persisted, and formal medical recognition of such a connection was affirmed in the 19th century (Dewhurst & Beard, 1970; Wulff, 1997). However, the link with epilepsy in general was complex, unclear, and generally weak. A possible connection with temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE) in particular seemed more substantial.

Persinger and his associates (Makarec & Persinger, 1985; Persinger, 1987, 1993; Persinger & Makarec, 1987; Persinger, Bureau, Peredery, & Richards, 1994) studied the religious ideation accompanying the neuroelectrical activity termed “temporal lobe transients” (i.e., brief electrical discharges). Persinger’s work was among the first in this difficult area; hence it should come as no surprise that it has been challenged and sometimes not replicated (Granqvist et al., 2005).

In a somewhat similar effort, Ramachandran and Blakeslee (1999) reported God-associated mental content and limbic system involvement during episodes of TLE.³ When these events were studied, virtually every possible religious experience was reported (mystical experiences, conversions, strengthened religious beliefs, etc.). These researchers feel that the content of such episodes is learned by the affected individuals in their cultural context. The sociocultural shaping of religious content is well known (Poloma, 1995). This view has also been supported in a study of social and linguistic expectations regarding mystical experience (Spilka, Ladd, McIntosh, Milmo, & Bickel, 1996).

The graphic nature of religious experiences in TLE episodes should not obscure the fact that most studies used rather small samples of epileptic participants. This is evident from the research of Ogata and Miyakawa (1998), who studied 234 persons with epilepsy. Their sample contained only three cases, or 1.3%, who had religious experiences during epileptic episodes. The highest percentage, 38%, was reported by Dewhurst and Beard (1970). These findings imply that although the combination of epilepsy with religious expressions may be quite striking when found, it is not as common as one might expect. Some workers indicate that those with TLE show either a relatively strong response to religious content or greater religious interest than is true of control subjects (McClenon & Nooney, 1999). Though Ogata and Miyakawa (1998) focused on the temporal lobes and the limbic system, they did not attempt to stimulate these brain structures, as did Persinger’s and Ramachandran’s groups. Ogata and Miyakawa did confirm the earlier claims of Bear and Fedio (1977) that the seizures do not produce a specific psychological pattern. Challenges to the TLE–religion relationship are not lacking (Sensky, Wilson, Petty, Fenwick, & Rose, 1984; Tucker, Novelly, & Walker, 1987). Despite its long history, this is an area where there is more confusion than clarity.

³The limbic system consists of a number of the older and deeper brain structures, such as the amygdala, hippocampus, and limbic cortex. It has been viewed as the seat of the emotions and is involved in the expression and control of emotionally motivated behavior (Bear, Connors, & Paradiso, 1996).

Contemporary Avenues to the Neurobiology of Religion

The barrier separating faith from the nervous system has been breached in a number of places. The process began with redefining the relationship. Religion has been placed in a cognitive context that emphasizes goal-directed thinking. The purpose is to make sensory stimulation meaningful. In other words, religion is framed as a search for meaning in which the individual struggles to make sense out of the world. Kamppinen (2002) uses the term “understanding,” and for humans the final stage of the search results in explanation. Utilizing such an approach, the neurobiological picture now includes beliefs, values, attributions, causal processes, meditation, dreaming, paranormal phenomena, the idea of magic, consciousness (especially of social relations), and morality. The religious correlates referred to include religious beliefs, animism, spirituality, and religious/mystical experience.

Psychologically and cognitively, “belief” and “experience” refer to different things, but where religion is concerned the two concepts are very closely related. We know that churchgoers would undoubtedly affirm a belief in God and the principles of their church. As a rule, about three-quarters of attendees further indicate that they have had religious experiences. The overlap is so great that “belief” and “experience” are not sharply distinguished here. At the same time, we should be sensitive to the ways these terms are employed. Apparently various brain sectors are involved in a number of these expressions.

The neurobiological search aims to identify neural circuits in the brain that underlie the cognitive-experiential responses listed above. Contemporary popular language suggests that we are “hardwired” for these expressions (Clark & Grunstein, 2000; Haldane, 2006; Hamer, 2004).

The Neurobiology of Religious Belief and Experience

We all believe in innumerable things that appear to be simply self-evident: The sun will rise and set daily; objects, when released, will fall to the ground. Although we expect these to occur, such expectations are fundamentally beliefs that our experiences confirm. Supernatural beliefs in God, deities, spirits, angels, and the like are found among all peoples. As natural as these notions seem to be, it is inevitable for scientists to pen volumes on the biology of religious beliefs (Giovannoli, 2000; Newberg & d'Aquili, 2001; Wolpert, 2006). These workers largely assume that religious beliefs are innate and genetically programmed (Bering, 2006).

A special problem concerns belief in God. Conjecture and theory range from the idea that the concept is learned to the view that it has roots in evolution, brain function, and genetics. Dawkins (1976) first introduced the notion of “meme” as an analogy to “gene.” Memes are cultural beliefs assumed to operate as genes do in biology. Using the term “memes” shifts the focus from the truth of religious beliefs to their adaptive value. Religious beliefs thus become functional precisely because of their adaptive significance, as they transfer similar ideas from one mind to another. Obviously, several cautions are in order here. The major Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) stress the idea of God, but this is not true of certain Asian faiths, so the literature cited here may not be meaningful for all religions (Klass, 1995). Still, a number of social scientists consider the anthropomorphic tendency to see deities as taking human forms or as acting and feeling like people to be innate (Boyer, 1994, 2001; Guthrie, 1993). Hamer (2004) mentions Persinger and colleagues' research, in which magnetic stimulation of the parietal and temporal lobes

created the experience of God; he calls these areas “the God spot.” Another popular term in this literature is a “God module.” These terms reduce God to a location or set of locations in the brain that deals exclusively with such beliefs. The notion of a “God module” has found some acceptance in neuropsychological quarters, but has also elicited criticism (Atran, 2002; Horgan, 1999; Richardson, 2000).

Regardless of terminology such as “memes,” “God spots,” or “God modules,” we need to examine actual research and theory on brain correlates of religion. One of the first workers to address this issue was the late Eugene d’Aquili, a professor of psychiatry. He claimed that the parietal lobe on the nondominant side of the brain is involved in deity perceptions (d’Aquili, 1978). More recently, Spinella and Wain (2006) have focused on the prefrontal cortex with regard to beliefs they consider religious and superstitious. Relying heavily on brain evolution, Persinger (1987) shifted attention from belief to the experience of God. He believed that this is localized in the temporal lobe and is associated with “temporal lobe transients” (p. 16), as mentioned earlier in the discussion of TLE. Persinger admitted that these have not been shown to exist in all people. Though this is a conflicted area, we have already noted the infrequent but striking affiliation of these transients with religious content. Persinger (1987) further introduced the concept of “psychic seizures” (p. 17), which do not result in convulsions but are accompanied by a wide variety of visual, auditory, and olfactory experiences. Strong feelings and emotions may be present. These reactions led Persinger to emphasize the temporal lobe, which he viewed as the “biological basis of the God experience.”⁴ The God experience is not distinguished from other mystical, cosmic, or religious experiences.

Some neuroimaging research on religious experiences has been conducted by Azari and her associates. Its results both overlap and differ from those of d’Aquili and Newberg and of Persinger. Variations in research methodology, along with small samples, may account for some of these differences and disagreement among researchers. Although we do not go into the details of the neuroimaging techniques used by Azari and colleagues (which are beyond the scope of this volume), they include functional magnetic resonance imagery (fMRI), positron emission tomography (PET), and single-photon emission computed tomography (SPECT). Some comparisons among these techniques have been offered in the literature (Azari, 2006; Newberg, 2006a). They are also becoming increasingly popular in modern medicine and neurobiology.

Azari (2006) summarizes much of this work relative to religious experiences among Protestant Christians and Buddhists. In addition, she warns against inferring cause from correlational findings. Her research stresses changes in brain activity that accompany religious experience. This work suggests that the prefrontal and medial frontal cortex may play an especially important role in mediating religious experiences. An example of her research on the neurobiological underpinnings of religious experience is presented in Research Box 3.2.

Traditional psychologists may argue that the samples in this study are too small to permit definitive conclusions. In addition, there are likely to have been motivational differences between the experimental and control groups in the different conditions. Research of this nature is extremely difficult to undertake and needs to be examined closely.

This cognitive emphasis is consonant with findings of roles for expectancy and desirability in religious experience (Spilka et al., 1996).

⁴The full title of the chapter in Persinger’s (1987) book is “The Temporal Lobe: The Biological Basis of the God Experience.”

RESEARCH BOX 3.2. Neural Correlates of Religious Experience (Azari et al., 2001)

In pioneering research, Azari and her coworkers attempted to locate those areas in the brain that are active during religious experience. The researchers used positron emission tomography (PET) to image the brain during religious and other activities. Six different activation conditions (a religious state, a nonreligious emotion state, and appropriate control conditions) were constructed; in all conditions, the state achieved was self-induced and subjectively defined. Six religious and six nonreligious participants took part in the six religious and control conditions.

While reading the 23rd Psalm, the religious participants (all Christian Protestants) reportedly attained a religious experiential state. Of most importance, the PET scans for the religious respondents, when they reported being in a religious state, showed activation in the frontal and parietal lobes—areas that have been shown in independent studies to be central for complex cognitions. Limbic structures (specifically the amygdala) were not activated during the religious state, but were involved during the nonreligious emotional state. On the basis of these findings, Azari and her coworkers have proposed that religious experience is likely to be a cognitive process utilizing established neural connections between the frontal and parietal lobes.

The Neurobiology of Spirituality

Much of what is generally considered religious belief or experience is not only part of traditional religion, but would today be considered part of spirituality. The current emphasis on mystical experience is usually identified this way. The classic problem of knowing where religion leaves off and spirituality begins may never be resolved, because the concepts overlap and disagreements exist regarding the definition and components of spirituality, as well as whether a wide variety of feelings (e.g., Hamer's [2004] concern with transcendence) should be considered either spiritual or religious. One also reads of "cosmic experiences," "other-worldly consciousness," "out-of-body experiences," "heightened enlightenment," and a host of other notions. Our emphasis, however, is on their biological underpinnings.

Hay and Socha (2005) analyze many of the issues underlying this work. In doing so, they transform notions of traditional religious experience into the broader context of "spiritual awareness." A naturalistic biological state of "relational consciousness" (p. 597) is introduced. This appears similar to what Azari and colleagues infer from their brain research. Like Hardy and others, Hay and Socha believe that spiritual awareness is a naturally selected evolutionary product that was "useful in the preservation of the species" (p. 600). Why natural selection was operative with spirituality, if it really was, is still an open question. They, however, also adopt a radical stance by seeing natural selection as adaptive not only in nature but also in culture. This motif relative to culture has been around for some time. Its underlying mechanisms have yet to be demonstrated.

When the neurobiology of spirituality has been studied, it is usually reduced to some kind of religious experience, such as meditation (Begley, 2001); however, meditation exists in both religious and nonreligious forms. Newberg (2006a, 2006b) has extensively reviewed the research on meditation and other aspects of spirituality. Because of the complexity of this work and its measurement problems, he mixes research findings with possibilities for future testing that imply the potential of neurobiological research for faith and spirituality. The

RESEARCH BOX 3.3. Religious Experience and Emotion:
Evidence for Distinctive Cognitive Neural Patterns (Azari, Missimer, & Seitz, 2005)

The purpose of this study was to distinguish the neural networks involved in religious experience from those involved in a nonreligious emotional state.

Six religious individuals were compared with six who were not religious. The former were Christian Protestants who had all had conversion experiences. The groups were matched on a number of background, verbal ability, personality, and life satisfaction measures, as well as in the capacity to visualize scenes. There were three conditions: (1) a religious state; (2) a nonreligious, happy emotional state; and (3) rest. Everyone underwent PET scans, and regional cerebral blood flow was studied. A self-assessment procedure was used to judge the degree to which participants attained the desired goal state for each task.

The groups were compared relative to task conditions. Specific neural patterns/networks were indicated. These revealed activity in prefrontal cortical areas that are involved in complex cognition, as opposed to activation of the limbic system, which is understood to mediate basic emotional responses. The religious participants described their “experiences in terms of cultivating an interpersonal relationship with God (in the person of Jesus Christ)” (Azari et al., 2005, p. 274). A concept of perceived “relational cognitivity” is thus proposed to explain the observations.

findings are difficult to summarize because of differences in the experimental and analytic methods used. Research Box 3.3 presents one example of this research.

Clearly, the literature on neurobiology and religion–spirituality is quite complicated and badly needs coordination. For example, Newberg (2006a) reveals the wide variety of neurochemicals (e.g., neurotransmitters) that are part of the receptor signaling and activation processes present in religious experience and ritual. In an effort to tie together spirituality, developmental psychology, and neurobiology, Newberg and Newberg (2006) have presented an integrative overview of research and thinking that should be required reading for all interested in this area. Suffice it to say that current work along these lines does not allow inferences about cause; they must be treated as fundamentally correlational in nature. No one has found God in the nervous system.

HEALTH IN RELIGIOUS GROUPS

All groups of people develop genetic mutations that are either supported or eliminated by natural selection. When a group tends to be geographically isolated, or distinguishes itself from other social bodies because of its culture and/or religion, the mutations created among its members are likely to persist because of within-group marital bonding. In other words, inbreeding is the rule. Some mutations may be positive, others negative. The latter are often more noticeable, as they largely involve deformity or disease. Inbreeding in small isolated groups can become a particular problem with recessive genetic conditions. This means that, in the simplest case, the likelihood that two parents will both have the undesirable mutation may be high. Among offspring, the genetic disorder will appear 25% of the time, and 50% of the children will be carriers. If one spouse lacks the mutation, only 50% of the children will

be carriers and none will evidence the problem, since the illness is recessive. Various recessive and other genetic disorders have been demonstrated among the Amish, Hutterites, and Jews—religious groups that have histories of physical and/or social separation from others.

The Amish

Exact data on the Amish are difficult to come by. The Amish are one of several groups known collectively as Anabaptists. Mennonites are another Anabaptist denomination; they have some similarities to the Amish, but many differences too (the primary ones being that many Mennonites are less isolated than the Amish and accept more conveniences of modern life, such as electricity). Population estimates for the Amish range from 150,000 to 200,000, but those change rapidly, as the average Amish family has seven children.

Though Amish communities are found in 21 states, most are in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. These states are viewed as separate inbreeding subgroups. Hostetler (1980) states that the Amish and Hutterites are the “best defined inbred group(s)” in North America (p. 319). Because intermarriage across the distinct communities is relatively rare, each has its own pattern of genetic conditions.

Extensive genetic research has revealed a high incidence of certain inherited conditions among the Amish (McKusick, 1978). For example, one Pennsylvania community displays a form of hereditary dwarfism, the frequency of which is equivalent to that in the rest of the world. A different type of dwarfism is found in some other Amish populations. The Amish in Ohio evidence a high frequency of hemophilia (pathological bleeding), whereas in Indiana an unusual form of muscular dystrophy is present. In Pennsylvania, genetically based stillbirths have also been noted (Hostetler, 1980). Other problems observed include congenital deafness, neuromuscular disorders, types of anemia, thyroid defects, cardiac deficiencies, and dementias (McKusick, 1978).

The Hutterites

The Hutterites, another Anabaptist group that originated in the same general central European region as the Amish and the Mennonites, also came to the United States to escape persecution. They arrived in the middle to late 19th century and located themselves first in the Dakotas and then in western Canada. They maintain a strong ingroup communal society and actively resist outside educational influences.

For the Hutterites, as for the Amish, separation from outgroups and inbreeding have resulted in some negative genetic developments. A general observation of mental health suggests that neurotic manifestations are low but that relatively high rates of certain major mental disorders are found (Eaton & Weil, 1955). Both schizophrenia and bipolar disorder (called “manic–depressive psychosis” when this work was done) possess substantial genetic components. The Hutterites have relatively low rates of schizophrenia, but a high rate of bipolar disorder. Since both disorders are also environmentally influenced, genetic factors do not tell the entire story. Overall, however, the prevalence of these disorders is low relative to national data (Hostetler, 1974).

Research studies on genetically based illnesses among the Hutterites are older and fewer than those conducted with the Amish. Still, one sees many similarities (and a few differences) between the two groups. A Canadian Hutterite collective evidences a type of inherited muscular dystrophy similar to that found among the Amish (Frosk et al., 2005; Shokeir, Rodz-

ilsky, Opitz, & Reynolds, 2005). A genetically based brain disorder associated with mental retardation has also been reported by Schurig, Van Orman, Bowen, and Opitz (2005). In addition, some 38 genetic blood markers have been observed among Hutterites (Lewis et al., 2005). There is clearly a need for additional research with this religious group.

The Jews

Historical Background and Types of Genetic Disorders

Whereas the Amish and the Hutterites exist on the fringes of society, Jews have been a central group in Western civilization for millennia. To a considerable degree, Jewish history in the past 2,000 years has been a tale of anti-Semitic discrimination and self- and other-imposed separation from Christian neighbors (the nadir of which was, of course, the Nazi Holocaust). Long before Jesus, the early Hebrews sharply distinguished themselves from others who resided near them in the Near and Middle East. This pattern continued into the Christian era, when the separation of Jews into their own communities was formalized in the Middle Ages by the creation of the ghetto. Contrary to general belief, the ghetto was often instituted by the Jews themselves, not by Christian authorities (Wirth, 1928). As Wirth (1928) noted, "To the Jews the geographically separated and socially isolated community seemed to offer the best opportunity for following their religious precepts" (p. 19). Administratively, the ghetto was an agency of social, political, and economic control that enforced the segregation of Jews from non-Jews. Considering the prevailing anti-Semitism of Christians, this separation also served their desires well.

This situation began changing rapidly in the 20th century. Prior to World War II, Jewish intermarriage rates were below 5%. By 1970, about 32% of Jews were intermarrying. In more recent years, intermarriage rates of 40–60% have been reported (Silberman, 1985). This is likely to change the genetic situation in the not too distant future. However, recent genetic marker analyses reveal that Jews from eastern and western Europe, north Africa, and the Near and Middle East are related despite over 2,000 years of the Diaspora (i.e., the dispersion from their roots in Palestine during Biblical times) (Ostrer, 2000).

Simply put, the physical isolation of the Jews for millennia offered an opportunity for mutations to appear; hence this group has been troubled by a fairly large number of genetically based disorders. Though Jews are prone to a wide variety of inherited illnesses, in many instances one can argue that lifestyle and other factors contribute to the expression of certain diseases (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001). We must also keep in mind that genetics is usually more probabilistic than deterministic (Barkow, 1982; Gould, 1978). Still, a number of heritable conditions evidence great discrepancies between Jews and non-Jews (Griffiths, Miller, Suzuki, Lewontin, & Gelbart, 2000; Post, 1973). For example, Gaucher syndrome—a metabolic disease that affects the liver, spleen, bones, blood, and possibly the nervous system—has a prevalence of 1 per 2,500 among Ashkenazi Jews (also known as Ashkenazim), but 1 per 75,000 among non-Jews.⁵ Another condition occurring disproportionately in this group is Tay–Sachs disease, a degenerative disorder of the brain that results in blindness, deafness, paralysis, and death, usually by the age of 3 or 4. It is found in 1 of 3,500 Ashkenazi Jews, but only 1 per 35,000 non-Jews. Genetic testing for Tay–Sachs is a success story.

⁵Ashkenazim come primarily from central and eastern Europe and account for about 80% of all Jews. Sephardic Jews are found in southern Europe and the entire Mediterranean region, while a number of smaller groups may be found in Asia.

Between 1970 and 2000, over 1 million Jews were tested for mutations for this condition, and the incidence of Tay–Sachs births dropped over 90% (Macmillan Science Library: Genetics, 2004).

Recently, a genetic predisposition to breast cancer has been identified in Jewish women (Egan et al., 1996). In a balanced manner, these authors also note the influence of lifestyle and reproductive history on the development of breast cancer. Those who would like to peruse the medical literature on other genetic disorders among Jews might research essential pentosuria, familial dysautonomia, Niemann–Pick disease, and torsion dystonia, among other possibilities. Goodman's (1979) overview of genetic disorders lists some 22 conditions among the Ashkenazim.

Concern among Jews about these conditions resulted in a National Foundation for Jewish Genetic Diseases, which has recently been absorbed into the Center for Jewish Genetic Diseases at the Mount Sinai Medical Center.⁶ It is a voluntary, nonprofit health and research organization that gathers and provides information on research, care, and resources for those interested in and/or affected by any of the genetic diseases to which Jews are susceptible.

A New Theory: Genetic Diseases and Intelligence among Ashkenazi Jews

Recently, a new theory has associated the pattern of Jewish genetic diseases with the issue of above-average intelligence among Ashkenazim. Formulated by three non-Jewish scholars affiliated with the University of Utah, this theory has been termed “politically incorrect” by a number of evaluators (Wade, 2005), but that is a poor excuse for avoiding controversy. This is a radical perspective that ties biology to religion, specifically only to Ashkenazim (Cochran, Hardy, & Harpending, 2005). To put it mildly, it has stimulated much debate and disagreement. These scholars make the following points:

1. The genetic disorders described above have plagued Ashkenazi Jews for centuries.
2. From 50–80% of the variation in intelligence test scores has been attributed to genetics (Bouchard, 1996a, 1996b; Myers, 1998).
3. Observations indicate that Ashkenazi Jews, on the average, score 10–15 points higher on intelligence tests than the norm for such measures (Lynn & Longley, 2006).
4. A relationship involving neural development is hypothesized between high intelligence and the production of certain genetic diseases among Ashkenazi Jews.
5. This association is a function of the long-term effects of prejudice and bigotry on Ashkenazi Jews in central and eastern Europe from about 800 to 1800 A.D.
6. The inference is made that discriminatory treatment forced the Ashkenazim into occupations requiring intelligence, especially of a verbal and mathematical nature (but not spatial).
7. Such occupations (e.g., money lending, banking, business, etc.) selected over time for high intelligence.
8. These males were financially well off, married the daughters of similar Ashkenazim, and had large families.
9. The outcomes were high intelligence and high rates of certain neurological conditions.

⁶The center can be contacted at the Mount Sinai Medical Center, Fifth Avenue at 100th Street, New York, NY 10029, or via its website (www.mssm.edu/jewish_genetics).

Some of these points merit further elaboration. Research points to two clusters of genetic problems. The primary one is termed the “lysosomal” or “sphingolipid storage” cluster of disorders (e.g., Tay–Sachs disease, Niemann–Pick disease, mucopolidosis, and Gaucher syndrome). These disorders evoke disturbances in neural function that interfere with the speed of nervous signals, the insulation of nerve fibers, and the growth of connections among nerve cells (Nuenke, 2005; Wade, 2005). The second group of disorders is labeled the “DNA repair” cluster and may be involved to a lesser degree in neural functioning. Still, sufferers from at least one of these defects, torsion dystonia, evidence uncommonly high intelligence (Cochran et al., 2005). Referring mainly to the first cluster, Cochran et al. (2005) claim that genetic neurological diseases with high rates among Ashkenazim “are known to elevate IQ” (p. 661).

With respect to point 3 above, what may be of greater significance is not the average difference in IQ, but the probability that IQs above 140 may be six times more frequent among Ashkenazim than among non-Ashkenazim. This positive development was, however, accompanied by “an increased [rate] of hereditary disorders” (Cochran et al., 2005, p. 659). For example, studies of patients with Gaucher syndrome reveal high IQs and occupations requiring high intelligence.

Given the problems associated with rapid natural selection, particularly with genetically recessive disorders, those not disabled by their mutations—namely, carriers of the mutations—may well manifest high intelligence. They possess, however, the very undesirable likelihood of passing on their presently silent neurological defects to future generations. This implies a testable hypothesis: Compared to those without these mutations, Ashkenazic carriers of the mutations should reveal significantly higher intelligence (Cochran et al., 2005). One estimate suggests that 29% of Ashkenazi Jews may possess genetic mutations for these disorders (*Intermountain Jewish News*, 2006). These mutations may function in a manner similar to the one for sickle cell anemia, which, despite its very negative character, protects against malaria. Another consideration is that the mutations causing these diseases should be eliminated unless they are performing some adaptive evolutionary function.

High IQs would be meaningless if they were not manifested in concrete accomplishments in life. Stark (1998) claims that “The Jews rapidly became the most highly educated group in the United States . . . and have the highest family income of any racial, religious or ethnic group” (p. 298). Further evidence is found in regard to Nobel Prize winners: From the second half of the 20th century up to 2004, the Jewish population in the United States ranged from about 2% to 3%, but they accounted for 41% of those receiving Nobel Prizes. In addition, though approximately 0.33% of the world’s population is Jewish, this group has produced over half of the world’s chess champions (Cochran et al., 2005). Similar data may be cited for intellectual honors in a wide variety of fields.

As indicated earlier, the view of Cochran and his associates has been challenged. Metzenberg (2005) claims that the operative selective process is not Darwinian natural selection, but a system of self-selection more than two millenia old. He stresses a Jewish cultural emphasis on learning and study, with those who were most successful becoming highly valued in their communities. Actually, self-selection and natural selection would have been mutually supportive. Either way, the result was that community leaders chose these men for their daughters. The consequences were financial support for further study, plus large families. Despite some good arguments, Metzenberg’s thesis has also come in for sharp criticism (Razib, 2005). Cochran et al. (2005) stress that their position is hypothetical, capable of being tested and providing an avenue for further evaluation. Though knowledgeable scientists and

scholars have ranged themselves on both sides of the issue, this work shows the psychological complexities of religion in its historical–cultural context. Politically incorrect or not, it is likely to elicit polemics for some time to come.

THE BIOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS RITUAL

Human life is pervaded by ritual. It can, depending on the situation, be called “social,” “political,” “spiritual,” “religious,” or whatever the immediate circumstances suggest. When we meet someone we know, the ritual is to say, “How are you?” The expected response is “Fine, how are you?” A pattern of small talk follows unless another ritual reaction to events dictates otherwise. The words we use and the gestures we make are all in the service of ritualistic design—at least in form, if not in content. As a rule, we are not usually aware of such actions in our everyday behavior, since they are invariably habitual.

“Ritual” is individually and/or socially organized behavior that is often repetitive. Its roots lie deep in the genetic prehistory and neurophysiology of our species. In other words, ritual has a considerable evolutionary history, and is apparently significant in the functioning of the human nervous system. Clearly, we follow a long line of animal predecessors that have also engaged in ritualistic activities for a variety of reasons though not for religious purposes. Bell (1997) simply tells us that “animal and human rituals can be considered akin biologically and evolutionarily” (p. 31). Paul MacLean’s (1973) studies of the brain led him to name a network in the old brain the “R-complex.” He claimed that this network is involved with ritual behavior, especially with regard to the control of sex and aggression. In sum, many scholars in this area have stressed the idea that ritual is “biologically advantageous” (Huxley, 1966, p. 252). With this theme, natural selection is placed at the core of ritual studies.

Ritual in Religion

In a number of ways, ritual and ceremony are central to religion. It is here where humans separate themselves from their animal predecessors, but maybe not totally. A wonderful example of animal ritual that borders on the religious but may be considered prereligious animism is provided by Goodall (1971) and elaborated on by Guthrie (1993). Goodall describes the patterned, ritualistic response of a group of chimpanzees to a thunderstorm. The chimpanzee response is not considered religious by Guthrie, but he seems to agree with Lowie (1924) that human animism is “essentially nonreligious or only potentially religious” (Guthrie, 1993, p. 25). One must know the cultural and religious framework of a people before animism and religion can be distinguished.

Within religious systems, there is much conscious learning of approved verbal and non-verbal ways of communicating—such as when to genuflect, kneel, or adopt other postures or movements; say certain prayers; engage in dance; drink liquids or eat foods with religious significance (e.g., wine, wafers, matzoh); and so forth. Over the centuries, institutional religions have refined and redefined their rituals. Private and public forms of worship are specified for certain times of day (on arising, prior to sleep, at calls to prayer, etc.). Particular days of the week plus certain times of the month and year are set aside for special recognition and action by the faithful; all such times have their formally structured ceremonial expressions. Ritual circumscribes the entire process.

The Utility and Significance of Ritual

The prevalence and importance of ritual in animals and humans have led some psychologists and anthropologists to theorize an evolutionary history that has resulted in a neurophysiology with specific brain sites (Bell, 1997; d'Aquili, Laughlin, & McManus, 1979; d'Aquili & Newberg, 1999). Eugene d'Aquili and his associates specifically applied their neurological analyses and interpretations to religious ritual (d'Aquili et al., 1979; d'Aquili & Newberg, 1999).

Ritual is often regarded as both the core and origin of religion. Wallace (1966) called it the "primary phenomenon of religion . . . religion in action" (p. 102). Pilgrim (1978) states that "the ritual act not only is universal to religion but is the single most important characteristic of any living religiousness" (p. 64).

There is general agreement that the basic purpose of ritual is communication, whether the ritual is the waggle dance of a bee to its fellow bees (Raven, Johnson, Losos, & Singer, 2005) or the fervent prayer of a petitioner to a god. Messages are sent through whatever means an organism or a person apparently feels is most effective. These messages counter the stress of ambiguity and uncertainty. They contain information that endows the vague and indefinite with meaning. The discomfort, distress, and threat of uncertainty are lessened when one possesses ritualistic means of coping with troublesome situations. As Leach (1966) has pointed out, ritual summarizes a great deal of information that in many settings "is essential for the survival of the performers" (p. 405). Ritual connects people not only to each other, but, in their minds, to their deities. Psychoanalysts have added that it provides a connection to one's inner desires and feelings. Communication and language, as instruments of control, organize interpersonal and group situations to elicit behaviors that primarily maintain peace and harmony on all societal levels (Schefflen, 1972). Ritual thus coordinates religion, both in the public domain and within individuals (Ostow & Scharfstein, 1954).

This relationship has led Rappaport (1999) to theorize that religion originated in ritual. There is a regularizing order to the way in which things are ritualistically done. This provides the kind of organization that supports consistency and comfort for individuals—and, in most instances, amity and understanding in community life. With this in mind, many scholars see ritual as reducing aggression and managing sexual impulses (Wulff, 1997). More broadly, rituals are viewed as means of encouraging and controlling emotion. Rituals in general and religious rituals in particular usually survive not because of the power of authorities, but because people want them, volunteer to participate in them, and probably gain pleasure from having ritual roles to play.

To most people, religion represents an ideal state, with institutional faith emphasizing the discrepancy between reality and the ideal over which one frequently lacks control. Smith (1982/1996) perceives ritual as indicating the way things ought to be. Participation in religious ceremonies confirms identification with the ideal, reestablishing a sense of mastery.

People frequently make religious attributions when serious medical problems arise (Spilka & Schmidt, 1983a, 1983b). Ritual also becomes significant at such times (Helman, 1994). Healing rituals are efforts to transform illness into health. Psychologically, for both patients and their supporters, they reduce anxiety and uncertainty. These actions are in effect religious appeals and behaviors designed to bring supernatural forces to the aid of the afflicted. Prayer and participation in religious healing ceremonies often alleviate suffering and increase social integration.

If these considerations are not enough, Sosis (2004) asserts that ritual is an adaptive product of natural selection, the ultimate purpose of which is “cooperation and commitment” (p. 172) to the group.

An extensive physical basis has been theorized to place ritual in neurophysiological perspective. The neurological network proposed to be involved in ritual is considered part of the autonomic nervous system and termed the “ergotropic–tropic system.” Ritual is invoked as a possible balancing and/or control mechanism in the relationship between the often antagonistic functions that characterize the components of this system. The interested reader can explore this thinking in the work of Laughlin, McManus, and d’Aquili (1990). Other than its suggestion that there may be a complex biology underlying ritual, too little is known about this theory to go into further detail here.

THE BIOLOGY OF PRAYER

Biological Correlates of Prayer, Meditation, and Relaxation

Since prayer involves ritual, the neurobiological correlates of ritual may also hold for prayer, but this has not been demonstrated and appears to be controversial (Sloan, 2006). The results of research studies are not consistent in supporting the selective neural suppression postulated by d’Aquili and Newberg (1999). Noting that Transcendental Meditation (TM) seems to slow down brain waves (as recorded by electroencephalograms or EEGs), Surwillo and Hobson (1978) expected TM to be similar to prayer. Hoping to observe the same neural slowing effects in prayer as in TM, they studied EEGs from a rather small sample, but were unable to confirm their hypothesis. Yoga and Zen meditation have, however, been associated with the production of alpha brain waves, which occur with feelings of well-being (Benson, 1975).

Utilizing the same theoretical approach, but with a much larger sample, Elkins, Anchor, and Sandler (1979) focused on tension reduction in their subjects’ muscles. They compared relaxation techniques with observations from “intercessory” and “reflective” prayer. No information was provided as to how they defined these forms of prayer. Subjective claims that the prayers resulted in relaxation were not objectively confirmed by the measurement of muscle potentials. The relaxation condition seemed to be more effective than prayer; the latter demonstrated minor but nonsignificant tendencies toward tension reduction.

Though prayer may be aimed at reducing tension, its goal could actually be an altered state of consciousness, either contemplative or mystical (Benson, 1975). Insofar as prayer may induce relaxation, Benson (1975) suggests that it should also result in a slowing of breathing, and thus a lowered exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide. This relaxation pattern has been observed in TM. Regardless of how it is elicited, it is considered a healthy reaction (Benson & Stark, 1996). Benson and Stark further report that 80% of their patients selected prayer as an avenue to the relaxation response, and that 25% felt it enhanced their spirituality. Interestingly, this latter group manifested fewer medical symptoms than those who did not experience any spiritual enlightenment.

Benson impressively conveys his belief that prayer is physiologically and psychologically beneficial. This is buttressed by research showing that faith lowers anxiety, blood pressure, and depression, and that it counters the use of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. These and other similar observations suggest to Benson that evolution has “wired” the brain for religion, or, as he has put it, “wired for God” (Benson & Stark, 1996, p. 196; Roush, 1997, p. 357). In other

words, beliefs in God and religion have aided humans to survive and perpetuate themselves through offspring—possibly, in part, because these beliefs have encouraged beneficial physiological reactions such as tension or stress reduction and relaxation.

Prayer and Physical Health

The above-described biological correlates of prayer suggest that it may actually affect the health of those who pray. This is a debatable view (Sloan & Bagiella, 2002). One way of looking at this potential is to conceive of prayer as an “emotion-regulating strategy” (Koenig, George, & Siegler, 1988). In one study of older adults, prayer appeared to reduce negative emotional expressions under stress (Koenig, George, & Siegler, 1988). Using a broad-based national sample, Ferraro and Albrecht-Jensen (1991) concluded that “people who pray and participate more actively in their religions have better health” (p. 199). A similar conclusion came from a study of patients undergoing coronary artery bypass, whose authors claimed that those who prayed evidenced better postoperative emotional health (Ai, Bolling, & Peterson, 2000). Benson (1997) points out that prayer induces relaxation and results in “decreased metabolism, heart rate, rate of breathing and distinctive slower brain waves” (p. 1695). These are taken as signs of reduced stress. Though noting the positive effects and correlates of prayer relative to bodily health, those who have conducted extensive surveys of this literature are more cautious in their conclusions. They point out a variety of design-related, analytic, and interpretive problems in the research (McCullough, 1995). Prayer appears to be helpful, but the reasons are not so clear. Once again, controlled enthusiasm is merited.

THE BIOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is often a religious ideal (Hope, 1987). Studying a national sample, Gorsuch and Hao (1993) have shown that personal religiousness and a sense of forgiveness go together. Lack of a willingness to forgive correlates positively with hostility. In turn, the finding that hostility is associated with unhealthy cardiovascular reactions has been well documented (Baum & Singer, 1987; Sarafino, 1990). In many people, hostility, stress, hypertension, and coronary heart disease constitute the main features of a syndrome known as the “Type A personality” (Friedman & Rosenman, 1974). The main destructive feature of Type A is its hostility component (Rhodewalt & Smith, 1991). Research shows that forgiveness not only counters hostility, but also lowers blood pressure and subjective feelings of stress, and reduces objective signs of stress (Witvliet & Ludwig, 1999). Studying posttraumatic stress disorder, Witvliet, Phipps, Feldman, and Beckham (2004) also found that forgiveness was related to desirable physical changes.

Forgiveness has been conceptualized as an “emotion-focused coping strategy” (Worthington & Scherer, 2004, p. 385) that counters stress and reduces adverse physiological responses. Health is thus benefited. Other work has not only confirmed the favorable effects of forgiveness on cardiovascular indicators, but also identified desirable modifications in brain reactions (Farrow et al., 2005; Lawler et al., 2003, 2005). There is little doubt that forgiveness is an important personal and social aid supporting the religion–health connection. It performs a similar function psychotherapeutically.

OVERVIEW

In this chapter, we have briefly examined the main questions surrounding the relationship of religion to biology. This is a realm about which volumes can be written. It is also one that rapidly becomes highly specialized and technical, as biochemistry and the neurosciences are part of the overall picture.

The relationship between religion and biology has been historically conditioned by the theory of evolution. Soon after Darwin presented his views, the religious community split—interestingly, with conservatives on both sides of the conflict. One group saw evolution as posing a dire threat to faith by doing away with the distinction between humans and other animals. The religious proponents of Darwinism saw evolutionary theory as testimony to the wondrous way God works through natural law. This battle is continuing into the 21st century, with science on one side and creationism and intelligent design on the other. As fascinating as this debate is, it is beyond the scope of the present volume, and much good writing on the various issues is available elsewhere (K. R. Miller, 1999; Ruse, 2006).

In current biological and social-scientific thinking, religion has become a popular topic. Grand, all-encompassing theories may be intellectually exciting, but unless they eventuate in fruitful research, they will essentially remain sterile. The ever-present danger is that scientific research may become confused with “scientism,” the view that the only avenue to knowledge is via the scientific method.

Research on religion and the brain appears to be a “hot” research area today, but it is basically in its infancy. Work in this domain has, however, opened new avenues to understanding the biological correlates of religious belief, behavior and experience. Much still needs to be done to unravel the issues of cause, correlation, and effects between religious expression and these physical processes.

It is abundantly evident that religion, which seems so distant from biology, is actually intimately involved with it on many levels. The tip of this iceberg is now displayed, but more of its body is coming into view as science studies the various links between religion and biology.

Chapter 4

Religion in Childhood

Dear God, instead of letting people die and having to make new ones, why don't you just keep the ones You have now?—Jane

Dear God, are You really invisible or is that a trick?—Lucy

King Solomon must have been fond of animals, because he had many wives and one thousand porcupines.

Mummy, in the Bible, there is a story about a flood and God promised that there would never be another flood. How come there was a flood in Texas then?

If Jesus is born every Christmas and crucified every Good Friday, how does he grow so quickly?¹

RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDHOOD

With some exceptions, in this chapter we restrict our consideration of “religious development” to theory and investigations involving *children and young adolescents* (here taken to include persons through the midteen years). This purposely avoids many studies of college students and adults, unless such research has implications for child and young adolescent religious development. Our focus upon childhood is heavily theoretical. Ironically, despite the fact that fewer than 1% of almost 150,000 studies identified in PsycINFO included studies of religion in childhood, and despite the fact that 45% of all dissertations addressing religion and childhood have been completed since 1990 (Boyatzis, 2005, p. 124), theories from mainstream psychology have dominated the study of religion, spirituality, and childhood. It is a case of “more theory than data” that is only now beginning to be remedied.

¹These quotations come, respectively, from the following sources: Paw Prints (n.d.); Paw Prints (n.d.); a child quoted in Goldman (1964, p. 1); Madge (1965, p. 14); and Madge (1965, p. 14).

Stage Theories of Religious and Spiritual Development

The Influence of Piaget

Hyde (1990) pointed out almost two decades ago, “The study of religion in childhood and adolescence has been dominated for thirty years by investigations of the process by which religious thinking develops” (p. 15), and this dominance has been largely attributable to the influence of Jean Piaget. Although Piaget is no longer held on a pedestal, his influence remains considerable. For many, it is hard to think of religious development in other than cognitive terms (Boyatzis, 2005, p. 126).

Piaget argued that “cognitive development” involves a series of stages. Beginning in the 1920s, he studied these stages in part by sitting on street corners and playing marbles and other games with his own and other children—asking about the “rules” of each game, posing problems for the children to solve, and so on (Piaget, 1932/1948, 1936/1952, 1937/1954). He was just as interested in the “errors” the children made as he was in “correct” answers to his questions, and noted that there were striking similarities among the ways in which children of the same age reasoned about things. Piaget concluded that there are four major identifiable stages of cognitive development, which reflect the general reasoning abilities of children of different ages:

1. *Sensorimotor stage* (birth to about 2 years). During this stage, children seem to understand things through their sensory and motor (“sensorimotor”) interactions with the world around them (e.g., by touching and looking at things, and by putting them in their mouths). It is during this period that infants come to realize that objects continue to exist even though they are no longer immediately perceived (“object permanence”), and also that infants develop a fear of strangers (“stranger anxiety”). Both of these cognitive changes appear at about 8 months or soon thereafter.

2. *Preoperational stage* (about 2 to 7 years). During this second stage, children live in a very egocentric world, being unable to see things from others’ perspectives. Preoperational children become quite at home in representing things with language and numbers, but lack sophisticated logical reasoning capability, and are unable to grasp more than one relationship at a time. Also, children at this stage are prone to errors, especially for concepts of conservation. That is, they have difficulty grasping the idea that such characteristics as volume, mass, or length of objects remain the same, in spite of changes in their outward appearance. For example, even when a child has seen the same amount of liquid poured back and forth between a short, fat beaker and a tall, thin beaker, the youngster may fail to understand that the amount of liquid in the two containers is the same. Rather, he or she may think that the tall, thin beaker holds more water because it “looks bigger.”

3. *Concrete operational stage* (about 7 to 12 years). During this stage, children become capable of understanding the concepts of conservation that gave them so much trouble at the previous level. They are also able to reason quite logically about concrete events, to understand analogies, and to perform mathematical transformations such as those involving reversibility (i.e., $4 + 3 = 7$; therefore, $7 - 3 = 4$).

4. *Formal operational stage* (12 years and up). The last stage of cognitive development allows a move away from the concrete in thought processes. These older children are capable of complex abstract thinking involving the hypothetical—for example, by generating potential solutions to a problem, and then creating a plan to systematically test different possibilities in order to arrive at a “correct” solution.

Piaget's proposals have not escaped criticism (Boyatzis, 2005, pp. 125–126). One crucial assumption accepted by others influenced by Piaget is that cognitive growth proceeds sequentially so that growing children can assimilate and deal with their environment, and can also alter their thinking in order to accommodate new information. In other words, it is assumed that each stage builds on the previous stages in order to further children's cognitive development. This has important implications for religious and spiritual development. For example, it suggests that children are not cognitively capable of understanding the complex and abstract concepts involved in most religions of the adult world. Piaget did not write directly about the religious growth of children (Hyde, 1990), even though he wrote a book on moral development (Piaget, 1932/1948). It was left to others to relate Piaget's theories of cognitive stages to religion and spirituality.

Applications of Piaget's Stages to Religious and Spiritual Development

ELKIND'S APPROACH

David Elkind proposed that religion is a natural result of mental development, such that biological roots of intellectual growth interact with individuals' experiences. Specifically, Elkind suggested that four basic sequential components of intelligence (conservation, search for representation, search for relations, and search for comprehension) are critical in religious development, and that this sequence parallels the cognitive stages described by Piaget (Elkind, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1970, 1971). Three studies investigating Elkind's ideas about cognitive religious development are described in Research Box 4.1. Essentially, his research supported a Piagetian kind of progression as religious understanding emerges in children. A subsequent study (Long, Elkind, & Spilka, 1967) revealed a similar cognitive sequence for children's ideas about prayer.

Shifting from a child's sense of religious identity to children's religious experience, David and Sally Elkind (1970) studied the compositions of 149 ninth-grade U.S. students who were asked to respond to the questions "When do you feel closest to God?" and "Have you ever had a particular experience of feeling especially close to God?" (p. 104). The former question was assumed to tap recurrent religious experiences, and the latter acute religious experiences. The researchers concluded that the majority of respondents regarded personal religious experiences as a significant part of their lives, even though many resisted formal religious activities and participation. Across all respondents, 92% wrote compositions indicating recurrent experiences, and 76% wrote compositions indicating acute experiences (Elkind & Elkind, 1970, p. 104).

TAMMINEN'S RESEARCH

Kalevi Tamminen's (1976, 1994; Tamminen & Nurmi, 1995; Tamminen, Vianello, Jaspard, & Ratcliff, 1988) studies of the religious experiences of Finnish children and adolescents deserve attention in this chapter for several reasons. First, almost 3,000 young people have been studied. Second, this research program has produced limited but important longitudinal data. Third, and possibly most important, these studies have moved a step beyond the more traditional cognitive-stage approach by investigating the meaning and implications of religious *experiences* for children's lives, in addition to aspects of religious cognitive development.

RESEARCH BOX 4.1. The Child's Concept of Religion (Elkind, 1961, 1962, 1963)

In three separate studies, Elkind posed a series of questions to Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant children, respectively, concerning their understanding of their religious identity and ideas. For example, in his 1961 study, Jewish children were asked questions such as these: "Are you Jewish?", "What makes you Jewish?", "Can a cat or a dog be Jewish? Why?", and "How do you become a Jew?" Elkind found considerable age-related cognitive similarity in children's responses to such questions across his three major religious groups. The development of religious ideas seemed to parallel Piaget's cognitive stages to some extent.

In the 5- to 7-year range (comparable to Piaget's late preoperational stage), children seemed to think that their denominational affiliation was absolute, having been ordained by God, and therefore it could not be changed. A few years later (ages 7–9, comparable to Piaget's early concrete operational stage), religious ideas were indeed very "concrete." Religious affiliation was seen to be determined by the family into which one was born, and if a Catholic family had a pet cat, it was thought to be a Catholic cat. At the next stage of religious development (ages 10–14, corresponding to Piaget's late concrete and early formal operational stages), children apparently began to understand some of the complexities of religious practices and rituals, and they could conceive of a person's changing his or her religion because they understood religion to come from within the person rather than being determined externally. Abstract and differentiated religious thinking was beginning to appear. In the end, Elkind concluded that children were not capable of an abstract "adult" understanding of religion before the age of 11 or 12 (i.e., the beginning of Piaget's formal operational period).

Tamminen used the five religious dimensions of Glock and Stark (1965) to organize his longitudinal study of religious development in Scandinavian youths. A summary of his work is reported in Research Box 4.2. As noted in the box, Tamminen asked his subjects, "Have you at times felt that God is particularly close to you?" Percentages of responses by grade level for the 1974 sampling are presented in Table 4.1. The steady decline in the percentage of students reporting experiences of nearness to God by grade level (and hence age) is obvious. This decline is further evident in Table 4.2, which contains responses to the same question in 1986 from this longitudinal study. Tamminen's study is thus the only major longitudinal study to document the steady decline in the report of religious experience from childhood through adolescence in a highly secularized culture. It suggests that such experiences (or their report) are quite common in childhood, supporting the claims of Paffard (1973) and others as discussed later in this chapter.

Tamminen's research program is not without problems. It is difficult to know what to make of written questionnaire responses from relatively young children; probably the younger children were not able to express themselves well in writing, and it is not clear that their self-reported "religious experiences" are consonant with what adults would call "religious experiences." Also, questionnaires were administered in school classrooms, suggesting that peer pressure, contextual influences, and other such factors may have influenced responses. For example, children may have been reluctant to reveal personal religious experiences to an unknown adult, especially while sitting among their classmates. As Scarlett (1994) has pointed out, "These are surveys carried out in impersonal settings not conducive to tapping

RESEARCH BOX 4.2. Religious Experience in Childhood and Adolescence: Finnish Research (Tamminen, 1994)

Tamminen began his series of investigations with a 1974 study that tested 1,588 children and adolescents (ages 7–20), who were mostly Lutheran and fairly evenly divided between boys and girls. Longitudinal data were collected 2 years later on 277 of the original participants, and a final longitudinal wave of data was collected in 1980 on 60 of those who had participated in the first and second stages. Also, 242 classmates of the “third-wave 60” were studied for comparison purposes. Finally, in 1986, a study was carried out to replicate and extend the 1974 investigation, involving 1,176 students. Most of the data were gathered by means of group questionnaires administered in classrooms, although the youngest students (first grade) were also interviewed. Tamminen acknowledges that many students up to fifth grade had difficulty expressing themselves in writing, and that this could have compromised his findings for the younger children.

Religious experience was operationally defined by the question “Have you at times felt that God is particularly close to you?” and its follow-up, “Would you like to tell me about it—when and in what situations?” Interestingly, 10–16% of the two youngest groups of students reported that they had *not* felt particularly close to God, and this figure grew steadily to 53% of the 17- to 20-year-olds. That is, older children and adolescents were significantly less likely to report any religious experiences involving closeness to God.

Closeness to God among the 7- to 11-year-old children was most likely to be linked with “situations of loneliness, fear, and emergencies—such as escaping or avoiding danger—or when they were ill” (1994, p. 81). Tamminen notes that these reports corresponded to a more general concreteness of thinking at these ages. Similar experiences were reported by the 11- to 13-year-olds, though they also linked closeness to God with encounters with death, loneliness, prayer, and contemplation. There was not much evidence of more abstract thinking until later ages.

The 13- to 15-year-olds evidenced a variety of religious doubts (e.g., concerning God’s existence and trustworthiness, as well as the efficacy of prayer). Reports of decreased closeness to God were more common, and those reports of closeness that did appear were more often linked with death and external dangers. Finally, the religious experiences of older students (15- to 20-year-olds) tended to involve personal identity issues and existential questions (e.g., the meaning of life and death), and this material was more obviously abstract in nature.

Overall, Tamminen has concluded that the results of these far-reaching studies showed “a developmental line from concrete, separate, and external to more abstract, general, and internalized. In addition, experiences in childhood were related almost exclusively to everyday situations—as was the case also with evening prayer—whereas at the age of puberty and in adolescence, such experiences were more frequently related to congregational situations [i.e., church-related contexts]” (p. 82). In general, parallel findings appeared for other questions dealing with God’s guidance and direction in life.

Note. A more extensive treatment of Tamminen’s research on religion in Finnish young people can be found in his 1991 book *Religious Development in Childhood and Youth: An Empirical Study*.

TABLE 4.1. Scandinavian Students' Reports of Experiencing Nearness to God (1974)

Response	Percentage responding by grade level					
	I	III	V	VII	IX	XI
Yes	84	—	—	—	—	—
Very often	—	42	17	10	10	8
A few times	—	30	40	33	31	27
Maybe once	—	18	12	15	14	13
No	16	10	31	43	44	53

Note. $n = 1,336$. Level I answered only "yes" or "no." Adapted from Tamminen (1991, p. 42). Copyright 1991 by Soumalainen Tiedeakatemia. Adapted by permission.

into what God and religious experience *mean* to adolescents" (p. 88; emphasis in original). Furthermore, the children and adolescents were fairly homogeneous in terms of their religious background (Lutheran), and it is not clear to what extent Tamminen's findings might generalize to children from other religious backgrounds or no religious background at all. For a better appreciation of differences in religious experience across religious traditions (though not specifically in childhood), the reader might consult the first six chapters of Hood's (1995b) *Handbook of Religious Experience*.

THE WORK OF GOLDMAN

Goldman (1964) applied Piaget's theory of cognitive development to religious thinking, claiming that "religious thinking is no different in mode and method from non-religious thinking" (p. 5). Working in England, he asked 5- to 15-year-old children questions about drawings with religious connotations (e.g., a child kneeling at a bed, apparently praying), as well as questions about Bible stories (e.g., Moses at the burning bush). He then analyzed responses to the questions by looking for evidence of Piagetian stages of development. He concluded, as did Elkind, that religious thinking does indeed proceed in a fashion similar to more general cognitive development.

TABLE 4.2. Scandinavian Students' Reports of Experiencing Nearness to God (1986)

Response	Percentage responding by grade level						
	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
Very often	19	19	13	10	5	1	4
A few times	31	33	44	29	20	13	15
Maybe once	18	20	19	27	24	18	22
No	32	28	24	34	52	68	59

Note. $n = 971$. Adapted from Tamminen (1991, p. 43). Copyright 1991 by Soumalainen Tiedeakatemia. Adapted by permission.

A number of studies have confirmed these general conclusions about “cognitive stages,” especially the implication that children are capable of more abstract religious thinking as they grow older (see, e.g., Degelman, Mullen, & Mullen, 1984; Peatling, 1974, 1977; Peatling & Laabs, 1975; Tamminen, 1976; Tamminen & Nurmi, 1995). There has also been some confirmatory cross-cultural work (see Hyde, 1990). Some studies have examined specific predictions of the Piagetian approach for religious development. For example, Zachry (1990) concluded that his data, obtained from high school and college students, were “consistent with the prediction of Piagetian theory that abstract thought in a specific content area such as religion depends on an underlying formal logic” (p. 405).

EVALUATING GOLDMAN'S FINDINGS

Some empirical work has not been entirely supportive of Goldman's conclusions about the development of religious thought. For example, Hoge and Petrillo (1978b) studied 451 high school sophomores in different Protestant and Catholic churches, and concluded that Goldman had overestimated the importance of cognitive capacity and underestimated the role of religious training in the development of religious thought. This conclusion, however, was apparently based primarily on differences between public and private school Catholics. Hoge and Petrillo attributed such differences to religious education at the private school, but there might well have been selection factors at work, such as socioeconomic status or parental religiosity. Hoge and Petrillo themselves acknowledged the bias in their sample, such that “the youth most alienated from the church refused [to participate] disproportionately often” (pp. 142–143).

Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis (1993) reconsidered Hoge and Petrillo's (1978b) results and concluded that their conclusions were inappropriate. In fact, they suggested that Hoge and Petrillo's findings were “precisely what Goldman would have predicted” (1993, p. 62). The disagreement between these two groups of authors apparently hinges partly on a specific Goldman prediction concerning the level of religious *teachings* (e.g., “concrete thinking” about religious content) and adolescents' overall *capacity* for higher, more abstract (“formal operational”) religious thinking. Hoge and Petrillo did not measure this “gap” directly, but assumed that higher absolute scores on a measure of abstract religious thinking meant that a smaller gap existed. Furthermore, their findings were not consistent across different measures of religious rejection or across different participant groupings, and the majority of reported correlations did not achieve statistical significance. It is not surprising that there was some disagreement as to the interpretation of these findings.

Some authors (e.g., Godin, 1968; Howkins, 1966; Kay, 1996; McCallister, 1995) have been quite critical of Goldman's general conclusions, especially the implications he drew for religious education. Apparently Elkind's research (see above) has escaped the severe criticism applied to Goldman's work, in part because Elkind avoided theological biases or assumptions (see Hyde, 1990), whereas Goldman “assumed a particular theological point of view” (Hyde, 1990, p. 35). For example, Greer (1983) has suggested that the cognitive tests of Goldman and those of Peatling, who developed a measure of religious cognitive development (Peatling, Laabs, & Newton, 1975), were biased in such a way that theologically conservative respondents would tend to endorse responses indicating concrete (rather than abstract) religious thinking.

In the end, although it has been argued that the religiosity of children is *not* dependent on cognitive development (Pierce & Cox, 1995), the works of Elkind, Goldman, and others

have demonstrated the utility of a Piagetian framework for understanding the development of religious thinking. These researchers also set the stage for much subsequent work in related areas, such as faith development, moral development, and the emergence of the God concept and prayer.

Fowler's Stages of Faith Development

James Fowler (1981, 1991a, 1991b, 1994, 1996) has suggested that individual religious faith unfolds in a stage sequence similar to that described by Piaget for cognitive development, and by Kohlberg for moral growth (see below). He defines faith as “a dynamic and generic human experience . . . [that] includes, but is not limited to or identical with, religion” (Fowler, 1991a, p. 31). That is, although Fowler’s use of the term “faith” does overlap with institutionalized religion, the two are also independent to some extent. Faith is seen as a deep core of the individual, the “center of values,” “images and realities of power,” and “master stories” (myths) involving both conscious and unconscious motivations. In other words, faith involves centers of values that vary from one individual to the next, but that are foci of primary life importance (such as religion, family, nation, power, money, and sexuality).

Furthermore, people tend to align themselves with power in this dangerous world—possibly religious power, but also sources of secular power, such as nations and economic systems. “Faith is trust in and loyalty to images and realities of power” (Fowler, 1991a, p. 32). Also, Fowler argues that faith involves stories or scripts that give meaning and direction to people’s lives (e.g., what it means to be a good person or a part of a religious community).

Fowler and his colleagues have carried out extensive interviews with hundreds of people about these aspects of their faith. They have concluded that there are essentially seven stages in faith development, although some people never progress very far through these stages. Fowler’s stages “aim to describe patterned operations of knowing and valuing that underlie our consciousness” (Fowler, 1996, p. 56), and are described in Table 4.3, with the approximate time of emergence of each stage shown in parentheses.

Fowler has concluded that it is extremely rare for people to reach the seventh and final stage in his sequence, but that people who have attained universalizing faith might include Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mother Teresa. It is no coincidence that both Gandhi and King were assassinated. Fowler claims that people who achieve universalizing faith are in danger of premature death because of their confrontational involvement in solving serious problems in the world.

Fowler’s analysis of stages of faith is rich in ideas, provides a framework for empirical work, and can potentially contribute to our understanding of what it means to be “religious.” However, it has been pointed out that Fowler’s conceptualization is complex and difficult to comprehend, and it has failed to generate relatively rigorous empirical research. Also, Fowler has generally declined to analyze his own results statistically and has ignored related work in the psychology of religion (Hyde, 1990).

Streib (2001a) proposes that revisions to Fowler’s faith development theory are needed—for example, to free the theory from “its almost unquestioned adoption of the structural-developmental ‘logic of development’ . . . in order to account for the rich and deep life-world- and life-history-related dimensions of religion” (pp. 144–145). Similarly, Day (2001) claims that “contemporary research challenges the fundamental assumptions of the cognitive developmental paradigm” (p. 173); therefore, we need to look elsewhere if we are to understand religious development. He has suggested that greater attention should be addressed to (reli-

TABLE 4.3. Fowler's Stages of Faith Development

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1. *Primal faith* (infancy). This first stage involves the beginnings of emotional trust based on body contact, care, early play, and the like. Subsequent faith development is based on this foundation.
 2. *Intuitive/projective faith* (early childhood). In the second stage, imagination combines with perception and feelings to create long-lasting faith images. The child becomes aware of the sacred, of prohibitions, of death, and of the existence of morality.
 3. *Mythical/literal faith* (elementary school years). Next, the developing ability to think logically helps to order the world, corresponding to the Piagetian stage of concrete operations. The child can now discriminate between fantasy and the real world, and can appreciate others' perspectives. Religious beliefs and symbols are accepted quite literally.
 4. *Synthetic/conventional faith* (early adolescence). During the fourth stage, there is a reliance on abstract ideas of formal operational thinking, which engenders a hunger for a more personal relationship with God. Reflections on past experiences, and concerns about the future and personal relationships, contribute to the development of mutual perspective taking and the shaping of a world view and its values.
 5. *Individuative/reflective faith* (late adolescence or young adulthood). The fifth stage involves a critical examination and reconstitution of values and beliefs, including a change from reliance on external authorities to authority within the self. The capacity for "third-person perspective taking" contributes to the development of consciously chosen commitments and to the emergence of an "executive ego."
 6. *Conjunctive faith* (midlife or beyond). In the sixth stage, there is integration of opposites (e.g., the realization that each individual is both young and old, masculine and feminine, constructive and destructive), generating a "hunger for a deeper relationship to the reality that symbols mediate" (Fowler, 1991a, p. 41) "Dialogical knowing" emerges, such that the individual is open to the multiple perspectives of a complex world. This enables the person to go beyond the faith boundaries developed in the previous individuative/reflective stage, and to appreciate that "truth" is both multidimensional and organically interdependent.
 7. *Universalizing faith* (unspecified age). The relatively rare final stage involves a oneness with the power of being or God, as well as commitment to love, justice, and overcoming oppression and violence. People who have attained this stage of faith development "live as though a commonwealth of love and justice were already reality among us. They create zones of liberation for the rest of us, and we experience them as both liberating and as threatening. These people tend to confront others concerning their involvement in, and attachments to, dehumanizing structures which oppose 'the commonwealth of love and justice'" (Fowler, 1991a, p. 41).
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gious) speech and narrative. McDargh (2001) focuses his critique of Fowler's theory more on its theological foundations, and claims that a more individually focused approach would be useful. McDargh (2001) and Rizzuto (2001) have both argued for more incorporation of psychoanalytic concepts and processes in analyzing faith development. However, Fowler (2001; Fowler & Dell, 2006) has defended his theory, arguing that it continues to serve after three decades of research as a useful framework for studying faith development at different levels (individual, family, and social group).

One problem with Fowler's theory has been the difficulty in operationalizing the stages, and consequently there have been attempts to simplify the measurement of his proposed stages. For instance, Leak, Loucks, and Bowlin (1999) have developed an 8-item Faith Development Scale intended to measure Fowler's proposed stages. However, attempts to validate this scale have generated mixed results. Leak et al. (1999) have suggested either that this might be due to limitations of the scale, or that we should have "reservations on the beneficence of

mature faith within a Fowlerian framework” (p. 122). More promising is the development of a Religious Schema Scale by Streib and his colleagues (see Streib, 2008, pp. 58–59).

Oser’s Stages of Development of Religious Judgment

Fritz Oser, with Gmunder and other colleagues (Oser, 1991, 1994; Oser & Gmunder, 1991; Oser & Reich, 1990, 1996; Oser, Reich, & Bucher, 1994), has focused on a related aspect of religious development called “religious judgment.” Apart from the work of Elkind, Fowler, and others, Oser (1991) has stated that

there have been few investigations directed at building up a theory about the development of an individual’s constructions and reconstructions of the religious experiences and beliefs. [Therefore we] are attempting to formulate a new paradigm of religious development, using a structural concept of discontinuous, stagelike development and the classical semiclinical interview method as our primary research strategy. (p. 6)

Oser’s research has revealed five stages in the emergence of religious judgment, as qualitative changes occur in people’s relationship to an “Ultimate Being” or God. Individuals move from a stage of believing that God intervenes unexpectedly in the world and that God’s power guides human beings (Stage 1), through belief in a still external and all-powerful God who punishes or rewards, depending on good or bad deeds (“Give so that you may receive”) (Stage 2). Individuals in Stage 3 begin to think of God as somewhat detached from their world and as wielding less influence, with people generally responsible for their own lives, since they can now distinguish between “transcendence” (God’s existence outside the created world) and “immanence” (God’s presence and action from within). In Stage 4 people come to realize both the necessity and the limits of autonomy, recognizing that freedom and life stem from an Ultimate Being, who is often perceived to have a “divine plan” that gives meaning to life. Finally, in Stage 5 the Ultimate Being is realized through human action via care and love. There is “universal and unconditional religiosity” (Oser, 1991, p. 10).

Oser and Reich (1996) have pointed to limited empirical support for this stage conceptualization of the development of religious judgment; some research (e.g., Bucher, 1991; Di Loreto & Oser, 1996, as cited in Oser & Reich, 1996; Roco & Ticu, 1996; Zondag & Belzen, 1999) has provided further support for Oser’s proposals. Huber, Reich, and Schenker (2000) have argued that it is important to match the technique of measurement to the goals of an investigation in this area. Their findings suggest that combinations of methods may be appropriate.

Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development

Lawrence Kohlberg’s (1964, 1969, 1981, 1984) theory of moral development has served as a basis for the investigation of many issues related to morality. Building on Piaget’s belief that the moral judgments of children derive from their cognitive development, Kohlberg attempted to identify cognitive stages that underlie the development of moral thinking. In a series of studies, he asked people what they thought about different “moral dilemmas.”

Kohlberg’s most famous dilemma involved a woman near death from cancer who could potentially be saved by a new drug developed by a nearby druggist. The druggist, however, wanted 10 times what the drug cost him to make—more than the sick woman’s husband,

Heinz, could afford—and refused to sell it for less. So Heinz considered breaking into the druggist’s store to steal the drug for his wife. Respondents were asked to comment on the morality of Heinz’s potential decision to steal the drug, and to indicate the reasoning behind their response. Based on such responses to such dilemmas, Kohlberg proposed that individuals pass through three broad levels of moral development, each with substages. As Sapp (1986) stated, “each stage is distinguished by moral reasoning that is more complex, more comprehensive, more integrated, and more differentiated than the reasoning of the earlier stages” (p. 273). Table 4.4 outlines the levels and stages of moral development proposed by Kohlberg.

Kohlberg’s theory has been criticized (Darley & Shultz, 1990), and Bergling’s (1981) extensive assessment of its validity suggests that the theory may have limited utility outside of Western industrialized countries. But there is some support for Kohlberg’s conclusions that children do progress through moral stages, especially from the preconventional level to the

TABLE 4.4. Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development

<u>Preconventional level (develops during early childhood)</u>
<p><i>Stage 1. Punishment and obedience orientation</i> The first stage is characterized by avoidance of punishment and unquestioning deference to power as values in themselves. Morality is seen as based on self-interest, and the goodness or badness of actions is determined by their physical consequences, regardless of any human meaning attached to these consequences.</p> <p><i>Stage 2. Instrumental relativist orientation</i> This stage is defined by a focus on instrumental satisfaction of one’s own needs as the determiner of “right.” Reciprocity may be present, but is of the “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours” variety.</p>
<u>Conventional level (develops during late childhood and early adolescence)</u>
<p>Generally, this level involves a move toward gaining approval or avoiding disapproval as the basis for morality; law and social rules are seen as valuable in their own right.</p> <p><i>Stage 3. Interpersonal concordance or “good boy/nice girl” orientation</i> Early in the conventional level, the individual is driven by behavior that pleases or helps others and that receives their approval.</p> <p><i>Stage 4. “Law and order” orientation</i> Subsequently, in the conventional level, the person focuses on the maintenance of the social order and the importance of authority and strict rules.</p>
<u>Postconventional level (may develop from late adolescence on)</u>
<p>People at this level tend to be concerned with morality as abstract principles. They are able to separate their own identification with groups from the principles and moral values associated with those groups.</p> <p><i>Stage 5. Social-contract/legalistic orientation</i> The fifth stage involves recognition of the relative nature of personal values, and the importance of having procedural rules to reach consensus. The individual can separate the legal world from individual differences of opinion.</p> <p><i>Stage 6. Universal ethical principle orientation</i> The last and highest stage of moral development, according to Kohlberg, involves defining “right” in one’s own conscience, consistent with one’s own abstract ethical principles, but with a sense of responsibility to others. There is a clear emphasis on universality, consistency, logic, and rationality.</p>

conventional level of morality. Also, Snarey's (1985) review of the literature suggests that this progression *is* reasonably similar in different cultures.

One might expect that Kohlberg's conceptualization of moral development would be closely linked to religious growth, or that religious development would directly affect (and possibly determine) the emergence of morality. However, Kohlberg made it very clear that moral and religious development are quite separate, and that the two should not be confused. For example, he suggested that it is a fallacy to think that

basic moral principles are dependent upon a particular religion, or any religion at all. We have found no important differences in development of moral thinking between Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Buddhists, Moslems, and atheists... Both cultural values and religion are important factors in selectively elaborating certain themes in the moral life but they are not unique causes of the development of basic moral values. (Kohlberg, 1980, pp. 33–34)

Research has confirmed Kohlberg's conclusion in this regard (Bruggeman & Hart, 1996; Cobb, Ong, & Tate, 2001; Gorsuch & McFarland, 1972; Selig & Teller, 1975), and other experts on moral development have taken a similar stance (e.g., Turiel & Neff, 2000). Moreover, Nucci and Turiel (1993) found that older children and adolescents were able to distinguish between moral and religious issues, and that they viewed moral rules as unalterable by religious authorities. However, this has not stopped many, many researchers from speculating about and investigating possible relationships between moral development and religiosity (e.g., Clouse, 1986; Fernhout & Boyd, 1985; Glover, 1997; Hanson, 1991; Kedem & Cohen, 1987; Mitchell, 1988). Such research has been facilitated by the development of a less subjective scoring system to evaluate stages of moral development.

Rest's (1979, 1983; Rest, Cooper, Coder, Masanz, & Anderson, 1974) Defining Issues Test (DIT) asks people to respond to a series of 12 statements concerning each of six moral dilemmas. The DIT was intended to be both simpler and more objective than Kohlberg's initial scoring of moral stages, and it has stimulated numerous studies on moral development and religion, though apparently few with children. These investigations have reported some relationships between level of moral judgment and religious orientation, though typically not strong ones (Clouse, 1991; Ernsberger & Manaster, 1981; Holley, 1991; Sapp, 1986). There have also been claims that people from fundamentalist denominations have lower DIT scores (Richards, 1991; Sapp, 1986). The validity of the DIT for conservative religious groups has been called into question, however, by Richards (1991; Richards & Davison, 1992). An improved measure of moral judgment, the DIT2, has since been published (Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau, 1999). It remains to be seen whether this new measure will help to clarify the literature on moral development and religion.

Gilligan (1977) has criticized Kohlberg's theory and research for their failure to deal with unique aspects of women's moral development, especially the care and responsibility orientation of many women, as contrasted with the male justice orientation emphasized by Kohlberg. This could have implications for religious development—for example, in terms of gender differences in images of God, if God is seen as a person's anchor for morality. There is evidence that images of God diverge along gender lines, with women more likely to see God as supportive and men more likely to see God as instrumental (Nelsen, Cheek, & Au, 1985). Reich (1997) has pondered more generally whether such considerations might suggest the need for a theory specifically for women's religious development. However, he has concluded

that there is no need to modify current theories of religious development, or to generate new ones in this regard. Others (DeNicola, 1997; Schweitzer, 1997) have been critical of Reich's stance; they have argued that, at a minimum, revisions to current theories are needed.

In general, Kohlberg's stages of moral development can at least stimulate our thinking about religious growth. For example, Scarlett and Periello (1991) have suggested that Kohlberg's ideas could help in understanding aspects of the development of prayer. Furthermore, religion has much to say about morality, and understanding how moral development occurs is certainly relevant to the communication and understanding of moral issues at different ages. At the same time, we must take Kohlberg's warning to heart and not assume—as some researchers have—that moral and religious development are necessarily directly and causally related. (Other approaches to morality and religion are discussed in Chapter 12).

Is a Unified Approach to Religious Development Possible?

Given the overlap among current stage conceptualizations, it might be productive to attempt an integration and synthesis of Piaget's, Fowler's, Oser's, and others' stage theories of development, in order to delineate the common elements of these theories as they apply to the development of religious thought processes. Such an integration has been attempted by Helmut Reich (1993a, 1993b). He has attempted to summarize the "smorgasbord" of differing theoretical and empirical approaches to the study of religious development. In addition, he has attempted to distinguish between the degree of "hardness" and "softness" of stage theories. "Hard" stages describe organized systems of action (first-order problem solving), are qualitatively different from each other, and follow an unchanging sequence with a clear developmental logic: A later stage denotes greater complexity and improved problem-solving capacity. Each hard stage integrates the preceding stage and logically requires the elements of the prior stage. (Reich, 1993a, p. 151).

The stage models of Piaget, Kohlberg, Elkind, and Goldman would be considered "hard." "Soft" stages, on the other hand, "explicitly include elements of affective or reflective characteristics (metatheoretical reflection) that . . . do not follow a unique developmental logic" (Reich, 1993a, p. 151). Oser's and Fowler's theories would fall into this "soft" category. The "hard-soft" distinction could be helpful in understanding and categorizing theories of religious development, as well as the circumstances under which one theory might be more appropriate than another. However, Fowler (1993) has criticized this approach, suggesting that the use of "hard" and "soft" categories is obsolete; that Reich's formulation does not incorporate the important work by Gilligan (1977) on the ethics of responsibility and care; and that Reich fails to acknowledge important differences between Oser's and Fowler's stage theories.

Reich's work does a considerable service by mapping common elements in different theories and empirical investigations, critically evaluating and integrating theories, and suggesting the need for clarification and some standardization in terminology and approaches. In reaction to Reich's proposed integration, Wulff (1993) has suggested that "in the long run . . . the psychology of religion and its practitioners will be best served if we not only recognize the limitations of these theories and their associated research techniques, but also strive to develop new ones more faithful to the traditions and life experience of the persons we seek to understand" (p. 185). Reich's beginning could stimulate further integrative conceptualizations. However, a single major integrative theory of religious development remains an elusive goal (see also Tamminen & Nurmi, 1995).

Critique of the Stage Theory Approach

Is the “stage” approach the best way to conceptualize religious growth and change? Certainly this approach has increased our understanding of the general processes involved in the emergence of adult religiousness. However, it is possible that an obsession with stages may detract from our ability to understand the complexity and uniqueness of individual religious development. That is, the tendency to assume that such growth involves cognitive commonalities across all members of specific age groups can to some extent blind us to the idiosyncratic nature of religion in childhood and adolescence (see, e.g., Day, 1994, 2001; Streib, 2001a). Furthermore, the stage approach implies a certain amount of discontinuity in religious development, whereas it may actually be a reasonably continuous process. Streib (2001a) suggests that we focus upon faith “styles” rather than “stages.” Streib allows for religious schemas and faith styles to be continuously available, and thus avoids the pitfalls of demanding invariant stages. Boyatzis (2005) has been vocal in noting the limitations of cognitive-developmental approaches to the study of religious and spiritual development in children. Others have argued that children and adults can employ similar thought processes, and that there is no necessity to postulate a sequence from magical to rational thought, such that children’s thought processes are inevitably denigrated in comparison to “mature” adult thought (see Boyatzis, 2005, p. 126, for a discussion).

Solid empirical investigations of the development of religious concepts are rare (Boyer & Walker, 2000), and the topic of religious development has been generally neglected (Harris, 2000). The studies that do exist are often “misguided” (Boyer & Walker, 2000, p. 140), because they compare how children think with “how adults ought to think, according to theological doctrine” (p. 141). Boyer and Walker have pointed out that we do not know whether adults’ religious representations are indeed consistent with church doctrine; nor should we assume that children’s religious development can be assessed by comparing it to adult religious thought. Possibly investigations of children’s religion simply elicit “theologically correct” information. That is, children may say what their church, parents, or culture expect them to say, and this tells us little about, for example, religious concept development. In a similar vein, Harris (2000) has concluded that in spite of appearances to the contrary, the Piagetian legacy has actually led us to neglect the development of religious thinking. Socialization theory, especially when focused upon child–parent interactions, is beginning to clarify the development of religious and spiritual thinking in children.

SOCIALIZATION THEORY

Boyatzis (2005) has taken the lead in arguing for a clearer understanding of how socialization influences religious and spiritual development in children. Furthermore, he has noted the complexity of what actually is involved in the family mechanisms of socialization. Although generalizations such as “Religious families tend to produce religious children” remain true, they offer little insight as to *why* they are true. For instance, it is clear that even young children are not simply passive accepters of parental views. To take a secular example, Prentice, Manosevitz, and Hubbs (1978) showed that even among children whose parents taught them to believe in the Easter Bunny, almost one-fourth did not believe. Okagaki and Bevis (1999) have shown that parents’ beliefs are not as important as children’s perceptions of what their parents believe. Likewise, efforts to suggest that children naturally harbor anthropomorphic

tendencies that can account for both their religious thinking and experience are balanced by studies showing that children recognize that God is *unique* and must be understood in *nonanthromorphic* terms (Barrett & Richard, 2003). Boyatzis (2005, pp. 134–135) has provided effective critiques of studies where children are asked to draw pictures of God, and then researchers interpret this as indicating anthropomorphic thinking! Heller (1986) has shown that Hindu children have complex views of God, attributing both personal and impersonal characteristics to God. Finally, Evans (2000) has shown that even children not raised with religious creationist beliefs tend to favor creationist views.

Thus, in contrast to anthropomorphic views derived from evolutionary models of general cognitive development (discussed in Chapters 3 and 9), socialization-oriented theorists favor a “preparedness” model in which children are assumed to have a natural tendency to be prepared to accept religious ideas. This natural tendency is enhanced when parents and others reinforce this with explicit religious instruction. Here religion, as an explicit system of beliefs, is grafted onto a spiritual awareness natural to children (Nye, 1999). Quantitative longitudinal research has shown that as children mature, they tend to adopt the religious values of their parents (Wink, Ciciolla, Dillon, & Tracy, 2007). Qualitative research indicates that whether or not spirituality is religiously framed, children are naturally spiritual beings, insofar as they have a sense of interconnectedness with something larger than themselves (Coles, 1990; Hay & Nye, 1998; Reimer & Furrow, 2001).

Parenting Style

There is general agreement among developmental psychologists that parenting practices have important implications for child development (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). In spite of the likelihood that parental religious orientation influences parenting style (see Luft & Sorell, 1987), there has been little research relating parenting approaches, religion, and child development. A few early studies (e.g., Bateman & Jensen, 1958; Nunn, 1964) suggested the potential of such links. Subsequent theoretical and empirical work on “parenting styles” has provided new avenues for exploring the relationship between parenting and child religious development.

Baumrind (1967, 1991) has suggested that there exist four very different styles of parenting, based on parental responsiveness and demandingness: “authoritarian,” “authoritative,” “permissive,” and “rejecting/neglecting.” Authoritarian parents are high on demandingness but low on responsiveness, preferring to impose rules on their children and emphasize obedience. Authoritative parents tend to be both demanding and responsive, explaining why rules are necessary, and being open to their children’s perspectives. Permissive parents make few demands, use little punishment, and are responsive to the point of submitting to their children’s wishes. Rejecting/neglecting parents are neither demanding nor responsive, being generally disengaged from their children.

Correlational and longitudinal research has suggested that the authoritative style of parenting may have benefits for children’s development, whereas the authoritarian and rejecting/neglecting styles may have some negative implications (Buri, Louiselle, Misukanis, & Mueller, 1988; Rohner, 1994). Other research suggests that parental emphasis on obedience is related to “cognitive accomplishment” (Holden & Edwards, 1989) and to personality development (e.g., right-wing authoritarianism; Altemeyer, 1988). There is also tentative evidence that permissive parenting is associated with an extrinsic religious orientation, and that authoritative parenting may be related to an intrinsic religious orientation among adolescent

offspring (Giesbrecht, 1995) and to greater religiosity among parents (Linder Gunnoe, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1999).

The authoritarian parenting style bears some similarity to Biblical injunctions to emphasize obedience among children, and not to “spare the rod.” Zern (1987) has argued that from a religious perspective, obedience is a preferred trait. In fact, research by Ellison and Sherkat (1993) has revealed that conservative Protestants (and, to a lesser extent, Catholics) tend to endorse an authoritarian parenting orientation, valuing obedience in children. Religion has also been linked with parental disciplinary practices (Kelley, Power, & Wimbush, 1992)—including a preference, among more conservative groups and those who subscribe to a literal belief in the Bible, for the use of corporal punishment (Ellison, Bartkowski, & Segal, 1996; Gershoff, Miller, & Holden, 1999; Grasmick, Morgan, & Kennedy, 1992; Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001; Wiehe, 1990). Similarly, religiousness has been linked with emphasis on obedience to cultural norms generally (Zern, 1984).

As described in Research Box 4.3, Danso, Hunsberger, and Pratt (1997) found evidence that more fundamentalist university students (Study 1) and parents (Study 2) were more likely to condone the use of corporal punishment and to value obedience (rather than autonomy) in child rearing. However, mediation analyses suggested that the greater desire of fundamentalists to socialize their children to accept the (parental) religious faith was linked more closely to right-wing authoritarianism than to religious fundamentalism per se. One wonders, then, whether conservative religious groups (or religious fundamentalists more generally) might be inclined to use an authoritarian parenting style, with consequent implications for their children. Also, what role does right-wing authoritarianism as a parental personality trait play in such a relationship?

Darling and Steinberg (1993) have suggested that parenting goals and values should be distinguished from parenting styles and parenting practices. In light of the discussion above, it seems apparent that religious orientation is likely to have some impact on parenting goals and values. Certainly, some conservative Christian books on child rearing emphasize the importance of authoritarian-like goals for parents—for example, by explicitly advising parents that raising obedient children is an important goal (Fugate, 1980; Meier, 1977). Such goals in turn are likely to influence both general parenting style as delineated by Baumrind, and specific parenting practices such as the use of corporal punishment to teach obedience (e.g., Danso et al., 1997). The role of religion in this process might even help to explain variations in the prevalence of different parenting styles in North American ethnic groups (Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992).

Parenting goals and practices can have important real-world implications beyond their direct effects for the children themselves. For example, in Aylmer, Ontario, Canada, seven children whose family belonged to a conservative religious group were taken from their parents by child welfare authorities (Saunders, 2001). The parents reportedly sometimes disciplined their children by hitting them with a rod or strap. When the authorities met with the parents, the parents justified their disciplinary methods by reference to their literal belief in the Bible, and they refused to assure the authorities that this practice would stop. The children were eventually returned to the family when the parents reportedly provided some assurance that they would not use certain types of physical punishment to discipline the children. However, the broader issues of the legality of such religiously based justification for corporal punishment, and of whether or not authorities should remove such children from their homes, have yet to be resolved.

RESEARCH BOX 4.3. The Role of Parental Religious Fundamentalism and Right-Wing Authoritarianism in Child-Rearing Goals and Practices (Danso, Hunsberger, & Pratt, 1997)

These authors concluded that previous research had established links between stronger parental religiosity and a greater parental emphasis on obedience for their children, and also more positive attitudes toward corporal punishment (e.g., spanking) in child rearing. It was further hypothesized that parents' desire to raise their children to accept the family religion ("faith keeping") would have an influence on the goals that they set for their children. More fundamentalist parents were expected to place greater value on faith keeping, to emphasize obedience for children more strongly, and also to be more likely to condone the use of corporal punishment in child rearing. But beyond this, the authors explored how these factors were linked—suspecting, for example, that right-wing authoritarianism would mediate the relationship between religious orientation and child-rearing attitudes.

Two studies were carried out; the first involved 204 university students, and the second 154 mothers and fathers of university students. Measures included Faith Keeping, Attitudes toward Corporal Punishment, Autonomy, and Obedience scales developed for the research, as well as Religious Fundamentalism and Right-Wing Authoritarianism measures (the last scale was administered in Study 2 only). The university students were asked to respond to parenting items by imagining that they had children of their own. The parents were asked about their actual child-rearing attitudes when their (university student) children were between 7 and 12 years old.

The results of both studies indicated that religious fundamentalism was positively correlated with greater valuation of obedience, stronger endorsement of corporal punishment in child rearing, and the importance of socializing children to accept their parents' faith. Fundamentalism was also linked with weaker valuation of autonomy in one's children. In both studies, it appeared that faith keeping seemed to play a mediating role between fundamentalism and obedience attitudes. That is, more fundamentalist parents' child-rearing attitudes (e.g., increased emphasis on obedience, endorsement of corporal punishment) seemed to be a result of their stronger desire to have their children uphold the family's religious faith.

However, the addition of the Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale in Study 2 indicated that it was actually a more powerful mediating variable in these relationships than was faith keeping. That is, the fact that religious fundamentalism was strongly positively correlated with right-wing authoritarian attitudes "explained" the links between fundamentalism and child-rearing attitudes (e.g., the tendency to emphasize obedience, and condone the use of corporal punishment). The authors suggested that future researchers should consider the role of parental personality variables such as authoritarianism in studies of religion and child rearing.

The limitations of this research include the facts that university students were simply speculating about what their child-rearing attitudes would be *if* they had children (Study 1), and that parents had to reflect back 5–10 years to recall what their child-rearing attitudes had been at that time (Study 2). We do not know the extent to which such speculations and memories are accurate. Also, the authors do not discuss the "chicken and egg" problem of whether fundamentalism or authoritarianism comes first, or whether they may be causally related.

It is important to note that the research and ideas discussed above involve conservative or fundamentalist religion groups and measures, and that the hypothesized relationships between conservative/fundamentalist religion and authoritarian parenting style may not hold for more general measures of religiousness. For example, Linder Gunnoe et al. (1999) did *not* find a positive link between authoritarian parenting style and a measure of the extent to which parents' religious beliefs played a role in their daily lives. Furthermore, Wilcox (1998) found that the strict discipline characteristic of conservative Protestant religious parents is tempered by the finding that conservative parents are also *more* likely to praise and hug their children. Wilcox has therefore argued that parents who hold theologically conservative beliefs may show aspects of *both* authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles. This possibility, as well as its implications for child and adolescent development, needs further investigation.

Other Aspects of Parenting

Religion may play more subtle roles in child rearing as well. Carlson, Taylor, and Levin (1998) found that the ways in which children use pretend play can differ across religious groups, even for different varieties of Mennonites. Ojha and Pramanick (1992) studied mothers in India and found that Hindu mothers began weaning and toilet-training their children earlier than did Christian mothers, on average, who in turn did so earlier than Muslim mothers. Of the three religious groups, Christian mothers were the most restrictive toward their children. The role of religion in these aspects of parenting and child rearing (and consequences for child development) has received little empirical attention to date.

Parenting techniques have been linked with religion in a somewhat different context. Nunn (1964) suggested that some parents invoke the image of a punishing God in an attempt to control their children's behavior. He hypothesized that relatively ineffective, powerless parents would be inclined to use God in an attempt to gain some semblance of power, telling their children such things as "God will punish you if you misbehave." Nunn's data supported this view of parents who formed a "coalition with God," and also suggested that this "God will punish you" approach had negative consequences for the children, who were reportedly more inclined to blame themselves for problems and to feel that they should be obedient.

Nelsen and Kroliczak (1984) have pointed out that there has been a general decline in people's belief in a punishing God, and that this decline is at least partly attributable "to parents being less likely to use coalitions with God. Hence, fewer children form this image" (p. 269). Nelsen and Kroliczak examined data from over 3,000 children in Minnesota elementary schools in an attempt to replicate Nunn's findings. They found a decreased tendency of parents to resort to the "God will punish you" approach (73% of respondents said that neither parent in a family employed this approach, compared to Nunn's 33%). But the children whose parents tended to use the "coalition" also tended to view God as malevolent, to have higher self-blame scores, and to feel a greater need to be obedient. Essentially, Nelsen and Kroliczak replicated Nunn's findings some 20 years later.

These studies have implications for the development of God images, but they also suggest that parents' approach to discipline may be important for children's religiosity, as well as for more general child development (e.g., tendencies toward self-blame and obedience). There may also be noteworthy ramifications for how parents deal with other child-rearing issues, such as illness. For example, research has indicated that parents who believe more

strongly in divine influence are more likely to seek spiritual guidance in coping with (hypothetical) child illnesses (De Vellis, De Vellis, & Spilsbury, 1988). All of these findings are consistent with the suggestion that parenting goals, styles, and practices may have significant links with religious orientation.

Much of the research described above has assessed the extent to which parenting affects religion in one's children. We should not forget that religion can also affect parenting and parent-child relationships (e.g., Pearce & Axinn, 1998). There is also evidence that parenting can itself contribute to religious change in fathers (Palkovitz & Palm, 1998).

Child Abuse and Religion

Since the early 1990s, there has been increasing interest in possible links between religion and child abuse (e.g., Bottoms, Shaver, Goodman, & Qin, 1995; Capps, 1992; Greven, 1991). As we have noted earlier, evidence suggests that a conservative and fundamentalist religious orientation is linked with a tendency to condone the use of physical punishment in child rearing (e.g., Ellison et al., 1996). Greven (1991) has argued that the inclination of some religious groups and individuals to legitimize and promote the use of corporal punishment in child rearing can effectively condone child abuse. Whether or not this is true, abuse can apparently have implications for religiosity. Rossetti (1995) found, not surprisingly, that people who were sexually abused as children by priests expressed less trust in the priesthood, in the Catholic Church, and in a relationship to God (see Chapter 12 regarding sexual abuse perpetrated by clergy). Similarly, others found that childhood sexual abuse more generally was associated with lower levels of religiosity (Doxey, Jensen, & Jensen, 1997; Hall, 1995; Stout-Miller, Miller, & Langenbrunner, 1997) or a more negative view of God (Kane, Cheston, & Greer, 1993).

However, some researchers have concluded that those who were sexually abused as children may turn to religion for support (Reinert & Smith, 1997), or at least may show some evidence of increased religious behavior, such as prayer (Lawson, Drebing, Berg, Vincette, & Penk, 1998). Possibly such increased religiousness acts as a form of compensation, as discussed later in the context of attachment theory. Others (Gange-Fling, Veach, Kuang, & Hong, 2000) found that a group of individuals in psychotherapy for childhood sexual abuse did not differ in spiritual functioning from a group of people in psychotherapy for other reasons. However, both of these groups scored lower in spiritual well-being than people not in psychotherapy did.

In view of the apparently conflicting results of studies in this area, more research is needed. Possibly there are gender differences in response to abuse, and factors such as the religious environment before and after the abuse need to be taken into account, as well as the type, perpetrator, and context of the abuse.

Future Directions for Socialization Theory

Socialization theory is still in its infancy, insofar as psychologists seek to understand the actual dynamics of parent-child interaction. Heller (1986) has noted that parents are the primary interpreters of religious beliefs to their children. However, this is not a one-way street: Boyatzis and Janicki (2003) have focused on the bilateral and dynamic interaction between parents and children. The movement is clearly toward more specific empirical studies of the

complex dynamics of religious and spiritual socialization, and away from stage-based theories (Boyatzis, 2006). Similar movement is evident in research focused on children's concepts and images of God.

CONCEPTS AND IMAGES OF GOD

When children think of God, what sort of an image forms in their minds? Many studies of religion in childhood have focused specifically on this issue. Some of this research was based on psychodynamic and object relations theories about the development of an image of God. For example, Freud (1913/1919, 1927/1961b) interpreted the God image as a father figure, a kind of projection of one's real father in the context of the resolution of the Oedipus complex. Jung (1948/1969) apparently agreed that there is some projection of one's earthly father into one's God image, but he felt that "archetypes" (images/symbols with biological roots, found in many cultures) also play a role in concepts of God. Although such analytic theories of the origins and development of a God image are difficult to test directly, they suggest that there should be a firm link between how children see their real fathers and their images of God. Object relations theorists have also explored the role of father figures on images of God (Rizzuto, 1982). What does the empirical research show?

Parent and Gender Issues

Empirical research has confirmed that God images are typically male-dominated in Western culture (Foster & Keating, 1992), possibly more so for girls than for boys (Ladd, McIntosh, & Spilka, 1998). But empirical support for the prediction that God images should be related to children's views of their own fathers has been mixed (Rizzuto, 1979, 1982; Spilka, Addison, & Rosensohn, 1975). Vergote and Tamayo (1981) suggested that the God image may actually bear more similarity to the mother than to the father, and Roberts (1989) found a correspondence between images of God and images of self. There is also evidence that general qualitative aspects of relationships with parents may be related to positive (e.g., warm, loving) images of God (Godin & Hallez, 1964; Potvin, 1977).

Krejci's (1998) investigation of college students led him to conclude that God images were organized around three dimensions: "nurturing-judging," "controlling-saving," and "concrete-abstract." He found few gender differences, with the exception that control was more salient in men's God images. More gender differences appeared in another study (Dickie et al., 1997), which emphasized the importance of parents in affecting children's God images, both directly and indirectly. Dickie et al.'s results suggested that girls' God concepts were more closely related to attributes and discipline styles of parents than were boys' God concepts. Hertel and Donahue (1995) examined more than 3,400 mother-father-youth triads from data obtained through the Search Institute in the United States in 1982-1983. The young people in this study were in fifth through ninth grades. Results showed that although the relationships were not large, there were significant tendencies for parents' images of God to be reflected in young people's impressions of parenting styles. In particular, fathers' and mothers' loving God images both apparently affected children's images of their fathers and mothers as loving, respectively. In turn, parenting styles and parents' God images predicted youths' God images. These relationships remained even after social class, religious denomi-

nation, church attendance, and youths' ages were controlled for. Hertel and Donahue also concluded that there was a strong tendency for their participants to perceive God as love ("maternal") rather than as authority ("paternal"), and that mothers played a more important role in socializing their children's God images, especially for daughters.

At least one study has found evidence that teachers may be more important than parents in God concept development. De Roos, Miedema, and Iedema (2001) found that kindergarten children who evidenced a close relationship with their teachers also tended to display a loving God concept, whereas the mother-child relationship did not make a significant prediction in this regard.

In general, the literature on children's God images seems reasonably consistent in confirming the importance of parents in the development of these concepts. There is less agreement about gender differences in God images, the actual nature of those images (e.g., loving vs. authoritarian), and the relative impact of mothers and fathers in contributing to the development of God concepts (Rizzuto, 1982).

Does a God Concept Develop in Stages?

Attempts to understand the developmental aspects of God concepts have typically focused on cognitive development. Some of these approaches are clearly Piagetian in orientation, whereas others have a more general cognitive focus. This area has benefited from research carried out in several different Western countries.

Harms (1944) suggested that previous investigations of children's images of God had erred by asking children to respond to fixed questions. Instead, he asked more than 4,800 U.S. children (ages 3–18) both to talk about and to draw their representations of religion, especially God. Their responses led Harms to conclude that there are three stages in the development of God concepts:

1. *Fairy-tale stage* (3–6 years). Children see little difference between God and fairy-tale characters.
2. *Realistic stage* (6–11 years). As children's cognitive capacities begin to expand, they see God as more concrete and more human. They are more comfortable using religious symbols.
3. *Individualistic stage* (adolescence). Adolescents no longer rely exclusively on religious symbols. They take a more individualized approach to God, resulting in very different conceptualizations from person to person.

Another major study of the development of God concepts was undertaken by Deconchy (1965) in France, though he did not include children under 7 years of age. He concluded that the development of God concepts occurs in three stages, revolving around themes of attribution, personalization and interiorization, respectively; these are described in Research Box 4.4.

There have been variations on these themes, but different authors describe similar stages in the development of God concepts (Ballard & Fleck, 1975; Fowler, 1981; Nye & Carlson, 1984; Williams, 1971), including some based on a Piagetian framework (Elkind, 1970; Goldman, 1964; Nye & Carlson, 1984). Others have simply noted the general change from fragmented, undifferentiated thinking through very simple, concrete God concepts to more abstract and complex images as children grow older (see, e.g., the review of Euro-

RESEARCH BOX 4.4. The Idea of God: Its Emergence between 7 and 16 Years
(Deconchy, 1965)

In this investigation, Catholic children and adolescents were asked to free-associate when they heard words such as “God.” An analysis of their responses led Deconchy to conclude that these children exhibited three major stages in the development of God concepts. Those from about 7 or 8 to 11 years of age used predominantly “attributive” themes; that is, God was seen as a set of attributes, many anthropomorphic with overtones of animism. God concepts were relatively independent of other religious constructs, such as the historical events in the life of Jesus. The associations of children between 11 and 14 years of age emphasized “personalization” themes, such that God took on parental characteristics and was seen in more sophisticated anthropomorphic terms (e.g., “just,” “strong,” “good”). Finally, by approximately the age of 14 a further shift began to take place, focusing on “interiorization” themes. That is, in middle adolescence anthropomorphic characteristics of God disappeared, and God concepts became more abstract and tended to reflect relationships with God (e.g., involving love, trust) emanating from within the individual, rather than simply involving descriptive characteristics.

pean research on this topic by Tamminen et al., 1988). However, attempts to further specify the parameters of such development, as well as the processes through which this unfolding occurs, have not been particularly successful (Ladd et al., 1998). For example, Janssen, de Hart, and Gerardts (1994) used open-ended questions about God in a study of Dutch secondary school students. They concluded that perceptions of God among their participants were complex and “can hardly be summarized” (p. 116). Furthermore, although there was evidence of abstract thinking among their Dutch adolescents, the authors pointed out that there was no proof that it resulted from a developmental process that moved away from concrete thinking in childhood.

Variation in Concepts of God

Does the development of God concepts vary across cultures or different religious groups? Vergote and Tamayo (1981) found that although there are commonalities in God images across cultures, at least some cultural differences do emerge with respect to maternal and paternal symbolism. Ladd et al. (1998) found that God concepts developed similarly across Christian denominations, in a manner generally consistent with Piagetian theory, in their study of almost 1,000 children from eight Christian groups in the United States. These authors have suggested that more research is necessary to understand how and why very different religious education experiences do not lead to divergent concepts of God by adolescence.

Diversity of Method and Direction

Harms’s (1944) call for less constraining measures of ideas about God has not been ignored. In addition to his own attempt to allow subjects greater freedom in description of their God concepts, other researchers have used diverse techniques: pictures or drawings (Bassett et al.,

1990; Graebner, 1964; Ladd et al., 1998); word associations (Deconchy, 1965); adjective ratings (Roberts, 1989; Schaefer & Gorsuch, 1992); open-ended questions (Janssen et al., 1994); letters written to God (Ludwig, Weber, & Iben, 1974); semantic differentials² (Benson & Spilka, 1973); Q-sorts³ (Benson & Spilka, 1973; Nelson, 1971; Spilka, Armatas, & Nussbaum, 1964); other card-sorting tasks (Krejci, 1998); standardized scales (Gorsuch, 1968); combination techniques such as “concept mapping” (Kunkel, Cook, Meshel, Daughtry, & Hauenstein, 1999); and sentence completions, essays, and “projective photographs” (Tamminen, 1991). There has been some interest in comparing the utility of the different approaches. One study (Hutsebaut & Verhoeven, 1995) concluded that closed-ended questions concerning God offered slight advantages over open-ended questions, but the participants in that research were university students. Comparative studies involving children are needed.

The measures used can apparently influence research findings. Tamminen's (1991) extensive research with Finnish children and adolescents (described earlier) involved both structured questions about God and unstructured methods, such as sentence completion and “projective photographs.” His results were generally consistent with the stage approach outlined above. However, he noted that the images of God that emerged varied somewhat, depending on the measures used: “For example, God's effect on people, making them be good to each other, which was considered very important in the alternative answers chosen in the questionnaires, was not often mentioned in the fill-in sentences or essays” (Tamminen, 1991, p. 192).

The first edition of this book (Spilka, Hood, & Gorsuch, 1985) pointed out that despite the value of studies in this area, research has tended to be descriptive rather than carefully designed to test theories of cognitive development. This is still generally true today. Also, relevant research sometimes involves only older adolescents or adults. Furthermore, Hyde (1990) has suggested that research on children's ideas of God has been “occasional and sporadic, with no continuous theme and [it] has tended to remain so, following the varied interests of those undertaking it” (p. 64). Additional research is needed, but it must address these problems.

CHILDREN AND PRAYER

Children's concepts of prayer seem to develop in a manner consistent with Piaget's cognitive-developmental stages. For example, Long et al. (1967) interviewed 5- to 12-year-olds about prayer (see Research Box 4.5). The authors concluded that there was a clear tendency for these children's concepts of prayer to evolve in three stages: They moved from habits and memorized passages, through concrete personal requests, to more abstract petitions.

Other studies seem generally to be consistent with this Piagetian view of prayer development (see, e.g., the review by Finney & Malony, 1985a)—from relatively direct replication research by Worten and Dollinger (1986) to, for example, Brown's (1966) investigation of adolescents, which suggested less emphasis on the material consequences of prayer among older children. Scarlett and Perriello (1991) asked seventh- and ninth-grade Catholic school

²The semantic differential technique involves rating concepts on a series of bipolar adjective descriptors, such as “good ____:____:____:____:____:____:____ bad.”

³The Q-sort technique involves having a person sort cards with words (e.g., “loving”) on them into various piles according to how well they describe, for example, one's concept of God.

RESEARCH BOX 4.5. The Child's Conception of Prayer (Long, Elkind, & Spilka, 1967)

In a Piagetian context, these researchers interviewed 80 girls and 80 boys ages 5–12 about prayer. They asked them open-ended questions, such as “What is a prayer?” and “Where do prayers go?”, as well as giving them sentence completion tasks (e.g., “I usually pray when . . .”). Three judges independently analyzed the children's responses according to a scoring manual that outlined levels of differentiation and degree of concretization–abstraction. The results suggested three stages of prayer concept development:

1. At the younger ages (5–7), children responded to the questions with learned formulas based on memorized prayers.
2. Children ages 7–9 identified prayer as a set of concrete activities, with time and place defined; the purpose was also concrete, typically centered on personal requests.
3. For children between the ages of 9 and 12, prayer tended toward shared conversation rather than specific requests; prayer was also more focused on abstract goals than on material objects.

Thus, across the 5- to 12-year age range, prayer seemed to evolve from habits and memorized passages, through concrete personal requests, to more abstract petitions with humanitarian and altruistic sentiments. There was also an emotional shift noted: Praying was emotionally neutral for the younger children, but by the older ages prayer had important emotional implications (e.g., expression of empathy, as well as identification with others and the deity). All of this is quite consistent with the Piagetian conceptualization of cognitive development. The first two stages of prayer development parallel the preoperational (pre-conceptual substage) and concrete operational stages. Long et al.'s third stage is best characterized as transitional, giving evidence of the abstract thought characteristic of Piaget's stage of formal operations, which he felt did not begin until approximately 12 years of age.

students, as well as college undergraduates, to write prayers for six hypothetical vignettes (e.g., a woman's best friend is dying of cancer). They found a shift from “using prayer to request changes in objective reality” (p. 72) among the younger students, toward prayer as a way to deal with feelings and become closer to God among the older participants. This shift is apparently consistent with the second and third stages of prayer outlined by Long et al. (1967), though at slightly older ages for the Scarlett and Perriello (1991) sample.

Tamminen (1991) also found some divergence from Long et al.'s (1967) stages in his Finnish young people. Personal conversation with God was important at younger ages (7–8 years) than Long et al. (1967) had found (9–12 years); moreover, petitionary prayer remained important up to age 20, whereas Long et al. reported decreasing importance of petitionary prayer as children grew older. Woolley (2000; Woolley & Phelps, 2001) also found that prayer and its connection to God developed years earlier (age 5) than Long et al. reported (9–10 years).

Finally, Woolley and Phelps (2001) and Barrett, Richert, and Driesenga (2001) observed less tendency for children to anthropomorphize their concept of God than did Long et al. (1967). More research is necessary to determine the reasons for the differences across these studies. They could be attributable to culture, unique samples, method, time period of the

research, and so on. For example, Woolley and Phelps (2001) pointed out that Woolley's sample came from religiously affiliated schools, compared to Long et al.'s private school sample. Also, her procedures involved new forced-choice questions and a variety of tasks, in addition to open-ended questions similar to those of Long et al.

Francis and Brown (1990, 1991) carried out investigations of influences on prayer, rather than cognitive stages in development of prayer. They found some denominational differences; for example, Church of England schools exerted a small "negative" influence on attitudes toward prayer, compared to the lack of influence in Roman Catholic schools. They also reported a shift in influence from parents (stronger among their 11-year-olds) to church (stronger among the 16-year-olds). They have interpreted their results as supporting a social learning or modeling interpretation of prayer, since prayer among children and adolescents seemed to result more from "explicit teaching or implicit example from their family and church community than as a spontaneous consequence of developmental dynamics or needs" (Francis & Brown, 1991, p. 120).

Some research has also attempted to relate prayer to (nonreligious) aspects of adjustment in children. For example, Francis and Gibbs (1996), in an investigation of 8- to 11-year-olds, found no evidence to suggest that prayer contributed to the children's self-esteem, or that low self-esteem led to prayer. Other studies have reported negative links between prayer and psychoticism scores on a personality test (Francis, 1997b; Francis & Wilcox, 1996; Smith, 1996).

Prayer has also been associated with identity status, such that private prayer was less frequent for college students with higher "moratorium" scores (an indication of searching for answers to religious and other questions, but without ideological commitment; McKinney & McKinney, 1999; see Chapter 5 for a discussion of identity status). McKinney and McKinney also found that the social identity reflected in the prayers of adolescents tended to be limited. Prayers involved family and friends, but usually did not involve the broader community.

It is surprising that more research attention has not been focused on prayer as it relates to religious development. Although there are problems in operationalizing and studying prayer (especially spontaneous personal prayer), prayer is an important religious ritual that could potentially serve as a "window" into more general religious development, as well as the meaning of faith to religious persons. Furthermore, there remain many questions about the nature and function of prayer in individual lives, as well as the nature of social and contextual factors in shaping prayer (Francis & Brown, 1991). Brown's (1994) book *The Human Side of Prayer* has initiated an exploration of some of these issues and provided an integrative review of the diverse research in this area.

Woolley (2000) has pointed out that there are "clear connections between magic and religion" (p. 118); in particular, prayer is conceptually similar to wishing, which in turn is related to magical thinking. Goldman (1964) also referred to magical thinking in the early stages of children's thought processes related to religious development. However, Woolley (2000) has also concluded that prayer is a more complicated process than wishing, since, for example, it involves an intermediary (God) between thinking and physical events. Research is needed to further explore connections between magical thinking in childhood and the emergence of religious faith and prayer.

Finally, efforts to socialize children to accept atheism as an ideology have met with only limited success (see Chapter 9). For instance, Zugger (2001) has noted that when the (then) Soviet Union occupied Poland, a heavily Catholic country, efforts were made to prove that God did not exist:

Children were told to close their eyes and pray to God for candies and presents. When they opened their eyes nothing new was present in the room. Then they were told to close their eyes and ask the great Stalin for presents. Now when they opened their eyes, great heaps of goodies appeared on the teacher's desk. (p. 267)

However, most children saw into this deception, and the crude experimental effort to induce atheism in the children of a passionately Catholic country failed.

ATTACHMENT THEORY AND RELATED RESEARCH

Kirkpatrick (1992, 1994, 1995, 1997, 1998, 1999; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990, 1992) has extended Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) theory of parent–infant attachment to the realm of religion. In so doing, he has provided a unique approach for the study of links between early development and religion, and their implications for children's and adult's lives. As Kirkpatrick (1992) describes Bowlby's work, attachment theory "postulates a primary, biosocial behavioral system in the infant that was designed by evolution to maintain proximity of the infant to its primary caregiver, thereby protecting the infant from predation and other natural dangers" (p. 4). Attachment theory is not without its critics (e.g., Kagan, 1998), but Kirkpatrick has pointed out that this theoretical basis may help to explain individual differences in religiousness. For example, he has noted the extent to which the God of Christian traditions corresponds to the idea of a secure attachment figure. Similarly, religion more generally may serve as a comfort and a sense of security, especially during times of stress or other difficulties.

These observations led Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) to suggest that attachment and religion may be linked in important ways. They posited a "compensation hypothesis," which predicts that people who have not had secure relationships with their parents (or other primary caregivers) may be inclined to compensate for this absence by believing in a "loving, personal, available God." This was contrasted with a "mental model hypothesis," predicting that people's religiousness may be at least partially determined by early attachment relationships; that is, they may model their religious beliefs on the attachment relationships they experienced early in their lives.

In a study designed to test these ideas, Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990; see Research Box 4.6) found some support for the compensation hypothesis, but only for people from relatively nonreligious homes. Findings generally contradicted the mental model hypothesis. Subsequent studies of adolescents (Granqvist, 2002b; Granqvist & Hagekull, 2001) and university students (Granqvist, 1998; Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999) in Sweden, and of adult women in the United States (Kirkpatrick, 1997), also lend some support to the compensation hypothesis.

Kirkpatrick's writings on attachment and religion have provided a rich source of ideas for empirical investigation. For example, it has been suggested that attachment theory has relevance for understanding conceptualizations of God, religious behaviors such as prayer and glossolalia (speaking in tongues), and links between religious experience and romantic love (Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1994, 1997; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992). However, it is also true that attachment theory has been criticized as a theory biased toward Western values and meaning (Rothbaum, Weisz, Pott, Miyake, & Morelli, 2000).

Subsequent research has confirmed the utility of attachment theory for understanding religion. Eshleman, Dickie, Merasco, Shepard, and Johnson (1999) interviewed 4- to 10-year-

RESEARCH BOX 4.6. Attachment Theory and Religion (Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990)

In this investigation, Kirkpatrick and Shaver tested the compensation and the mental model hypotheses (see text) with respect to links between childhood attachment to parents and adult religiousness. Data were collected from two surveys—one involving 670 respondents to a questionnaire in a Sunday newspaper, and the other including a subsample of 213 of these same people who agreed to participate in a further study. Various measures were used to tap aspects of religiousness, including the Allport and Ross (1967) scales for assessing Intrinsic and Extrinsic religious orientation (see Chapter 2). Child–parent attachment was measured in a standard way, which placed respondents into one of three categories (percentages in parentheses are from Kirkpatrick and Shaver’s study): secure (51%), avoidant (8%), and anxious/ambivalent (41%).

Attachment did indeed serve as a predictor of religiousness, but in a somewhat complicated way. There was a tendency for those from avoidant parent–child attachment relationships to report higher levels of adult religiousness, and also for persons with secure attachments to report lower levels of religiousness, but only for respondents whose mothers were relatively nonreligious. The attachment classification apparently had a more direct relationship with reported sudden conversion experiences: Anxious/ambivalent respondents were much more likely to report such conversions at some time in their lives (44%) than were respondents from the other attachment groups (fewer than 10%). Home religiosity did not affect this relationship.

This study relied on adults’ retrospective reports of earlier attachment and family religiousness, so memory and other biases may have affected responses. The authors pointed out that their investigation was very much an exploratory study of attachment–religion relationships. However, their initial findings are provocative and tend to support the compensation hypothesis (though only for people from relatively nonreligious homes in this study); they generally contradict the mental model hypothesis (i.e., that religiousness may be modeled after early attachment relationships). The reasons for this are not clear and call for further investigation.

old children, and also surveyed their parents. Eshleman et al. concluded that their findings supported Kirkpatrick and Shaver’s (1990) attachment theory model. For example, as children moved from early to middle childhood, their distance from parents increased as perceived closeness to God increased, just as attachment theory would predict. As a sidelight, these researchers also found that “perceiving God as male may distance God for girls and women” (p. 146). Dickie et al. (1997) also found evidence that seems to support attachment theory predictions; they concluded that “God becomes the ‘perfect attachment substitute’” (p. 42) as children become more independent of parents.

Granqvist and Hagekull (1999) found that retrospective accounts of attachment to parents suggested a positive association between security of attachment and socialization-based religiosity. Thus there are two major empirically supported findings on attachment security and religiosity. One is Kirkpatrick and Shaver’s (1990) “compensatory hypothesis,” in which an insecure attachment history is linked to a greater need to establish compensatory relationships to regulate distress and obtain felt security. The other is the “correspondence hypothesis,” in which a secure attachment history is linked to successful socialization. In a religious

home, such successful socialization predicts an acceptance of a positively imaged God supported by specific religious beliefs (see Granqvist, Ljungdahl, & Dickie, 2007; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008).

In keeping with the new paradigm for the psychology of religion, dialogue between psychodynamic psychologies and mainstream psychology is desirable (Corveleyn & Luyten, 2005). Despite efforts to clearly differentiate object relations theory from attachment theory (Granqvist, 2006a, 2006b), their roots are intertwined (Rizzuto, 2006; Wulff, 2006). Luyten and Corveleyn (2007) have persuasively made the case for the reciprocal exploration of the findings of object relations and attachment theorists. Much of the distancing is due to philosophical differences in appropriate methodologies, which are no longer defensible. In the spirit of the new paradigm for the psychology of religion, multiple levels and interdisciplinary cooperation are required if our understanding of religion and spirituality is to be advanced. What attachment theory lacks in rich phenomenological description is balanced by its focus upon measurement. However, measurement must not trump description if we are to fully understand children's images and concepts of God. Roehlkepartain, Benson, King, and Wagener (2006) have argued that "the contrast between the call for deep, multidimensional theoretical frameworks and the 'shallow' measures often used in this domain represents one of the major challenges for the future of research in child and adolescent spiritual development" (p. 9).

OTHER WORK ON RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN CHILDHOOD

It is difficult to summarize the considerable literature on childhood religious development in a chapter such as this one. To this point, we have attempted to outline several major theoretical and empirical directions, and the resulting knowledge accumulated from many studies. We have given little attention to other theories (e.g., psychodynamic), and to the many articles that do not offer theoretical advances or that lack an empirical base (e.g., some in the religious education and pastoral counseling literatures). Furthermore, many empirical studies have not fallen neatly into the subcategories used in this chapter. Other authors (e.g., Benson, Masters, & Larson, 1997; Hyde, 1990) have summarized much of this other work. Here we offer a sampling of research directions not discussed above.

Paffard's Research

Research on religious and spiritual experiences in childhood "enlighten by countering the old view that God becomes important only after childhood" (Scarlett, 1994, p. 88). Certainly there is a rich description of the nature and content of children's and adolescents' self-reported "close to God" experiences in Tamminen's research (described above). His research should serve as a stimulus to other investigators to approach the topic of religious development from different perspectives, and not to be constrained by a Piagetian-based framework. Another example is provided by the research of Paffard (1973).

Paffard was influenced by the research of Laski (1961), who identified mystical experiences among adolescents. Laski's research is discussed more fully in Chapter 11. In her interview sample, there were two girls ages 14 and 16, and one male age 10. This unwittingly opened the door to a series of studies identifying spiritual experiences among children and

youths. Especially among those influenced by literary works, the poet William Wordsworth has given an implicit model of mystical experience relevant to children and adolescents. Laski (1961, p. 399) used two excerpts from Wordsworth's poetry in the literary texts she analyzed. In his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, C. S. Lewis (1956) extensively analyzed three boyhood experiences central to his religious development, noting that such descriptions had also been furnished by such poets as Wordsworth and could be "suffocatingly subjective" (p. viii). However, they gained ontological validity as they pointed to something "outer" and "other" (Lewis, 1956, p. 238). Paffard (1973) later titled a book that was partly based upon questionnaire responses from both grammar school and university students *Inglorious Wordsworths*. Implicit in all these observations is a model purporting that children have an intense longing for transcendent experiences, which often are realized. Much of adult life is assumed to involve a longing for such experiences once again. Such a model can be contrasted with psychoanalytic and object relations theories, which assume mystical experiences to be regressive in a pathological sense. "Inglorious Wordsworths" have transcendent experiences that are valuable and healthy, and are capable of being recovered in adulthood.

As part of a questionnaire study, Paffard had both university students and sixth-form grammar school students respond to a literary description of an experience typical of Wordsworth's poetry—an experience that was specified as occurring in childhood, and one that involved consciousness of something more than a mere child's delight in nature (Paffard, 1973, p. 251). The actual text was from W. H. Hudson's (1939) autobiography *Far Away and Long Ago*. Participants were to describe in writing any experience of their own that they felt was in any way similar to the one described in the passage. Paffard analyzed responses from 400 participants, half each from the university and grammar school samples; there were equal numbers of males and females in each sample. He found that 40% of the grammar school boys and 61% of the grammar school girls had had such experiences. In the university sample, the percentages were 56% for the men and 65% for the women (Paffard, 1973, p. 91).

Although Paffard's samples can be classified and analyzed in as many intuitive ways as Laski's, he did at least attempt some crude quantitative and statistical analyses. One quantitative effort was to have respondents check off, on a list of 15 words, those that applied to their experience. These results are presented in Table 4.5. It is interesting to note that whereas Paffard claimed, partly from his own transcendental experiences, that such experiences are part of the essence of what he termed "real" religion, his own respondents checked the two most religion-related words ("holy" and "sacred") quite infrequently. It is unlikely that the most frequently checked word ("awesome") was interpreted by the respondents in a religious sense.

Paffard found that transcendental experiences were most typical in the middle teens, under conditions of solitude. The experiences were positive, and most respondents wished to have such experiences again. However they were less frequent in adulthood. One of the most common outcomes of the experience was some effort at creativity, although Paffard (influenced by Laski's work, as discussed in Chapter 1) specifically asked about creative acts following the experience, perhaps setting an expectation among respondents to list such activities.

Both Laski (1961) and Paffard (1973) found most mystical-type experiences discussed in Chapter 1 to be uncommon in childhood—Laski because she sampled so few children, and Paffard because his samples reported most such experiences in middle adolescence, even though the literary example he cited stated 8 years of age as the beginning of such experi-

TABLE 4.5. Endorsement of Words Characterizing Transcendental Experiences

Word	Frequency of endorsement	Percentage of subjects endorsing
Awesome	119	54
Serene	87	39
Lonely	81	37
Frightening	77	35
Mysterious	65	29
Exciting	64	29
Ecstatic	47	21
Melancholy	45	20
Sacred	39	18
Sad	33	25
Holy	28	15
Sensual	21	13
Irritating	7	3
Erotic	5	2

Note. Number of respondents = 222. Adapted from Paffard (1973, p. 262). Copyright 1973 by Hodder and Stoughton Limited. Reproduced by permission.

ences. Since in Paffard's sample sixth-form grammar school students would have tended to be age 18 and university students age 19 or above, his respondents may simply have reported their most recent experiences, hence minimizing reports of possible experiences in childhood. However, Miles (2007, pp. 16–18) reported a replication of Paffard's findings with sixth-form students, suggesting that transcendent experiences are indeed common in childhood. Likewise, Hay and Nye (1998) extensively studied small samples of children ages 6–7 years and 10–11 years. They suggest that children's spirituality is dominated by a relational consciousness that consists of "child–self," "child–God," "child–world" and consciousness.

Klingberg's Research

Klingberg (1959) sought to focus upon the study of religious experience in children, sampling only the age ranges from 9 to 13. Klingberg's study was done in Sweden in the mid-1940s, but was not published in English until 1959. Two sets of data were collected, intended to be "mutually supplementary" (Klingberg, 1959, p. 212); one of these consisted of adults' religious memories from childhood. Our concern is with compositions collected from 630 children (273 boys and 357 girls) in Sweden from 1944 to 1945. Most were 10–12 years of age. All children responded in writing to the statement "Once when I thought about God . . ." Of the 630 compositions received, 566 contained accounts of personal religious experiences (244 from boys and 322 from girls). An unspecified number of compositions contained accounts of more than one experience. Assessing the experiences for depth indicated "phenomena which call to mind the experiences of the mystic" (Klingberg, 1959, p. 213). These primarily included both apparitions of objects of religious faith, such as Jesus, God, and angels; more importantly for our interests, however, they also included a felt sense of an invisible presence. Although Klingberg recognized the facilitating role of a religious culture, school, and home

in encouraging such reports among children, he claimed that the value of the study is that it shows that mystical experiences *can* take place during childhood. Klingberg argued that maturational mechanism cannot eliminate mystical experiences in children, and suggested their universality. Fahs (1950) has persuasively argued for the awakening of mystical awareness in children by avoiding narrow religious indoctrination, which might preclude a sense of wonder, curiosity, and awe. (Mystical experiences are discussed more fully in Chapter 11).

Personality and Attitudes

Leslie Francis (1994) has summarized a considerable body of research on personality and mental aspects of religious development, relying heavily on the work and orientation of Hans Eysenck (e.g., Eysenck, 1981). Francis and colleagues' own studies (e.g., Francis, Pearson, & Kay, 1982, 1983b) suggest that among children, religiousness and introversion are positively related, and that these in turn may be related to rejection of substance use (Francis, 1997a). An extensive literature on religion and substance use/abuse exists, but it tends to focus on postchildhood samples and is discussed in the chapter on morality (see Chapter 12). Bible reading has also been linked to increased purpose in life among 13- to 15-year-olds (Francis, 2000).

Another line of research has focused on influences on religiousness and attitudes toward religion among young people (especially the influence of parents, but also peers, schools, church, etc.). Some of this work has included samples of children or early adolescents (e.g., Francis & Gibson, 1993; Francis & Greer, 2001); however, most of these studies have involved older adolescents and young adults. Likewise, there has been some emphasis on the influence of religiously affiliated schools versus public institutions on values and other aspects of children's lives, but these have not shown much difference between the two types of schooling (see, e.g., McCartin & Freehill, 1986). However, Francis (1986) has found variations between the influences of Catholic and Protestant schools in England.

Much other work has included religion as simply one of many variables of interest. For example, Archer's (1989) investigation of gender differences suggests that among early to late adolescents, males and females use the identity process similarly with respect to religious development. de Vaus and McAllister (1987) concluded that gender variations in religiosity are not attributable to child-rearing roles of females, and Albert and Porter (1986) found that liberal Christian and Jewish backgrounds were related to less rigid conceptions of gender roles in 4- to 6-year-old children. An Israeli study (Florian & Kravetz, 1985) found that Jewish and Christian 10-year-olds had internalized a Western scientific conception of death to a greater extent than Muslim and Druze children had. Other work (Saigh, 1979; Saigh, O'Keefe, & Antoun, 1984) has pointed to a link between religious symbols worn by examiners and performance on intelligence tests, such that performance may be better when young people are tested by same-religion examiners.

There has been interest in the difficulty of getting children, especially at young ages, to understand and respond appropriately to questions about religion (e.g., Tamminen, 1994). Similarly, Francis and colleagues have noted tendencies for children's scores on attitudes toward religion to be positively related to lie scores on other scales (Francis, Pearson, & Kay, 1988), and also for children to bias their responses in a proreligious direction when a priest, as opposed to a layperson, is the test administrator (Francis, 1979). Similar effects were not found by Hunsberger and Ennis (1982) in several studies of university students, however. The best conclusion seems to be that caution must be exercised in studies of children involving

measurement of religion, and that appropriate checks should be included to assess possible biases or distortion of responses whenever possible.

Meaning and Implications of Religion in Childhood

We know relatively little about the meaning and implications of religion for children as they grow older, beyond the cognitive and experiential components discussed earlier in this chapter. We need to find novel ways of studying children's religious development without assuming that adult thought is the "gold standard" for comparison in this regard (see, e.g., Boyer & Walker, 2000). What impact, if any, does religion have on the day-to-day lives of children—including their physical and mental health, personal identity, and social relationships? How does childhood religion affect later religiosity, as well as nonreligious social attitudes? Does religious training affect a child's concept of death (see Florian & Kravetz, 1985; Stambrook & Parker, 1987)? What role, if any, does religion play in childhood psychopathology, and what role does (and should) religion play in the clinical treatment of children (see Wells, 1999)?

Findings suggest that a conservative or fundamentalist religious upbringing has implications for educational attainment and gender roles (see Sherkat, 2000; Sherkat & Darnell, 1999). A broad survey of children and young adolescents (fifth through ninth graders) led Forliti and Benson (1986) to conclude that religiosity was related to increased prosocial action, as well as to decreased rates of sexual intercourse, drug use, and antisocial behavior. They also concluded that a restrictive religious orientation was linked to antisocial behavior, alcohol use, racism, and sexism. These latter conclusions are not always consistent with those reached for older adolescents and adults (see Chapters 5 on socialization and 12 on morality). Also, given the moderately strong associations among right-wing authoritarianism, religious fundamentalism, and prejudice observed by Altemeyer (1988, 1996; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992), it would seem appropriate to investigate the childhood antecedents of such relationships, as well as the developmental dynamics fostering such connections.

OVERVIEW

Fresh conceptual approaches are needed to revitalize the study of children's religious development. The area of religious development is top-heavy in theory, especially stage theories of religious cognitive development. There has been a considerable amount of overlap in research that "tests" these theories, but not much integrative work has been done to make sense of it all. Furthermore, there has been little or no empirical research on many issues related to childhood religious development, and some studies of religious development have little to say about *children*, having focused on older adolescents or young adults.

Theoretical conceptualizations of religious growth generally (Elkind, Goldman), and faith development in particular (Fowler, Streib), have apparently been stimulated by Piaget's formulations. And much other work on religious development (e.g., images of God, concepts of prayer) has also used the Piagetian framework as the basis for empirical studies. The results of numerous investigations have confirmed the utility of Piaget's cognitive stages for understanding various aspects of religious growth. However, promising non-Piagetian theoretical conceptualizations and empirical work have also appeared in the psychology of religion.

In spite of attempts at integration of work on religious development, we are left with a kind of “smorgasbord” of differing directions (Reich, 1993b, p. 39). This is not necessarily a bad thing, since this diversity has stimulated many different creative and useful empirical studies of religious development. Further integration of this work could eventually lead to a more comprehensive theory of religion in childhood. Future research on religious growth could take many potentially fruitful directions. The role of religion in parenting goals, styles, and practices, and the consequences for child development, are especially promising in this regard.

Chapter 5

Religion in Adolescence and Young Adulthood

True love and religious experience are almost impossible before adolescence.

And further, contrary to the specific claim that Europe's secularity is exceptional, we will show that modernized societies outside Europe, such as Canada and even the US, are undergoing marked declines in religious beliefs and practices, especially among youth.

Adults appear to seriously underestimate the interest teens have in religion.

... doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith.

When I was a boy of fourteen my father was so stupid I could scarcely stand to have the old man around, but by the time I got to be twenty-one I was astonished at how much he had learned in the last seven years.¹

Early studies (Allport, Gillespie, & Young, 1948; Webster, Freedman, & Heist, 1962) of religion among college students found that the vast majority felt they needed religion in their own lives (e.g., 82% of the women and 68% of the men in the Allport et al. study), with only small percentages reporting little interest or no religious training. But these studies were carried out a half-century or more ago. Have times changed?

Some countries have apparently experienced broad-based and substantial decreases in church attendance and religious interest 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 Nether-

¹These quotes come, respectively, from the following sources: Kupky (1928, p. 70); Mason, Singleton, and Webber (2007, p. 58); Bergman (2001, p. 46); Tillich (1957, p. 116); Mark Twain (attributed).

lands, and the Scandinavian countries. Typically, in these European countries only about 10–15% of the population is involved in a religious group (Lippman & Keith, 2006), 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).

However, religious involvement remains relatively high in the United States for both adults and adolescents, unlike the trends for many other Western countries. Though self-reported church attendance in the United States may be inflated (Chaves & Cavendish, 1994; Hadaway, Marler, & Chaves, 1993; Marcum, 1999), 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). Similarly, belief in an afterlife was high (about 80%) and stable from 1973 to 1991, according to the General Social Survey data from the United States (Harley & Firebaugh, 1993).

Most research findings suggest that, in general, adolescents and young adults are less religious than middle and older adults in both 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, Donahue, & Erickson, 1989), at least for adolescents in mainstream religious groups. However, such conclusions may reflect only certain measures of religiousness (e.g., involvement in institutional religion), and should not be construed to mean that adolescents are nonreligious or have little interest in spiritual matters.

In fact, a large nationwide survey of American college students conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI, 2005) at UCLA show that most college students report high levels of spirituality and espouse many spiritual and religious values. To a considerable extent, students believe in the sacredness of life (83%), have an interest in spirituality (80%), search for meaning or purpose in life (76%), have discussions about the meaning of life with friends (74%), find spirituality as a source of joy (64%), and seek out opportunities to grow spiritually (47%). Also, they report believing in God (79%); pray (69%) and at least occasionally attend religious services (81%); discuss religious or spiritual matters with friends (80%) or family members (76%); and at least somewhat agree that their religious beliefs provide strength, support, and guidance (69%). Similar findings are reported by Smith and Denton (2005), based on data from the National Study of Youth and Religion: Adolescents in the United States believe in God (84%), believe that God is a personal being (65%), feel at least somewhat close to God (71%), and claim their religious faith is at least somewhat important in shaping major decisions (80%).

The HERI has also conducted an annual survey of American college freshmen since the late 1960s. This survey has found that in the 20 years from the early 1980s to the early 2000s, the percentage of those reporting no religious preference (vs. some other sort of religious identity) has doubled from 8% to 16%, though during the same time period the percentage identifying themselves as born-again has remained consistent at about 25% (as reported in Levenson, Aldwin, & D'Mello, 2005). Smith, Lundquist Denton, Faris, and Regnerus (2002) have provided a broad picture 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 12th graders decreased by

about 8% (from approximately 40% to 32%) and those “never” or “rarely” attending grew by about 4%. Just 44% of 12th graders reported being involved in religious youth group activities sometime during their 4 years in high school. Still, 85% of the 13- to 18-year-olds surveyed reported some kind of religious affiliation, with over two-thirds identifying themselves as Protestant (44%) or Catholic (25%). More females than males were religiously affiliated, and African American youths reported higher levels of church attendance than either European Americans or Hispanic Americans did.

The few studies to date of those who consider themselves “spiritual but not religious” have often been conducted by comparing them with those who self-identify as “spiritual and religious.” Though much of the discussion has focused on critical antecedents of the “spiritual but not religious” development—most notably the “baby boomer” tendency to value individual conscience over institutional authority (Roof, 1993, 1999)—we are just beginning to get a handle on what these spiritual “seekers” are like (see Shahabi et al., 2002; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Shahabi and her associates found that such seekers are younger, better educated, less likely to be married, more likely to be white (vs. a member of a racial minority group), and less likely to live in the South. Zhai, Ellison, Stokes, and Glenn (2008) found that the “spiritual but not religious” are more likely to be offspring of divorced parents (62%), possibly because divorce may interrupt the transmission of religious values from parents to children, may disrupt institutional religious practices (see Lawton & Bures, 2001), or may reduce the degree of supervision of children—all of which may contribute to the fact that children of divorced parents, compared to those raised in intact two-parent families, are less likely to adopt parental religious values and practices (Regnerus, Smith, & Smith, 2004).

It is not clear why adults and adolescents in the United States report much higher rates of interest and practice in religion and spirituality than do people in other countries. Perhaps it is the successful tendency for U.S. religious groups to “service the spiritual needs of Americans” (Bibby, 1993, p. 113), thus providing people with “social capital” that helps foster positive developmental outcomes through the religious context. Research by King, Furrow, and Roth (2002) on 413 high school students found that family and peers provide such capital. 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). Whatever the reason, 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).

INFLUENCES ON RELIGIOUSNESS AND SPIRITUALITY IN ADOLESCENCE

Many external influences have the potential to affect people’s religiousness: parents, peers, schools, religious institutions, books, the mass media, and so on. Oman and Thoresen (2003, 2007) have argued that there has been no systematic framework for investigating how religiousness or spirituality is “caught” from the influence of others. They propose that Bandura’s (1977, 1986) theory of social learning, with its emphasis on observation and vicarious learning, is capable of providing such a framework for the psychology of religion. Spiritual models, they suggest, whether they be major historical religious figures (e.g., Buddha, Muhammad, Jesus), contemporary spiritual leaders (e.g., Mother Teresa, Gandhi), or key individuals in a

person's life (e.g., youth pastors, religious mentors), are overlooked influences on spiritual and religious development (see also Bandura, 2003, and Silberman, 2003).

External influences (parents, peers, etc.) 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, along with a fourth factor that has been studied: education. Though we have already said much about the influence of parents, we further consider their role as influence agents specifically in terms of adolescent religious and spiritual development, since there is general agreement that parents are the most important influence (e.g., Benson, Masters, & Larson, 1997; Brown, 1987; Cornwall, 1989). We 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.

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

It is not a straightforward matter to tap parental influence in studies of religious socialization. Many highly religious parents sanctify their role as parents; that is, they see parenting as a sacred duty, with religious beliefs and values as among the most important things to be transmitted to their children (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003). 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. Collectively, these different approaches offer insight into parental religious socialization influence.

Studies of “Keeping the Faith”

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 that

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.

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. Hunsberger (1976) found that the greater emphasis on religion in one's childhood home was associated with religiousness during college. 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, Yeager, 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 identifying 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 et al., 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

Is there what was popularly termed in the 1960s and 1970s a "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 (e.g., Friedenberg, 1969; Thomas, 1974) have concluded that there is such a gap, while others have contended that parent-adolescent attitudinal differences are relatively minor (Lerner & Spanier, 1980) or virtually nonexistent (Coopersmith, Regan, & Dick, 1975; Nelsen, 1981a). 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). For example, Hunsberger (1985a) found a stronger parent-child agreement on religious matters than on a number of 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 partialled 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. However, 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 some textbooks on adolescence (e.g., Cobb, 2001).

Self-Reports of Religious Influence

Studies involving a wide variety of age groups in North America and elsewhere have confirmed that individuals perceive their parents as the most important influence on their 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. In this study, parents were listed as having the most important influence by 44% of all respondents (friends came next at 15%). In other studies, Hunsberger asked several hundred students at a Canadian university (Hunsberger, 1983b) and 85 older Canadians (ages 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). 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.

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 weight of the evidence suggests that mothers are more influential than fathers (e.g., Hertel & Donahue, 1995; see also Benson et al., 1997)—perhaps because they play a more nurturing role in child rearing; perhaps because they are more religious than men (e.g., Donelson, 1999; Francis & Wilcox, 1998); or perhaps because they tend to assume more child-rearing responsibilities (Smith & Mackie, 1995), which may include taking children to church or in teaching about religion.

However, it is quite possible that fathers also play an important role (see Dollahite, 2003; King, 2003). Fathers may 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

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 age 11, and the second about 700 students age 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).

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

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 religiousness 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 degree of parental religiousness was the causal factor in their study of 9- to 12-year-old African Americans living in the rural southern United States. That is, they maintained that greater parental religiousness 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.

Are there any specific mechanisms that parents use to instill increased religiousness in their children? Dollahite and Marks (2005), utilizing a narrative approach based on 74 interviews from highly religious Muslim, Mormon, other Christian, and Jewish families, identified 10 central processes by which parents facilitate religious and spiritual development in their families. These include relying on God for guidance and support; living one's religious values at home (including religious traditions); resolving conflict with prayer, forgiveness, and repentance; loving and serving others; overcoming challenges through shared faith; abstaining from proscribed activities and substances; self-sacrifice of time, money, and comfort for spiritual reasons; nurturing growth in family members through teaching, discussion, and example; explicit obedience to God, prophets, parents, and/or commandments; and giving priority to faith and family over secular or personal interests.

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, though such 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, selection of religious vs. secular schooling, or control of what is viewed on television), and these in turn may have some influence on young people’s religion.

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 that peer group effects are weaker than parental influences. Such studies almost always rely on self-reports of peer influence, however, and the direction of the influence (positive or negative) is not always specified.

The impacts of parents and peers were compared in a study of 375 Australian youths ages 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. King et al. (2002) found that although parental influence tends to be the most significant, the influence of peers should not be overlooked. Whereas verbal communication tends to be the primary vehicle through which parents have an influence, peers tend to have an impact through both verbal discussion (surprisingly, they found the influence of discussion to be greater for boys than for girls) and shared religious activities. Similarly, Regnerus, et al. (2004) found that though parents are the primary influence, the ecological contexts provided by friends and school matter as well in adolescent religious development, especially in self-rated importance of religion.

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 et al., 2002).

Of course, peer influence may be stronger in some religion areas than in others. For example, peers may have little influence on 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, tends to "liberalize" the 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 skeptical 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 either 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 (1978) 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).

Studies in both Australia (Mason et al., 2007) and Great Britain (Savage, Collins-Mayo, Mayo, & Cray, 2006) of "Generation Y" young adults reveal a similar pattern of an emerging skepticism with respect to religious matters. For instance, in the two-stage Australian study, Mason et al. conducted intensive qualitative interviews with 91 persons born between 1981 and 1985, which made them 20–24 years old at the time of the study, followed by a national phone survey that resulted in 1,619 completed interviews. This wise use of mixed methods revealed that while 46% of interviewees identified themselves as traditionally Christian, such identification was associated with the belief that they could pick and choose among religious beliefs (Mason et al., 2007, p. 91). While some non-Christians identified with alternative religious views (19% identified with New Age beliefs, including beliefs in astrology and reincarnation), 28% were classified as secular. In Great Britain, Savage et al. (2006) found similar patterns. In both Australia and Great Britain, therefore, it appears that many Generation Y persons (defined for our purposes as those born between 1980 and 1990) have adopted what Mason et al. (2007) identify as "a liberal, secular individualism in its postmodern form"

(pp. 331–332). This stands in opposition to a more classical acceptance of Christianity as a grand narrative providing a coherent and authoritative frame for life's meaning. Savage et al. (2006, pp. 38–89) provide an in-depth analysis of Generation Y persons' ability to utilize narratives centering on the here and now. Thus many in Generation Y in both Australia and Great Britain have framed a life of meaning and purpose without the necessity of resorting to grand narratives associated with religion or an appeal to the supernatural. They are satisfied with "happy midi-narratives" (Savage et al., 2006, p. 36). Similar studies in the United States suggest that as some adolescents advance through the college years, traditional religious beliefs and commitment to a single grand narrative may decrease.

Data from a national longitudinal research study (Higher Education Research Institute, 2007) on college students from 2004 to 2007 in the United States support the studies in Australia and Great Britain. In this study, 2004 freshmen were administered the same set of questions as second semester juniors in 2007 by the HERI at UCLA (mentioned at the beginning of this chapter). Results showed that religious engagement and charitable involvement decreased significantly over the course of the college years. For example, frequent attendance at religious services dropped from approximately 43% of the students to 25%. A similar decline was noted by the respondents in their friends' attendance at religious services. Students who reported frequent or occasional participation in such charitable services as volunteer work, community service, or participation in a clothing/food drive also significantly decreased during the 4 years of college. On the other hand, a number of religious or spiritual factors showed increases during the college years, including spiritual quest (e.g., developing a meaningful philosophy of life, attaining inner harmony, seeking beauty in life), equanimity (e.g., seeing each day as a gift, being thankful for all that has happened to one, finding meaning through hardship), spirituality (e.g., integrating spirituality into one's life, believing in the sacredness of life), an ethic of caring (e.g., helping others in difficulty, helping to promote racial harmony), and an ecumenical world view (e.g., improving one's understanding of other cultures, growing spiritually without being religious).

These results suggest that Feldman's (1969) conclusions (quoted above) are still partially true today. That is, as students progress through college, they do seem to become less conventionally religious, though the absence of church involvement may be uniquely associated with the college years. But the college years also appear to be a time of interest in spiritual matters, many of which are addressed by conventional religion.

Parochial School Attendance

Some investigations have compared public with parochial schools regarding the religiousness of their students. These investigations have generated rather muddled findings, possibly because of methodological shortcomings (Benson et al., 1989; Hyde, 1990). In the United States in recent decades, conservative Protestants (mostly evangelical or fundamentalist) have founded a growing number of "Christian schools" as an educational alternative to public or secular private schools. Also, some parents (again, especially conservative Protestants) are choosing to home-school their children, at least through some grades. Though there are many anecdotal accounts of the effects of such educational efforts, often used for promotional purposes, such programs have received little scientific scrutiny. Most of the research conducted to date has focused primarily on traditional mainline Protestant and Catholic schools.

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 40 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, such “minimal-impact” conclusions have been challenged by some authors (e.g., Greeley & Gockel, 1971; Greeley & Rossi, 1966), and Himmelstam (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, above and beyond the home influence per se. This is *not* to say that there is no influence, for influence can take many forms. It is likely that parochial school students come from more religious homes in the first place, and thus one role (among many) of such institutions may be the provision of a social and educational context where already existing religious values and beliefs are reinforced. The issue is not clear-cut and

does not include the recent wave of Christian schooling in the United States, simply because research on such schooling that meets scientific criteria is not yet available. 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 (Erickson, 1992; Francis & Brown, 1991; Hoge, Heffernan, et al., 1982; Hoge & Thompson, 1982; Nelsen, 1982; Philibert & Hoge, 1982) 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.

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; and the subtle interplay among these and other religious socialization factors.

The Polarization Hypothesis

Earlier in this chapter, we have discussed 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. As noted in Chapter 4 (see Research Box 4.2), 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 pos-

sibility 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. Women’s attitudes toward religion may also be developed at an earlier age (Tammiminen & Nurmi, 1995). Such gender differences may be 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., Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993; 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 a 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, peer, educational, and other influences and their possible interactions. Many typical problems that face social-scientific researchers (e.g., self-report accuracy, sampling limitations) afflict this area of research as well. 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. Peers, education, parochial school environment, the mass media, and reading have been found to affect religious socialization to a lesser degree, though it is sometimes difficult to isolate the effects of specific causal factors. It has been suggested, however, that when the parents and other potential influential agents (e.g., the church, social network of friends) 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.

DOES RELIGIOUS SOCIALIZATION INFLUENCE ADJUSTMENT AND NONRELIGIOUS BEHAVIOR IN ADOLESCENCE?

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 entire development. 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, 1997a; 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 both less sexual activity and 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), but also with less condom use in adolescents (Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000). Some of these links are explored in greater detail in Chapter 12 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 “a large research literature . . . 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, 1995; 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 Chapter 13.

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 (King et al., 2002; Regnerus et al., 2004), 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 positive activities as alternatives to 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. However, two studies carried out by Hunsberger et al. (2001b), one with college students and one with high school students, found no difference on various adjustment measures between those raised in religious versus nonreligious homes.

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

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 Notion of 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" (quoted in 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

"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 to reveal (3) differentiation; higher scores (4–7) indicate the extent to which people integrate these differentiated concepts into broader structures. Research Box 5.3, which describes a study by Hunsberger and his colleagues on fundamentalism and religious doubt, gives examples of responses receiving different complexity scores.

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 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, scores on the Quest

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).

measure of religious orientation were significantly positively correlated (.43) with complexity scores for thinking about existential content. For both orthodoxy and quest, comparable correlations involving *nonreligious* sentence completions were not statistically significant. However, it should be noted that the integrative complexity scores were distributed primarily in the lower half (1–4) of the scale, suggesting that even those who differentiate well are not necessarily capable of integrating those differentiated concepts into broader structures. Furthermore, a series of investigations by Hunsberger and his colleagues (Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 1994; Hunsberger, Alisat, Pancer, & Pratt, 1996; Hunsberger, Lea, Pancer, Pratt, & McKenzie, 1992; Hunsberger, McKenzie, Pratt, & Pancer, 1993; Pancer, Jackson, Hunsberger, Pratt, & Lea, 1995; Pratt, Hunsberger, Pancer, & Roth, 1992), using open-ended essay or interviews for a full expression of ideas, suggest that the complexity–religious orientation relationship may be restricted to issues involving existential content only (which, of course, are still clearly related to religious experience). In spite of these limitations, it is safe to conclude that not all people think about their religious faith with the same degree of complexity and that one major predictor of integrative complexity is religious orientation.

RELIGIOUS DOUBTS

Of course, adolescents and young adults are not completely passive recipients of social influence when it comes to their religious beliefs. They think about religious issues, and they may not be willing to accept all that they are taught. Almost everyone has questions (e.g., “Does God really exist?”, “Should I accept my parents’ religious faith?”) related to religious teachings at some time. Many people apparently resolve their questions to their own satisfaction, and their underlying religious beliefs are not substantially altered. Others, however, may have trouble resolving their questions, and this may lead to 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, though they may also occur among adults. 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.

However, research suggests that the mass media’s depiction of young people as rebellious and questioning of parental values, implying that adolescents are boiling cauldrons of bubbling religious doubts, is exaggerated. 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 rated 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 rated 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).

Correlates of Doubt

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 this measure 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 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 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 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 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 various positive mental health and adjustment benefits are derived 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, the resulting decreased religiousness may detract 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).

Thus, strictly from a psychological perspective, we are hard pressed to say that religious doubting is either “good” or “bad.” This is not to say that the predominant church attitude “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) is necessarily wrong. It is to say, however, that judgments about religious doubts’ being “good” or “bad” depend on how one defines these terms, and probably also on one’s personal religious orientation.

Dealing with Doubt

Regardless of whether doubt is good or bad, most people who experience religious doubts are motivated to somehow resolve them. Hunsberger et al. (2002) investigated two ways in which young people attempt to deal with their religious questions and doubts. One way is to consult with people or reading materials that would likely push them in a proreligious direction. Scores on a self-report Belief-Confirming Consultation (BCC) scale were found to significantly predict increased religiousness 2 years later. A second approach is to consult resources that would be more likely to provide nonreligious or antireligious answers to questions (e.g., talking with friends with no religious beliefs, reading materials that go against one’s religious beliefs). Scores on a self-report Belief-Threatening Consultation (BTC) scale significantly predicted reduced religiousness 2 years later. Of course, whom one consults may really be indicative of one’s inclination to resolve religious doubts one way or the other in the first place.

Also, Hunsberger 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.

APOSTASY

Broad-based survey studies suggest that disengagement from religion is most common for people in their late teens and early 20s. 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, Cornwall, & Cunningham, 1988), Presbyterians (Hoge, Johnson, &

Liudens, 1993), and broader religious groupings (Albrecht & Cornwall, 1989; Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977; Hadaway & Roof, 1988; see also Schweitzer, 2000).

Furthermore, there seems to be a growing interest in atheism—as witnessed by the dizzying array of popular books on this topic (Dawkins, 2006; Dennett, 2006; Grayling, 2007; Harris, 2004, 2007; Hitchens, 2007), often presented as the “thinking person’s” alternative to the irrationality of religious belief. As already pointed out, the high rate of theistic belief in the United States seems to be an exception among postindustrial Western countries. In most European 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 had “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” (i.e., those who had abandoned faith).

Atheism is complex, and any single definition (of the many that have been offered), fails to capture the wide range of positions held by atheists. Philosophers have long debated whether atheism is a religion, or even whether it must involve belief. For example, a leading atheist philosopher, Michael Martin (2002), has argued that atheism must be defined entirely in terms of belief, though he distinguishes what he calls “positive atheism” (the explicit disbelief in God) from both “negative atheism” (simply the lack of theistic belief) and “agnosticism” (the lack of either belief or disbelief in God). It is beyond our purposes here to go into this debate. We will note, however, that at least for the “positive atheist,” as defined by Martin, as rational as atheism may appear to be, it does involve belief. Our focus here is on why people, some of whom were raised in religious homes, find either atheism or some other belief system more convincing. Of course, many of the same socialization processes that we have discussed in this chapter (influence of parents, peers, and other social factors) are likely to play a role in apostasy as well.

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.

Yet another important issue to consider in defining and measuring apostasy is the degree to which it is a permanent abandonment of faith. Most of the research on apostasy has been conducted with college students, and there is some evidence of a tendency to return to religion (including institutional religion) soon after the college years, perhaps due to the influence of marriage and parenthood (Argue, Johnson, & White, 1999; Bibby, 1993; Chaves, 1991; Hoge et al., 1993).

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 1965 high school seniors to 1973 and again to 1983. 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.

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 on 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.

Roots of Apostasy

A number of researchers (e.g., Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977; Putney & Middleton, 1961; Wuthnow & Glock, 1973) have suggested that rebellion against parents and other aspects of society is at the root of apostasy. For example, Caplovitz and Sherrow (1977) proposed four factors that may contribute to the abandonment of faith: (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 is the apparent assumption that apostasy represents a deliberate rejection of previous identification, and a conscious acceptance of a new identification.

Early 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 religion 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. Three studies of university students 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 et al., 1988; Bahr & Albrecht, 1989) and Roman Catholics (Kotre, 1971), as well as in studies of more representative U.S. samples (Nelsen, 1981b; Wuthnow & Mellinger, 1978).

In Hunsberger's studies, no support was found for two of Caplovitz and Sherrow's (1977) hypothesized predisposing factors—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. Although Brinkerhoff and Mackie (1993) concluded that apostates “are less satisfied in life, [are] 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 religious 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, according to other researchers, 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).

Going against the Flow: “Amazing Apostates” and “Amazing Believers”

Not everyone is equally influenced by the socialization processes of parent, peers, education, and church/other factors as described in this chapter. Though there is strong evidence that most people who become religious believers or apostates are behaving quite consistently with socialization theory predictions (i.e., most religious believers come from homes where religion was relatively strongly emphasized and modeling was readily available; most apostates come from homes where religion was only weakly emphasized and parental modeling of

religion was not strong), there are rare exceptions to the rule. 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. After screening several thousand students at their respective Canadian universities, Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1997) could find only 1.4% who met their established strict criteria for “amazing apostates” (those who were in the bottom 25% on a measure of orthodoxy but in the top 25% on a measure of religious emphasis in the home while growing up) and only 0.8% who met their equally strict criteria for “amazing believers” (top 25% on orthodoxy, but bottom 25% on religious emphasis).

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 Etzhebarria, 1992), but in retrospect they believed that the benefits of leaving their religion far outweighed any costs involved. The 24 amazing believers interviewed 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 many of the amazing believers’ conversions. 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.

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. In the end, as rare as these amazing apostates and believers are, such “exceptions to the rule” can potentially help our general understanding of the religious socialization process. (A further discussion of nonbelievers is provided in Chapter 9).

RELIGION AND IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN ADOLESCENCE

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).

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

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

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.

Several studies have indicated that more religious commitment 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 many studies relied on self-reported church attendance, which 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 diffused 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, Quest scores (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 students with more achieved and foreclosed identities, and commitment was weaker for students with more diffused and moratorium identities. 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 5.4).

In summary, recent findings suggest that 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 fore-

RESEARCH BOX 5.4. 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 ensure 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. People with more achieved and foreclosed identities did score higher, and people with more diffused and moratorium identities 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 BCC and 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.

closed 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, Bennion, & Huh, 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 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. Other religious socialization agents have sometimes been presumed to be active, such as peer groups, education, and the church.

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. Furthermore, there appears to be considerable interest in topics of religion and spirituality among college students.

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. 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 are nonapostates.

Other 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.

Chapter 6

Adult Religious Issues

My religion is to do good.

People will do anything for religion, argue for it, fight for it, die for it, anything but live for it.

Among all my patients in the second half of life—that is to say, over thirty-five—there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. . . . none of them has really been healed who did not regain his religious outlook.

Religion reveals itself in struggling to reveal the meaning of the world.¹

There are no sharp divisions in life. Childhood phases into adolescence, which in turn becomes adulthood, with old age quietly following. Psychological, social, and cultural references are usually conveniences in making these distinctions. The law may speak of 18 or 21 years of age marking the beginning of adulthood, but such ages are little more than practical cues that are essentially meaningless outside the law. Similarly, society has a history of designating age 65 as a transition point into the “elderly” category, but we can find adolescent, if not childish, behavior in people of any age. A popular saying suggests that people should “act their age,” yet these responses are often dependent on vague social expectations associated with broad age ranges. For simplicity’s sake, however, we denote adulthood as extending roughly from 18 to 65 years of age.

Given these definitional problems, we normally think of certain behaviors as representative of adulthood. Here we find love, sex, and marriage; concern with work and economic matters; involvement in politics; and numerous other possibilities. Moreover, religious thinking and activity probably attain their greatest richness and complexity in adulthood. Other chapters of this book deal with such major expressions of this richness and complexity as religious and spiritual experience, mysticism, conversion, and spiritual transformation. In

¹These quotations come, respectively, from the following sources: Thomas Paine, quoted in Cohen & Cohen (1960, p. 277); Caleb Colton, quoted in Edwards (1955, p. 535); Jung (1933, p. 229); S. H. Miller, quoted in Simpson (1964, p. 204).

this chapter, we begin our exploration of adult issues in religion by examining adult religious beliefs.

The problem of arbitrary distinctions among youth, adulthood, and old age is important in the realms of anthropology, sociology, and psychology, though considerable overlap among age groupings is evident in all of these areas. Here we attempt a social-psychological foray that should indicate how religious beliefs and behavior are an integral part of adult life, and in this endeavor we often cross disciplinary dividing lines.

THE FAITH OF AMERICAN ADULTS

Religious Identifications

Religion is deeply ingrained in the U.S. cultural milieu, and many organizations have undertaken extensive surveys of faith among Americans. The U.S. federal government has summarized the results of the massive 2001 American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) in the 2008 *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008). Whereas most surveys study at most a few thousand people, Kosmin, Mayer, and Keysar (2001) questioned over 50,000 in the ARIS, which replicated and extended the National Survey on Religious Identification (NSRI) of 1990. The latest large-sample effort is by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2008).

Surveys such as the ARIS and the NSRI are conducted by a number of different university centers, public service groups, and businesses (e.g., the famous Gallup Poll organization). This is a complex research area, and the differences in findings may largely be a function of differences in the wording of questions that survey researchers employ. Sampling error is, of course, always present as well. A Gallup Poll recently looked at adults who stated that they had no religious preference and found, instead of ARIS's 14%, only 10% in this category. Since the Gallup Poll's data go back to 1968, they found a trend for those taking this stance to have increased from 3% to 10% over a 37-year period (Winseman, 2005).

Even though the United States is considered quite religious, the Gallup Poll of Religious Indicators, a measure of religiosity that has been used for over 60 years, has shown a decline since 1956. With a possible maximum score of 1,000, in 1956 the American score was 746; in 2004 it was down to 648 (Lyons, 2005). Even though this possible trend is probably due to many influences, two concerns stand out. The first is a reduction of confidence in religious institutions, leading some to identify themselves as "spiritual but not religious" (see Chapter 10). Also likely to be a factor are questions about the ethical standards of clergy; these are thought to result primarily from the sex abuse scandals of a small percentage of Catholic priests.

There are indications that the percentage of those identifying themselves as Christians has also been decreasing. In 1990, it was 87%, 10% higher than a decade later (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008). The Pew Research Center (2007) claims that religious beliefs and practices among adults have slowly declined from 1987 to 2007, but a 2005 Gallup Poll suggests a 5–9% rise in congregational engagement between 2001 and 2004. Unfortunately, very little research has been directed toward the reasons for either the declines or the increases just noted. The Gallup Poll organization conducted an investigation of the latter, albeit rather superficially (Newport, 2007a). This investigation found that 23% of churchgoers claim they attend for "spiritual growth and guidance," and another 20% feel that church attendance "keeps them grounded/inspired" (p. 2). Some are there simply because it is their faith (15%);

others attend because they desire to worship God (15%) or just believe in God or religion (12%). We cannot dismiss habit, which accounts for 12%. Clearly, more detailed interview questioning is necessary if we are to understand what is actually taking place.

As noted above, the most recent effort to assess the national religious panorama was reported by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life in June 2008. Titled the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, it was a telephone survey of over 35,000 Americans. A number of its findings merit much additional follow-up, since some interesting trends are suggested.

Whereas the NSRI indicated that 90% of adults identified with a religion in 1990 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008), the 2008 Pew Forum number was 83%. In 1990 the NSRI reported that 86% of the population was Christian. Eleven years later, in the ARIS of 2001, 77% stated that they were Christians; the 2008 Pew work suggests a flattening out of this decline, with 78% designating themselves as Christians. Still, there seem to be noteworthy shifts in the numbers claiming to be unaffiliated with any religion. In the 1990 NSRI, 8% fell into this category; however, by 2001, the corresponding percentage in the ARIS was 14%, and the 2008 Pew data place it at 16%. Only 4% of the 2008 Pew respondents stated that they were atheist or agnostic. Without question, this appears to be an important trend that calls for further research and explanation.

Though we have necessarily emphasized religion *per se*, when we try to understand the changes that occur over time, we need to examine other characteristics of all religious bodies. For example, there is great variation in the incomes of religious groups and their members. Looking at incomes of \$100,000 and above, we find that 19% of Catholics, 18% of Protestants, and 46% of Jews reported such incomes in 2008. Twenty-one percent of mainline Protestants were at this income level, but only 13% of evangelical Protestants (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008). Income parallels education and other components of socioeconomic status; given such considerations, we can hypothesize relationships with social and motivational factors. Some testing along these lines has been carried out, but not recently (Demerath, 1965; Demerath & Hammond, 1969). We need more such work. Faith in context is of great importance.

Religious Beliefs and Behaviors

Despite the questions that some of the foregoing data may raise, the actions and beliefs of Americans indicate a rather strong commitment to traditional religious ideas and behaviors. Table 6.1 offers a picture of the faith of most American adults. To make this picture more informative, the age range 18–65 years has been divided into early adulthood (ages 18–39) and later adulthood (ages 40–65).

This table confirms that adult Americans are quite religious. If we look at belief in God in other parts of the world, Greeley's (2002) landmark study of European nations indicates that Poland with 94% and Ireland with 95% are comparable to the United States. Most countries reported numbers in the 50–70% range in response to these items.

Granted that problems of sampling over the years produce slight variations in such percentages, one wonders whether belief in God may be decreasing in the United States. A few decades ago, the polls regularly provided estimates of 95–97%. In 1999, Gallup and Lindsay found 95% avowing such a belief. In 2004, a Gallup Poll observed 90%, and in 2007 belief in God was down to 86% (The Gallup Poll, 2007). Again, findings like these need further confirmation. Another analysis claims that “more people are publicly saying they have no religious

TABLE 6.1. Some Religious Beliefs and Practices among Americans in Early Adulthood (18–39 Years) and Late Adulthood (40–65 Years)

Variable	18–39 years %	40–65 years %
Church/synagogue membership	55	64
Pray once a day or more	46	61
Belief in God is very important (yes)	53	57
Belief in miracles (yes)	74	77
Belief in life after death (yes)	78	79
Belief in heaven (yes)	85	87
Belief in hell (yes)	52	55
Belief in the Devil (yes)	43	47

Note. These data cover the period from 1972 to 2006 and were collected by the General Social Survey (GSS, 2007).

faith” (Jordan, 2007, p. 11A). The reasons given for such disillusionment include violence and terrorism in the name of religion, and religious extremism in general.

Table 6.1 also tells us that younger adults are not as religious as their older peers. Chapter 7 shows that the tendency to be religious increases into old age. We do not know whether this is simply a result of aging, or whether it is due to the likelihood that older persons were more exposed to religion in their early years than their younger counterparts have been.

THE ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION OF INSTITUTIONAL RELIGION

Becoming Involved with Religious Institutions

There are many reasons for people to affiliate themselves with religious institutions. These range from an automatic, habitual continuation of family tradition to deep personal struggles with understanding one’s place in life and society. A fine example of work in this area was carried out by Roberts and Davidson (1984), who recognized the importance of psychosocial factors in church involvement. These researchers noted two major approaches to the problem: (1) the importance of religious meaning to the individual, and (2) religion as a social phenomenon (i.e., the significance of belonging to a church and relating to its members). Research Box 6.1 details this study.

Many factors affect the choice to become involved with a church (or other religious institution). Meaning systems and social relationships are important and probably not independent of each other. For example, both may relate to socioeconomic status and to the nature of the church under consideration (Roberts & Davidson, 1984). Surprisingly, in this research, religious beliefs were least important in this complex array of motivations. In all likelihood, this reflected the effects of little variation in beliefs. Because this effort was basically correlational, low variability worked against obtaining the kinds of data (correlation coefficients) that might reveal the real significance of religious beliefs. This limitation may have masked the qualitative and quantitative importance of beliefs.

RESEARCH BOX 6.1. The Nature and Sources of Religious Involvement
(Roberts & Davidson, 1984)

Seeking to answer the basic question of why people become involved in their church, Roberts and Davidson studied 577 members of two Methodist and two Baptist churches in relation to four sets of possible predictors of involvement. These were (1) one's personal meaning system, (2) social ties to church members, (3) sociodemographic factors, and (4) religious beliefs. Specifically, these variables were assessed as follows:

Meaning: How one makes sense out of the world—theism, science, nonreligious materialism, social humanism.

Social relations: Connections to other church members, a sense of belonging to the church community.

Demographic factors: Age, gender, socioeconomic status (education, occupation, income), denominational affiliation.

Religious beliefs: Beliefs in existence of God, divinity of Jesus, miracles, virgin birth, and life after death.

Using the statistical method of path analysis, Roberts and Davidson observed a complex set of associations among the measures. Meaning and social relations were positively correlated, which suggested that others confirmed and supported one's personal meaning system. These two factors directly contributed most to church involvement. Religious beliefs were weakly and indirectly influential. Sociodemographic variables were also indirectly effective, largely through their influence on one's meaning system. Older church members and women tended to be most involved, but most important was membership in the liberal (Methodist) or conservative (Baptist) denomination being studied. Overall, meaning and social ties were the big determiners of church involvement. More research of this nature would help us understand further the connections among the predictor variables—in particular, the role of religious and social beliefs.

Clearly, liberal churches have members whose views differ from those in conservative churches; however, there is probably considerable like-mindedness and hence little variation within each type of church.

Utilizing a slightly different theoretical approach, Cornwall (1987) asked two basic questions: "How do adults come to their religious perspectives?" and "What maintains these outlooks?" Her answer to the first query was religious socialization by family and friends. Once this framework is established, a connection to a "personal community" of like-minded believers supports and strengthens the religious system.

O'Hara (1980) suggests some differences between Protestants and Catholics in why church participation persists from childhood to adult life. For Protestants, the dominant influence is "accommodation," or how one deals with the social pressures exerted by significant others. Second comes meaning via cognition—namely, the degree to which the faith that is embraced resolves basic questions about life, death, God, and the supernatural. Third is socialization, or being part of a religious group that has established norms for religious belief and behavior. The order of these factors for Catholics is cognition, accommodation,

and lastly socialization. These differences between Catholics and Protestants are probably a function of the historically conditioned practices and beliefs that distinguish these two broad patterns of faith.

The processes of becoming and remaining involved in religion are clearly complex. Socio-cultural influences operate on a large scale. Psychologically, we contend that religious behavior, belief, and experience are gratifying to the individual. Religion simply makes people feel good: it helps them resolve conflicts, answers fundamental questions, enhances their sense of control in life, and brings like-minded individuals together. One meta-analysis of 28 studies concluded that among adults, subjective well-being and religion go together (Witter, Stock, Okun, & Haring, 1985). Apparently religious activity is more important than belief, but both contribute to the sense of self-satisfaction generated by religious participation. These positive feelings probably result from social integration, which, according to Durkheim (1915), makes life more meaningful.

Peter Benson (1988a, 1988b), a scholar known for studying the big problems in the psychology of religion, has undertaken extensive research on what he terms “mature faith.” This concept has much in common with Allport’s Intrinsic religious orientation—namely, a deep religious commitment that includes social sensitivity and “life-affirming values” (Benson, 1988a, p. 16). The latter constitute Saint Thomas Aquinas’s classical duties to oneself, others, and God (Spilka, 1970). In mature faith, then, a healthy lifestyle is combined with an appreciation of human welfare, equality, personal responsibility, and what sounds like the role of faith in everyday life.

Utilizing thousands of respondents, Benson found religious maturity to be an outgrowth of literally being steeped in one’s faith through family, early religious education, and affiliations throughout life with others who possess similar outlooks. Maternal and spousal influence (which may be translated into support and reinforcement) also appeared to be central in maintaining strong attachments to religious principles and church doctrines (Benson, 1988b).

We can see that becoming deeply involved with religious institutions has many facets, among which are the need for personal meaning, identification with a like-minded community, and probably most important of all, a family background with family ties that stress the pertinence of religious faith to the way life is lived. Undoubtedly, there is room for utilitarian attachments to religion, as Allport’s concept of Extrinsic religious orientation conveys.

Apostasy: Leaving the Faith or Finding a New One

At the opposite end of the spectrum from involvement is apostasy, disaffiliation, or leaving the faith. This has two main aspects: A person may join a different church, or may simply reject religion *in toto*, embracing either agnosticism or atheism. When we look at why individuals leave their churches, the situation gets even more complicated. One study identified three kinds of “unchurched” Protestants (Perry, Davis, Doyle, & Dyble, 1980). Those regarded as “estranged” and “indifferent” held similar traditional beliefs, but differed in commitment: The latter just became inactive, whereas for the former, religion was no longer salient in their lives. This was also true for “nominal” Protestants, for whom traditional beliefs were irrelevant.

After interviewing respondents in six counties across the United States, Hale (1977) offered a scheme that demonstrates how complex the realm of unchurched individuals is. Table 6.2 details this framework. A system such as Hale’s begs for rigorous, objective study,

TABLE 6.2. A Taxonomy of Unchurched Individuals

Unchurched type	Description
Anti-institutionalists	See themselves as truly religious, “better Christians” (Hale, 1977, p. 40).
The boxed-in	Church was too restrictive.
The constrained	Feel limited by doctrinal rules.
The thwarted	Feel suppressed from growing by church insistence on conformity and dependence.
The independents	Independent, nonconformists.
The burned-out	Feel exhausted, drained, emptied.
The used	Feel exploited, worked over.
Light travelers	Feel no need to continue a deep commitment, just “take it easy.”
The cop-outs	Never really committed, involved.
The apathetic	Can “take it or leave it.”
The drifters	Establish no real attachments.
Happy hedonists	Either utilitarian or leisure-oriented; seek gratification.
The locked-out	Feel rejected or victimized.
The rejected	Claim that the church has not accepted them.
The neglected	Assert that the church ignores them.
The discriminated	Argue that the church is biased against them.
The nomads	Religious vagrants, expect to move on and up; casually attached.
The pilgrims	Seekers and searchers who believe.
The publicans	Self-righteous; feel “better than others.” Can’t find their “true faith” in church.
The scandalized	See power seekers, factions, and divisiveness in church.
True believers	Hold alternative or antichurch position.
Agnostics/atheists	Don’t know if God exists, or fully reject the idea.
Deists/rationalists	Rely on reason, not revelation.
Humanists/secularists	Committed to human ideals outside of the church.
The uncertain	No reason for nonaffiliation.

Note. Data from Hale (1977).

because there is a high likelihood that some of these categories overlap or could represent personality and social dispositions for which religion is a convenient scapegoat or expression.

Some of these factors are also present in a classificatory scheme proposed by Hoge (1988) for Catholic dropouts. Though there is some overlap with Hale’s (1977) framework, some new, more personal and familial factors are described in Table 6.3. Hoge also noted that dropout type in his study was a function of age. Those under 23 were mostly in the “family tension” group; adolescent rebellion entered this picture. In contrast, “weary” and “lifestyle”

TABLE 6.3. Hoge's Classification of Catholic Dropouts

Dropout type	Description
Family tension	Rebellion against parents causes rejection of church and family.
Weary	Low religious motivation; church "boring and uninteresting."
Lifestyle	Lifestyle clashes with church's moral position and teachings.
Spiritual needs	These needs not met by church.
Antichange	Oppose church liberalization.
Out-converts after intermarriage	Marriage to a non-Catholic and shift to spouse's faith.

Note. Adapted from Hoge (1988). Copyright 1988 by Sage Publications. Adapted by permission.

dropouts were commonly found among those older than 23. Problems with faith may well represent personal and social needs that one struggles with, particularly in early and middle adulthood.

Finding a New Faith: Switching Religions

Even though most people remain with the religion in which they were reared, there is a fair amount of movement across the major religious bodies. Some disagreement exists among the pollsters as to the level of switching. Fairly recent data suggest that 15% of respondents have switched their religious preferences, while another 10% have moved away from religion altogether (Newport, 1979). The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2008), when examining changes from one major religion to another, has found 24% shifting from the faith in which they were reared; when denominational switching within Protestantism was included, the number increased to 44%. Approximately 7% claimed that they were raised in unaffiliated homes, yet adults accounted for 16% of this group. Overall, the greatest shift occurred in the Catholic Church, which experienced a net loss of 7.5% of its members. The traditions that managed to hold on to their childhood members were the Jews (76%), various Eastern Orthodox bodies (73%), and Mormons (70%). Catholics, with 68% remaining, came in fourth. Younger people were more likely to leave their tradition altogether, while the oldest members usually sought another denomination within their general identification (e.g., Protestant). Unfortunately, there does not seem to have been any thoroughgoing study of the motives for switching. A number of smaller, focused investigations have, however, been undertaken.

For example, Albrecht and Bahr (1983) have described some unexpected facts about those who either leave Mormonism or abandon their original church to become Mormons. Most ex-Mormons simply become nonreligious. The next largest group of leavers turn to Catholicism, implying that they remain religiously conservative. Most converts to Mormonism come from mainline Protestant bodies, and possess rather orthodox outlooks that the Mormon faith can effectively satisfy.

An interesting hypothesis is offered by Albrecht and Bahr (1983) in regard to either dropping out altogether or switching to a new faith. Switching may be seen as more deviant than dropping out. It means going public with a rejection of the previous identification (in

this case, Mormonism) in favor of a new group that, by implication, the switcher considers “better.” The person who just drops out can be viewed as a “lost soul” who has not found any real alternative. The first action can stimulate hostility; the second, pity by former coreligionists. The dropout may be considered potentially salvageable; the switcher is not. One wonders whether pity might turn to rage and ostracism if a dropout publicly denies the existence of God. This could add even more insult to injury than switching. The major reason identified by Albrecht and Bahr for switching or leaving the church seems to be disagreement with its teachings (40%). Another 38% claim to have found a more fulfilling faith. Nineteen percent of young adults fall into this last category, while only 9% of those between 50 and 64 act similarly.

Hadaway (1980), using Gallup Poll data from national samples, also notes that switchers are mostly conservative religious seekers. The motivation to change is frequently associated with a religious experience, particularly among evangelicals. Apparently a period of integration of the meaning of the experience takes place during the process of reaffiliation into a group that values such encounters.

Institutional Disaffiliation

Simple institutional disaffiliation may occur for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the prevailing influence of secularization in modern society (Nelson, 1988). Some of these are implied in the labels (“dropouts” and “unchurched”) that researchers now normally apply to those who leave a church. Many such people remain personally religious, but churches, temples, and synagogues no longer seem relevant to their life in the modern world. Causes for this strain between individuals and religious institutions also lie in the considerable level of physical, social, and economic mobility that prevails in much of early and middle adulthood. People are often “too busy” to consider questions of ultimate meaning or to feel a need to relate to a specific religious community. With respect to a wide variety of attitudes and beliefs, those who are religiously disengaged tend to be more liberal than churchgoers on many social, moral, and political issues (Nelson, 1988). Regardless of the reasons for leaving formal religion behind, as already noted, the tendency has increased in the last decade. Atheism, agnosticism, and secularism appear to be increasing in many cultures (see Chapter 9 for a fuller discussion).

Intermarriage and Religious Switching/Dropping Out

Though we discuss intermarriage and divorce later in this chapter, we briefly consider it (and its effects on the children of such unions) here as a basis for switching or dropping out. A major reason for shifting from one religious body to another occurs when people of different faiths marry. McCutcheon (1988) indicates a rather orderly increase in the number of “exogamous” marriages (i.e., marriages outside the religious group) among Protestants, Catholics, and Jews throughout the 20th century. The more conservative the faith in which people were raised, the less often switching occurs (Hadaway & Marler, 1993). Over 80% of conservative Protestants and Catholics maintain their original church affiliation. If a person is brought up within a specific religious tradition, and marries someone of the same persuasion, the probability that either spouse will change affiliation is extremely low (Hadaway & Marler, 1993). Again, we should note that the more conservative people’s faith is, the less likely they are to marry someone from a different religious body.

Again, there are a number of possibilities for switching. First, religion may be unimportant to two people from different religious backgrounds. If they marry, religion may never be a problem. In many instances, however, the initial unimportance of faith changes for one or both spouses when children enter the family. Individually or together, the new parents may become seekers, as many baby boomers have done. Community and family social pressures frequently enter the picture. American society, with its high level of religiosity, makes separation from a religious or spiritual framework increasingly difficult with the passing years.

About 20% of switchers do so because of intermarriage; one spouse usually switches to the faith of the other. Using national data on approximately 8,000 respondents, Musick and Wilson (1995) show the least switching for marital reasons among Jews (3.4%), Baptists, Mormons, and Catholics (each about 5%). The highest switching rates for intermarriage occur among Disciples of Christ, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and members of the United Church of Christ. Still, intermarriage is the main route to religious change for Jews, Catholics, and Lutherans. With regard to the details of switching for marital purposes, Musick and Wilson suggest that liberal religionists tend to affiliate with conservative religious bodies, while conservatives move toward the liberal end of the spectrum. Interestingly, Catholics shift to the no-religion category when marriage is an issue. The need for a more in-depth analysis of factors that relate to marital switching is abundantly evident.

There is a real problem in determining the actual percentages of people who marry outside their religious groups. This is most evident in Jewish intermarriages. Between 1900 and 1920, only 2% of Jews reportedly intermarried; between 1966 and 1972, 31.7% reportedly did so (Reiss, 1976). By the 1980s, Silberman (1985) suggested a rate of 24%, but noted that others put the rate as high as 60%. The 3.4% rate given by Musick and Wilson (1995; see above) is suspect, but considering their use of national data, their findings must be noted. To suggest that the actual numbers range between 3% and 30% is not very informative. Some of this variation might be explained by where and how samples are gathered; in areas where there are few Jews, the rate of intermarriage is high. A distinction also needs to be made between first and second marriages, as the latter have an intermarriage rate about 50% higher than that for first marriages. This also means that older Jews are more likely to intermarry than their younger cohorts (Mayer, 1985). Despite these numbers, one study reported that in 1990, 94% of those who were born Jews maintained their religious identification as Jews (Fishman, 2000).

Intermarriage usually occasions considerable unhappiness on the part of parents and religious officials (Petsonk & Rensen, 1988; Stark & Bainbridge, 1985). A 1965 survey of Jews in Boston found that almost 70% felt that the Jewish community had "an obligation to urge Jews to marry Jews" (Geffen, 2001, p. 7); according to Geffen, a more recent survey still indicated that about 40% of Jews would be greatly distressed if their children married outside the faith.

Changing one's religious affiliation may involve a formal conversion; however, such switching does not always involve serious commitment. A convert for whom faith doesn't mean much may simply take on the affiliation of the more devoted spouse to please him or her. Unfortunately, long-term discrepancies between spouses in terms of religious observance commonly result in conflict and divorce (Gordon, 1967; see "Intermarriage and Divorce," below).

There is another effect that merits study. What about the religious identification of the children of intermarried couples? A study of Jewish intermarriages in New York City showed that if the wife is Jewish, the children are raised as Jewish in three out of four families; if

TABLE 6.4. Percentages of Youths Indicating No Religious Identity, by Parental Religious Identity

Religion of parents		Youths indicating "none" for religious identity	
Mother	Father	%	Sample size
Catholic	Catholic	1.5	3,919
Protestant	Protestant	3.1	4,985
None	None	85.4	398
Catholic	Protestant	5.6	303
Protestant	Catholic	9.7	288
Catholic	None	16.1	112
Protestant	None	17.2	221
None	Catholic	47.4	19
None	Protestant	57.1	21

Note. From Nelsen (1990, p. 130). Copyright 1990 by the Religious Research Association. Reprinted by permission.

the husband is Jewish, the ratio is one out of four (Silberman, 1985). This issue has been studied with Catholic, Protestant, and unaffiliated parents (Nelsen, 1990). The last group is interesting, as the proportion of those who are unaffiliated has been steadily increasing since the beginning of the 20th century. From about 1900 to 1965, their numbers grew from 3% to 13% of the U.S. population (Roof & McKinney, 1987). Nelsen's (1990) breakdown of the numbers of youths identifying their religion as "none" with regard to each parent's faith is presented in Table 6.4.

Even though the small samples where unaffiliated mothers are married to affiliated fathers is worrisome, the overall pattern for youth religion makes sense. When parents share the same faith, the percentage of unaffiliated youths is miniscule. When parents attend different churches, religious differences may cause some conflict and confusion in their offspring; hence the percentage of youths claiming no affiliation increases. The main difficulty occurs when one or both parents indicate no religious identity. When fathers report no affiliation, the proportion of youths who are unaffiliated increases two to three times above the proportion when the intermarried spouses are either Protestant or Catholic. When mothers report "none," the rate of "none" among their adolescents again increases, now by at least three times. This supports the common finding that mothers are more important than fathers in affecting the religious inclinations of their offspring. Lastly, when both parents are unaffiliated, their combined potency is considerable; in this instance, 85.4% of their children also report "none." These findings make an important contribution to our understanding of the socialization of religious identification.

The Influence of Education

Some earlier observations raise questions about the possible role of education in disaffiliation from institutional religion. This relationship is by no means clear. Though a negative correlation between education and holding orthodox beliefs was found in the 1950s, by the 1980s

this association had essentially disappeared (Wuthnow, 1993). Roof (1993) has commented that his baby boomers were exposed to more secular and scientific explanations for various phenomena than earlier generations. Though these perspectives were found among post-graduates, they do not appear to have adversely affected their belief in God. Roof has noted that “both uncertainty and belief in a higher power are more common among the better educated” (1993, p. 73). Greeley’s (2002) multinational study, however, finds that current university graduates are likely to be theists. Atheistic propensities among these highly educated people have been declining for many years. More recent work suggests that college graduates plus those with some postgraduate experience are only slightly more likely to list themselves as “nones” when it comes to religious affiliation (Winseman, 2005). There also seems to be a steady decline in the judged importance of religion with increasing education. Whereas 64% of those with a high school education or less feel that their faith is very important, only 50% of those with postgraduate experience think similarly (Newport, 2006c).

In contradiction, Shermer (2000) cites large-sample data (over 2,000 respondents) showing a negative relationship between belief in God for either rational or emotional reasons and education. Though these results are statistically significant, they are rather weak. Other work on a sample of over 12,000 people revealed that the average educational attainment of church members fell 1 year below that of nonmembers (Caplow et al., 1983). Again, one should approach such small differences with caution.

RELIGION AND GENDER

The Traditional Importance of Religion among Women

Another major factor that must be considered is gender, and a recent Gallup Poll indicates that in the adult age range chosen here, women feel more strongly than men that religion is very important to daily life (Newport, 2006c). The percentage differences range from 13% to 16%. Table 6.5 offers a broader range of behaviors and beliefs relative to gender.

TABLE 6.5. Some Religious Beliefs and Practices among American Adults (AGes 18–65) by Gender

Variable	Males (%)	Females (%)
Church/synagogue membership	53	64
Pray once a day or more	42	63
Belief in God is very important (yes) ^a	52	58
Belief in miracles (yes)	67	81
Belief in life after death (yes)	77	80
Belief in heaven (yes)	82	89
Belief in hell (yes)	73	73
Belief in the Devil (yes)	64	65

Note. These data cover the period 1972–2006 and were collected by the GSS (2007).

^aResponses were given with two degrees of “yes” and two of “no.” Both “yes” categories are combined. Four are combined for importance.

The data are clear: Women consistently demonstrate a greater affinity for religion than men do. A number of theories have been proposed to explain the differing religious roles of women and men, as gender is a realm that cuts across psychology and all of the social sciences. Anthropologist and sociologists suggest that males are socialized to be dominant and that females are socialized to be dependent and submissive; as a result, lower status is commonly accorded to women, and this has repercussions in terms of the division of labor. In many societies, women are defined solely as homemakers and caretakers of children. Not being in the work force, they are regarded as having more time for religion and as demonstrating greater church attendance and stronger religious beliefs and commitments than are true for men. Religious participation is then treated as natural to the traditional female role (Miller & Hoffman, 1995).

Psychologically, Miller and Hoffman (1995) interpret the female social position in terms of risk taking. Being in a weaker cultural position than men, women should be less willing to take risks and more likely to adopt psychosocially safe positions such as religion. In other words, women are expected to confront life stresses and ambiguities conservatively. A case can also be made that males are socialized to be independent, and hence to become risk takers. This may explain gender differences in many aspects of life in which females are more risk-adverse than males. As expected, the research shows that risk aversion is positively associated both with religiosity and with being female (Miller & Hoffman, 1995).

The lower status and power of women (McGuire, 1992; Pargament, 1997) have been analogized by Hinde (1999) to the “religion of the oppressed”—namely, the need of the powerless to turn to their faith when all other avenues fail. He further proposes that femininity is biologically affiliated with a greater propensity for social connections and relationships with others. Both of these inclinations may be gratified through institutional faith.

This greater attachment to religion on the part of women has some interesting implications. One is that religion is likely to possess more utility for women than for men, and the evidence suggests that this is true (Pargament, 1997). The more personally important religion is the more helpful religion is, in coping with life's problems.

Another fascinating possibility that may partially explain the religion–women connection involves biology. Whitney (1976), citing data from many mammalian species, shows greater social cohesiveness and cooperation among females than among males. That religion and ingroup social cohesion go together has been well explained by Durkheim and others (McGuire, 1992). Arguments in favor of women's religion and spirituality stress cooperation and cohesion (Conn, 1986). Could there be a genetic component in the propensities of women for religion and social unity? Hypotheses like this one must be very carefully examined, as they may be perceived as “politically incorrect” and in fact may be used against women to buttress male control and female subjugation.

A further argument may be derived from the theory that in most instances, women seem to be the “religious culture carriers.” A fascinating demonstration of this role across the centuries is illustrated by the work of Janet Jacobs (1996) on the function of women in the survival of “crypto-Jewish culture.”

Crypto-Jewish culture is a result of the 15th- and 16th-century persecution of Jews by the Spanish Inquisition. Facing death or conversion to Catholicism, many Spanish Jews either left Spain or “converted.” This frequently meant that their Judaism “went underground” but persisted until the present day in concealed form. Currently, crypto-Jews live primarily in the southwestern United States and Mexico, though some are also found in the eastern United States among Hispanic émigrés from the Caribbean.

Jacobs (1996) attributes the survival of crypto-Jewish culture to the women in these families. This framework of beliefs and behavior, both historically and contemporaneously, has been kept secret from outsiders, often beneath a veneer of Catholicism. Support for crypto-Judaism is associated with the maintenance of classical Jewish rituals, primarily by the women in the home. Among these, Jacobs has observed the lighting of Sabbath candles; enforcement of dietary laws; and the celebration of Jewish holiday ceremonies for Passover, Purim, and Chanukah. Since the families are often overtly Catholic, the Jewish festival of Purim may be practiced as the Festival of St. Esther, and Chanukah may be masked as the festival of Las Posadas (a celebratory representation of the journey of Joseph and Mary). Often central to this Catholic-Jewish syncretic activity is the preparation of food, which in these families is strictly a female duty. The importance of secrecy plus the maintenance of classic Jewish rituals and practices endows the women in these crypto-Jewish families with both power and responsibility. The mothers must protect the family's religious integrity in each generation, and pass on to their daughters the heritage they have received from their forebears. Jacobs does not deny that the men in such religious settings may play some role in preserving the old religious traditions; however, the women are the dominant force in teaching their faith to the children.

Women's Changing Roles in Life and Religion

Across the centuries, a few exceptional women in every generation have broken the psychosocial bonds that essentially held them captive. However, major changes in women's position and status began in the 20th century, as women started rising against male control in virtually all aspects of their lives. The classical roles of women in relation to religion also began to change radically by the 1960s. Subservience was often replaced by self-direction. Instead of following the paths set by males, many women developed new ways of achieving their own directions.

These new paths took several forms. First, women spoke openly of their religious/spiritual struggles and aspirations (Meadow & Rayburn, 1985; Ware, 1985). Next came attempts to realize these hopes by critiquing traditional religious-institutional structures and their theological justifications (Christ & Plaskow, 1979; Plaskow & Romero, 1974; Ruether, 1974). Concurrently, women took long-overdue leadership positions in churches and synagogues (Conn, 1986; Ruether & McLaughlin, 1979). Chaves (1997) argues that pressures for gender equality were a major force in spurring the ordination of women—a trend that has increased rapidly over the past 30 years.

It is hard to believe that broad-based concern with the religion of women only started with the women's movement of the last 50 years. There is no comparable enlightenment on the religion of men, as it was taken for granted that men should naturally dominate both women and religion. Historically, clergy were males, and scripture was used to validate the controlling role of men in both the family and the Judeo-Christian heritage. Where women serve the church, such as Catholic nuns, real power still resides in the hands of a masculine hierarchy.

Cultural change is often slow and troubled. This is evidenced in recent work on the conflicted attitudes of women in conservative Christian and Jewish groups. While arguing for equality in self-expression and opportunity outside of their conservative faiths, they appear ambivalent regarding the liberalization of their roles in church and home. There is also a tendency to oppose feminism explicitly, while implicitly accepting its ideas when these are framed in conservative terminology (Manning, 1999).

Studying the feminist identity of Jewish women, Dufour (2000) encountered a situation similar to that found by Manning. Dufour perceives the process of coping as one of “sifting.” Judaism is examined, and doctrinal selection takes place in order to resolve the conflict between spiritual and religious identities. Beliefs and actions that do not satisfy feminist spiritual needs are thus “sifted” out.

ADULT “GENERATIONS”

As noted earlier, our interest in adult religion is essentially limited to Americans from 18 to 65 years old. Two groups in this range have been popularly referred to as the “baby boomers” and “Generation X.” The first is defined as the post-World War group born between 1946 and 1964; the second is roughly identified as those born in the 1960s and 1970s, though a common practice is to include individuals born from 1961 or 1964 to about 1980. Labeling these cohorts in this way implies that each possesses a distinctive character.

Religion and the Baby Boomer Generation

The “baby boomers” stand out because of their radical stances in the 1960s and 1970s against authority, the Vietnam war, and long-accepted traditions in many areas (ranging from education and politics to personal appearance). Their involvement in drugs, social communes, and “hippie” subcultures also distinguished them. Actually, the individuals who engaged in all this activity constituted a minority of the population in their age bracket, albeit a very noticeable one. At this writing, the “baby boomers” are about to enter the ranks of the elderly. Slowly moving into their 60s, they have demonstrated the struggles adults can have in establishing a satisfactory religious stance. With respect to faith, the noted sociologist of religion Wade Clark Roof (1993) has called them *A Generation of Seekers* in a book title.

Many baby boomers pursued spirituality outside of the religious mainstream through alternative religions, Transcendental Meditation, Scientology, and many other New Age possibilities. When we consider what happened after 1980 to those who were formerly active in such movements, we may perhaps conclude that the future of organized religion in our nation should not evidence major changes for some time to come.

In the first stage of his major study of boomer religion, Roof (1993) employed a sample of 1,599 people in four states spanning the nation. A second phase utilized 536 people who were in the initial sample. He distinguished three groups: “loyalists,” “returnees,” and “drop-outs.” Loyalists, as the word implies, stayed within America’s customary religious mold; the returnees often deviated considerably in their personal experiments with faith before rejoining the religious establishment; the dropouts included those who either moved away from or were never affiliated with mainstream religious institutions. Table 6.6 offers some insight into the journey of those who were reared as Catholics, and as “mainline” and “conservative” Protestants.

Roof’s data indicate that conservative Protestants and Catholics—in general, the most orthodox religious bodies—were more successful in keeping their members as active religionists than were mainline Protestants. In addition, about twice as many of the mainline Protestants shifted to different faiths. These effects may be an expression of the power of conservative religious bodies. More mainline Protestants also became nonreligious than

TABLE 6.6. Religious Paths Taken by Baby Boomers Reared as Catholics, Mainline Protestants, and Conservative Protestants

Religious path taken	%
<u>Reared as Catholics</u>	
Loyalists (identify selves as Catholics)	33
Currently active as Catholics	50
Shifted to other faiths ^a	12
Currently religiously active	58
Initial dropouts	67
Returnees	25
Final dropouts	42
Inactive Catholics	31
<u>Reared as mainline Protestants</u>	
Loyalists (identify selves as mainline Protestants)	31
Currently active as mainline Protestants	39
Shifted to other faiths ^a	24
Currently religiously active	56
Initial dropouts	69
Returnees	24
Final dropouts	44
Inactive mainline Protestants	26
<u>Reared as conservative Protestants</u>	
Loyalists (identify selves as conservative Protestants)	39
Currently active as conservative Protestants	55
Shifted to other faiths ^a	13
Currently religiously active	64
Initial dropouts	61
Returnees	25
Final dropouts	36
Inactive conservative Protestants	25

Note. Adapted from Roof (1993, pp. 176–179). Copyright 1993 by HarperCollins Publishers. Reprinted by permission.

^aFor Catholics, this includes shifts to mainline and conservative Protestant groups plus a variety of undefined faiths. For mainline Protestants, this includes shifts to conservative Protestants plus other faiths; for conservative Protestants, this includes shifts to mainline bodies.

those in the other groups. Still, Roof (1993) found that before their possible return, over 60% of all the young adults with conventional religious backgrounds had dropped out of their churches. When they did come back, 13% moved toward fundamentalism, and 21% were denoted as conservative (technically, “evangelical moderates”). Anderson (2008) labels returnees “baby boomerangs,” and, like Roof, he stresses their role as seekers of spirituality. He further emphasizes the role of raising their own children in bringing the “boomerangs” back to established churches. One should not underestimate the significance of family life in connecting people to the mainstream religious organizations.

We see some possible contradictions when we look at attitudes toward churchgoing and actual weekly attendance among Roof’s subjects. With respect to the latter, as we move from liberal to conservative groups, the attendance percentages for men ranged from 31% to 51%; for women, the comparable figures were 30% to 80%. When asked, however, whether a person “can be a good Christian and not attend church,” the agreement percentages varied from 66% (conservative) to 94% (not conservative). Churchgoing became an issue of personal determination and choice. Roof (1993) described this as the “new voluntarism” (p. 110).

Exposure to the 1960s “revolution against the establishment” was quite compelling. For those minimally affected by this period, 56% dropped out of formal institutional religion. Among those for whom such influence was high, 84% left their churches. Still, in terms of belief in a deity, the baby boomers essentially matched the overall population, with 94–95% affirming this stance. An interesting subtle shift may be inferred from the finding that, as Roof (1993) put it, “these intense seekers prefer to think of themselves as ‘spiritual’ rather than as ‘religious’” (p. 79).

Perkins (1991) studied a subset of the baby boomers, called “yuppies” (“young, upwardly mobile, urban professionals”). On the average, though religious commitment conflicted with yuppie values, many yuppies identified with traditional faiths. In addition, a religious stance was positively associated with a sense of happiness. Greater insight into the religious perspectives and needs of the yuppies would have nicely supplemented Roof’s research.

Even though Roof’s study included some Jews, no data on Jews were provided. It is therefore not possible to form an opinion regarding “religious seeking” on the part of Roof’s Jewish respondents.

In allied work, Roof (1990) compared older and younger “boomers.” The younger group revealed a more conservative Christian stance, although it included fewer loyalists, fewer returnees, and more religious dropouts. Unfortunately, data were not presented for the three religious bodies studied, but one might infer that the conservative Christians benefited from this somewhat conflicted orientation.

Continuing his research, Roof (1999) in the mid-1990s administered a third round of questions to 409 of the 536 respondents who participated in the second stage. Now he identified five subcultures: “dogmatists,” “born-again believers,” “mainstream believers,” “metaphysical believers,” and “seekers and secularists.” The complexity of the religious scene for the baby boomers was evident, and even though such tendencies were probably always present among American religionists, they became most obvious in the boomer generation. Religion was extended well beyond immediate church experience to such issues as love, justice, the environment, and a host of similar concerns. The boomers now became active and involved in politics and government, and it is easy to perceive their influence today. Still, there are signs that the boomers’ search for spiritual meaning was troubled. They manifested strong inclinations to move on, as only 43% of returnees were still actively religious after 7 years. Of the 86% of strong believers in 1989, only one-third held such a position in 1996 (Johnson, 2001).

Using poll data, Waxman (1994) studied a sample of 801 Jewish baby boomers. Unfortunately, very few questions were employed, and it is difficult to compare Waxman's findings with those of Roof (1993). On the surface, this group of boomers seemed quite different from those studied by Roof. If we assume some correspondence between Roof's category of "loyalists" (Protestants and Catholics identifying with their traditional faith) and Waxman's "personal importance" distinction, Jewish identification among Waxman's subjects appeared greater than traditional Catholic or Protestant identification among Roof's Christians. From 31% to 39% of Roof's groups were classified as loyalists, whereas Waxman found that 85% of his sample regarded being Jewish as important to some degree. (Keep in mind that the comparison between Roof's and Waxman's groups can be challenged.)

Sometimes one hears the term "cultural Jew," which may be valid here. Christianity is rather strongly tied to religion, whereas Judaism often refers to both a faith and a culture, especially in the United States. One rarely if ever hears of "Christian Americans," but "Jewish Americans" is a common referent (Goldstein & Goldscheider, 1968). Though being Jewish was considered important, half of Waxman's baby boomers (49.8%) were not married to Jews; by contrast, almost 80% of an older comparison sample of 46- to 64-year-olds had Jewish spouses. This favors the "cultural Jew" argument, rather than one based on conformity to Jewish religious principles.

Neither the work of Perkins (1991) nor that of Waxman (1994) approaches the depth of Roof's (1993) effort, and we can easily ask for more. Interview data are excellent for the development of hypotheses that can be quantitatively assessed. We may perceive the struggles of individuals, but as poignant as they are, they point to subgroups that need further delineation and exploration. Studies of background motivational and experiential factors are largely lacking. Among Jews, distinctions among Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox affiliations need to be examined. Whether Jewish or Christian groups are studied, there are seekers, rejecters, and those who are simply apathetic about religion. There is much more to be learned about the life histories of such persons. To say that the baby boomers seek fundamental meanings about life and themselves from religion is simply not enough.

Religion and Generation X

Though the baby boomers represented a rather sharp break from their pre-World War II forebears, they largely aged back into a cultural quietude that accepted traditional values. Rarely, however, do people totally leave behind the hopes of their younger years; hence Roof (1993) and others stress boomers' desires for self-improvement, plus their continuing search for life's basic meanings. Their temporal followers—"Generation X" or, more popularly, "Gen X"—seem to be employing a similar adaptive process by putting forth both conservative and liberal feelers for a future that is not easy to define.

Overall, the Gallup Poll index of leading religious indicators shows a considerable decline from 1956 to 2004 (Lyons, 2005). Except for minor shifts since the late 1990s in attitudes toward the Bible and the existence of God, the boomers and Gen X look alike (Newport, 2006a, 2007b). More boomers than their Gen X successors see religion as very important (44% to 34%), and more boomers describe themselves as religious (35% to 27%), but the Gen X respondents appear comparable in their aspirations to the boomers when they were younger.

Additional detailed questioning is necessary, as potential disagreements keep surfacing in the polls. Beaudoin (1998) stresses that Gen X focuses on personal experience and feels

that this experience should be spiritually expressed. This generation is, however, described as challenging Christianity or more broadly institutionalized faith, according to The Barna Group (2007). This organization conducted a study of 16- to 29-year-olds. Eighty-four percent expressed some degree of negativism toward Christianity, with only 3% being favorable toward evangelicals. "Half of young churchgoers said they perceive Christianity to be judgmental, hypocritical and too political" (The Barna Group, 2007, p. 2). Whereas approximately 75% of boomers identified themselves as Christians, only about 60% of Gen X'ers do.

Miller and Miller (2000), in attempting to define Gen X religion, emphasize that it is not expressed in any simple manner. Basically, they recognize that a so-called generation includes people who evidence their faith in many different ways. Because of this, Flory (2000) moves to a higher level in order to characterize religionists in the Gen X age range. Like the boomers, Gen X'ers are viewed as a deeply spiritual generation searching for the fundamental meanings and purposes on which they feel their existence is premised. Although they are disinclined to accept the view that traditional religious avenues can satisfy their needs—Miller and Miller (2000) have described them as "bruised by their parents and disappointed by their society" (p. 10)—Gen X'ers do appeal to organized religion for structure and authority. This fits well with Flory's (2000) characterization of this group as rootless, yet one that seeks an authentic religious identity via a personal anchoring of the self in the community via their church connections. Though variety and diversity are endemic among Gen X'ers, they appear to avoid traditional religious orientations in favor of newer churches that employ current music and media to aid the search for personal spiritual experience. Much of this sounds similar to what the young boomers wanted in order to validate their own individuality away from community existence. In contrast, Generation X builds on a community base—but, rather than that of their elders, one that represents contemporary styles of living.

Basically, we are observing the foundations and effects of sociocultural change over the last 60 or so years. The psychology of religion must be placed in such a context in order to understand the plight of people in these times.

RELIGION IN LOVE, SEX, AND MARRIAGE

If anything defines a person as an adult, it is concern with love and marital commitment—topics that place the individual at the center of a matrix of biological, historical, sociocultural, and psychological forces. Alfred Adler (1935) termed love one of the three great tasks of life. The biology of love, translated into sex and procreation, has been analyzed in relation to evolution (Ackerman, 1994; Fisher, 1983). The historical, cultural, and psychological aspects of love and intimate relationships have also been widely discussed and researched (Brehm, 1992; Hunt, 1959).

Even though the modern world has seen a considerable liberalization of religion, there remains a fair degree of tension, ambivalence, and discomfort in the religious context with regard to love, sex, and marriage. Historically, much of this is associated with institutional religion's sexist treatment of women (O'Faolain & Martines, 1973; Ruether, 1975). Furthermore, in recent years homosexuality has also "come out of the closet" and must be understood in contemporary life. The world now openly confronts established faiths with many love- and sex-related problems that in earlier times were suppressed or ignored. In addition to the ones already noted, we may think immediately of premarital sex, and extramarital sex, and divorce—all of which involve religion.

Religion and Heterosexuality

History and Context

The relationship between religion and sexual behavior has a long and troubled history. (This is particularly true for homosexual behavior, which is treated in a later section; our present discussion is confined to heterosexuality.) Conflict, ambivalence, and outright insensitivity have characterized the way organized religion has often dealt with sexual needs and expressions. To borrow a term from one book title, religion and sexuality have often been “intimate enemies” (Bach & Wyden, 1969). Indeed, at best, they have often been poor bedfellows.

Historically, religion has always attempted to control sexuality (Burkert, 1996). The Judeo-Christian perspective, in part, reflects an earlier Greek view that placed pleasures of the mind above those of the body. This was sometimes equated with the notion that the body is corrupting, whereas the exercise of mind through reason reaches toward enlightenment. Early Christian ascetics often claimed that the body interferes with the attainment of a mystical union with the divine. In certain quarters, this translated into the association of the body with sexual activity (Bottomley, 1979). This kind of thinking was a step toward the justification of celibacy for those dedicating their lives to the church.

Another step in this process was to identify sexuality with women and to associate the two with evil, as in Tertullian’s reference to woman as “the Devil’s gateway” (O’Faolain & Martines, 1973). Although one can selectively view scripture as emphasizing the mandate to “be fruitful and multiply,” implying a positive and constructive purpose to sex, stress was often placed on the role of Eve in the fall of humanity, in order to generalize wrongdoing to all females. By the 3rd century A.D., elements of Manicheism filtered into Christianity (Mathews & Smith, 1923). This movement emphasized the conflict between good and evil, and even regarded marital sex negatively. Such views probably influenced Saint Augustine and other early church fathers to relegate sensuality, sexual relations, and women to a lower and more sinful realm (Ruether, 1972, 1974).

Contemporary Research on Premarital Sexual Behavior among Religious People

In regard to premarital sex among people in general and religious people in particular, the data are often challengeable. We do not know about excessive denial or admission of such experience. Gender may be a factor, with men trying to appear very experienced and women desirous of presenting images of chastity and purity. According to *The Janus Report on Sexual Behavior* (Janus & Janus, 1993), 67% of the married men and 46% of the married women who were surveyed had engaged in premarital sex. Janus and Janus also noted that the more religious people were, the less likely they were to be sexually active before marriage, or at least to admit it. Nevertheless, they reported figures of 52% for “very religious” men and 37% for such women. Obviously, these findings are far from the religious ideal of abstinence prior to marriage.

A large-sample study of approximately 2,000 Christians revealed the lowest rates of premarital sex among Pentecostals, Mormons, and Jehovah’s Witnesses (Beck, Cole, & Hammond, 1991). These groups were denoted “institutional sects,” as opposed to other conservative groups (e.g., Baptists). Since all of the mainline Protestant, Catholic, and conservative Protestant bodies included in the study held the same negative religious views of premarital involvement, the authors claimed that the lowest rates for institutional sects were a function of the “level of commitment and social integration” (p. 179) of young people in these groups.

Even though religious commitment reduces the probability of premarital sexual behavior, evidence of such activity has been repeatedly shown. Reynolds (1994) notes signs of a potentially serious error in such research—namely, a failure to identify and control for forced intercourse or rape. She suggests that 20–30% of premarital involvement by young people, particularly teenagers, may involve coercion. If this is true, and such instances are statistically removed from the data, religious effects should become much more strongly negative.

Though the rate of intercourse is lower among religiously active, single evangelical Christians than it is in the general population, some are sexually active, contrary to their faith. In a study by Wulf, Prentice, Hansum, Ferrar, and Spilka (1984), 59% of such individuals reported no such involvement, while 18% were active once a month or more. These data were gathered on 365 respondents, and the prediction of who was engaged in these behaviors proved to be fairly reliable. Older men and women who had previously been married and currently had a close friend of the opposite sex were likely to be sexually intimate. Though the relationships were not strong, high scores on Allport's Intrinsic religious motivation scale opposed sexual involvement, while high Extrinsic scores were positively related to sexual activity.

Studying a large GSS sample of never-married adults, Barkan (2006) found that religiosity supported involvement with one or a small number of premarital sexual partners. Low religiosity was strongly associated with having many partners. Otherwise, there seemed to be no evidence that being religious reduced premarital sexual involvement per se.

It has often been asked whether premarital sexuality has later repercussions. The most recent large-sample work on over 6,500 women indicates high marital dissolution rates for women who were premaritally involved with men other than their future husbands (Teachman, 2003). Teachman claims that "premarital sex and cohabitation have become part of the normal courtship pattern in the United States" (2003, p. 453).

Religion and Sexual Pleasure

Another issue that has been examined is the extent of sexual pleasure reported by religious people. Masters and Johnson (1970) claim that religion adversely affects sexual pleasure. Among the difficulties discussed, it is suggested that orgasm may be inhibited and sexual satisfaction diminished. These views have not been borne out by research. Indeed, reported sexual activity levels are higher for very religious people than for those who are irreligious. In addition, the frequency of such activity appears to have increased in the 3 years preceding the Janus and Janus (1993) study, and more so for those who were "very religious" than for their nonreligious counterparts. Tavriss and Sadd (1977) found no difference in frequency of orgasm between religious and nonreligious women. Mathews (1994) studied the sexuality of conservative, evangelical, submissive wives and found that "accountability to God for a wife's happiness and sexual satisfaction is part of exercising headship in the home" (p. 12). Fifty-seven percent of the men and 49% of the women in these marriages gave themselves a 10 or 10+ on a scale of sexual fulfillment. Religion thus appears to be no impediment to sexually gratifying relations.

Some social scientists are reluctant to accept the positive testimony of religious women. Suggestions have been made that they probably "don't know what they are missing," or are responding to researchers in a socially desirable way. No evidence to support these interpre-

tations has been forthcoming. Although Tavis and Sadd (1977) believed that such women may have lower sexual expectations and are less willing to believe widely purveyed popular fantasies about ecstatic sexual gratification, again no data backing such an assertion have been produced. In short, efforts to cast religion in repressive or suppressive roles relative to sexual expression have not gained research support.

Religion and Gender Traditions in Marriage

In classic Christianity, the man is the head of the household. One survey of evangelicals (both males and females) indicated that approximately 90% affirmed the Biblical injunction of male domination in the family, and that about 40% would deny women any positions of power in the church (Kosmin & Lachman, 1993). Tradition has it that women should be subject to male control, and the more orthodox a religious body is, the more such a doctrinal view prevails.

However, Carolyn Pevey's (1994) study of a fundamentalist Southern Baptist church shows that tenet or theory may be one thing, but practice may be another. Pevey found that wives were sometimes forced to submit, but when necessary, these religiously conservative women subverted masculine claims to authority. Usually, however, husband–wife relationships seemed to be mutually supportive and cooperative rather than combative (albeit within an authoritarian framework).

The employment of wives when spouses are members of a conservative religious body also raises conventional arguments about “woman's place” (see Research Box 6.2). Cultural reality and economic necessity commonly take precedence over tradition.

RESEARCH BOX 6.2. Wives' Employment Status and Marital Happiness of Religious Couples (Johnson, Eberly, Duke, & Sartain, 1988)

Mixed results have plagued research on marital satisfaction and the employment of wives. Theory has it that religiosity should correlate positively with the happiness of wives. Johnson and colleagues selected Mormon wives for study. Even though such women are members of a conservative religious group, they are as likely to work outside the home as members of any other denomination in the United States. Data were gathered for both husbands and wives on religiosity, education, age of children, and the full- or part-time nature of wifely employment.

Johnson et al. found that marital happiness and religious commitment went together for both husbands and wives. Wives who were employed part-time were, however, less happy than those holding full-time jobs. Among the husbands, the most satisfied were those with full-time-employed wives. They were followed by husbands of traditional homemaking, unemployed wives. Among the wives, traditional homemakers were most pleased with their situation, followed by the full-time-employed wives. The finding that both the part-time-employed wives and their husbands were least satisfied may be due to a number of factors. Part-time-working wives may be under stress by also remaining full-time homemakers. In addition, wives' part-time jobs may not provide enough income—another source of familial stress. In other words, the provider role may not be fully satisfied for both spouses.

Intermarriage and Divorce

The data are clear and consistent in showing that interfaith marriages have a much higher likelihood of ending in divorce than within-faith unions do (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Levinger, 1979; Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001). The problem is not only that intermarried spouses often have different backgrounds and expectations, but that they also may vary in degree of religiousness. When the “honeymoon is over,” and the spouses face the realities of married life, religious issues can take on a new importance. As noted earlier in this chapter, this frequently occurs after children are born and the new parents clash over needs for religious identification and education. One estimate suggests that religious differences are mitigated through conversion, which takes place in about 50% of marriages (McCutcheon, 1988).

The evidence suggests heightened levels of conflict in intermarriage. This is more likely to occur when there is a greater religious distance between the spouses (e.g., one is low in religiosity while the other is strongly attached to a religious group, or each spouse is firmly committed to his or her own faith). Interreligious distance appears to have deleterious effects upon the children of such unions. The latter are more likely to become involved with drugs and alcohol (Petts & Knoester, 2007). It should come as no surprise that divorce adversely affects the spiritual growth of children (Blomquist, 1985). Lawton and Bures (2001) have shown that the experience of parental divorce among those who intermarry commonly eventuates in religious switching on the part of their children.

Religion and Marital Adjustment

Dating precedes marriage, and singles are more willing to date than to marry someone outside of their religious group. Furthermore, the characteristics that are appealing in dating are often different from those desired in a marriage partner (Udry, 1971). The choice of a potential mate entails a shift to more stable, lasting behaviors that are more appropriate to creating a successful marriage and home life. This includes a heightened emphasis on religion.

As might be expected, Dudley and Kosinski (1990) found that the more similar husbands and wives are in religious behavior and attitudes, the greater their marital satisfaction. In particular, marital fidelity is enhanced by religion in a number of ways. Couples claim that their faith sanctifies their devotion to each other; joint religious activity enhances marital commitment, strengthens moral values, and improves their relationship to God and to each other (Dollahite & Lambert, 2007). In related work, religious couples described a variety of ways that God was involved in their marriage, all to the benefit of their union (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006).

When both spouses are religiously committed, they are also likely to be involved in a moral community. This helps explain many of the findings reported on religion and morality. In one study, marital happiness was positively correlated not only with agreement on religious matters, but also with the belief that love had continued to grow since the spouses were married. These findings parallel increasing satisfaction with both oneself and one's mate (Hunt & King, 1978). Extrinsic religion is also operative here, suggesting that faith performs a utilitarian function—one that is beneficial both to the marital union and to its members as individuals.

Evans, McIntosh, and Spilka (1986) found that spouses with equivalent religious orientations/motivations expressed greater marital satisfaction. Since this work was correlational,

those with high Intrinsic and Extrinsic religion scores either acquired mates with similar perspectives or increasingly grew to share the same religious outlook, thereby enhancing the success of their marriages along with their personal happiness. Regardless of the process, the outcome was beneficial.

There is more to personal faith than attitudes and public observance, both of which were concerns of the two studies just described. Recognizing the lack of attention to private devotional practices, Gruner (1985) looked at the frequency of prayer and Bible reading, and found that both were associated with marital adjustment. With respect to religious affiliation, the relationship between Bible reading and marital satisfaction was strongest for members of sects, somewhat less strong for evangelicals, and weakest for Catholics and members of liberal Protestant denominations. Of interest would be information on the degree to which members of such groups perceive prayer and Bible reading as pertinent to their marital state. Certainly, sects and evangelical bodies do emphasize Bible reading more than the other groups, but we know very little about the effects of private devotional practice on other aspects of an individual's life. An interesting possibility is that Bible reading may be more of a joint spousal activity in conservative than in liberal faiths. In sum, regardless of the measures used, religiosity and marital happiness go together (Filsinger & Wilson, 1984).

What about the other side of the coin—namely, those who describe themselves as having “no religion,” or who conceive of their religion as outside of established faiths? The data suggest what the studies above imply: Religious independents are more likely to be unmarried, separated, divorced, or remarried than those who are affiliated. In addition, they reveal lower levels of satisfaction, personal fulfillment, and social integration (Bock & Radelet, 1988).

The evidence is strong that marital adjustment and longevity are functions of the “sanctification of family relationships” (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003). This means that spouses who consider their marriage a sacred covenant are happier with their union and are more devoted to each other than are those who do not view their partnership in religious terms. Regarding a marriage as “made in heaven” is a powerful force in producing a happy family.

Religion, Marriage, and Family: Directions for a Summary

We have only sampled some of the main work on religion, marriage, and the family. An immense amount of additional theory and research may be found in this literature. Happily, some scholars have produced outstanding coordinating and summarizing papers (Mahoney et al., 2001; Weaver et al., 2002).

Religion and Homosexuality

The control and expression of sexual impulses have always been central issues for religion, not only in the West, but throughout the world. This holds for both heterosexuality and homosexuality. Historically, Western religion has been hostile toward homosexuality, citing scripture as the basis for its negative outlook. Many contemporary religious groups, especially liberal ones, have challenged the traditional Judeo-Christian stance. Among others (Boswell, 1988; Cohen, 1990), Daniel Helminiak (2000), a Catholic priest and a noted psychologist of religion, has examined in depth the Biblical bases for antipathy and fear of homosexuals. He

raises serious questions about the unfavorable scriptural heritage that has pervaded Western religious thought on this topic.

Placing homosexuality in a broader, anthropological light, Carlsson (1997) explains the great variation in the way homosexuals are regarded across cultures. He feels that one reason for this is the relative frequency of homosexuality. In societies where it is common, it seems to be treated in a positive manner; where it is rare, strong efforts to suppress it are present. Without question, the valuation of homosexuality is culturally defined. In one study of 76 societies, 49 did not treat homosexuality as negative, deviant, or abnormal (Farb, 1978). Furthermore, whether it is viewed as culturally normal or not, in many of these societies homosexuality is defined in supernatural and religious terms (Hoebel, 1966; Katchadourian, 1989).

The Judeo-Christian Tradition: An Extreme View

Pargament (1997) describes a harsh religious view advanced by one Christian critic, who avers that AIDS is God's punishment for homosexual activity. As for those innocents who contract AIDS, "they, too, must pay the price for the moral depravity of a society that tolerates such abominations" (quoted in Pargament, 1997, p. 326). Stances like this can be exceedingly dangerous. Being homosexual and part of an orthodox religious community can eventuate in such a degree of shame and fear that a person not only remains "in the closet," but may even deny being infected with AIDS, seriously jeopardizing life (Bieser, 1995).

Clerical Perspectives

A relatively early study of the attitudes of Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and Lutheran clergy toward homosexuality observed the expected relationship between orthodoxy and rejection of homosexuals (Wagenaar & Bartos, 1977). This position also related to what the researchers termed "a unidimensional approach to life" (p. 123). This refers to a polarized view of many issues in terms of simple dichotomies (good–evil, acceptance–rejection, etc.), which are premised on a fundamentalist literal reading of the Bible. A more recent research effort examined the attitudes of 1,100 pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and confirmed the earlier work (Taylor, 2000). Again, Biblical literalism was the justification. Attempting to define the religion of these clerics further, Taylor found that only the Quest religious orientation appeared relevant: High Quest scores correlated positively with favorable attitudes toward gays and lesbians.

Hochstein (1986) examined the stance of pastoral counselors, overwhelmingly clergy, in regard to lesbian and gay clients. Though no distinction was made with regard to mental health between homosexuals and heterosexuals, 30% of the counselors scored high on a measure of homophobia. The main finding was that sex stereotyping was present. Interestingly, heterosexual males were seen as less masculine than heterosexual females, gays, or lesbians. Unfortunately, Hochstein provided no data that would distinguish the outlooks of male and female counselors.

The problem of homophobia in Western religion is not only individual but institutional. Even relatively liberal churches officially maintain the biases of their more conservative peers. The last decade has, however, witnessed counter responses by pastors and backtracking by church officials. In 2001, the United Methodist Church "ruled that practicing gays cannot be in the ministry" (Culver, 2001, p. 11A). By 2005, gay and lesbian ministers were

being approved by Methodist ruling bodies (Los Angeles Times, 2003). Apparently, Lutheran churches now accept lesbian and gay pastors if they remain celibate (*The Denver Post*, 2001). One recent overview of 47 Christian churches reveals a broad range of positions that may or may not be rigidly adhered to in practice (Robinson, 2008). Homophobia may remain official doctrine, but it is clearly in retreat.

The Issue of Conversion Therapy

Regardless of the reasons for homosexuality, many conservative religionists believe in what has come to be known as “conversion therapy” (Haldeman, 1991, 1994, 1996). The intention is to convert homosexuals into heterosexuals (celibacy seems acceptable to the proponents of this therapy). In orthodox circles the notion of therapy implies that homosexuality is at best, an illness. Neither the American Psychiatric Association nor the American Psychological Association holds such a view.

In an impressive effort to get past isolated anecdotal statements regarding the effectiveness of conversion therapy, Shidlo and Schroeder (2002), using rigorous selection criteria, were able to interview 202 recipients of conversion methods administered by a total of 308 therapists. The majority (66%) were licensed mental health practitioners, and 14% of these were explicitly identified with a particular religion. Of the unlicensed therapists, 55% were religious counselors. Two-thirds of the clients were religious. Eighty-seven percent of the respondents regarded their therapy as a failure; only 13% felt that it was successful to some degree. Approximately half of the “successes” experienced relapses or participated in alternative practices that implied continuing adjustment difficulties. There was also evidence that such therapy could eventuate in considerable psychological harm.

The landmark research of Shidlo and Schroeder is much more complex than this brief summary indicates. It spanned some 5 years, and provides very little support for those who consider conversion or reparative therapy a productive alternative to homosexuality. Strong emotional biases cloud any serious attempts to evaluate all of the issues involved in changing homosexual behavior (Winfield, 2002). Shidlo and Schroeder offer the kind of solid scholarship that this troubled realm needs. In previous work, Haldeman (1991, 1994) simply concluded that there is no evidence that conversion therapy changes sexual orientation.

The Link between Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Antihomosexual Sentiment

The antipathy of fundamentalists and other religious conservatives toward gays and lesbians has been well documented (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Hunsberger, 1996). Even though scripture serves as its justification, one may ask whether an antihomosexual stance is simply another form of prejudice. Laythe, Finkel, and Kirkpatrick (2001) looked at this question with respect to personality/attitude characteristics that might foster bias. Distinguishing religious fundamentalism (RF) from right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), which is also part of fundamentalist ideology, they observed that even though RWA and RF were positively correlated, RF was associated with antihomosexual feelings, but not with racism when RWA was statistically controlled for. RWA was tied positively to both forms of prejudice. After obtaining some contradictory findings in two additional studies, these researchers concluded that RF is at best weakly related to antihomosexual sentiment. The culprit really seems to be RWA.

Hunsberger (1996) extended the relationship among RF, religious RWA, and antihomosexual sentiment to Hindus, Muslims, and Jews. Even though the non-Christian samples

tended to be small, the correlations showed that the same association between RF and anti-homosexual sentiment was found across all of the groups. Even when we restrict ourselves to the large Christian samples in four different studies, the connection is clear, as Table 6.7 demonstrates.

Even though there is variation among the coefficients in the table, these data show that RWA is indeed the problem, as four of the five partial correlations become nonsignificant when RWA is removed from the RF–RWA relationships. Some coefficients are only of borderline significance. Still, when RF is removed, all of the coefficients are statistically significant, further indicating that the RWA component causes the difficulty.

The complexity of this realm prompted Tsang and Rowatt (2007) to look more closely at questions this research has raised. Examining different religious orientations, they observed that, contrary to expectations, Intrinsic faith and an Extrinsic perspective were both tied fairly strongly to negative attitudes toward gays and lesbians. Even with controls, the Intrinsic influence persisted. RWA remains in the picture as above, but we must ask: Why the Intrinsic involvement? In such work, one can always point to the nature of the sample or the measures employed. We know that measures of orthodoxy relate highly to Intrinsic faith, and some research implies that this includes a “narrow orthodoxy” that supports bigotry (McIntosh & Spilka, 1990). Such orthodoxy may be a factor here. More research is called for.

There is a more basic ethical question—namely, whether sexual decisions are up to individuals as long as they are within the bounds of law. The fact that laws against homosexual activity are still on the books in some states complicates this issue, as we discuss in Chapter 12.

Finally, we would be remiss if we did not mention an issue of considerable current significance to the American religious community—namely, gay marriage. A 2007 survey by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that this is opposed by 55% of Americans. Seventy-three percent of those with strong religious commitments take a negative stance toward such unions. The opposition reaches 81% among evangelicals. When we examine those unaffiliated with churches, 60% approve of gay marriage. There is certainly a lot we do not know about the reasons for these feelings.

TABLE 6.7. Zero-Order Correlations and First-Order Partial Correlations among Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA), Religious Fundamentalism (RF), and Antihomosexual Sentiment (AHS) in Four Samples of Christians

	Altemeyer & Hunsberger (1992)	Laythe et al. (2001)		Wylie & Forest (1992)
		Study 1	Study 2	
Initial (zero-order) correlations				
RF–RWA	.68	.72	.68	.75
RF–AHS	.42	.48	.41	.56
RWA–AHS	.65	.52	.64	.72
Partial correlations				
RF–AHS/RWA	.04	.18	–.05	.04
RWA–AHS/RF	.54	.28	.52	.54

Note. The control variables are RWA and RF. The sample sizes are of such a magnitude to make virtually all of the zero-order and partial correlations statistically significant. They are: Altemeyer & Hunsberger, *n* = 432; Laythe et al., *n* = 140; Wylie & Forest, *n* = 75.

Alternative Religious Organizations and Approaches for Homosexuals

The rejection homosexuals encounter in mainline churches often causes them to respond in kind to those who spurn them. A common development is for lesbians, gays, and bisexuals to search for accepting religious groups or to establish their own churches and religious/spiritual organizations. A representative group is Dignity, an association for Catholic gays and lesbians (Wagner, Serafini, Rabkin, Remien, & Williams, 1994). Sometimes these bodies take unusual forms. Stark and Bainbridge (1985) describe a militant lesbian commune that organized as Wiccans, peaceful practitioners of contemporary witchcraft who pray to a "Great Goddess." One can view such actions as a struggle to obtain a sense of power.

Helminiak (1995) speaks of a nontheist spirituality, particularly among gays with HIV. He also notes that there are ministers who go beyond the traditional limits of their religious bodies to care for the spiritual needs of gay men and lesbians. Marshall (1996) details the problems of women who are in the process of developing lesbian identities. She specifies procedures and other considerations that pastoral caregivers can employ in their work with such women.

Since HIV/AIDS is a major problem among homosexuals, it will come as no surprise that those suffering from this disease complex search for religious meanings to deal with their dilemma. One creative interview study revealed four major approaches involving religion (Jacobson, Luckhaupt, Delaney, & Tsevat, 2006). These are detailed in Table 6.8.

Effect of Religion-Based Hostility on Homosexuals

There is no reason to believe that the religious needs and desires of homosexuals are any different from those of heterosexuals (Goodwill, 2000; Haldeman, 1996; Lynch, 1996). The hostility of traditional religionists can therefore have serious deleterious effects on lesbians and gay men (Clark, Brown, & Hochstein, 1989; Grant & Epp, 1998; Haldeman, 1996; Lynch, 1996). But what are these effects? Quite often, homosexuals reject traditional religion (Clark et al., 1989; Goodwill, 2000). One study suggested that up to 50% of Catholic gays may leave the church. This is commonly associated with confused and contradictory images of God, as well as with negative self-concepts (Marcellino, 1996). The latter tendency may be one

TABLE 6.8. Religion-Related Meaning Patterns among Patients with HIV/AIDS

Group	Meaning pattern
1. Deferring believers	Deference to a God who will make the decisions.
2. Collaborative believers	Belief that God and the patients will work together.
3. Spiritual/religious seekers	Unsuccessful search for spiritual/religious meanings that will help them cope.
4. Self-directed believers	Belief that the patients must find their own spirituality to deal with their problem.

Note. Deferring, collaborative, and self-directed believers relate to the coping styles of Pargament (1988).

adverse effect of damaged identity development (Grant & Epp, 1998). Homophobia can also be internalized as part of a pattern of self-hatred (Wagner et al., 1994).

Influence of Religious Orientation in Heterosexuals' Views of Homosexuals

The influence of religious motivation or orientation in heterosexuals' views of homosexuals has also been studied (Batson, Floyd, Meyer, & Winner, 1999; Fulton, Gorsuch, & Maynard, 1999). The results have been confusing.

Batson et al. (1999) undertook an experiment in which heterosexual subjects could monetarily help a same-sex peer who disclosed homosexual inclinations or gave no such information. In the case of the former, the gay respondent indicated that the money donated would go either to a cause that promoted homosexuality or to one that did not. Heterosexuals with an Intrinsic orientation gave less to the gay discloser, regardless of where the money would go. This was seen as reflecting a bias against homosexuality. In order to resolve some of these difficulties with religious orientation, let us examine Research Box 6.3, which presents the work of Fulton et al. (1999).

That this is a troubled topic goes without saying. One can argue that social change in recent years has entered this realm, and that prejudice against alternative sexual styles is clearly under attack. The psychology of religion needs a continuing research program to understand what is taking place both sociologically and psychologically.

RESEARCH BOX 6.3. Religious Orientation, Antihomosexual Sentiment, and Fundamentalism among Christians (Fulton, Gorsuch, & Maynard, 1999)

This study attempted a systematic evaluation of the role of the major forms of religious motivation in fostering antihomosexual sentiment. Measures of Intrinsic (personal) and Extrinsic (social) religious orientation plus their total, as well as scales assessing a Quest orientation and Fundamentalism, were employed. In addition, indices of antihomosexual sentiment and prejudice against African Americans and other groups were used. A measure of social distance was also administered to evaluate attitudes toward practicing and celibate Christian and non-Christian homosexuals. Because Intrinsic faith has been confounded with religious orthodoxy, the Fundamentalism scores were partialled out to obtain a purer measure of Intrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic faith was associated with rejection of prejudice against blacks and antihomosexual sentiment. Even though homosexuals were not the object of Intrinsic bias, homosexual behavior was still regarded as a moral problem. Extrinsic motives correlated positively with antiblack and antigay indices. There were few significant correlations with the Quest scale; where present, these were weaker than, but similar to, those of Intrinsic religion with attitudes toward homosexuality. The Fundamentalism scale was independent of antiblack measures, but those with high Fundamentalism scores were strongly negative toward homosexuals. Distinctions were not made between active and celibate homosexuals.

Clearly, different religious motivations need evaluation when feelings about homosexuality are studied. The authors concluded that "not all negative sentiment toward homosexuals by Christians should be interpreted as prejudice, while not all committed Christians are bound to express negative sentiment toward homosexuals" (p. 21).

RELIGION, WORK, AND OCCUPATION

Achievement Motivation and the Desire to Succeed

Among the central features of adult life to which religion is relevant are work and occupation. Despite a long history of religious pronouncements in this realm, surprisingly little research and few theories have been produced.

The Protestant Work Ethic

Waste of time is thus the first and deadliest of sins. . . . Loss of time through sociability, idle talk, luxury, even more sleep than is necessary for health . . . is worthy of absolute moral condemnation. . . . it is at the expense of one's daily work. (Weber, 1904/1930, pp. 157–158)

Although this Calvinist theme on the value of work and labor may seem a bit extreme by today's standards, the notion is well embedded in Western civilization. Labor and good works are regarded as inseparable. Historically, they have also been considered indispensable to personal salvation and success, as well as to the rise of the capitalist economic order (Rotenberg, 1978; Tawney, 1926).

Collectively, all of the characteristics cited above constitute what has become known as the "Protestant ethic" or, more specifically, the "Protestant work ethic" (hereafter abbreviated as PWE) (Furnham, 1990). Mueller (1978) has suggested a Catholic ethic that values "a steady state economy and society . . . cooperation, security, and authority" (p. 143), and hence support for the status quo. This may in part explain the relatively low achievement of Catholics in North America (Riccio, 1979; Stark, 1998), although this condition has been changing over the past 50 years (Porterfield, 2001; Roof & McKinney, 1987). A precursor to this change was offered by Greeley (1963), who found that Catholics and Protestants had similar economic aspirations.

Achievement Motivation and Occupational Success in Different Religious Groups

Underlying work and labor, in the perspective of the PWE, is the motivation to achieve. This has three components: activism, individualism, and a futuristic orientation (Riccio, 1979). A strong institutionally centered faith such as Catholicism is theorized to counter activism and individualism. In contrast, the history of Protestantism suggests the opposite, with the PWE spurring capitalism and personal strivings in all areas (Rosen, 1950; Tawney, 1926).

Judaism has no source of central control, and certainly no direct PWE influence. Even though local religious enforcement through Jewish families might have been stronger in the past than it is today, formal Talmudic learning has always stressed debate and argument, with the potential of new discovery. The scholar has thus been highly regarded since ancient times. Discrimination against Jews has also fostered action to escape the restrictions of prejudice, and secular intellectual achievement has increasingly paralleled and recently overtaken religious knowledge in importance.

The need for freedom from bigotry and oppression stimulated Jewish immigration from Europe to North America. The United States in particular offered many opportunities, including education. Jews often gravitated toward security-enhancing professions such as medicine and law (Gorelick, 1981). New chances to succeed in business were rapidly adopted. Jewish

families now saw learning and higher education as avenues to honor and economic success, and strongly inculcated achievement values in their children (McClelland, 1961).

Training children in the home for later independence is a positive correlate of achievement motivation, and Rosen (1950) has shown earlier independence training among Protestants and Jews than among Catholics. He also found that independence training and achievement motivation go together, further supporting the underpinnings of the PWE. This is also realized in the vocational aspirations of Jewish and Protestant mothers for their children. The occupational goals selected by both groups have tended to be higher than those chosen by Catholics. In other words, until the late 20th century, Catholic mothers were more satisfied with lower-status occupations that offered stability and job security for their children than were their Jewish and Protestant counterparts (McClelland, 1961).

Lenski (1961) and Mayer and Sharp (1962) took the next step and compared religious groups in terms of socioeconomic status, using largely measures of income, self-employment, occupational positions, and education. The patterns they observed were in harmony with the findings of Rosen (1950): Jews and Protestants exceeded Roman Catholics in all of these indicators. Bronson and Meadow (1968) reported a similar finding when Catholic and Protestant Mexican Americans were studied; the latter also revealed higher achievement needs than the former. A review of such studies by Riccio (1979) showed that the majority of American adults at that time supported the PWE; however, its acceptance was higher among Protestants and Jews than among Catholics.

Changes over Time in Achievement Motivation?

Considering the many changes that have occurred in North American society in the last several decades, there is a need for further comparative testing of religious groups. Riccio also concluded that the situation even in 1979 was far more complex than a surface perusal of this research would suggest. He felt that "these studies were plagued by serious conceptual and methodological deficiencies" (p. 226). Though this research needs updating, Blackwood (1979) found a sharp decline in favorable attitudes toward the PWE between 1958 and 1971. This may have caused religious group differences to begin disappearing. Such findings could, in part, reflect the disruption and protest that prevailed in the Vietnam era (the 1960s and early 1970s). By the 1980s, a conservative calm had returned. In a more recent study, Wuthnow (1993) observed that hours spent working had increased while leisure time had decreased.

Furnham (1990) has examined the issue of change over time in the PWE, and noted that conflicting arguments and data exist: Different studies contend that the PWE hasn't really changed, has actually weakened, or in some instances has strengthened in recent years. Problems of when, where, and how change has been measured cloud the picture. At this time, there are no definitive answers.

When Is Work Considered a "Calling"?

A basic empirical question regarding the relationship of religion to work has been asked by Davidson and Caddell (1994). One assumption of the PWE is that work is not simply a career, but possesses religious significance and is therefore a "calling." Studying 1,869 respondents from 31 Catholic and Protestant congregations, these scholars found that about 15% of their sample did consider work a "calling." Secular cost and benefit factors dominated how respondents viewed their own labor and occupation. Davidson and Caddell concluded that inter-

preting work religiously is most likely to occur when people are intrinsically committed. As might be expected, such a perspective infuses all aspects of life with religious and spiritual significance, including work.

The Phenomenon of Jewish Achievement

As noted previously, Jews found that many new opportunities were open to them when they left Europe and came to North America. Again, their heritage had nothing to do with the PWE in the “old country.” Achievement for most Jews meant the gaining of religious knowledge and then occupational success. In discussing the small Jewish communities of Eastern Europe, Zborowski and Herzog (1952) noted that “A Jewish community without a center of learning is unthinkable” (p. 71). This tendency translated well to the North American milieu. A Jewish subculture now developed that adapted Old World values regarding knowledge and education to the New World environment. If anything, the greater chances for advancement strongly reinforced family pressures to instill an achievement orientation in children (Greenberg, 1960). The result is well stated by Stark (1998): “The Jews rapidly became the most highly educated group in North America . . . and have the highest average family income of any racial, religious or ethnic group” (p. 298). Stark further claims that male Jews are overrepresented in the professions and among managers and proprietors, and underrepresented in blue-collar occupations. This message, along with information on the economic achievement of Jews and other religious groups, has likewise been provided by Lehrer (2004) in a key paper.

Concurrently, a disproportionately high number of Jews have come to the forefront of North American society. For example, a study of the 1974–1975 edition of *Who's Who in America* revealed that Jews had a rate of inclusion two and a half times higher than expected for the overall population (Silberman, 1985). More recent work on the 1992–1993 edition of *Who's Who* indicates that this incidence increased for Jews to over four times their numbers in the United States. Between 1930 and 1992, the percentage of Jews in *Who's Who* increased over 900% (Davidson, Pyle, & Reyes, 1995). Study after study further places Jews among the intellectual elite at 4 to 10 or more times their percentage in the U.S. population, the latter being less than 3% (Silberman, 1985). Similarly, among Nobel laureates, Jewish percentages have been for some time in the 30–40% range (Levitan, 1960). A strong attraction of Jews toward the sciences has been observed among applicants for the Westinghouse Science Talent Search (Datta, 1967), and Stark (1963) also noted that the percentage of Jews in arts and sciences graduate programs was three times greater than their presence in the general population.

Explaining the continuing level of Jewish achievement in a number of areas requires more than the bare-bones theory presented above. A number of theoretical possibilities have been advanced (Stark, 1998). Readers are referred to the theory and citations provided by Cochran, Hardy, and Harpending (2005), which are discussed in Chapter 3.

Integrating Religion and Work

Religion and Vocational Choice

Koltko (1993) has proposed a theory about the influence of religious values on vocational choice. This may seem obvious when one decides to enter the ministry or a religion-related

profession; however, the more basic question is whether religious values may affect personal interests and influence occupational or professional selection. Koltko sees four dimensions of religion as crucial in this process. These are belief structures (theology); the history of the religious group studied; its social structure and socialization (religious practices, organization); and lifespan milestones (standardized practices relative to life events).

Unfortunately, these rather interesting directions for research do not appear to have been taken up by psychologists of religion. Wuthnow (1994) points out that we really know very little about how people in the United States integrate religious beliefs with economic motivations. His impressive survey reveals that even though religion's role in U.S. economic life is muted, it exerts a subtle pressure as a background variable. For example, Calvinistic/Puritan ideas counsel morality in business dealings. Likewise, appeals to thrift and economic advantage probably find responsive minds when purveyed in advertisements by banks, investment firms, stock brokers, insurance agencies, and other financial "movers and shakers."

When asked directly about the role of religion in choosing a job, about 22% of Wuthnow's (1994) sample felt that their faith might have been operative in their decision. A comparison of churchgoers with the total labor force on a wide variety of characteristics revealed none that really distinguished these two groups. With regard to their sense of personal worth, the former valued their relation to God much more than was found in the overall labor force. Slight differences showed churchgoers favoring familial, social, moral, and community values over personal pleasure and gain. These tendencies are in line with research revealing that Intrinsic/committed leanings are associated positively with social, altruistic, and religious values. As Wuthnow (1994) theorized, those who subscribe to a utilitarian/Extrinsic faith orientation are more concerned with status, materialism, achievement, income, and security (see also Spilka, 1977). The classical Calvinistic view that hard labor is pleasing to God still prevails. Wuthnow (1994) claimed that 53% of the total work force and 68% of weekly churchgoers affirmed this view.

Given the foregoing, one might reasonably ask about ties between religiosity and job satisfaction. Validating earlier research, Wuthnow found that religiosity was correlated positively with job satisfaction. He has also suggested that religious beliefs and activities might reduce job stress. His data as a whole imply that faith endows work with meaning, and that it constructively helps integrate work into one's life.

Religion and Ethics in the Workplace

Continuing his examination of the potential influence of religion in work settings, Wuthnow (1994) examined the possible role of ethics and found a number of factors related to faith commitments. In defining what work ethics entail, weekly churchgoers were more likely than the work force in general to stress honesty and fairness. There was also a tendency to see such concerns in a more absolutist than relativistic manner. Regarding major work decisions, moral absolutism was again present, along with a theistically premised moralism and altruism. These inclinations countered an individualistic/opportunistic utilitarianism. In other words, Wuthnow's respondents felt that personal desires and benefits should give way to religious and humanitarian considerations. They also felt that moral concerns should take precedence over personal ones; hence those who subscribed to absolutist moral and theistic perspectives were likely to adhere to ethical rules and regulations in the workplace. These positions were held most strongly by those affiliated with religious fellowship groups, again revealing the behind-the-scenes role of religious involvements.

In summary, even though Wuthnow's (1994) work is generally in line with Koltko's (1993) recommendations, data on the specifics of the four dimensions identified by Koltko are still lacking.

Social Change and New Considerations

The 20th century witnessed almost unbelievable events and developments in all aspects of life, and religion did not escape these changes. In order to assess contemporary religious and spiritual views in relation to work, the impressive studies of Roof (1993) and Wuthnow (1993, 1994) may be considered models that require follow-up. Similar work detailing the beliefs of scientists is again necessary. We must keep in mind that beliefs in God and an afterlife can take many forms, so simplistic assumptions and generalizations about what intelligent and intellectually sophisticated people believe cannot be made lightly.

Much has been made of the importance of socioeconomic status for understanding how vocation relates to religion (Roberts, 1984). Findings from the 1980s and later place Episcopalians, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Jews at the top, and Baptists, other Protestants, and sectarian groups at the bottom. Catholics have slowly been moving up the economic ladder (Porterfield, 2001; Roberts, 1984; Roof & McKinney, 1987).

As noted earlier, Koltko's (1993) interesting theory has not been very thoroughly investigated to date. We have largely noted what might be termed broad social-structural variables, but possible psychological ties between vocation and religion have yet to be studied.

OVERVIEW

The complexity of adult religion has barely been touched upon in this chapter. A volume alone could be written on the nature of prayer. One by Brown (1994) currently leads the field, but research and writing in this area have increased considerably in recent years. The work and writings of Hood on religious experience clearly dominate the psychology of religion, but, again, we cannot give his research its due in this chapter. Happily, other chapters handle this material properly (see Chapters 8 and 10).

Change has also been endemic in the area of sexual and family behavior during the second half of the 20th century. This is obviously continuing into the 21st century. Understanding adult faith will continue to be a fascinating venture for a long time to come.

Chapter 7

Religion, Aging, and Death

All diseases run into one, old age.

The older you get, the older you want to get.

Youth is a blunder, manhood a struggle, old age a regret.

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

It is impossible to experience one's death objectively, and still carry a tune.

Achieving immortality is surprisingly simple. . . . To reach human immortality we must follow Rule No. 1 of anti-aging medicine: *Don't die.*¹

In 1929, the world-famous anthropologist Ruth Underhill interviewed a 92-year-old Papago woman who put a number of life's truths together in her statement: "It's not good to be old; it's not beautiful. When you come again, I will not be here" (quoted in Underhill, 1936, p. 64). This may be the basic story of the last stage of our lives, but one's faith has much to say about how this time is lived and what it may mean for all of us. The significance of death in all theologies cannot be overestimated. This is a worldwide religious concern (Reynolds & Waugh, 1977).

SOME BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

The concern of religious institutions for the elderly, and the role faith plays in the lives of older people, are both likely to grow with the passing years. Life expectancy is continually increasing. In 1900, at birth the average American could expect to live 47.3 years. Data released in 2006 indicated that in 2004 life expectancy reached 77.8 years; an estimate for 2005 suggested 78.3 years (National Center for Health Statistics, 2006). This trend will prob-

¹These quotations come, respectively, from the following sources: Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted in DizzyBoy.com (n.d.); Benjamin Disraeli, quoted in DizzyBoy.com (n.d.); I Corinthians 15:55; Woody Allen, quoted in Peter (1977, p. 134); and McFatters (2002, p. 1W).

ably continue, and along with it an expanding elderly population whose voices will surely be heard in religious circles.

When a person is referred to as “old,” a number of largely undesirable stereotypes are imagined. Chief among these are physical and mental infirmities, as well as reduced capabilities in virtually all areas of life. In general, the rates of such disorders do increase, but we should not lose sight of the tremendous variability one finds among older persons. Many can surpass their younger associates in a wide variety of activities, and their long years of experience are a valuable commodity. Cultural sensitivity has motivated the euphemism “senior” as a popular way of minimizing the problems associated with advanced age. Still, negative conceptions too often dominate our thinking.

Research on religion and aging overwhelmingly focuses on what religion does for the elderly, and not as much on how the latter may contribute to their church and the well-being of themselves and others. This is also an area that has not received as much research attention as has been devoted to the issues of childhood, adolescence, and middle adulthood. Discussion is commonly based upon expectations, for the necessary data are absent. Since we have not defined when old age begins, workers in this domain simply study whoever is available, with a nod to such starting ages as 50 or 65. The basic question these considerations bring to the fore is this: What do we really know about the religion of older people?

THE FAITH OF THE ELDERLY

A recent Gallup Poll (Newport, 2006c) reveals that religion steadily increases in importance with age. Whereas 47% of 19- to 29-year-olds claim that religion is very important in their lives, 72% of those over age 65 feel similarly. Within the latter group, 78% of women and 63% of men take this position. Table 7.1, using data collected from 1972 to 2006 by the General Social Survey (GSS, 2007) of the University of California, shows the importance of various aspects of religion to Americans age 66 and over; comparing this table with Table 6.1 in Chapter 6 reveals the increasing importance of religion across the age spectrum.

If we take some other data at face value, some doubt enters the picture. One Gallup Poll examined church attendance and found that 67% of 18- to 29-year-olds claimed they

TABLE 7.1. Some Religious Beliefs and Practices among Americans Age 66 or More

Variable	%
Church/synagogue membership	78
Pray once a day or more	73
Belief in God is very important (yes)	65
Belief in miracles (yes) definitely	54
Belief in life after death (yes) definitely	64
Belief in the Devil (yes) definitely	54
Belief in heaven (yes) definitely	73
Belief in hell (yes) definitely	56

Note. These data cover the period 1972–2006 and were collected by the General Social Survey (GSS, 2007).

TABLE 7.2. Responses of Elderly Individuals to Selected Religious Questions

Question	Definitely true (%)	Definitely untrue (%)
My faith involves all of my life.	46.5–53.3	3.1–13.3
Nothing is as important to me as serving God the best I know how.	36.0–64.3	2.2–7.1
My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life.	33.7–57.1	0.0–12.6
My religious faith is the most important influence in my life.	44.2–54.7	0.0–10.5
One should seek God’s guidance when making every important decision.	50.0–65.6	0.0–4.2

Note. Only the extreme item responses are presented here. From Koenig, Smiley, and Gonzales (1988, p. 4). Copyright 1988 by Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

had gone to services within the preceding week. The rate for those age 65–74 was only 48%, and that for persons 75 and older was 54%. Since no information was available on the health status of the older people, we might reasonably hypothesize that the lower numbers could reflect physical problems (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999). We obviously need to know more about relationships between age and religious practices.

One should not overlook the fact that in their youth the elderly lived in an American culture in which religion was more prominent than it is today. Benson’s (1988b) study of 5,000 Protestants supports this inference. When asked about the role of church and faith in their early life, those over 70 accorded them greater significance than younger adults did. The over-70 respondents also evidenced a higher level of congregational and denominational loyalty, and what Benson termed “maturity of faith.”

In another study, Koenig, Smiley, and Gonzales (1988) questioned four groups of geriatric patients and senior center participants. Table 7.2 offers the percentage ranges of selected responses for these four samples combined.

These data illustrate both the relative strength of religion and the variability of research findings with different elderly samples. Koenig, Smiley, and Gonzales (1988) also found that, possibly because of increasing infirmity, private religious activities such as prayer and reading religious material seemed to be of greater importance during old age than was true for those under 65.

THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN LATE LIFE

Regardless of age, all of us want to feel secure and good about ourselves. These needs may be strongest among elderly individuals, for this is their time of greatest strain and probably social isolation. Physical and mental health problems are most likely to occur among the old, and these are frequently compounded by the loss of relationships as family members and friends die. Among aged persons, religion often counters these realities by offering meaning and enhancing their sense of control and esteem.

Meaning and Religion

A noted psychologist of religion who was also theologically trained, Walter Houston Clark, stated clearly and simply that “religion more than any other human function satisfies the need for meaning in life” (Clark, 1958, p. 419). Aldridge (2000) suggests that the search for meaning takes us to a different, probably higher level of understanding that calls upon an innate human capacity. He further claims that this is an essential aspect of spiritual development.

Recognizing the involved nature of the problem of meaning, Batson and his colleagues (Batson & Ventis, 1982; Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993) emphasized how people approach their religion. They formulated the notion of a Quest orientation, in which cognition serves as a “way of being religious” that focuses on “complexity, doubt, and tentativeness” (Batson & Ventis, 1982, p. 149). In the course of developing this approach, Batson’s group constructed a 12-item scale that assesses (1) “readiness to face existential questions without reducing their complexity,” (2) “self-criticism and perception of religious doubt as positive,” and (3) “openness to change” (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991a, p. 436). This is a rather sophisticated set of concepts for understanding and measuring faith.

Futerman, Dillon, Garand, and Haugh (1999) saw the potential of associating religion as Quest with elderly persons’ search for meaning in their lives. This work is described in Research Box 7.1.

Krause (2003) examined the relationship between religious meaning and subjective well-being in a national sample of older persons. Participants had to be at least 66 years old, and their average age was 74.4 years. There were 1,247 people in this sample, half of whom

RESEARCH BOX 7.1. Religion as a Quest and the Search for Meaning in Later Life (Futerman, Dillon, Garand, & Haugh, 1999)

In this study, 342 elderly people with an average age of 72.3 years were administered Batson and colleagues’ Quest Scale. Sixty-two percent of the sample were female, 48% were married, and 36% were widowed. Though 47% of the sample were Catholics, a broad range of Protestant denominations was represented. Two percent of the respondents were non-Christian. In addition to quantitative statistical analyses, qualitative information was gathered from interviews.

In contrast to the three scale dimensions defined by Batson and Schoenrade (1991), a factor analysis revealed primarily two factors. These stressed “questioning of religious meanings” and “religious doubt and willingness to change religious beliefs” (Futerman et al., 1999, p. 161). The interviews supported these themes. Questions were raised about Batson and Schoenrade’s inference of the independence of Quest from the better-known Means (Extrinsic) and End (Intrinsic) forms of religiousness. These results indicate that religion among the elderly is too complex to be easily categorized.

There are two other lessons in this work, which must lead to additional research. First, we need to ask whether the difference between this study and those of Batson and colleagues is a function of the nature of the sample. The one used by Futerman et al. differs from the samples used by Batson’s group. Second, it warns us to check on the measures we employ, no matter how popular they are or how often they have been used previously.

were white and half black. All were interviewed and given a brief survey to complete. Life satisfaction, self-esteem, and optimism were thus assessed. Religious meaning was defined as providing a direction and purpose in life—in other words, a reason for existence.

The results of this study indicated that older black persons attended church more often and more frequently engaged in private prayer than their white peers did. The former also manifested higher levels of religious meaning, self-esteem, and optimism. Religious meaning was found to be more pertinent than church attendance to life satisfaction. Self-esteem was found to be correlated with religious meaning. An unexpected finding occurred with private prayer, which was related to lower self-esteem and less optimism. This may have reflected a situation in which unhappiness over health or one's life situation elicited more praying, in the hope that the wish for improvement might be granted. In sum, religious meaning was positively associated with life satisfaction, optimism, and self-esteem. It also played a greater role in the well-being of older black Americans than of white Americans.

The opposites of a meaningful faith were doubt, uncertainty, and confusion. This concern has also been addressed by Krause, Ingersoll-Dayton, Ellison, and Wulff (1999). Using a national sample of approximately 1,800 Presbyterians, Krause et al. found that the issue was much more complex than expected. The literature suggested that doubt might spur intrapersonal growth on the one hand, but that it might adversely affect well-being on the other. In this sample, religious doubt was associated with depression, and hence well-being suffered. Those over age 60 handled their religious questions better than younger individuals did. The wisdom of experience may have endowed these elderly persons with the knowledge and skills to cope more successfully with their faith.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness has recently become a topic of great interest in the psychology of religion. Introducing this topic into the realm of aging, Krause and Ellison (2003) examined the role of (1) forgiveness of others and (2) belief in forgiveness by God. Full forgiveness of others was more closely linked with psychological well-being than was forgiveness by God. Those who failed to forgive others unconditionally revealed more somatic symptoms of depression, plus signs of greater emotional depression, than their fully forgiving peers. These conditional forgivers expected transgressors to evidence contrition. Refusal or failure to forgive was also associated with more death anxiety than was true of forgivers. These negative signs could be a function of feeling unforgiven by God. This study, along with the findings discussed in Chapter 3, reinforces both the spiritual and personal importance of forgiveness in the Western religious tradition.

Prayer and Aging

There is probably no more personally significant religious or spiritual activity than prayer (Aldridge, 2000). If prayer is anything, it is an active coping strategy that is practiced by at least 90% of Americans (GSS, 2007). The GSS also showed that the percentage of those over age 65 who prayed ranged from 91% to 95%; 12% claimed that they pray several times a day. Resort to prayer probably endows people with a heightened sense of control in problematic situations. Schulz and Heckhausen (1996) detail a lifespan theory of control that is pertinent to religion and aging. Another way of understanding what occurs to those who pray is offered by Krause (2004), as described in Research Box 7.2.

RESEARCH BOX 7.2. Assessing the Relationships among Prayer Expectancies, Race, and Self-Esteem in Late Life (Krause, 2004)

In this study, Krause was not simply concerned with the act of praying, but with the expectancies it engenders. Such expectancies include beliefs about when and how prayers may be answered, as well as the nature of God's responses. Since the when, what, and how may not match what people have prayed for, they often express the view that they will trust in God to do what is best. These are termed "trust-based expectancies" (TBEs).

Approximately equal numbers of black and white participants were selected from a national sample for interviews, of which 1,500 were conducted. The mean age of the respondents was 74.3 years. In addition to demographic data, prayer TBEs, frequency of praying, and self-esteem were evaluated.

The elderly black participants were more likely than their white peers to rely on TBEs, and this tendency raised the self-esteem of the former more than the latter. It was further observed that self-evaluation was a function of the TBEs, not of the frequency of prayer.

This study demonstrates that research on prayer is probably insightful when other than simple frequency is considered. The complexity of prayer suggests that additional work in this area is merited.

RELIGION AND PHYSICAL HEALTH AMONG THE ELDERLY

We can easily understand the psychological benefits of having faith when old, but a much more difficult issue comes to the fore when we study how physical health and religion are related for older persons. Again, research studies are not always in agreement.

We have seen that faith can aid older persons who are under psychological stress, because faith can remedy a lack of meaning, control, and social support. This is a realm that requires extra caution, however, and Harold Koenig (1997, 2000) has introduced such concerns into his writing and research. Recognizing the roles religion may play in mental and physical health, he appropriately adds that "these health effects do not depend on supernatural phenomena, but can be explained by behavioral, social, and psychological mechanisms acting through known physiological pathways" (Koenig, 2000, p. 90).

The mechanisms in question are broad in scope. Churches often actively sponsor a wide variety of healthful practices that are adopted by believers (King, 1990; Levin & Schiller, 1987; Sarafino, 1990). For example, the Mormons and Seventh-Day Adventists condemn the use of alcohol, smoking, and other self-destructive behaviors; in addition, they encourage constructive eating and health habits (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001). Moberg (2001) summarizes work showing that religious involvement relates negatively to hypertension, the occurrence of strokes, cancer pain, and the need for and length of hospitalization. These findings may be due in part to religion's positive influence on attitudes, and in part to the effects of the health-promoting behaviors that churches and synagogues sponsor.

Congregations also often provide social connections and support for the elderly. Along with spiritual doctrines, these factors appear to counter depression and suicide, the rates of which are high among older persons (Plante & Sharma, 2001). Spousal loss and isolation, combined with illness and infirmity, are major factors in suicide in this group (Bock & Warren, 1972). Pastoral caregivers and counselors may help to alleviate these problems—which

seem to be especially severe among widowers, who are not usually skilled in caring for themselves (Aldridge, 2000; Kimble, 1995).

It is not really possible to distinguish between the effects of the health-promoting activities of churches and the influence that being religious *per se* has on people. Koenig (2000) has observed that even religious patients with conditions that resist improvement adapt to their situation and resolve their depression faster than those low in religiosity. He reports similar findings in study after study. Asking why this occurs, he offers two possibilities: (1) The religious elderly have “a world-view in which suffering has meaning and purpose” (Koenig, 2000, p. 89), and (2) faith in God and the use of prayer heighten their sense of control through the idea that they may be able to influence the deity. Koenig further stresses the view that religion is a source of meaning; nothing is simply random, and hence coping is enhanced.

In general, faith is associated with lower reported rates of cardiovascular conditions, hypertension, stroke, and different forms of cancer, all of which are concentrated among the elderly (Colantonio, Kasl, & Ostfeld, 1992; Levin & Schiller, 1987). It is possible, however, that since religiosity correlates positively with optimism, life satisfaction, and purpose in life, more religious people may be less inclined to report symptoms of illness and therefore may downplay their possible significance (Kass, Friedman, Leserman, Zuttermeister, & Benson, 1991). Though this does not seem to be generally true, its potential should not be overlooked, as Wotherspoon's (2000) research on a sample predominantly composed of people over 80 indicated that both spiritual well-being and existential well-being were positively related to self-assessments of health.

The Role of Stress

In order to understand the research on religion and both mental and physical health, we need to deal with the issue of stress. Old age is a particularly significant stressor for many people. Because individuality and progress are valued in Western society, those who have retired and/or developed the infirmities of old age usually find it difficult to avoid negative self-views and loneliness. Erik Erikson (1963), the first modern thinker to develop a lifespan developmental psychology, pictured the last years of life as a struggle between ego integrity and despair. The aging individual must confront a number of noteworthy changes and losses: Physical and often mental skills decline; personal significance through work is usually reduced after retirement; family and friends die; and, finally, the knowledge that one's own life may shortly conclude is ever present.

Former capabilities are supplanted by weaknesses and the loss of muscle. Youthful beauty is replaced by wrinkles and white hair. There is a growing susceptibility to illness, not the least of which is the heightened probability of cancer, heart disease, arthritis, and neurological disorders such as Alzheimer disease and other dementias. New aches and pains keep appearing as the years pass. These constitute additional sources of unavoidable stress.

With regard to stress and cancer, a study not immediately relevant to the present topic is nevertheless worth mentioning. McClintock (cited in Packard, 2007) noted that black women in Chicago who live in poverty-stricken, high-crime neighborhoods move frequently and tend to lose their social connections. A correlate of this isolating stress is “lethal breast cancer” (p. 42). Using an animal model (a strain of white rats prone to mammary tumors), McClintock created a combination of stress and isolation, and observed that rats subjected to these conditions developed more cancerous tumors faster than did control groups. This work is explicitly distant from our immediate concern with aging and religion, but it is suggestive.

Prayer and Coping

Research has consistently shown that religious coping mechanisms, especially prayer, are frequently employed by seniors dealing with health-related stress (Conway, 1985–1986; Manfredi & Pickett, 1987). In a national study, Gurin, Veroff, and Feld (1960) found that troubled older persons utilized prayer more than their younger counterparts did. Turning to the deity for support may appear to be the most effective strategy available to the elderly. This holds true for persons from different ethnic groups, of different socioeconomic statuses, and with varying levels of education (Koenig, George, & Siegler, 1988; Krause & Van Tran, 1989). The data are clear: Religion in general and prayer in particular are powerful buffers against stress among the elderly. As Myers (1992) puts it, “the happiest of senior citizens are those who are actively religious” (p. 75).

RELIGION AND MORTALITY

Some impressive research has examined the relationship between mortality and religious involvement. Strawbridge Cohen, Shema, and Kaplan (1997) collected data on more than 5,000 people over 28 years. The results showed that frequent church attenders lived longer than infrequent attenders. Apparently the former were more likely to cease smoking, engage in exercise, remain married, and maintain their social connections. In follow-up work involving over 2,600 people and covering the period from 1965 to 1994, Strawbridge, Shema, Cohen, and Kaplan (2001) confirmed the earlier findings. Those who attended religious services weekly in 1965 engaged in more positive health behaviors and manifested better mental health through 1994. Similar work from a different vantage point was undertaken by McCullough, Hoyt, Larson, Koenig, and Thoresen (2000): They conducted a meta-analysis of data from 42 studies (see below), and again observed a positive connection between religious involvement and living longer. Other work shows that church attendance, self-assessed religiosity, and the attitude that religion is a source of personal strength are all positively related to staying alive (Koenig, Smiley, & Gonzales, 1988).

Though all of these researchers are wary of explaining their findings as a direct effect of faith, recent work suggests that loneliness—a common problem among older people—can adversely influence the body’s immune system. In specific, being alone can turn over 200 genes on or off. Many of these genes control the function of white blood cells, possibly increasing the likelihood of infections and infirmity (Cole et al., 2007).

Many variables confound the religion–longevity relationship, and research findings have been neither clear nor consistent. For example, the tie between gender and faith shows that correlations between mortality and religion are stronger for women than for men. We cannot take this finding at face value, because women tend to outlive men, so we must correct for gender. Moreover, indices of public religious involvement such as church attendance relate positively to longevity, and women tend to be more religious than men. The probability is that nonattenders have poorer health that can prevent them from going to church. These are only two of many possible confounds; hence it is understandable why the more such variables are controlled for, the weaker the association between faith and longevity becomes (McCullough, Hoyt et al., 2000).

Recognizing the necessity for a meta-analysis of the data, McCullough, Hoyt, et al. (2000) conducted such an analysis on studies that utilized almost 126,000 people. Meta-analysis is

a methodological/statistical procedure in which researchers gather a great deal of what they hope are comparable data from different studies, and analyze these data in order to resolve discrepancies and conflicting findings. After considering some 15 possible confounding factors, these scholars found that religious involvement and longevity continued to be positively related. The association was, however, rather weak. For example, if we had two groups of 100 people each, one group being high in religiosity, the other less religious, in a later follow-up we could expect to find that 53 people in the less religious group had died, while only 47 in the more religious group had died. The positive association of longevity with church/synagogue attendance (but not with private devotions) held. Women also seemed benefited more than men from attending services. Unfortunately, as indicated above, age, sickness, and disability go together, suggesting again that more and more older religious individuals cease attending church because of home confinement. This group may show high mortality, leaving relatively healthy regular churchgoers who live longer. Still, for those at home, religious radio and television programs may serve as a partial substitute for church participation (Swatos, 1998; Wotherspoon, 2000).

Research on a sample of institutionalized chronically ill elderly persons claimed that those who died within a year were less religious (Reynolds & Nelson, 1981). This picture is muddled by the fact that these persons also had poorer prognoses and were more cognitively impaired. In a contradictory vein, Zuckerman, Kasl, and Ostfeld (1984) reported that religion was positively correlated with longevity, but only among elderly persons who were in poor health.

A. H. Richardson (1973) studied over 1,300 octogenarians and found religion to be unrelated to 1-year survival rates. Later work by Koenig (1995) confirmed this finding. Idler and Kasl (1992) also found that neither public or private religiousness predicted mortality; however, for both Christians and Jews, there were significantly fewer deaths in the 30 days prior to a major religious holiday than for the same period afterward (see Research Box 7.3).

Despite much work in these areas, the mechanisms through which faith may operate have yet to be definitively identified. We also need studies that control for religious affiliation, cultural differences, and health-promoting/health-damaging behaviors (King, 1990; Levin & Schiller, 1987). In addition, issues of response biasing have yet to be addressed.

Finally, we see religion and spirituality in action in research on cardiac patients, often awaiting cardiac surgery (Ai, Dunkle, Peterson, & Bolling, 2000; Ai, Peterson, Bolling, & Koenig, 2002; Oxman, Freeman, & Manheimer, 1995). The rate of cardiovascular disease increases with age in such a manner that by 65 years, it is the second leading cause of death in the United States; when Americans reach 75, it is the top killer (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007). Ai, Peterson, et al. (2002) employed a sample ranging in age from 41 to 81 years old, with a mean age of 65. All participants were awaiting coronary bypass artery surgery. Private prayer was the most frequent supportive behavior practiced and was associated with a reduction in personal distress. Those engaged in spiritual coping also fared better 1 year following surgery than did their nonpracticing cohorts. The authors of this work suggest that prayer empowers those who pray. In other words, the patients enhanced their sense of control in this stressful situation. Another study of religion's positive effects on cardiac patients (Oxman et al., 1995) is described in Research Box 7.4.

Though we have looked at the general tenor of theory and research on religion and mortality relative to aging, death per se has always been a central concern relative to faith on many levels, from the social-psychological to the theological. The latter approach must be

RESEARCH BOX 7.3. Religion, Disability, Depression, and the Timing of Death
(Idler & Kasl, 1992)

In this interesting study, the authors examined the effects of public and private religiosity on health, and looked specifically at how these effects varied for Christians and Jews. In particular, mortality around religious holidays was studied. Starting with a sample of 2,812 people over 65 in 1982, the researchers reinterviewed the members of this group in 1983, 1984, and 1985.

Sophisticated data analyses showed that public religious participation in 1982 was related to low functional disability in the following 3 years. There was more involvement with private religiousness in 1984 when it was associated with greater disability; however, analysis of who died and who lived revealed that those engaging in private religiosity seemed to be protected against death, but not disability.

Studying who lived and who died in the 30 days preceding and following religious holidays showed a very strong effect relative to Easter for the Christian groups: The death rate was significantly lower prior to the holiday than after it. As expected, this effect did not occur for Jews relative to Christian holidays, but similar effects were found for the Jewish holidays of Passover, Rosh Hashanah (the New Year), and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). The pattern of reduced deaths prior to the Jewish holidays held for the males, but not for the females. This variation was seen as a possible function of the greater role and investment of Jewish males than females in these holidays.

RESEARCH BOX 7.4. Lack of Social Participation or Religious Strength and Comfort
as Risk Factors for Death after Cardiac Surgery in the Elderly
(Oxman, Freeman, & Manheimer, 1995).

This was a well-planned study of 232 elderly cardiac patients. Twenty-one of these patients subsequently died, and comparisons were made between the deceased and the survivors on a variety of measures. These assessments included aspects of personality; social and emotional interaction and support; religious denomination; attendance and participation in religious activities; and patients' degree of religiousness, plus the sense of strength and comfort derived from their faith.

Though the deceased sample was small, the findings were clear: The death rate among those not involved in religious groups was three times greater than that for active participants. Those who were high in religiousness, and who derived religious strength and comfort from their faith, were significantly less likely to die within 6 months following surgery. The researchers suggest that "religion serves both the social and existential needs of the elderly" (p. 12). In sum, faith and social support seem to meet not only social but probably very fundamental biosocial requirements of people in extreme stress.

left to the scholars of each faith; however, we must examine the former, as it has been a rich domain for creative research.

DEATH AND RELIGION: A FRAMEWORK

We humans do not take kindly to death. Shakespeare (1604/1964, p. 81) called it “a fearful thing,” and Matthew Arnold (1853/1897, p. 288) viewed death as “a hideous show.” One may speak of “noble deaths,” “death with dignity,” “eternal paradise,” or “ultimate rewards,” or may state that “nothing can happen more beautiful than death” (Whitman, 1855/1942, p. 18), but its immediate reality is terrifying to virtually all of us. We lament those who die, and dread the fact that we too, in time, will confront the end of our own existence. Many of us, however, refuse to come to terms with death. We repress, deny, shun, and withdraw where possible from reminders of death, and above all, we fight to delay death. If there is a basic purpose to medicine, it is to reduce mortality and increase longevity. And finally when we die, the customary North American way of death includes embalming, which Aries (1974) interprets as a “refusal to accept death” (p. 99). In other words, we wish to keep our bodies unchanged. Furthermore, our faiths inform us that we do not simply die; we move to another realm—heaven, hell, limbo, purgatory, or life with God. Finally, there is resurrection: We return to everlasting life. In sum, we never die; our destiny is immortality. Religion guarantees it.

Theologian Paul Tillich (1952) championed such an inference by claiming that “the anxiety of fate and death is the most basic, most universal, and inescapable” (p. 40). Reasoning further, the noted anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1965) maintained that “Death, which of all human events is the most upsetting and disorganizing to man’s calculations, is perhaps the main source of religious belief” (p. 71). In one study of clergy, only 2% felt that concern about death was not a factor in religious activity (Spilka, Spangler, Rea, & Nelson, 1981).

Even though Western religion assures us of our continuation, it often treats death as a correlate of evil. Scripture is replete with references to death as the appropriate punishment for sin. We are told that it all started with Adam and Eve, and has been our heritage ever since: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12). Through death, therefore, religion engenders hope, guilt, and fear.

Religion has historically been our culture’s dominant means of coping with the inevitability of our own demise. Religion makes death meaningful. Death is a mystery that we must unravel. It belies meaning and demands explanation. We have questions, and religion offers us the desired answers. Taken at face value, death implies a simple, final termination. Understandably, we do not easily accept the prospect of ultimate extinction; it is not just that we want to live on indefinitely, but that we desire certainty that this will occur. Religion provides assurance that this will eventually take place. Unamuno (1921/1954) asserted that the theme of “immortality originates and preserves religions” (p. 41).

Institutionalized faith, as we have seen, plays many roles in life, but the issue of death lies at its core. Kearl (1989) gets to the heart of the matter when he points out that “religion has historically monopolized death meaning systems and ritual,” and helps “create and maintain death anxieties and transcendence hopes as mechanisms of social control” (p. 172).

Social control easily translates into personal control, another major function of religion. Expectations of judgment in an afterlife can prompt socially conforming behavior and give people the feeling that they are in charge of their final destiny. Especially in individualistic, achievement-oriented American society, this means, as the historian Arnold Toynbee observed, that death is “un-American, an affront to every citizen’s inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (quoted in Woodward, 1970, p. 81). Religion, therefore, stands as the only major bulwark against the threat of death.

RELIGION, DEATH, AND IMMORTALITY

Belief in an Afterlife

Intellectually, we all know that everyone dies; emotionally, we are rarely inclined to accept that reality for ourselves. The result may be beliefs in an afterlife, heaven, and hell. These ideas have a strong grip on the minds of Americans. Whereas the GSS (2007) for the United States indicates that 79.1% of its respondents believe in an afterlife, the International Social Survey Program data for 1998 reveal no European country with such a high proportion of its population holding these views (Greeley, 2002). Cyprus with 80% and Ireland with 79% are most similar to us, but the majority of the European nations have rates in the 30–60% range. Since the mid-1950s, however, the general tendency has been toward an increase in such beliefs even among Europeans (Greeley & Hout, 1999; Greeley, 2002). And according to the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), between the 1970s and 1990s, belief in life after death increased in the United States from 19% to 56% among Jews and from 74% to 83% among Catholics (Morin, 2000).

Greeley and Hout (1999) present additional data suggesting that from 1900 to 1970, Catholic belief in an afterlife increased from 67% to 85%, and agreement by Jews went from 17% to 74% in the same period. Though a number of possibilities are offered in relation to Jews, these authors note that “the evidence of change is clear; an explanation of it is not” (p. 832). Actually, this statement holds true for all of these findings. Further understanding may come from an appreciation of the effects on individuals and groups of the rapid rate of technological development, national and international stresses, and a certain tenuousness to life (as shown by terrorist activities such as the attacks of September 11, 2001). We might hypothesize that for many people, the world has “gotten away from them.” The search for immortality may be one effort to regain the security that the “illusion of control” confers (Langer, 1983).

It should be noted, of course, that belief in an afterlife does not necessarily entail acceptance of heaven or hell. In particular, people are less inclined to believe in hell than in heaven. Given the religious criteria for being consigned to either realm, self-examination might prompt aversion on the part of most people to their potential for an afterlife in hell. A Harris Poll supports this hypothesis: 79% of this poll’s respondents believed that they would go to heaven, and fewer than 2% felt that their final destination would be hell (Taylor, 1998). According to the GSS (2007), 86.1% of those sampled believe in heaven, while 73.4% accept the existence of hell.

Before we go further, a digression is in order. It is obvious that even though survey samples are large, there is often considerable variation in their findings. Just above, for instance, we can see a discrepancy between 73.4% and 2%. Hynson (1975) presents afterlife belief find-

ings in consecutive years for Catholics of 75% and 48%, and for Protestants of 65% and 50%. Using Gallup Poll data, Hertel (1980) addresses some of these inconsistencies. Differences in questions and the selectivity of the samples studied may explain such discrepancies, but this information is rarely presented. Our suggestion is that readers keep an open yet challenging mind when it comes to such reports.

The distribution of afterlife beliefs by faiths is more or less what we might expect. These ideas have a long history within Christianity, but not within Judaism; in the latter, an undefined eschatology essentially prevails. Note that the 39.7% of Jews accepting an afterlife (GSS, 2007) is considerably less than the 56% reported by the NORC (Morin, 2000; see above). Such discrepancies call to our attention the methodological problems that exist in survey research.

Considering the evidence that women are more religious than men, it comes as no surprise to note that they believe more strongly in an afterlife, heaven, and hell. There is also a slight tendency for beliefs in heaven and hell to increase with age. Those in their 20s are furthest from expected death and show the least belief in an afterlife, heaven, and hell. Sampling variation might account for the highest beliefs in an afterlife for those in the 30–50 age range. Though not truly striking, these higher percentages could also reflect the typical concerns at these ages with supporting a family and raising children. Further verification of these observations is necessary, as well as hypothesis testing to explain such findings.

An interesting earlier study of church members revealed that only 46% of Protestants and 71% of Catholics claimed that “what we do in this life will determine our fate in the hereafter” (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985, p. 53). In addition, there seems to be considerable reluctance to change one’s ways to avoid hell (Litke, 1983; Stark & Bainbridge, 1985). Since over half of the Protestants and almost a third of the Catholics surveyed by Stark and Bainbridge agreed that heaven and hell are our destiny for reasons other than the way we live, we might wonder whether we are seeing a return to Calvinistic predestination. Again, further investigation into afterlife beliefs is warranted.

These ideas tend to be vague, since personal continuation is usually viewed as applying to the spirit rather than the body. Still, for many believers, the afterlife is succeeded by resurrection of the body. Contemporary Christianity prefers to conceptualize this as a “spiritual” body rather than a physical one (Badham, 1976). Those desiring further details are often referred to faith and “trust in the Lord.” Under such circumstances, this imagery becomes individualized. Nevertheless, the promise that one will not simply and totally cease to exist is present and is widely believed.

Transcending Death

“Transcending death” means overcoming its existence as a simple and final termination of further life in any form. Afterlife beliefs interpret transcendence as a simple transition from predeath life to a postdeath form.

In a broader sense, Lifton (1973) speaks of a universal need to transcend death. Utilizing the rubric of “symbolic immortality,” he suggests five ways of accomplishing such a goal. “Biological immortality” lets one live on through offspring and descendants. This potential is further realized when the person continues through contributions to larger biosocial units, such as attachments to groups ranging from the family to the human species. “Theological immortality” or “religious immortality” stresses spiritual attachment, implying the triumph of spirit over bodily death. “Creative immortality” is attained through one’s works and

achievements—the lasting contributions one hopes to make to the future. “Nature immortality” deals with continuation as part of an undying, enduring, permanent nature. Lastly, there is a state of “experiential transcendence” or a mystical kind of immortality, “a state so intense that in it time and death disappear... the restrictions of the senses—including the sense of mortality—no longer exist” (p. 7).

A few research efforts have related these modes of immortality to personal faith. Gochman and Fantasia (1979) found, as might be expected, that the religious form is strongest among devout persons, while the remaining types appear to be independent of religion. Religious immortality is also associated with short- and long-term life planning, implying a flexible time perspective—a tendency also noted in the positive relationship between time perspective and religion found by Hooper and Spilka (1970).

Utilizing a cognitive theoretical framework, Hood and Morris (1983) constructed a more rigorous quantitative assessment of Lifton’s modes, relating these to forms of personal faith and death perspectives. This work is described in Research Box 7.5.

RESEARCH BOX 7.5. Toward a Theory of Death Transcendence (Hood, & Morris, 1983)

With sensitivity to the necessity of theoretically guided research, Ralph Hood and Ronald Morris denoted what they termed “transcendent” and “reflexive” facets of the self. The former is conceptually associated with immortality, in which the person “survives” this world. The reflexive self or selves, which exist in this world in a real sense, can also survive after bodily death. Cognitive issues come to the fore in thinking about transcendent–reflexive relations and the various forms of the latter. Robert Lifton’s (1973) modes of biological, creative, and nature immortality/transcendence, described in the text, fall into the reflexive category.

Applying these ideas, Hood and Morris developed reliable measures of the Lifton modes from interviews with 39 persons averaging 65 years of age. Independent judges agreed 94% of the time on classifying the responses to the modes. In terms of the modes’ presence or absence, 27 people were identified with nature transcendence, 30 with biological (now viewed as biosocial) transcendence, 31 with religious transcendence, and 33 with the creative mode. These people were then administered scales assessing death anxiety and death perspectives, as well as the Allport–Ross scales for Intrinsic and Extrinsic religious orientations. Patterns of meaningful relationships were obtained, suggesting the usefulness of both the Lifton modes and Hood and Morris’s transcendent–reflexive distinction with elderly persons.

The religious mode was associated with perceptions of death as a test of courage, and belief in an afterlife of reward. It further countered not only fear of death, but perceptions of death as pain and loneliness, failure, the unknown, or a loss of experience and control—tendencies not found with the other modes. The experiential/mystical mode negated the idea of death as a natural end. The biological/biosocial mode shared the positive religious correlation with courage and an afterlife of reward, but added death as failure. The creative mode was tied to perceptions of death as pain and loneliness, the unknown, forsaking dependents, and failure, as well as to indifference toward death. These findings suggest that personal achievement is antithetic to ideas of death, which, of course, terminate individual accomplishment.

The Search for Evidence of Immortality

The idea of total termination is rightfully terrifying to most people; hence the need to convince oneself that life never really ends is intensely pursued on all fronts, from the humanistic to the scientific. When motivation is extremely high, we seek information to buttress our convictions, often making inferences that go beyond the pertinent data. This is probably nowhere more true than in the way we deal with death. An excellent illustration of this tendency may be seen in making a leap of faith from near-death experiences (NDEs) and possible contact with the dead to the existence of an afterlife. These phenomena imply that people do not simply cease to exist, but are transformed and have the potential of remaining connected to the living.

Near-Death Experiences

The concept of the NDE was popularized during the 1970s. Rather easily, many people transformed the idea of “near death” to “after death.” It was commonly believed that those undergoing NDEs had really died, entered an aspect of the afterlife, and then returned to tell what happened to them. The volume *Life after Life* by psychiatrist Raymond Moody (1976) supported such views, and Moody became quite popular. Criticality, logic, and alternative explanations were acceptable only in limited quarters.

Pollster George Gallup, Jr., and his associate William Proctor (1982) point out that NDEs (which they term “verge-of-death experiences”) have much in common with mystical and religious experiences, in that all may be triggered by threats to life. They even suggest seven different situations that can elicit these episodes. (Keep in mind, as we discuss in Chapter 1, that at least a third of the U.S. population reports having had mystical experiences, and that among religious persons the percentage is far higher.) According to Gallup and Proctor, 15% of their respondents claimed to have had NDEs. The possible identification of religious encounters with NDEs suggests that those who report the former may be inclined to have the latter, and this appears to be true. Gallup and Proctor (1982) found that 23% of those claiming religious experiences also stated that they had had NDEs—a percentage 8 points above that for the general populace. Another variation on this theme found correlations between NDEs and belief in other extraordinary phenomena, such as unidentified flying objects (UFOs), reincarnation, and the likelihood that the living can contact the dead.

Turning to scientists (a group whose members are likely to question NDEs), Gallup and Proctor (1982) reported that 10% admitted personal involvement in an NDE. Though 32% believed in an afterlife, only 3% felt that they had actually had a supernatural encounter. The overall tendency of scientists was to separate NDEs from the idea of an afterlife, and many attempted theoretical explanations of these phenomena in terms of physiological changes related to brain chemistry and function under oxygen deprivation, anesthetics, or the operation of endorphins. It is also significant that many religionists are also reluctant to claim that NDEs represent proof of an afterlife.

Doubt is cast on the supernatural origins of NDEs by the fact that these have changed over time, and are also affected by place (Osis & Haraldson, 1977; Zaleski, 1987). In addition to much individuality entering the picture, cultural influences are obviously present (Osis & Haraldson, 1977; Kastenbaum, 1981). To some religionists, the absence of religious content in most NDEs raises questions about their authenticity. Suggestions of increased social concern and compassion, less materialism, improved self-esteem, and greater internal control have

been reported (Ring, 1984). These last possibilities are also correlates of religious experiences.

Concern with NDEs has resulted in the production of a *Journal of Near-Death Studies*. Authors of papers published in this journal have taken essentially every stance that can be conceived, from the paranormal and religious to the exclusively scientific. It goes without saying that proponents of each extreme fail to, or even vehemently refuse to, appreciate the position of those who differ. Gibbs (2005a) agrees with another thinker in this field, Michael Sabom, that “near-death experiences (NDEs) should not be used to promote religious agendas” (p. 105). Still, Gibbs (2005b) claims that NDEs promote spirituality relative to a form of Christianity. Research has found that NDEs do relate to an increase in religious importance and activity (McLaughlin & Malony, 1984).

The initial enthusiasm that greeted NDEs in the 1970s and 1980s has subsided. Interpretation of these experiences varies widely from their acceptance as “proof” of an afterlife, to the concept of NDEs as “spiritual experiences,” to analyses in terms of consciousness and brain function. In this last category, we see research that overlaps with that cited in the chapter on religion and biology. Britton and Bootzin’s (2004) work on temporal lobe function parallels that of Persinger, Newberg and d’Aquili, and Azari on religious experience (see Chapter 3). Britton and Bootzin suggest that NDEs involve altered function in the temporal lobe. In a controversial and complex area, this offers an objective research avenue that may provide additional insights into other psychological and phenomenological questions raised by the NDE.

In addition to nonreligious factors either causing or relating to NDEs, a fascinating situation arises when the result of a religious activity serves as the stimulus for an NDE. Hood and Williamson (2008b, pp. 170–184) undertook a highly creative research program on members of a serpent-handling sect who sustained bites from rattlesnakes and copperheads. (The prevalence of such bites may be low, but fatalities are common.) These researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 13 snake handlers who were bitten and were close to death before recovering. Religious attributions to God’s will were employed by the victims to explain the experience of being bitten plus what followed, including final recovery.

An interesting large-scale cross-cultural study that bears on NDEs was conducted by Osis and Haraldson (1977). Research Box 7.6 shows the difficulties and hazards of conducting such research.

Contact with the Dead

The idea of contact with the dead is very popular in Western society. In November 2007, one Internet browser, Google, listed 43,200 websites pertaining to this topic. This appeal to electronics may have originated in 1928, when Thomas Edison unsuccessfully attempted to build an electrical device that would permit one to contact the dead.

To be able to communicate with the deceased means that they are still somehow “alive,” existing in a state that is “connected” to our life realm. Death thus suggests transformation, not termination. For some years, approximately 40% of U.S. adults have believed that they had some degree of contact with a deceased person (GSS, 1999). In earlier work, a 1973 NORC survey indicated that 27% of the U.S. population felt they had participated in such an interaction. This number increased to 42% by 1987 and has been fairly steady since (Greeley, 1987; Morin, 2000). If this represents a real trend between the 1970s and the 1990s, we need to understand what has been happening.

RESEARCH BOX 7.6. At the Hour of Death (Osis & Haraldson, 1977)

These researchers conducted three major surveys: a pilot study, a U.S. survey, and a survey in India. The last two efforts constituted the final comparative study. The pilot work sampled 5,000 physicians and 5,000 nurses. We read that “640 medical observers returned their questionnaires. These reported a total of 35,540 observations” (p. 27). In other words, there was a 6.4% return rate, which was not further defined by the nature of the “medical observers.” Still, an effort was made to imply validity with reference to the 35,000-plus pieces of data, but these too remain largely undefined. A respondent return rate as small as that obtained here casts considerable doubt on the generalizability of the information. Apparently 190 cases “of interest” were followed up with questionnaires and phone interviews, but again vagueness prevails. Given the use of questionnaires and the low return rate, one also wonders about the completeness of the returned forms. This is not discussed.

The real core of this work consisted of further studies in India and the United States. In the United States, mail questionnaires were sent to 2,500 physicians and 2,500 nurses. The return rate was 20%, or 1,004 responses. A more personal procedure was used in India: 704 medical professionals responded, which the authors indicate comprised almost all who were approached. Unhappily, again, an unscientific lack of precision is present in the descriptions of both the sampling and responses. Still, an attempt was made to provide data, some of which are interesting and possibly useful.

If we concentrate on the India–U.S. comparisons relative to religion, the categories employed often lack the desired exactitude. It makes good sense to see that only Indian respondents viewed the apparitional figures of Shiva, Rama, and Krishna, and a grouping of Mary, Kali, and Durga. If we interpret this latter grouping correctly, it mixes Christian and Hindu beings. The same is true of “saints and gurus” and of “demons and devils.” Of special interest to us is the finding that of the 418 apparitional figures seen, only 140 were religious beings. Of the figures seen by the U.S. respondents, only 12% were religiously identified; the comparable proportion witnessed by the Indian sample was 37.5%.

This work is more useful for hypothesis construction and testing than it is for making reliable and valid inferences. Its subjectivity demands rigorous cross-checking. Considerable room is left for the expectations and values of researchers and interpreters of NDEs to introduce bias, while giving the impression that it is scientifically rigorous. A door has been opened to understanding a fascinating phenomenon. To date, however, there has been much more talk than solid research (Bailey & Yates, 1996).

GSS data from 1972 to 2006 suggest a tendency for more religious than nonreligious persons to claim contact with the dead (Spilka, 2007). Of those who feel their faith is strong, 48% believe that they have experienced such contacts. Thirty-two percent of those who claim that they are not at all religious feel similarly. Also supportive of this theme, 42% of persons who pray at least once daily report such contact; the percentage is 29% for those who pray less than once a week. With regard to religious groups, 38% of Protestants, 42% of Catholics, and 34% of Jews state that they have had contact with the dead. Utilizing other data, Kears (1989) indicated that 66% and 68% of Catholics and Mormons, respectively, believe that “religious observances by the living” (p. 185) may benefit those who are deceased. Other Christian groups are considerably less likely to feel this way; nevertheless, such ideas keep alive the notion of a connection between the living and dead.

RELIGION AND ANXIETY ABOUT DEATH AND DYING

Western civilization has a religious heritage that affirms ideas such as resurrection and life after death in the strongest terms. In one form or another, these views also seem to exist worldwide. They offer much gratification and help to alleviate a basic source of fear and anxiety. This last concern has been central to those who study the association of religion and death.

Death continually surrounds us. The mass media reveal its presence in daily news accounts of accidents, crimes, natural disasters, and war, and more specifically in ever-present obituaries, death notices, and funeral announcements. Though death is usually distant from our everyday lives, we all personally encounter death—beginning in childhood with the loss of pets and the demise of elderly relatives. As already stated, we seek explanations and solace in afterlife notions that family, friends, and religious authorities reinforce. The factor motivating such views has been variously termed “fear of death,” “death anxiety,” or “death concern.”

Research Problems

Certain difficulties attend this research. First, the domains of religion and of death fear/anxiety have been confounded by measures from both areas containing similar items (e.g., belief in an afterlife). Second, various deficiencies have been identified: poor experimental designs, weak measures, inadequate controls, inappropriate statistical analyses, and the use of questionable samples (Lester, 1967, 1972; Martin & Wrightsman, 1964). With respect to the last problem, most researchers have examined college students—a young population with limited experience of death. Other workers have studied children, elderly persons, psychiatric patients, student nurses, medical students, terminally ill individuals, seminarians, and regular churchgoing community members. Finally, we have described how measurement in the psychology of religion has gone from simple unidimensional scales to more refined multidimensional instruments. A parallel development has occurred in the assessment of death anxiety.

Despite these questions, it has been claimed that “one of the major functions of religious beliefs [is] to reduce a person’s fear of death” (Groth-Marnat, 1992, p. 277). We may reasonably ask this question: Does faith lessen concern about death? Initially, we find inconsistency. Our own survey of this literature in the first edition of this book (Spilka, Hood, & Gorsuch, 1985) found that 24 of 36 studies evidenced negative relationships between death fear on the one hand, and faith and afterlife beliefs on the other. Seven studies suggested that these domains were independent of each other, while three showed an unexpected positive association. Another examination of 16 studies conducted in the 1980s indicated that six found a negative relationship, three a positive association, and five no connection between religion and death concern (Gartner, Larson, & Allen, 1991); there were also two studies with curvilinear patterns. These inconsistencies may be a function of the shortcomings noted above, plus such factors as cultural influences (Pressman, Lyons, Larson, & Gartner, 1992). Despite a minority of discrepant findings, our overview of this literature suggests that the more exacting research argues for the reduction of death anxiety when religious commitment increases.

The general label of “religiosity” may mask certain factors that reduce death anxiety. Even though religion and afterlife beliefs correlate positively, especially among Christians,

we need to consider the degree to which institutional faith in general includes belief in an afterlife. Thorson (1991) further points out that belief in an afterlife correlates more strongly in a negative direction with death anxiety than does religiousness. Others confirm the centrality of afterlife ideas in resisting death distress and related depression (Aday, 1984–1985; Alvarado, Templer, Bresler, & Thomas-Dobson, 1995). Confounding may well occur between religiosity and belief in an afterlife.

Rasmussen and Johnson (1994) bring another issue to the fore—namely, the question of spirituality versus religiosity. Their research showed no significant relationship between death anxiety and religiosity, but a noteworthy association with scores on a Spiritual Well-Being scale. Because of the often great overlap between spirituality and religiosity, this relationship needs to be explored further.

Breaking with the traditional sampling of American college students, Roshdieh, Templer, Cannon, and Canfield (1998–1999) were able to study death anxiety and death depression among almost 1,200 Iranian college students. The results were similar to what has been observed in the United States: Namely, religion countered both death, depression, and anxiety.

Though there is some disagreement in the rather large number of studies in this area, the dominant finding is that religion and spirituality can counter death anxiety and depression. This may be due to the promise of faith regarding an afterlife and entrance into the realm of the deity.

Experimenting with Death Fear

Despite the observations above, can we say that increasing concern with death might actually influence one's belief in an afterlife? In an ingenious experimental study, Osarchuk and Tatz (1973) found that inducing death fear could affect one's afterlife beliefs. This work is described in Research Box 7.7.

When significant research findings such as those of Osarchuk and Tatz (1973) are obtained, their findings should be confirmed before congratulations are offered. Too often in psychology—or, for that matter, in all of the sciences—initial findings are later contradicted. This is further suggested by a later study (Ochsmann, 1984). Differences in method call for more research with new controls, in order to resolve the discrepancies between these studies.

The Influence of Circumstances: The Threat of AIDS as an Example

A particular type of life-threatening situation is found largely among gays and bisexuals. In this population in particular, the threat of AIDS is ever-present if one is sexually active. Research Box 7.8 details one significant study in this troubled area (Bivens, Neimeyer, Kirshberg, & Moore, 1994–1995).

This effort charts a path to even more complex and insightful work regarding how religion may be employed as a resource to reduce fear of death by individuals suffering from a chronic, life-threatening disease. Concurrently, religion may play a negative role. One can also read the punishment motif of orthodox Christianity in Bivens et al.'s findings. This last theme may also be seen in other work, which found that the more men with AIDS attended church, and the more similar this church was to the one in which they were reared, the more death anxiety they showed (Franks, Templer, Capelletty, & Kauffman, 1990–1991).

RESEARCH BOX 7.7. Effect of Induced Fear of Death on Belief in an Afterlife
(Osarchuk & Tatz, 1973)

To test the hypothesis that making fear of death more salient would increase belief in an afterlife, these researchers constructed two equivalent and reliable 10-item scales of belief in an afterlife (Forms A and B). Two groups were created. Half of the people in each group received Form A initially; the other half received Form B first. From each group, 10 members were assigned to a death threat subgroup; 10 were assigned to a shock threat group; and 10 were designated as controls. Six subgroups were thus formed—three with high belief in an afterlife, and three with low belief. To the death threat subgroups, a taped communication was played giving an exaggerated estimate of the probability of an early death for individuals ages 18–22, due to accident or to disease caused by food contamination. The tape contained a background of dirge-like music. A series of 42 death-related slides was coordinated with the communication, including scenes of auto wrecks, realistically feigned murder and suicide victims, and corpses in a funeral home setting.

The members of the shock threat group were informed that they would receive a series of painful electric shocks (to which, of course, they never were subjected). The control groups engaged in ordinary play for the same amount of time that the other groups underwent the death or shock threats. All were then given the alternate form of the belief-in-afterlife scales that they had not taken earlier. The results were partially as predicted. Those with low belief in an afterlife, regardless of what group they were in, revealed no changes in their beliefs. In contrast, only those initially holding strong afterlife beliefs who were exposed to the death threat manifested a meaningful increase in these views. Apparently, heightening one's concern with death can influence belief in an afterlife. It would have been interesting to see whether other religious views (such as belief in God) were also similarly affected, but this was not examined here. The question is one of focus. As the 18th-century man of letters Samuel Johnson put it, "When a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully" (quoted in Boswell, 1791/n.d., p. 725).

In Franks et al.'s research, the greater death fear associated with religious activity in patients with AIDS does not necessarily point to the external stigmatizing role that religion may play. Churches are purveyors of community social values, and the prevailing levels of fear and rejection of AIDS and patients with AIDS are often internalized by these patients (Gilmore & Sommerville, 1994; Kegeles, Coates, Christopher, & Lazarus, 1989). The motivation to distance oneself from AIDS is illustrated by the Muslim denotation of AIDS as a Western disease that can be best avoided by complying with Islamic views and practices (Gilmore & Sommerville, 1994). Similar pronouncements by Christian ideologues are common.

The foregoing studies portray a negative role for religion in relation to AIDS, but there is research that indicates the opposite. Over the years, scientific progress has increasingly worked against the notion that AIDS is an automatic death sentence; newer treatments have provided hope. Moreover, the work of Hall (1994) with patients who have end-stage HIV disease shows that a major source of hope is religion. Hope is generated through religious beliefs and faith-related rituals that reduce death anxiety and depression on the part of those facing AIDS, as well as friends and relatives of those who have died from AIDS (Jull-Johnson, 1995).

RESEARCH BOX 7.8. Death Concern and Religious Beliefs among Gays and Bisexuals of Variable Proximity to AIDS (Bivens, Neimeyer, Kirchberg, & Moore, 1994–1995)

A sample of 167 gay or bisexual men was obtained; 24 were HIV-positive, and 19 had full-blown AIDS. These 43 were termed the “HIV+” group. The remaining men were HIV-negative (“HIV-”). Sixty-nine of the latter were defined as the “AIDS-involved” group, as they helped patients with AIDS in a variety of settings. The remaining participants were denoted “AIDS-uninvolved.” All participants were administered a multidimensional scale that yielded eight measures of death fear/concern. An index of personally perceived threat from the potential of one’s death was also used. Intrinsic and Extrinsic religious orientations were assessed by the Allport–Ross scales. Also included were a scale assessing Christian orthodoxy and a more general inventory of religious beliefs and practices.

The HIV+ group displayed greater fear than the other two groups with respect to the likelihood of a premature death. No difference on this measure was found between the AIDS-uninvolved and AIDS-involved groups. The AIDS-involved participants, however, (1) manifested less global threat and less threat regarding meaningfulness and survival concerns, and (2) were significantly more religious, than the AIDS-uninvolved participants. Intrinsic faith, belief in God, and church attendance were also associated with less global threat, threats to meaningfulness, survival concerns, and negative emotional appraisals. Literal Bible interpretations correlated positively with greater death fear, fear of personal destruction, and fear of consciousness in death.

RELIGION AND EUTHANASIA

Euthanasia is a troubled realm. Not a few seriously or terminally ill patients have appealed to be euthanized, and have sought relief through the courts. Behind the scenes, however, such desires are surprisingly common.

This is an issue that is often simplified and euphemized by such terminology as “mercy killing,” “assisted suicide,” “right to die,” and “death with dignity.” A distinction must, however, be made between “passive” and “active” euthanasia. The former usually implies the withholding of heroic measures to sustain life when death is imminent and the quality of life is very poor. In contrast, active euthanasia is the intentional termination of life under the same conditions, especially when great pain and suffering are present. This is probably practiced more often than we think when a patient makes an impassioned plea to die.

Support for Euthanasia: Medical and General

Though active euthanasia is illegal in most jurisdictions, the overwhelming majority of medical professionals favor passive euthanasia. Surveys reveal that from two-thirds to over 90% of health care practitioners approve passive approaches, whereas only 17% of physicians and 36% of nurses take positive views of active euthanasia (Carey & Posavec, 1978–1979; Hoggatt & Spilka, 1978; Lavery, Dickens, Boyle, & Singer, 1997; Rea, Greenspoon, & Spilka, 1975). The Gallup Poll organization (Gallup, 1992; *The Gallup Poll Monthly*, 1992) has taken a sophisticated view of the euthanasia issue, revealing how attitudes are dependent on a num-

ber of factors, such as severe pain, incurable disease, burden on the family, and the person's own judgment that life is meaningless. The Gallup figures also vary according to how euthanasia is defined (as withholding of treatment, doctor-assisted suicide, etc.).

Religious Perspectives on Euthanasia

Though scripture and theology usually oppose euthanasia, there is much deviation from such a position. If euthanasia is approved by a physician, 61% of Protestants, 62% of Catholics, and 78% of Jews agree with such a stance (Kearl, 1989). The strength of one's religious stance affects these findings, as the comparable data for "strong" Protestants, Catholics, and Jews are 49%, 51%, and 67%, respectively (Kearl, 1989). It is abundantly evident that euthanasia under certain circumstances is widely supported, regardless of religious affiliation. This support, however, decreases as religiosity increases. In addition, for over 50 years, approval of euthanasia has grown steadily among moderate and liberal religionists (Kearl, 2002). Such approval also accompanies belief in an afterlife (Klopfer & Price, 1979). In general, physicians and members of the public who are religious in general or Catholic in particular are less favorable to euthanasia (Emanuel, 2002); physician approval rates in Emanuel's study range from 33% to 66%.

Religion and Physician-Assisted Suicide

Opposition to physician-assisted suicide (PAS) has come more from formal religious organizations than from their individual members. Still, the more liberal Christian and Jewish groups are slowly increasing their support for PAS. The United Church of Christ already formally backs such action (Koenig, 1994a).

The increasingly favorable positions taken by clergy suggest that it is probably just a matter of time before more religious bodies justify euthanasia and PAS. In one investigation, Carey and Posavec (1978–1979) found that 96% of the clerics they sampled advocated passive euthanasia, and that 21% espoused its active form. Support for passive euthanasia varies with the reasons advanced for such action (Nagi, Pugh, & Lazerine, 1977–1978). Depending on the justification, Carey and Posavec (1978–1979) found that support ranged from 34% to 73% among Protestant clergy; the comparable percentages were 30% to 69% for Catholic priests. In regard to active euthanasia, the percentages were significantly lower: Only 13–25% of the Protestant clergy and 1–3% of the Catholic priests countenanced such action. Even though Carey and Posavec's investigation did not designate the denominations sampled, approval of euthanasia grows with liberality of a cleric's theological position and group. Conservative clergy balance their opposition with strong beliefs in a rewarding afterlife (Spilka, Spangler, & Rea, 1981).

Despite the fact that a study by Gillespie (1983) did not bear directly on the question of euthanasia, it demonstrated clerical differences on a variety of death perspectives across religious groups. This research implies that pastoral outlooks on euthanasia may be dependent on factors other than denominational conservatism and afterlife beliefs.

A word is in order regarding why there is religious opposition to euthanasia and PAS. In brief, a position derived from scripture simply avers that life and death are in "God's hands." That is, life can only be given and taken away by the deity. Other considerations are that the pain and suffering of the ill person is supposed to be experienced by that individual, and may benefit all concerned in the long run.

RELIGION AND SUICIDE

The tragedy of suicide is difficult to understand. With medicine making almost unbelievable progress, and with science and technology opening a future that points toward an easier and better life for all, suicide remains a mystery for most people. Psychological explanations such as depression abound, but these often mean little more than that a word has been substituted for a reality that cannot be easily grasped. Death itself is enigmatic, but suicide remains the ultimate conundrum.

Institutionalized religion has uniformly treated suicide in negative terms. The Judeo-Christian tradition teaches that suicide is immoral and therefore sinful (Kastenbaum, 1981). Those who commit suicide may not be allowed burial with the faithful in religiously sponsored cemeteries, or are consigned to certain sections that signify condemnation and rejection. Because of the stigma that has traditionally been attached to suicide, medical, religious, and civil authorities are often reluctant to identify a death as a suicide. The more modern religious perspective is to consider these individuals as mentally disturbed—a diagnosis that removes the burden of sin and mitigates the opprobrium that surviving family members have often received from the religious community. The influence of religion on attitudes toward suicide has, however, lessened considerably in the contemporary world, especially in the United States over the last half century (Wasserman & Stack, 1993).

Religion and Suicide among the Elderly

In 2003, 31,484 people in the United States committed suicide (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007). The National Institute of Mental Health tells us that approximately another half million people each year enter hospital emergency rooms as a result of attempting suicide (Brunner, 2003; Hoyert, Kochanek, & Murphy, 1999). Though women attempt suicide more often than men, the latter “are four times more likely to die than are females” (U.S. Office of the Surgeon General, 1999).

The rate of suicide is fairly level until age 59, after which it sharply increases from 23 per 100,000 to 65.3 per 100,000 for men 85 years and older (U.S. Office of the Surgeon General, 1999). After age 65, men account for 84% of all suicides. The suicide rate for elderly divorced or widowed men is 2.7 times that for their married peers, and over 17 times the rate for married women (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003).

Kearl (1989) suggests that “for some elderly individuals, suicide is preferable to loneliness, chronic illness, and dependency” (p. 145). This may be especially true for physically ill older men, the group with the highest suicide rate in the United States. Still, among elderly individuals, religion plays its traditional role in opposing self-destruction. Koenig (1994b) suggests that faith suppresses suicidal thinking in this group. He found that 18% of his sample of physically ill older men experienced suicidal thoughts, and that these related to ineffective religious coping.

As already noted, elderly religious individuals were reared at a time when religion was a stronger cultural force than it is today. Because of this, they may identify with their faith’s opposition to suicide, as well as with the promise of a happy afterlife. A related finding is that the recovery from bereavement of those who lose a loved one via suicide is enhanced by belief in an afterlife (Smith, Range, & Ulmer, 1991–1992). We must wonder whether this is true for those who committed suicide. Also, did they feel more isolated prior to their action?

Direct research relating suicide to belief in an afterlife with this group might be valuable information.

Another answer may lie in being socially integrated into the community, especially a religious community. For example, church attendance is negatively correlated with suicide rates (Martin, 1984). We have observed that the highest suicide rates are among older, single, socially isolated men (Dublin, 1963; Stengel, 1964). Dealing with suicide ideology, Stack and Wasserman (1992) have noted three possibilities:

1. Religion fosters general social integration, which opposes suicide.
2. Specific religious views, such as belief in an afterlife, may contravene self-destructive impulses.
3. Religious organizations foster networking and social support, which should thwart suicidal inclinations.

Using sophisticated statistical techniques on national data, these researchers found evidence supporting all three views, especially for conservative religious bodies. Focusing on church attendance, Stack and Wasserman concluded that the social connections faith may create and strengthen could be the main elements hindering suicide.

The fact that 85 people commit suicide each day in the United States is a true national tragedy (U.S. Public Health Service, 1999). This fact must be regarded as a call for help to all health agencies, including churches and synagogues. Happily, such a call seems to be increasingly heard. Concerns about training clergy and other church personnel to become skilled in pastoral care and counseling with older individuals have been repeatedly expressed (Ellor & Coates, 2001; Lapsley, 1985).

Apocalyptic Suicide

Recent years have witnessed a spate of mass suicides among members of religious cults. The cases of the Jonestown People's Temple, the Branch Davidians, and Heaven's Gate (among others) have shocked the world, and have left most of us without a satisfying explanation for these tragedies.

The rather bizarre forms religion has taken in several cults in which there were mass suicides have been analyzed by Dein and Littlewood (2000). Scholars have primarily examined these cults' leadership and group structure; searching for common personality factors or various forms of mental disorder has not been productive. The lack of hard data—specifically, too much clinical subjectivity and a dearth of confirmatory efforts—makes inferences in the realm of the individual rather tenuous. Vague allusions to paranoid traits, poor reality contact, or distressing early life conditions also do not appear useful. Previous work on mental disorders among cultists indicates that the rates of such problems are no higher in cults than in the population at large (Needleman & Baker, 1978; Richardson, 1980; Wright, 1987).

If generalizations can be offered, a number are in order. Cults are groups that center about charismatic leaders who want their members to be separate from society in general, from family members, and from anyone who might have divergent views. Absolute devotion to the leader's beliefs and teachings is reinforced in every manner possible. These doctrines may include the notions that death is invariably a door to a future life; that the physical body is a hindrance; and that those who commit suicide never truly die, but continue on into a

heavenly existence. These groups create the conditions that make suicide appear to be the only means of achieving ultimate happiness.

RELIGION, GRIEF, AND BEREAVEMENT

Living means that we will experience the deaths of loved ones, for there must always come that dreaded time when a beloved person “goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets” (Ecclesiastes 12:5). When someone dies, the likelihood is high that family and friends will turn to religion for solace and understanding. Faith is often a basic part of the coping process, and death is frequently confronted and conceptualized in spiritual terms.

The process of grief and bereavement is surprisingly complex. “Grief” is an emotional process. “Bereavement” is not unambiguously defined as separate from grief, though it emphasizes the sense of loss that leads to grief. Another overlapping concept is “mourning,” which refers to the combination of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses that one manifests in bereavement.

The literature offers discussions about stages of grief, models of grief, degrees of grief, ritual in grief, religion as a resource in bereavement, the grief of parents and grandparents for deceased children and grandchildren, the grief of spouses for deceased mates, and grief for other family members and loved ones. In all of these areas, the role of faith is significant. For example, Flatt (1987) suggests some 10 grief stages that range from “initial shock” to what he terms “growth.” In most of these stages, God is given a role. It might be a questioning of how the deity could let someone die or how the divine actively brings about a death, or a place for “God’s grace” in recovery from the depression resulting from grief. Another possibility is that recovery from grief may move the person toward new stages and tests, such that the deity is seen to care as the person is reintegrated into “God’s world.” This means that the bereaved gains new strength to realize “God’s purpose” in his or her remaining life (Flatt, 1987). Here we observe how significant attributions to God may be when death is confronted.

The central issue is “making sense” out of the loss, and religion is commonly the main source of meaning available to the survivors. Regardless of who dies, religious/spiritual commitments, doctrines, and ideas offer meanings that reduce symptoms of distress and engender hope (Dahl, 1999; Golsworthy & Coyle, 1999).

Though the majority of research on religion and bereavement points to the beneficial role of faith in such circumstances, it should be noted that not all work in this area supports such inferences (Sanders, 1979–1980). This is indeed an involved realm—one that requires more sensitivity to theory and the possibility of confounding factors.

Sanders (1979–1980) conducted an interesting study in which she compared grief reactions to the death of a spouse, a child, and a parent. Though the most intense responses occurred when a child died, church attendance was related positively to optimism, reduced anger, and a better appetite. When church attendance and family interaction were treated together, the findings even more graphically favored the religion–family combination. This may imply the significance of religion not only in terms of meaning, but in regard to a broader beneficial basis for social support from one’s kin.

There is evidence that bereavement varies as a function of the kind of death that occurred—in other words, whether it was natural, accidental, a result of violence, or a suicide (Morin & Welsh, 1996; Sheskin & Wallace, 1980). Morin and Welsh (1996) interviewed urban and suburban adolescents. The urban adolescents were in a facility for adjudicated

youths, and had experienced more violent deaths than the suburban groups had. Their views of death also involved violence and religion to a greater degree than those of the suburban teens. The latter emphasized the experience of suffering, while the urban juveniles were more concerned with the loss of loved ones. Both groups found that their grieving benefited from talking about their feelings and concerns.

Sheskin and Wallace (1980) studied widows, and observed that, regardless of the nature of their husbands' deaths, they usually needed to "unburden themselves" to good listeners. Theoretically, one might expect clergy to fulfill such a role, but this was not found. According to the studies reviewed by Sheskin and Wallace (1980), clergy were found to be particularly unhelpful by widows whose husbands committed suicide. The implication is that since organized religions oppose suicide, their representatives will have difficulty counseling the survivors of those who have committed suicide. Accordingly, the clergy, who should be understanding, and sympathetic regarding death, may not be of much help in such cases. Clerics could respond like others who relate to the surviving family members of those dying by suicide. This group feels that they are less accepted by their communities than those whose relatives died accidental or natural deaths (Smith et al., 1991–1992).

Another consideration brings us back to the issue of meaning. Even though the meaning of death in the religious/spiritual sense is enhanced by devotion to one's faith, suicide poses additional explanatory problems. We may try to play word games and attribute the death to depression or some "psychotic break," but then we face the question of why this mental state was present. We struggle to make sense out of the tragedy, for our social order values individual worth and dignity, and taking one's own life often creates a deep and troubling dilemma.

Religious Schemas and Bereavement over Child Loss

A useful theoretical treatment of bereavement has been advanced by Daniel McIntosh and his colleagues (McIntosh, Silver, & Wortman, 1993). McIntosh (1995) has extended this approach to religion in general and its role in life. Noting that "a schema is a cognitive mental structure or representation containing organized prior knowledge about a particular domain, including a specification of the relations among its attributes" (1995, p. 2), McIntosh observes that "people have different schemas for many domains." Schemas influence what is perceived, speed up cognitive processing of information, and offer meaning in difficult situations by filling in the gaps in our knowledge. In sum, they orient us to the world and the problems with which we must cope. They can help us adapt to problematic circumstances. With respect to death and bereavement, one salient aspect of a religious schema might be belief in an afterlife. Apparently such belief is "associated with greater recovery from bereavement regardless of the cause of death" (Smith et al., 1991–1992, p. 222). In contrast, bereaved persons with little belief in an afterlife evidence less well-being in general, and poorer recovery from the bereavement in particular. Such people also make greater efforts to avoid thinking about the death in question.

For many reasons, primarily culturally based, most people possess religious schemas that may be called upon when ambiguity and threat become troublesome. In their significant work on how parents cope with the death of an infant from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), McIntosh et al. (1993) demonstrated how parents' faith, through the use of religious schemas, indirectly facilitated their adjustment. The schemas both made the death meaningful and supported efforts to come to terms with the loss. Religious participation and social

support promoted the acquisition of helpful religious explanations. Cognitively, religious importance contributed to constructive mental processing and helped reduce distress.

The work of McIntosh et al. (1993) explains similar findings in other studies that have dealt with parental and grandparental bereavement (Bohannon, 1991; De Frain, Jakub, & Mendoza, 1991–1992). Studying the influence of church attendance, Bohannon (1991) showed that it was inversely related to anger, guilt, helplessness, obsessive thoughts about a child's death, somatic complaints, and death anxiety on the part of grieving mothers. Similar effects were found for paternal anger, guilt, and death anxiety. De Frain et al. (1991–1992) found that religious beliefs were strengthened for 46% of the grandparents of children who died of SIDS, and 90% felt that their faith aided them in coping with the SIDS death.

Further work by Gilbert (1992) stressed the perceived role of God in this situation. When religion was a resource, bereaved parents felt that (1) God did not do bad things; (2) God was in control and could be relied on to make the wisest decision; (3) God had good reasons for the child's death; (4) God inflicted this tragedy upon the parents because they had the strength to deal with it; (5) God wanted them to appreciate life more; and (6) God desired that they change their lives for the better. Interestingly, those who claimed that religion was not initially helpful acquired a more positive outlook over time. Lastly, those who claimed that religion was irrelevant tended to be extrinsically oriented. The implication is that for faith to be significant in this kind of tragedy, it must have an intrinsic, not superficial or utilitarian, quality.

Conjugal Bereavement

The demise of a spouse is extremely distressing to the widow or widower. No one has yet assessed all of the factors that may affect the surviving mate. For an older couple, separation after a half-century or more of living together may be extremely wrenching and painful. Often we read that the passing of an elderly husband or wife is shortly followed by the death of the other spouse, as if their link in life must continue indefinitely. The issue of an expected death versus an unexpected one must also be considered. If a wife's death is not anticipated, the level of somatic symptoms and depression is greater in the husband than if the death has been expected for some time (Winokuer, 2000). In the latter instance, anticipatory grieving may take place and reduce the overall amount of physiological disruption that occurs.

The classic research of Glick, Weiss, and Parkes (1974) stresses the benign effects of faith on bereavement when a spouse dies (see also Parkes, 1972). In their research, to the extent that widows were devout, they were described as turning "to the formal doctrine of their religions for explanation" (Glick et al., 1974, p. 133). Again we see the significance of spiritual meaning and understanding in alleviating depression and the sense of loss. In other work, social and religious support appeared to operate independently, both working to counter depression and subjective stress (Levy, Martinkowski, & Derby, 1994). Research in the United Kingdom further demonstrates that coping with conjugal bereavement by the elderly is especially difficult when there has been loss of faith (Coleman, 2001). Study after study confirms these findings: Personal adjustment and religious commitment and activity go together. As might be expected, religious involvement is likely to increase following the death of a spouse (Bahr & Harvey, 1980; Haun, 1977; Loveland, 1968). An excellent example of theoretically guided and methodologically sophisticated work in this area is presented in Research Box 7.9.

RESEARCH BOX 7.9. The Stress-Buffering Role of Spiritual Support: Cross-Sectional and Prospective Investigations (Maton, 1989)

Maton theorized that religion may mitigate the effects of stress through the use of cognitive and emotional pathways. Specifically, he defined these as “cognitive mediation” and “emotional support.” The former implies a positive reframing of negative life events, while the latter comprises perceptions of God as valuing and caring for the distressed individual. Treating these as independent, Maton assessed the contributions of each with two samples: (1) bereaved parents who had lost a child, and (2) college students. In the first sample, 33 parents who had been bereaved within the preceding 2 years constituted a high-stress group, and 48 whose child had died more than 2 years previously made up a low-stress group. Measures of spiritual, social, and friendship support plus depression were completed by the respondents.

Spiritual support countered depression and aided self-esteem for the high-stress group, but not for the low-stress sample. A similar pattern was noted for support provided to the former group, but not to the latter. A prospective study with college students ruled out the likelihood that spiritual help followed rather than contributed to well-being. Maton concluded that “spiritual support may influence well-being through directly enhancing self-esteem and reducing negative affect (‘emotional support’ pathway) or through enhancing positive and adaptive appraisals of the meaning of a traumatic event (‘cognitive mediation’ pathway)” (p. 320). He went on to theorize various forms of spiritual support, suggesting research possibilities for exploring this domain further.

The Significance of Ritual

As described in Chapter 3, ritual has roots deep within our human and animal past. It performs many functions, not the least of which is to establish and maintain control over our personal world and ourselves, especially when we feel pressured. Rites and ceremonies are integral to religion; they bring us psychologically closer to others and to our common cultural heritage. Ritual is a core feature of faith that plays a constructive role in grief. Various said to create a sense of safety and impart new constructive meanings, it may also distance a person from disturbing emotions. Reeves and Boersma (1989–1990) thus maintain that “rituals can provide a sense of positive personal power for an individual who is feeling out of control and clarify and provide meaning to an issue so that it is easier to work on” (p. 289).

On another level, rituals introduce structure, elicit social support, and may serve as a distraction from the grief itself. Formal ceremonies allow bereaved individuals to work through the pain of loss. Death is a disruption in the survivors’ lives, and religious ideology and ritual may help restore stability to those who are bereaved (Honigmann, 1959).

Illustrative of this principle is the Jewish practice of *shiva*, a 7-day, repetitive set of mourning rites that evokes community support in the form of a group whose members often bring food to the griever’s home and participate in a well-established set of ceremonies. It has been compared to group therapy (Kidorf, 1966). Gerson (1977) describes in depth the formalized mourning process in Judaism, and notes how it is designed to thwart the development of pathological grief by specifying degrees of return to normal social interaction. For these

reasons, the symbolic power of religious rituals has recently become part of the psychotherapeutic armamentarium of pastoral counselors.

The San Francisco gay community has created a set of rituals to commemorate those who have died of AIDS (Richards, Wrubel, & Folkman, 1999–2000). Though many of these ceremonies are privately designed, the majority (69%) contain formal or informal religious content. Multiple rituals may be carried out over a number of months, and possibly years.

All known societies have their death rituals. Whatever biopsychological resonances these represent, their significance is buried in cultural practice. Rituals do, however, reflect much elemental psychology—communication, emotional control, and the fostering of group cohesion (Lorenz, 1966; Wulff, 1997).

DEATH AND THE CLERGY

Unlike the rest of us, the clergy are commonly called upon to deal with death and dying. Many are trained in pastoral skills to deal with terminally ill patients and their families. Furthermore, once death has occurred, the clergy conduct the final rituals that consign the souls of those who have died to their ultimate divine destiny. Concurrently, clergy turn their attention to grieving family members and friends, attempting to bring solace to them. This may include such practices as praying with bereaved individuals, reading scripture with them, interpreting theology, discussing spiritual and practical matters, conducting home visits, and whatever else may help to alleviate the pain of loss. The pastoral goals are to engender hope in the face of death, and to assist bereaved persons through the process of recovery. Given these responsibilities, it is understandable why White (1991) perceives clerics as “primary caregivers” (p. 4). Leane and Shute (1998) define the aiding clergy as “gatekeepers,” a first line of help to those who grieve.

The relatively recent development of modern hospice programs and facilities has greatly extended the role of clergy in the predeath period. In the hospice context, a cleric provides friendship, and becomes a good listener to the patient and to visiting family members and friends (Dubose, 2000). The need for psychological understanding and clinical skills is overwhelmingly evident in these situations.

Three aims may be posited in work with dying persons and their survivors: (1) to make the death meaningful through a religious or spiritual system; (2) to transform the distress of the death and dying process into a vista of personal strength, self-identity, and a natural closing to an existence in which one has contributed to a better future; and (3) to attempt to convince all that death is not an end, but a new beginning—a doorway to immortality, a personal permanence, a new kind of life (Cook & Oltjenbruns, 1989). We have already shown how clergy may do these things by strengthening spirituality, offering hope, and enhancing the sense of death as meaningful beyond the immediate situation.

Training the Clergy to Deal with Death

Even though clergy overwhelmingly feel that they have a responsibility to deal with those who are dying (91%) and bereaved (89%), they find performing these duties difficult and anxiety-producing (White, 1991). However, an increased emphasis on death education for prospective clergy has sometimes imparted a heightened sense of competence in dealing with terminality. In one study, 64% felt moderately to well educated in this area (Spilka,

Spangler, & Rea, 1981). In contrast, older clergy had to learn about death and dying through direct experience in the pastorate. Today, these important skills can be acquired both in seminaries and through internships prior to ordination. Opportunities are currently provided for neophyte clerics to model themselves after mentors who have been engaged with dying people and their families for long periods of time.

With relatively little variation, those to whom the clergy provide their services are pleased with the pastoral efforts of hospital chaplains and “home pastors” (i.e., people’s regular clerics making home visits) (Brabant, Forsyth, & McFarlain, 1995; Johnson & Spilka, 1991; Spilka, Spangler, & Nelson, 1983). An interesting exception occurs for patients with breast cancer: Both male and female clerics usually avoid discussing some of these women’s central concerns about their identity as females and the surgical mutilation of their bodies (Johnson & Spilka, 1991). Obviously, there is still a need for pastoral training to deal with such sensitive personal issues.

Another approach revolves around the concept of a “good death.” Utilizing focus groups of clergy and congregants, Braun and Zir (2001) found agreement on a number of criteria that pastoral education might emphasize for a terminally ill patient to have a “good death.” The implication is that clerics should (1) be involved in pain management; (2) see that the dying process is not inappropriately prolonged; (3) work to encourage a supportive family atmosphere at the bedside; (4) try to resolve conflicts and introduce the potential of forgiveness, when desirable; (5) aid not only the terminally ill patient, but grieving family members; and (6) where proper, bring in theology and rituals to lighten the burden of mourning and bereavement.

Other troubling areas for which clergy feel unprepared are infant deaths and youth suicides (Strength, 1999; Thearle, Vance, Najman, Embelton, & Foster, 1995; Leane & Shute, 1998). With regard to adolescent suicide, an Australian study revealed low levels of knowledge about risk signs for such an eventuality. This is believed to handicap clerical efforts to counteract such suicidal inclinations (Leane & Shute, 1998).

Pastoral education might also look more closely at the problems children have when loved ones die. The problem of inaccurate, distorted, and troubling magical fantasies needs to be confronted in order to resolve a child’s grief (Fogarty, 2000).

Theology, Personal Faith, and Clergy Effectiveness

Spilka, Spangler, Rea, and Nelson (1981) found that among clergy dealing with death and dying, two-thirds claimed that the theology of their church was “very helpful,” while only 2–3% felt that it was of little or no use. Surprisingly, these numbers held whether the clerics were affiliated with a conservative or a liberal religious body. An interesting variation on this theme suggests that clerics’ own personal faith is of greater importance than their church’s theology, as 83% regarded the former as providing them with the most support in their death work (Spilka, Spangler, & Rea, 1981).

There is little doubt that working with terminality is a very trying experience for clerics. Almost 70% of those surveyed were less than “very satisfied” with their efforts, and 11–14% were quite unhappy with themselves. Some 43% of these pastors described themselves with qualifying adjectives such as “frustrated,” “inadequate,” “apprehensive,” and the like (Spilka, Spangler, & Rea, 1981).

That bereaved people consider the clergy helpful at this troubled time is abundantly evident. Carey (1979–1980) compared the satisfaction of widows and widowers with physi-

cians, nurses, chaplains, social workers, and family members. Although family members were viewed as most helpful, hospital chaplains came in a close second.

Like virtually everyone who confronts death, clergy probably never become immune to the feelings that death and dying engender. They have entered a profession in which they must continually confront these hard realities. Undoubtedly, pastoral effectiveness is a function of experiences that force clerics to face their own mortality while expressing the empathy and humanity these situations call for. Fortunately, most clergy acquire the skills, compassion, and understanding to handle these trials. Additional comprehension of these difficulties from the consumers' viewpoint is offered in Research Box 7.10.

RESEARCH BOX 7.10. Spiritual Support in Life-Threatening Illness
(Spilka, Spangler, & Nelson, 1983)

In the last analysis, the effectiveness of clerics must be determined by those who receive their ministrations. This was assessed in a study of 101 patients with cancer and 45 parents of children with cancer. All were questioned about their interactions with home pastors and hospital chaplains. The participants were generally quite religious. All respondents were administered a 45-item questionnaire, in which 6 items were open-ended, permitting a free response.

Twenty-nine percent of the patients were visited at home by their pastors, and 66% received hospital visits. With regard to the families of the children with cancer, 42% had home visits and 56% hospital visits. About 55% of both the patients and parents saw hospital chaplains. From 78% to 87% of the patients and parents were satisfied with the home and hospital visits. Most satisfaction was expressed in cases where the home clergy actually prayed with the patients and the family. Engaging in religious reading was also positively regarded. In the hospital, the families approved discussions of the future by the chaplain. Finally, the willingness of a cleric simply to be present and to devote time to this troubling situation was considered most desirable.

The respondents were often clearer about the undesirable characteristic of clerics than those they found positive. Most that was displeasing was attributed to poor communication and lack of understanding by a pastor. Specifically, conveying the impression of visiting out of a sense of duty alone, or failing to appreciate or be sensitive to the pain of the circumstances, was upsetting to these people. Extremely distressing were efforts (fortunately rare) to obtain "deathbed conversions." For example, one cleric harangued a patient to "change his pagan ways." Much more common were indications of the pastors' own discomfort—looking at their watches, acting "nervous," verbalizing clichés, standing at a distance from patients, being painfully silent and unresponsive, and finally being in a rush to leave.

Pastoral identity was also a problem. A fair number of patients reported difficulty discovering who was and was not a chaplain. This resulted from the wearing of informal sports clothes, the absence of a badge that defined one as a chaplain (or the use of a badge too small to read at any distance), and/or a person's failing to state that he or she was a chaplain.

The many things pastors do can bring comfort and solace to those greatly in need of such aid. In most instances, this is what takes place. Still, clergy sometimes convey a lack of feeling and compassion without intending to do so. There is clearly a need for "on-the-job" training in these critical situations.

OVERVIEW

In this chapter, we have examined the roles religion plays in the closing stage of life, as well as its significance in relation to death. Once again, we observe that things are far more complex than we might initially believe. Behind every obituary there is a life, and this existence has probably included religious beliefs, experiences, and behavior that influenced the way the person lived and died.

Until fairly recently, psychology paid little attention to older individuals. The fact that people are living longer and that the elderly population is growing at an extremely rapid rate has awakened the social-scientific community to the necessity of understanding this population. Similarly, religious institutions have found that the average age of congregation members has increased. As churchgoers grow older, new psychological and faith needs arise. The significance of religion in these circumstances cannot be ignored or minimized. Growing isolation, mental and physical infirmities, and the loss of friends and family create new functions for church and faith. We have thus looked at the importance of forgiveness and prayer in this group.

Overall, we have seen a major development in research in this area—namely, from the use of unitary notions of aging and death to multidimensional conceptualizations in both domains. Even though more sophisticated instrumentation is now available, too much work still relies on simplistic measures of death fear/anxiety. Part of this may be due to the fact that researchers are much more knowledgeable in the coping realm than they are with advances in the psychology of religion. Convenience samples in which testing must be kept to a minimum may also be impeding the use of more sophisticated measurement of religious perspectives; however, we now see multiform trends in work on religiosity relative to coping with AIDS, bereavement, euthanasia, and such phenomena as NDEs and contact with the dead.

Our position is that the deaths of others and the prospect of one's own death raise for each individual two very basic coping issues we have often referred to in this volume: the issues of meaning and control. Both aging and death arouse these concerns in their most intimate and ultimate forms. It is here that faith probably makes its greatest adaptive contributions.

Conversion, Spiritual Transformation, and Deconversion

Riding home with a friend that evening in the back seat of a car, I listened incredulously as my companions spoke glowingly about the message that they had just received. In fact, they were so moved by the guru's words that they made tentative plans to return the next day to pay homage to him by kissing his feet. I was flabbergasted, stunned. How could anybody have thought this guy was a spiritual master?

There are two lives, the natural and the spiritual, and we must lose the one before we can participate in the other.

He was down and out, the Catholics took him in and before he knew it, he had faith. So it was gratitude that decided the issue most likely.

But the Muslim believes that the propositional tenets of his faith are self-evident if they are properly presented and understood, and the focus of his proselytization is the proclamation of these tenets rather than the experiences of human beings.

All conversions (even Saul's on the road to Damascus) are mediated through people, institutions, communities, and groups.

And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds, And binding with briars my joys & desires.¹

In the early months of 1881, G. Stanley Hall delivered a series of public lectures at Harvard University. His topic was religious conversion, and much of the material he covered was later incorporated into his classic two-volume study of adolescence (Hall, 1904). The young science of psychology was courageous enough to tackle some of the most profound and meaningful religious phenomena of the times. Because the emerging psychology was linked in the popular mind with religious and parapsychological phenomena (Coon, 1992), some of the first North American psychologists divided along lines claiming to debunk or support such phenomena (Hood, 1994). Hall eventually went on to write a two-volume treatise with the title *Jesus, the Christ, in the Light of Psychology* (1917). The title reveals the Christian

¹These quotations come, respectively, from the following sources: Kent (2001, p. xvi); James (1902/1985, p. 139); Kundera (1983, p. 308); Poston (1992, p. 158); Rambo (1993, p. 1); and Blake (1789/1967, Plate 44).

bias of the emerging science of psychology: When they said “religion,” most psychologists meant Christianity. Furthermore, when they said “Christianity,” most psychologists meant Protestantism. Thus, not surprisingly, the North American psychology of religion emerged as a psychology of North American Protestant Christianity—a bias that dominates the field to this day (Gorsuch, 1988).

At the turn of the 20th century, religious revivals were common in North America, especially in evangelical Protestantism (Gaustad, 1966; Taves, 1999). Evangelicals focused upon the “born-again” experience. In his Gifford Lectures, James distinguished between those “once-born,” who are cultivated within their faith and gradually socialized to accept it unproblematically, and those “twice-born,” with more melancholy temperaments, who are literally compelled through crises to accept or realize their faith within an instant (James, 1902/1985, Lectures VI through VIII). Not surprisingly, North American psychologists were fascinated by this predominantly Protestant phenomenon, and conversion became the earliest major focus of the psychology of religion.

Sociologists were also concerned with conversion. Jackson (1908) chose conversion as his topic when he gave the Cole Lectures at Vanderbilt University. James (1902/1985) devoted two of his Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh to the specific topic of conversion (Lectures IX and X). James’s lectures relied heavily upon the research of his contemporaries, especially Edwin Starbuck and James H. Leuba. Both had been students of Hall’s at Clark University. Leuba (1896) published the first psychological journal article on conversion; this was rapidly followed by Starbuck’s (1897) article on conversion and by his first book-length treatment of the topic (Starbuck, 1899). Not surprisingly, Leuba’s and Starbuck’s research methods paralleled Hall’s, including the use of questionnaires and personal documents. Despite James’s aversion to questionnaire studies, he utilized material supplied by Starbuck from his questionnaire studies of religious converts. Another early investigator, Coe (1916), added quasi-experimental techniques to the investigation of religious converts.

Whereas these early investigators tended to focus upon dramatic cases of sudden conversion, others argued against the selection of such extreme cases as the basis for developing a general model of conversion. For instance, Pratt (1920), a student of James’s at Harvard, focused upon gradual converts, whose experiences were less dramatic, required intellectual seeking, and were hypothesized to be more genuinely characteristic of conversion within both Christianity and other religious traditions. As we shall soon see, from the beginning of the study of conversion, fundamental issues were identified and debated that continue to characterize the contemporary study of the subject. Yet as the psychology of religion waned in North America, conversion was ignored by psychologists. By the late 1950s, W. H. Clark bemoaned the fact that psychology had all but abandoned the study of conversion:

For students of religion and religious psychology there is no subject that has held more fascination than the phenomenon called conversion. Yet of recent years a kind of shame-facedness becomes apparent among those scholars who mention it. . . . among the more conventional psychologists of the present day, who infrequently concern themselves with the study of religion and practically never with the subject of conversion. It is quite obvious that the latter is regarded as a kind of psychological slum to be avoided by any respectable scholar. (Clark, 1958, p. 188)

Even now, critical reviews of the literature on conversion reveal that there are no systematic programs of methodologically sophisticated research on conversion. The necessary longi-

tudinal studies are nearly nonexistent. As Paloutzian, Richardson, and Rambo (1999, p. 1048) note, “most of the research is retrospective and cross-sectional, and no systematic program of research has ever been sustained.” Paloutzian (2005) has proposed placing the study of conversion within a meaning systems analysis which could produce programmatic research. Likewise, Streib and his colleagues have recommended using mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) to study deconversion systematically within a narrative framework linked to biographical analyses (Streib, 2008; Streib, Hood, Keller, Csöff, & Silver, 2009). Thus the future promises more systematic programs of empirical research on conversion, spiritual transformation, and deconversion, consistent with the call for a new paradigm that is multi-level and interdisciplinary (Hefner & Koss-Chioino, 2006; Gooren, 2007; Paloutzian, 2005; Streib et al., 2009).

CONVERSION AND SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION: DEFINITIONS AND APPROACHES

A distinction can be made between “spiritual transformation” and “conversion,” given the distinction between “spirituality” and “religion” that now dominates much of the scientific study of religion. As we discuss in Chapter 9, most persons in the contemporary United States identify themselves as both spiritual and religious. However, a stable minority identify themselves as either *more* spiritual than religious (Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999) or spiritual but *not* religious (Marler & Hadaway, 2002). Several investigators have noted that this latter group asserts an independence from, and often even hostility to, religious institutions (Hood, 2003b, 2005b; Streib, 2008). However, insofar as individuals alter their spirituality, they may do it either in association with religious institutions or in opposition to them. Consistent with Paloutzian (2005, pp. 333–334) we refer to the former alteration as “conversion,” and the latter as “spiritual transformation.” Thus spiritual transformation expressed in conventional religious language and associated with religious institutions is conversion in the classic sense. Spiritual transformation is expressed in nonconventional religious language and often in opposition to religious institutions from which the individual has deconverted (Streib et al., 2009). Although there may be overlap between religion and spiritual self-identification, Schlenhofer, Omotto, and Adelman (2008) noted in an in-depth qualitative of older adults that spirituality was a more abstract concept than religion and included nontheistic notions of a higher power. Religion, on the other hand, was more closely associated with community participation, specific beliefs, and organized practices.

It is primarily social psychologists who produce the majority of the empirical measurement-based research in the psychology of religion. Social psychology is divided into sociological social psychology and psychological social psychology (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). Although contemporary research on conversion is rapidly increasing in volume, the clear tendency is for sociological social psychology to dominate the field. Much of this can be attributed to the sociological interest in new religious movements, discussed in Chapter 9. For instance, a major bibliography on new religious movements by Beckford and Richardson (1983) contained at least 145 references pertinent to conversion, only 5% of which appeared prior to 1973. An earlier bibliography specifically on conversion literature prepared by Rambo (1982) listed 252 references, only 38% of which were published prior to 1973. Despite the claim of Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle (1997, p. 115; emphasis in original) that conversion

has been “*the* classical topic in the psychology of religion,” we see a reemergence of studies of conversion as a major focus for the contemporary social psychology of religion, but with a distinctive sociological rather than psychological emphasis. The focus is more upon spiritual transformation than upon religious conversion, reflecting what Gooren (2007, p. 347) has aptly identified as “disciplinary biases.”

Quite naturally, we can focus upon two major approaches to conversion and transformation—roughly identified with what we term the “classic” (psychological) focus and the “contemporary” (sociological) focus. The classic approach, influenced primarily by psychological social psychology, has been dominated (as noted above) by a concern with North American Protestantism. Many different techniques and methods characterize this research, but the focus is primarily upon intraindividual processes in conversion. The contemporary approach is influenced primarily by sociological social-psychological studies of conversion and transformation. This research is focused upon new religious movements, or varieties of communal Christian groups; it is less likely to be strongly measurement-based, and the focus is upon interpsychological processes. These major distinctions are not exclusive and overlap in significant ways, but as we shall see, they provide differing (and to some extent even contradictory) views of conversion and spiritual transformation. The extent to which the differences between the classic and contemporary approaches are confounded by claims about the nature of conversion and transformation processes is an open question.

THE CLASSIC RESEARCH PARADIGM: PSYCHOLOGICAL DOMINANCE

What we have chosen to call the classic research approach to conversion is not merely of historical interest. The early psychologists utilized a variety of methods to study conversion. They also accepted as raw data for analysis various types of material; these included personal documents such as private letters and confessions, as well as autobiographical and biographical materials. Questionnaires, interviews, and public confessions were also employed. Although contemporary psychology tends to minimize the use of many of these sources, especially personal documents, their value can be immense (Capps, 1994; Capps & Dittes, 1990). They cannot be used to identify the causal processes in conversion, but they are essential and valid as rich descriptions of the process of conversion as a human experience. They also provide a richness of detail that moves beyond monocausal explanations of what are clearly complex processes of social and personal change (Kwilecki, 1999; Streib et al., 2009).

Classic Conceptualizations of Conversion

Snow and Machalek (1984) have appropriately noted that any effort to understand the causes of conversion presupposes the ability to identify converts. However, they have also noted that few investigators have bothered to give clear conceptualizations of conversion. Most psychologists define “conversion” as a radical transformation of self; these definitions emphasize intrapersonal processes. Furthermore, early psychologists such as Cutten (1908) and Pratt (1920) emphasized that such definitions rely heavily upon a Protestant understanding of Saul’s (Paul’s) conversion on the road to Damascus as typical of all conversion (Richardson, 1985b).

The use of Paul's conversion as prototypical so dominates the classic paradigm of conversion research that Richardson (1985b) refers to the "Pauline experience" as the exemplar for conversion research in an article contrasting the classic paradigm with an emerging contemporary paradigm. Ironically, contemporary views echo Pratt, who argued that the fascination of psychologists with Paul's conversion as a model for all crisis-precipitated sudden conversion accounted for its overrepresentation in textbooks on psychology of religion. In Pratt's own words, "I venture to estimate that at least nine out of every ten 'conversion cases' reported in recent questionnaires would have no violent or depressing experience to report had not the individual in question been brought up in a church or community which taught them to look for it if not to cultivate it" (1920, p. 153).

As was the case with psychology at the beginning of the 20th century, much of the contemporary psychology of religion is really a study of Christianity, particularly Protestantism (Gorsuch, 1988; Taves, 1999). Gorsuch (1988, p. 202) has appropriately cautioned against extending the psychology of Christianity to other religions. However, social psychologists have not been appropriately cautious in this respect: They have generalized from Paul's conversion not only to all conversion within Christianity, but even to conversion experiences in other religions as well.

Defining conversion as a radical alteration in the self is probably itself heavily influenced by the conversion of Paul. Even sociologically oriented investigators tend to define conversion in terms that imply radical change in the self, even if these terms are deemphasized or if conversion is empirically assessed by other indicators as well. For instance, in an often-cited definition, Travisano (1970, p. 594) refers to conversion as "a radical reorganization of identity, meaning, life." Heirich (1977, p. 674) refers to conversion as the process of changing one's sense of "root reality," or of one's sense of "ultimate grounding." After critical analysis of definitions of conversion as radical personal change, Snow and Machalek (1984) define conversion in terms of a shift in the universe of discourse, which carries with it a corresponding shift in consciousness. However, as Coe (1916, p. 54) long ago noted, if self-reorganization is used to define conversion, "Conversion is by no means co-extensive with religion." Indeed, most psychologists are likely to focus upon changing the self outside religious contexts (Brinthaupt & Lipka, 1994). What then makes conversion, contextualized as a radical self-change, distinctively religious?

It does little good to define conversion in distinctively religious terms, by imputing causal power to a deity to distinguish religious from nonreligious conversions. For instance, Rambo (1993, p. xiii) admits his own predilection to define as genuine only conversions as alteration of the person by the power of God, though he recognizes that this is not a useful definition for empirical psychology. However, whether or not one makes attributions to the self-altering power of God is capable of being empirically investigated. The use of religious attributions or a religious universe of discourse is what makes conversion *religious* conversion (Snow & Machalek, 1984). After conversion, religious attributions defining and identifying the new self become "master attributions," replacing secular attributions or religious attributions that were peripheral prior to conversion (Snow & Machalek, 1984). In this sense, early clarifications of conversion mesh nicely with contemporary considerations. Coe (1916, p. 152) spoke of "self realization within a social medium" as defining conversion. James (1902/1985, p. 162) noted that "To say a man is 'converted' means . . . that religious ideas, peripheral in his consciousness, now take a central place, and that religious aims form the habitual center of his energy." Paloutzian (2005) explores the shifts in meaning systems following conversion, especially meaning expressed in classical religious language.

Most empirical studies of conversion implicitly, if not explicitly, utilize criteria that correspond to Coe's analysis of conversion. First, conversion is a profound change in self. Second, the change is not simply a matter of maturation, but is typically identified with a process (sudden or gradual) by which the altered self is achieved. Third, this change in the self is radical in its consequences—indicated by such things as a new centering of concern, interest, and action. Fourth, this new sense of self is perceived as “higher” or as an emancipation from a previous dilemma or predicament. Thus conversion is self-realization or self-reorganization, in that one adopts or finds a new self. The process also occurs within a social medium or context. Specifically, in religious conversion this entails a religious framework within which the altered self is described, acts, and is recognized by others. The fact that conversion may result in new habitual modes of action links any purely *intrapsychological* processes of conversion to the *interpsychological* processes that maintain them. Long ago, Strickland (1924) argued against James's distinction between once-born and twice-born believers, on the grounds that anyone who consciously adopts a religious view (whether gradually or suddenly), is twice-born: “And if action from new ideals and changed habits of life do *not* follow, there has been no conversion” (p. 123; emphasis in original).

Although admittedly some change must occur in conversion, the nature of that change must be carefully delineated. Psychologists frequently focus upon personality change. Paloutzian et al. (1999) argue that the two distinct literatures on conversion and personality change ought to be related. Adopting contemporary views of personality that recognize levels or domains to personality (Emmons, 1995) suggests that one can organize the empirical literature on conversion by the extent to which it produces changes in particular domains or levels of personality. For instance, research at the basic personality level, using such indicators as a measure based on the five-factor model of personality (McCrae, 1992), has produced little if any evidence that conversion changes basic personality. However, at other levels of personality functioning, changes resulting from conversion can clearly be identified. Research Box 8.1 summarizes the conversion literature with respect to the changes conversion produces in various levels of personality functioning.

Efforts to Explain Conversion and Spiritual Transformation

Perhaps the two most empirically studied correlates of conversion (and, more recently, of spiritual transformation) are linked to temporal issues. One is the age at which conversion or spiritual transformation is most likely. (In Chapter 5, we review the typical finding that religious conversion is most common in adolescence. However, as we note in a later section, spiritual transformation is likely to occur and continue after adolescence.) The second temporal issue related to conversion and spiritual transformation is the rate of change: Is it sudden or gradual?

Sudden Conversion

Early investigators did not fail to classify conversion types into simple dichotomies. The most obvious was derived from a continuum of duration. Some persons convert quickly, appearing suddenly to adopt a faith perspective previously unknown (conversion) or to make a faith that was previously of peripheral concern suddenly central (intensification). Other people seem to mature and blossom gradually within a faith perspective that in some sense has always been theirs. We have already noted the dispute surrounding James's once-born and twice-born

RESEARCH BOX 8.1. What About the Personality Changes in Conversion?
(Paloutzian, Richardson, & Rambo, 1999)

The empirical study of conversion interfaces two bodies of literature in psychology: the literature on conversion, a perennial topic in the psychology of religion, and that on personality change, a topic of renewed interest in personality theory. Paloutzian, Richardson, and Rambo have reviewed and organized these two literatures according to levels of personality. Identifying three levels or domains of personality and the accompanying empirical literature of the effects of conversion reveals a fairly consistent picture. The magnitude of the effects of conversion across these three levels or domains of personality is consistent, whether conversion is sudden or gradual, or whether it is active or passive. They also appear to hold regardless of whether conversion is to a Western or Eastern faith tradition. We can summarize these findings as follows:

Personality level or domain	Effects of conversion
Level I: Basic functioning	No or minimal change
Level II: Midlevel functions (attitudes, feelings, behavior)	Significant change ^a
Level III: Self-defining personality functions (purpose in life, meaning, identity)	Profound change ^a

^aChange may not be permanent if continual conversions occur (this is common among active seekers).

types. James (1902/1985) acknowledged the possibility of gradual conversion, but he focused upon sudden conversion, probably precipitated by crises. Many of James's examples of crisis-precipitated conversion are what Rambo (1993) identifies as intensification experiences.

In his fascination with sudden conversion, James was not alone. Starbuck (1899) focused upon "conversions of self-surrender" and "voluntary conversions." The former were thought to be elicited by a sense of sin, suddenly overcome; the latter by a gradual pursuit of a religious ideal. Ames (1910) favored restricting the term "conversion" to sudden instances of religious change associated with intense emotionality. Coe (1916) noted at least six senses of conversion, but likewise favored limiting the term to intense, sudden religious change. Johnson (1959, p. 117) later echoed these views succinctly when he stated, "A genuine religious conversion is the outcome of a crisis."

So influential were the early psychologists in focusing conversion upon sudden, intense experiences of religious self-reorganization that Richardson (1985b, p. 164) summarizes their implicit conceptualization as the "old conversion paradigm." The prototype is the conversion of Paul in the Christian tradition. It suggests what Miller and C'deBaca (1994) refer to as "quantum change." Its major characteristics can be summarized as follows (see Richardson, 1985b, pp. 164–166):

1. The prototype is Paul's conversion.
2. The process is more emotional than rational.
3. The convert is a passive agent acted upon by external forces.
4. The conversion entails a dramatic transformation of self.
5. Behavior change follows from belief change.

6. Conversion occurs once and is permanent.
7. Conversion occurs in adolescence.
8. Conversion occurs suddenly.

Richardson emphasizes that what we have called the classical model implies a passive subject transformed by forces that may be differentially identified. However, whether these forces are identified as “God” or “the unconscious” makes little difference. The convert is not seen as an active agent; instead, emotion dominates the irrational alteration of self that suddenly changes belief, and subsequent behavior change follows.

Richardson’s model has similarities to Strickland’s (1924) summary of the success of sudden conversions common among evangelical and fundamentalist Protestant groups in North America, including those that occurred during revivalist meetings. Strickland also emphasized the institutionalization of Paul’s conversion as the valued form of entering the Christian faith, with the emphasis upon sin and guilt as eliciting conditions joyously relieved in the emotionality of a sudden conversion. Strickland’s perspective thus adds a more dynamic understanding to Richardson’s assertion that the classical conversion paradigm is facilitated by emotional factors that are likely to erupt suddenly in late adolescence.

Not surprisingly, several empirical studies have related emotional states to sudden conversions. For instance, in a classic study by E. T. Clark (1929), 2,174 cases of adolescent conversions were classified as either sudden or gradual. Approximately one-third were sudden and were precipitated by either emotion or crisis; they also tended to be linked with a stern theology. Starbuck (1899) studied adolescent conversions and found that two-thirds were at least partially triggered by a deep sense of sin or guilt. However, he found that in later adolescence, conversion was likely to be more gradual. Pratt (1920) went so far as to identify the view that prior to their conversions, twice-born individuals wallow in extreme feelings of unworthiness, self-doubt, and depreciation that are released or overcome via conversion, as in the James–Starbuck thesis. The James–Starbuck thesis recognizes conversion as a functional solution to the burdens of guilt and sin, which are found to be unbearable prior to conversion. Research Box 8.2 presents a more detailed analysis of Clark’s (1929) classic study of conversion, which supports the James–Starbuck thesis.

In light of the James–Starbuck thesis, we must be cautious not to interpret negative emotions such as guilt, sin, and shame as necessarily psychologically unhealthy. Watson and his colleagues have provided a series of studies relevant to this thesis (Watson, 1993; Watson, Morris, & Hood, 1993). Watson argues that negative emotions such as shame and guilt can function positively when interpreted within an “ideological surround” that provides a context for both their meaningfulness and their resolution. Clearly, one individual’s personal religious reactions may be another’s madness. Just as many people refuse to experience the necessity of salvation from sin insisted upon by some fundamentalist groups, so may others perceive fundamentalists to be encased in a rigid, outmoded religious framework. Nevertheless, the functionality of sin, shame, and guilt within fundamentalism is hard to dispute (Gordon, 1984; Hood, 1992c). As Hood and his colleagues have noted (Hood, 1983; Hood, Hill, & Williamson, 2005), the empirical issues involved in studying fundamentalist religious groups are clouded by differences (often value-based) between investigators and those who are investigated.

That sudden conversion is often correlated with emotionality seems well established. However, such correlations do little to provide meaningful causal claims, such as that emotional feelings trigger conversions or that guilt and sin are resolved by such conversions. Nev-

RESEARCH BOX 8.2. The Psychology of Religious Awakening (Clark, 1929)

In this classic study, E. T. Clark classified 2,174 conversions as to whether they were sudden or gradual. Sudden conversions (32.9%) were subdivided into two types: (1) “definite crisis awakening,” in which a personal crisis was suddenly followed by a religious transformation (6.7%, majority males); and (2) “emotional stimulus awakening,” in which gradual religious growth was interrupted by an emotional event that was suddenly followed by religious transformation (27.2%, equal proportions of males and females). Gradual conversions were described as “gradual awakening,” a steady, progressive, slow growth resulting in gradual religious transformation (66.1%, slightly more females). A stern theology was associated with sudden conversions, equally distributed between crises and emotional awakenings. This was as would have been predicted from the James–Starbuck thesis. Almost all gradual conversions were associated with compassionate theologies that emphasized love and forgiveness.

Clark suggested that sudden conversions were associated with fear and anxiety. In addition, 41% of these conversions occurred during revivals, which were likely to be highly emotional settings. The dominant emotional states reported were joyful reactions, assumed by Clark to result from the alleviation of negative feelings that occurred prior to conversion, which were elicited by stern theologies emphasizing sin and guilt. This study suggests that negative emotional states can precipitate experiences within a religious setting, and that conversion then provides positive relief of these negative feelings.

ertheless, essentially correlational studies can be suggestive. A classic study by Coe (1916) compared 17 persons who anticipated striking conversions that actually occurred with 12 persons anticipating striking conversions that did not occur. Emotional factors were dominant in the group for which striking conversions occurred; cognitive factors were dominant in the group for whom striking conversions did not occur. In addition, the actual converts were more suggestible than the other group. Although Coe’s research suggests that emotional factors may be causally involved in sudden conversions, no true experimental studies or longitudinal studies documenting this claim exist. However, recent research in cognitive psychology suggests a reason to link emotionality and sudden dramatic conversions. McCallister (1995) has noted that emotional situations such as dramatic conversions may restrict the encoding of knowledge about experience, leading dramatic converts to utilize narrative formats to reconstruct their experience.

Still, in many studies it may be that emotionality and sudden conversions are merely correlated phenomena. For instance, Spellman, Baskett, and Byrne (1971) divided persons in a small Protestant town into sudden or gradual converts and compared them to nonconverts. They found that sudden converts scored higher on an objective measure of anxiety than gradual converts or nonconverts did. Yet this difference found was *after* conversion; there was no evidence that greater emotionality differentiated the groups prior to their conversion, as postulated by the James–Starbuck thesis. Furthermore, as Poston (1992) has noted, emotional and crisis-triggered conversions are uncommon in many non-Christian religions—they do not, for instance, characterize conversion to Islam. Woodberry (1992) notes that traditional Islamic thought does not even have a term for “conversion.” Finally, the specific case of sudden conversion associated with claims to mind control and “brainwashing” is discussed in Chapter 9.

There is considerable research relating attachment theory to religious conversion. Attachment theory has been discussed more fully in Chapter 4. Here we simply note that insofar as sudden religious conversion is concerned, a meta-analysis based on almost 1,500 participants strongly supports an association with early parental insensitivity, consistent with the theory that God serves as a compensatory attachment figure (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2004). Likewise, even dramatic increases in religious commitment have been shown to be precipitated by emotional turmoil among individuals whose parents were judged to be insensitive, again supporting the compensatory hypothesis (Granqvist, Ivarsson, Broberg, & Hageskull, 2007). In light of the new paradigm proposed for the psychology of religion, the relationship between the compensatory hypothesis and conversion is strengthened by the fact that it has been demonstrated in research using a variety of methods and measures of attachment (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2004).

Gradual Conversion

Like sudden religious conversions, gradual conversions result in a major change of self within a religious context. Yet gradual conversions occur almost imperceptibly; they are usually distinguished empirically by not being identified with a single event. Some investigators have argued that gradual conversions need not result in radical shifts in personality, self, or even religious beliefs. These researchers have essentially redefined conversion or have accepted as empirical criteria such things as merely joining a new religious group. Scobie (1973, 1975) even argues for “unconscious conversion,” referring to persons who cannot recall *not* having been religious. Clearly, characteristics associated with joining a new religious group need not precisely parallel those defining conversion in the classic sense. Neither do continual faith commitments without an intensification experience. We must note in each case the empirical criteria used to assess conversion, and must keep these in mind when comparing individual empirical studies.

Strickland (1924) contrasted gradual and sudden conversions. In gradual conversions, the emphasis is upon conscious striving toward a goal. This is consistent with Paloutzian’s (2005) emphasis on meaning, and with the summary of Paloutzian et al. (1999) noted above that changes in personality occur with respects to attitudes and behaviors (Level II) and in terms of purpose in life and meaning (Level III). The convert is not likely to experience a single decisive point at which conversion is either initiated or completed. There is an absence of emotional crises and of feelings of guilt and sin. The process is cognitive rather than emotional, and if it occurs in opposition to religion, it is best viewed as a spiritual transformation.

THE CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH PARADIGM: SOCIOLOGICAL DOMINANCE

Strickland’s distinction between gradual and sudden conversion laid the foundation for the emergence of what we term the contemporary paradigm of conversion and spiritual transformation. The focus upon an active agent, seeking self-transformation, has become the target of extensive research among more sociologically oriented investigators. No single theory dominates the research literature, but most theories share enough common assumptions to contrast them with the classic psychological paradigm.

Five characteristics of the contemporary paradigm are notable. First, the research is done primarily by sociologists and anthropologists or sociologically oriented social psychologists, rather than by psychologists or psychologically oriented social psychologists. Second, the research focuses upon new religious and spiritual movements, many of non-Western origin or influence (or, if Christian, often fundamentalist groups of a sectarian nature). Third, the research is often participatory in nature, with single groups studied over a period of time. Investigators are less likely to take a single set of measurements on a group, as is typical of classic research by psychologists on conversion. Both structured and unstructured interviews with research participants are common. Fourth, almost by definition, the research focuses upon gradual rather than sudden conversion or transformation. Finally, the process of deconversion is investigated, in which individuals who have converted and then left new religious movements are studied. (We cover deconversion in greater detail later in this chapter.)

Major Differences between the Classic and the Contemporary Paradigms

Richardson (1985b) has been the most articulate theorist arguing that the old paradigm, based upon the “Pauline experience,” is being abandoned in favor of an emerging paradigm. Some have debated the claim that there is a new emerging paradigm; they argue instead that perhaps the nature of conversion itself has changed over time (Lofland & Skonovd, 1981). It is difficult to compare the classic and contemporary paradigms empirically, given differences in research methods and the nature of religious groups studied. It is also unwise to think that both paradigms cannot operate, with some conversions being sudden and others gradual. The empirical issue seems to be under what conditions each type of conversion occurs.

What undoubtedly characterizes the contemporary paradigm is the use of typologies, often based upon assumed contrasts widely acknowledged in the classic paradigm. In the classic paradigm, sudden change was contrasted with gradual change, and associated with this distinction were other contrasts (such as passive vs. active and emotional vs. intellectual). The classic and contemporary paradigms are contrasted in Table 8.1. It is noteworthy that all these contrasts were noted by early investigators (Starbuck, 1899), as well as emphasized by contemporary investigators (Richardson, 1985b; Granqvist, 1998; Gooren, 2007).

The classic paradigm acknowledged a series of contrasts between sudden and gradual conversion, although empirical research was focused upon the more dramatic case of sud-

TABLE 8.1. The Classic and Contemporary Paradigms Compared

Classic paradigm	Contemporary paradigm
Conversion is sudden	Conversion or transformation is gradual
Middle adolescence to late adolescence	Late adolescence to early adulthood
Emotional, suggestive	Intellectual, rational
Stern theology	Compassionate theology
Passive	Active
Release from sin and guilt	Search for meaning and purpose
Emphasizes intraindividual psychological processes	Emphasizes interpsychological processes

den religious conversion. Perhaps it was this narrowed focus in the empirical literature that allowed the contemporary paradigm to emerge. In addition, the emergence of new religious movements and their obvious appeal to converts altered that typical pattern of research, almost by definition. Thus intensification experiences within traditions that focused upon intrapsychological processes (studied by psychologists) gave way to conversion to new religious movements focused upon interpersonal processes (studied by sociologists and social psychologists). Thus, as several investigators have noted, the distinction between sudden and gradual religious conversion is partly due to the fact that temporality is confounded with two different definitions of “conversion”—one that we define as “religious conversion” (or simply “conversion”), and the other that we define as “spiritual transformation” (Granqvist, 1998, 2003; Paloutzian, 2005; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1998).

Below, we summarize the characteristics of the emerging paradigm in conversion/transformation research (Richardson, 1985b, pp. 166–172). Our list follows Richardson closely, but consistent with what we have said above, we add “spiritual transformation” to “conversion.”

1. Conversion or spiritual transformation occurs gradually.
2. Conversion or spiritual transformation is rational rather than emotional.
3. The convert or transformed person is an active, seeking agent.
4. There is self-realization in the humanistic tradition.
5. Belief change follows from behavior change.
6. Conversion or spiritual transformation is not permanent; it may occur several times.
7. Conversion or spiritual transformation occurs in early adulthood and continues.
8. No one experience is prototypical.

Spiritual transformation is different from intensification experiences within a religious tradition that typify the psychological conversion paradigm. Spiritual transformation is associated with many of the new religious movements, as well as with deconversion from mainstream religious traditions (Hood, 2003b; Streib et al., 2009), and is freed from the classic Protestant conversion model that has dominated the early study of religious conversion as described above.

It is readily apparent, however, that Richardson’s claim to an emerging paradigm ironically meshes quite closely with earlier psychological research on spiritual transformation. Perhaps appropriate is the fact that the Lofland and Stark (1965) model, seen by Richardson (1985b) as transitional between the old and new paradigms, is still useful insofar as it permits identification of both predisposing psychological factors (typically studied in religious conversion) and situational and contextual factors (typically studied in spiritual transformation). This model is based upon Lofland’s (1977) provocative research in what was then only a minor new religion. He was one of the earliest investigators to study the Unification Church (popularly known as the “Moonies”) at a time when it was a minor cult and had not yet gained prominence on the world scene. As discussed in Chapter 9, research on the Unification Church, like research on many religious cults, is often dichotomized into psychological and sociological studies. In the former, sudden conversion is associated with denigrating popular metaphors, such as “brainwashing” and “mind control.” Yet more sociologically oriented studies of the gradual and voluntary process of conversion to the Unification Church are consistent with empirical findings concerning a variety of new religious movements, and are not compatible with denigrating models of conversion or transformation as pathologi-

cal (Barker, 1984). Long and Hadden (1983) have argued for a “dual-reality” approach, in which conversion may involve either sudden, emotional processes (associated with intrapsychological processes, which can be denigrated in terms of a “brainwashing” metaphor) or more gradual processes (associated with interpsychological processes). However, we need not assume conversion/transformation to be an either–or process, based upon dichotomies such as sudden–gradual or passive–active.

Conversion (and Transformation) Motifs

Among those studying conversion to new religious movements or spiritual transformation, the emphasis upon gradual processes has suggested a variety of empirical phenomena operating over time. Several investigators have attempted more diversified classifications of conversion types, identifying various possible “conversion careers” (Richardson, 1978b). It is undoubtedly true that personal accounts of conversions often reflect biases elicited by investigators who rely upon interviews and observation after the fact to assess which factors are operating, as Beckford (1978) has noted. Classifications of conversion that rely upon psychological dispositions and intrapsychological processes ought not to be simply opposed to those that rely upon social contexts and interpsychological processes. The union of both is needed.

One classification system admirably linking the classic and contemporary models, the psychological and the sociological, is that of Lofland and Skonovd (1981). These scholars coined the concept “conversion motif” to take account of the “phenomenological validity” of “holistic subjective conversion experience” (p. 374). They have postulated six conversion motifs, and five major dimensions that apply to each motif. These are presented in Table 8.2.

The Lofland and Skonovd typology allows for variations in conversion without forcing arbitrary dichotomies. It permits a distinction among basic objective phenomena, identified

TABLE 8.2. The Lofland and Skonovd Conversion Motifs

	Intellectual	Mystical	Experimental	Affectional	Revivalist	Coercive
Degree of social pressure	None or low	None or low	Low	Medium	High	High
Temporal duration	Medium	Short	Long	Long	Short	Short
Level of affective arousal	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High	Low
Affective content	Insight	Awe or love	Curiosity	Affection	Love and fear	Fear and love
Belief–behavior sequence of change	Belief first	Belief first	Behavior first	Behavior first	Behavior first	Behavior first

Note. Adapted from Lofland and Skonovd (1981, p. 375). Copyright 1981 by the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Adapted by permission.

along the five dimensions; it also respects the subjective account of conversion by the convert. Thus their six conversion motifs provide “phenomenological validity” to the objective factors (dimensions) postulated to be operative in conversion (Lofland & Skonovd, 1981, p. 379). Their motifs are capable of operationalization and empirical study. They also cut across the psychological and sociological concerns that mediate between the classic and contemporary paradigms of conversion discussed above. For instance, their mystical motif fits the classical Pauline prototype of conversion, emphasizing intrapsychic factors; by contrast, the experimental motif focuses upon the processes by which “seekers” creatively transform themselves, often by interacting with others who model proper converted behavior, as in the contemporary paradigm (Straus, 1976).

Embedded in the conversion motif typology is the assumption that there are three levels of reality to consider. The first is what Lofland and Skonovd (1981, p. 379) call “raw reality,” or the actual truth of conversion, which is only imperfectly available to the social scientist. The second level is the convert’s experience and interpretation. The third is the analytic interpretation provided by the social scientist. The change in conversion motifs over time may reflect a change in any one or all of these levels of reality. Obvious examples are the clearly historical contingency of coercive motifs (discussed in detail in Chapter 8) and the revivalist motif (now less common among nonevangelical forms of Protestantism).

The processes of conversion within each motif need to be empirically researched. Once again, psychological and sociological social psychologists actually parallel one another in their analyses. For instance, whereas sociological social psychologists tend to focus on accounts (Beckford, 1978; Snow & Machalek, 1983), a parallel literature exists among psychological social psychologists in terms of attributions (Spilka & McIntosh, 1995; Spilka, Shaver, & Kirkpatrick, 1985). To a large extent, various conversion motifs exist because of the linguistic frameworks within which conversion is understood. These include biographical reconstructions, the adaptation of master attribution schemes, and various rhetorical indications that one has indeed been converted. Mafra (2000) has even argued that conversion can be treated as a narrative genre in its own right.

Much of the sociological literature on the process of conversion emphasizes how people behave in such a way that they essentially “convert themselves.” Whereas classic conversion research focused upon what happens to passive converts, the contemporary research focuses upon what converts actively do to produce their conversions. For instance, Balch (1980) has emphasized how individuals must learn to act like converts by performing particular role-prescribed behaviors expected of people who have been converted. Thus behavior change occurs before an individual internalizes beliefs and perceptions characteristic of a convert. Perhaps actual perceptual changes require a reconditioning of habitual patterns of perception, aptly captured by Deikman’s (1966) notion of “deautomatization.” However, it is only after participating in activities associated with new religious groups that such alterations in perceptions can occur. Thus behavior change precedes belief change. Several investigators have documented this via participation research with new religious groups. For instance, Wilson (1982) has demonstrated such a process with converts to a yoga ashram, and Preston (1981, 1982) has demonstrated this same tendency among converts becoming Zen practitioners.

In terms of empirical assessment, it is important to note that the use of either behavior change or belief change as an indicator of conversion will determine at what point conversion occurs (if at all). The two types of change need not occur at the same time. In addition, the

temporal duration of conversion may be different for belief change and behavior change, even within a single conversion process. An individual may gradually be socialized into a new religious group and at some point suddenly experience a deautomatization, resulting in new perceptions congruent with the group's world view. This is apparently particularly true of some Eastern traditions that emphasize practice over belief, such as Zen and yoga (Preston, 1981, 1982; Wilson, 1982; Volinn, 1985). In this sense, a person may not be able to actively pursue deautomatization as a goal; it is a product of successful socialization into religious groups, and becomes possible once proper techniques and practices are mastered (Balch, 1980; Deikman, 1966). Much of the research literature has reintroduced classic cognitive dissonance theory to provide theoretical justification for a sequence of behavior change–belief change. The focus has been upon maintenance of conversion within groups when prophecy appears to fail.

Finally, the distinction we have made between conversion and spiritual transformation is associated with distinctions firmly rooted in mainstream social science. To cite but one example, Granqvist (2003) has noted that conversion is likely to be associated with previously insecure attachment in those for whom conversion is a compensation and effective means of controlling distress, and is likely to occur suddenly. On the other hand, spiritual transformation is associated with those with continual secure attachment and is more involved with socialization processes and the quest for meaning.

Support for both conversion and spiritual transformation is provided by the recent National Spirituality Transformation Study (NSTS; Smith, 2006). With funding from Metanexus and support from the University of Pennsylvania, three items were added to a random half of the 2004 General Social Survey (GSS). The NSTS used a full-probability sample of 1,328 adults living in American households. The personal interviews conducted with these adults included qualitative explorations of the triggers and consequences of experiences of spiritual transformation. Table 8.3 presents the results for the NSTS with comparisons for other years in which the same questions were asked in the GSS.

The percentages of reported experiences agree well with similar reports of mystical experiences discussed in Chapter 11. However, with respect to conversion and spiritual trans-

TABLE 8.3. Responses to Selected Questions about Spiritual Transformation

Question	Survey and date			
	GSS (1988)	GSS (1991)	GSS (1998)	NST (2004)
Q3. Born-again experience?	37%	35%	37%	37%
Q1. New commitment to religion?	na	47%	46%	37%
Q2. Experience that changed life?	na	na	40%	35%

Note. Full questions:

Q1. Has there been a turning point in your life where you made a new and personal commitment to religion?

Q2. Did you ever have a religious or spiritual experience that changed your life?

Q3. Would you say that you had been “born again” or have had a “born-again” experience, that is, a turning point in your life where you committed yourself to Christ?

na, not asked; percentages rounded up. Adapted from Smith (2006, pp. 284, 296). Copyright 2006 by Blackwell Publishing, Ltd. Adapted by permission.

formation, several points can be emphasized. First, Questions 1 and 3 focus upon conversion. Question 3 focuses upon “born-again” experiences common to Protestant fundamentalists and evangelicals, and its constant response rate mirrors the percentage of persons identifying themselves as evangelicals in America. Question 1 refers to an intensification experience, and focuses upon renewed commitment to one’s religion. Only Question 2 refers to change that can pertain to spiritual transformation, but unfortunately the wording of the question confounds spirituality with religion. This, we suspect, accounts for the decline in positive responses to this question over the years: There has been a 10-point decline in that we suspect accounts for persons who now likely identify themselves as more spiritual than religious.

The interview data focused upon triggers of the experiences as well as their consequences. Here, consistent with data on mysticism discussed in Chapter 11, the widest possible nature and type of triggers were cited. However, relative to the issue of distress, approximately half who indicated that they had had a religious or spiritual experience that changed their lives indicated that a personal crisis had triggered it, while the remaining half indicated that the experience was a result of gradual and routine religious practices. Thus the NSTs data support the distinction between conversion (or intensification) as likely to be sudden and stress-induced, and spiritual transformation as likely to be more gradual and unassociated with distress. This latter point is supported by the fact that experiences perceived to have changed respondents’ lives were moderately related to switching religions, even for those interviewees who did not indicate that they changed their religion because of their experience (Smith, 2006, p. 287).

As further support for spiritual transformation being less related to institutional religious involvement than conversion, we can note data from the 1988 GSS as summarized by Streib and his colleagues. Streib et al. (2009, p. 32) note that in response to the question “Have you ever had another religious preference?”, 64% answered “no.” However, of the 36% who answered “yes,” the vast majority had had only one (24%). Fewer than 1% had had four or more previous preferences. Thus conversion and intensification experiences are associated with limited religious exploration.

Streib et al. (2009, p. 36) also provide data from the 2006 GSS results asking persons whether they were “more religious than spiritual,” “equally both,” “more spiritual than religious,” or “neither.” Here we simply note that among persons with no religious affiliation, the majority (49%) indicated that they were “more spiritual than religious.” Within religious groups, the percentages of believers responding that they were more spiritual than religious were equal for the Protestants and Catholics (both 22%) and higher for Jews (30%). Yet we suggest that these data overall are most consistent with the move from conversion and intensification experiences to spiritual transformation that largely is focused outside institutional religion. This is also consistent with our discussion of the emergence of mystics outside the church (see Chapter 11).

Maintenance of Conversion When Prophecy Appears to Fail

One theory that has had considerable influence in the study of conversion is the theory of cognitive dissonance, first proposed by Festinger (1957). Basic to his theory is the notion that cognitions more or less map reality. Hence there is pressure for individual beliefs to be congruent with reality—whether physical, psychological, or sociological (Festinger, 1957, pp. 10–11). This has led some researchers to puzzle over how it is that individuals can maintain membership in religious groups when prophecy fails. The classic study by Festinger and

his colleagues was titled *When Prophecy Fails* (Festinger, Riecken, & Schachter, 1956). This participant observation study of a group that believed in flying saucers and predicted the end of the world began a series of participant observation studies of religious groups whose success in maintaining converts is paradoxically linked to failed prophecies. Part of the appeal of Festinger's theory is undoubtedly due to its counterintuitive claim—that prophecies proven to be incorrect result both in maintenance of conversion and in efforts to convert others. How is this possible?

Central to Festinger's theory is that cognitions can be dissonant. Dissonance exists if the obverse of one belief follows from the other. When this is the case, the believer is motivated to reduce this dissonance. However, since the dissonance of two cognitions is defined by psychological as well as logical means, Festinger's theory has undergone a series of modifications as investigators have continued to study religious groups and what perhaps are only apparent prophetic failures. As in much of the literature on conversion, the more psychologically oriented and the more sociologically oriented social-psychological studies yield different results.

Psychologically Oriented Social-Psychological Studies of Failed Prophecy

Festinger et al. (1956) infiltrated a religious group in which a housewife began experiencing automatic writing that revealed to her the coming end of the world. Included in this prophetic claim was that superior beings would come in flying saucers and save those who, like this housewife, believed in them. Festinger and his colleagues infiltrated this group and, as participant observers, sought to test their own prophecy—namely, that when this group's prophecy of the world's destruction failed, the group would both continue in its beliefs and attempt even greater proselytization. Simply put, in Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance, proselytization increases when prophecy fails. Why?

Festinger's theory requires five basic conditions: First, the belief must be sincere and held with one's "whole heart"; second, and closely related, the person must be committed to this belief; third, he or she must actually take "irrevocable action" based upon it; fourth, the individual must be presented with "unequivocal and undeniable" evidence that the belief is wrong; and, finally, there must be social support subsequent to disconfirmation (Festinger et al., 1956).

Festinger's theory seems straightforward enough and is uniquely relevant to religious groups for two basic reasons. First, religious groups do seem to make predictions and assert beliefs that from other perspectives seem disconfirmed. This is especially the case when clear prophecies are made that do not come true. Second, Festinger sidetracked the issue of pathology by noting that the beliefs are shared among individuals: There is social support. In Festinger et al.'s (1956) classic study, the predicted date came and passed, apparently falsifying the prophecy. Nevertheless, Festinger and colleagues claimed that the group did not disband because of the failed prophecy, but continued—renewed in its faith commitment, and passionate in its efforts to convince others of the truth of its beliefs. Although this has been widely reported by psychologists as a positive test of Festinger's theory, we shall shortly note that more sociologically oriented social psychologists have criticized this claim.

Festinger's claim to have identified the consequences of failed prophecy has been applied to many historical examples of failed prophecy, such as the Montanists, the Millerites, and even Christianity itself. For instance, it is claimed that the 2nd-century failure of Montanus to predict the return of Jesus led to renewed commitment and the success of the Montanists

(Hughes, 1954). Similarly, William Miller's mid-19th-century prediction of the end of the world never materialized, and yet the Millerites prospered as a consequence (so we are led to believe) of their failed prophecy (Sears, 1924). Perhaps most dramatic is the interpretation that Christianity itself succeeded largely because of the failed prediction of Christ's second coming (Wernik, 1975). Although Festinger and his colleagues were careful only to suggest that historical examples of failed prophecy can be explained by cognitive dissonance, specific historical studies of the prophetic traditions of the Bible have considerably modified their claims—particularly their claim to have objectively identified actual failed prophecies (Carroll, 1979). However, psychologically oriented social psychologists continue to interpret dissonant beliefs objectively, offering even quasi-experimental support for Festinger's basic theory (see, e.g., Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993, pp. 210–216). Thus psychologically oriented social psychologists have tended to see in Festinger's theory a classic model of theory construction that has allowed specific empirical tests, which are viewed as largely supportive of the theory. However, sociologically oriented social psychologists have argued quite the opposite.

Sociologically Oriented Social-Psychological Studies of Failed Prophecy

Sociologically oriented social psychologists have found major flaws in cognitive-dissonance-based interpretations of failed prophecy. First, Festinger et al.'s (1956) classic study has been faulted on methodological grounds. Bainbridge (1997) has noted that often almost one-third of the members were participant observers, and that the group members were continually badgered by the press to account for their commitment. Thus the increased proselytizing and affirmations of faith may have been influenced by media pressure. Others have noted that Festinger's interpretation of historical cases in the light of dissonance theory is flawed. For instance, Melton (1985) has argued that the Millerites were not simply focused upon prophecy and did not disband in the manner Festinger claimed in order to provide support for his theory. Melton (1985, p. 20) further notes that "within religious groups prophecy seldom fails." Likewise, Van Fossen (1988) has noted that the continual citation of Festinger et al.'s (1956) classic study provides a deficient guide to the study of prophetic groups. Bader (1999, p. 120), after critically reviewing his own and Festinger et al.'s study, concludes that "Nevertheless no study of a failed prophecy, the current research included, has provided support for the cognitive dissonance hypothesis."

How can psychologically and sociologically oriented social psychologists have such different evaluations of dissonance theory? The answer is largely methodological. Psychologically oriented social psychologists tend to take an outsider perspective—as if they could identify dissonant beliefs by more objective criteria, or could identify "unequivocal and undeniable disconfirmation of a prophecy" (Festinger et al., 1956, p. 3). Yet as Coyle (2001, p. 150) notes, the term "religious gap" has become common with reference to the difference between mental health professionals and the general population in regard to religious beliefs. Table 8.4 shows the nature of this gap.

The religious gap hypothesis is relevant when it is recognized that researchers tend to describe for themselves when beliefs are dissonant or when prophecy has failed. This is crucial, since Festinger's theory requires that beliefs must be *proven* false—in his group's own words, that the disconfirmation must be "unequivocal and undeniable." However, as Carroll (1979) noted when applying cognitive dissonance theory to Biblical prophecy, there are no simple objective criteria by which one can identify failed prophecy. What outsiders (espe-

TABLE 8.4. Religious Gap between Mental Health Professionals and the General Population

Group	Religious	Nonreligious
General population	72%	19%
Family therapists	62%	15%
Social workers	46%	19%
Psychiatrists	39%	24%
Psychologists	33%	31%

Note. Religious respondents endorsed the statement “My whole approach to life is based upon my religion.” Nonreligious respondents identified themselves as atheist, agnostic, humanistic, or otherwise nonreligious. Data from Coyle (2001, p. 150).

cially researchers!) see as failed prophecy is seldom seen that way by insiders. Tumminia (1998, p. 165) notes that “what appears to be seemingly irrefutable evidence of irreconcilable contradictions to outsiders, like Festinger, can instead be evidence of the truth of prophecy to insiders.” Carroll (1979) observes that among the faithful, there is a transcendental dimension to prophecy, securing it from failure. Sociologically oriented social psychologists have noted this as well, recognizing that failed prophecy entails hermeneutical considerations that make claims to “unequivocal and undeniable” falsification problematic.

Sociologically oriented social psychologists have tended to take an insider’s perspective and to focus upon interpersonal processes that maintain a socially constructed reality incapable of any simply falsification. “Failed prophecy” is thus a negotiated term and depends upon negotiated claims to reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Carroll, 1979; Pollner, 1987). Furthermore, among prophetic groups, prophecy is less central than outsiders assume. The exclusive focus upon prophecy leads outsiders to assume that the major concern of the group is prophecy; it ignores the complex cosmology that serves to integrate the group (Melton, 1985). Participant observation studies of prophetic groups have begun to show how rare increased proselytization is as a reaction to what is only apparently failed prophecy (Stone, 2000). Zygmunt (1972, p. 245) defines “prophecy” as a prediction that a “drastic transformation of the existing social order will occur in the proximate future through the intervention of some supernatural agency.” The recognition of the transformation is socially constructed, and hence it cannot be unequivocally or undeniably disconfirmed. Thus, from the insider’s perspective, prophecy cannot fail.

The denial of failure of prophecy is the most common response from within prophetic groups, as members struggle to stay within the group and to seek a proper interpretation of what must be only an apparent failure (Carroll, 1979; Dein, 1997, 2001; Melton, 1985; Tumminia, 1998). Increased proselytization is actually an uncommon response to failed prophecy (Stone, 2000). As Dein (2001) notes, dissonance theory is utilized too often to persuade others that those who stay within prophetic groups are irrational and driven by forces they do not understand. Such claims are possible only when researchers assume an objectivist stance and can claim that in fact prophecy has failed. However, researchers who adopt the perspective of the insider avoid committing what James (1890/1950) identified as the “psychological fallacy”—assuming that others must experience the world as psychologists do. The task is to understand how believers confront a more spiritual understanding of prophecy, rather than a simple literal understanding of its “failure” (Carroll, 1979; Dein, 2001). For instance,

Dawson (1999) notes that increased proselytization is only one way to decrease dissonance, and that it is not at all a common way in the face of failed prophecy. More common than increased proselytization is the denial of failed prophecy (Zygmunt, 1972). This can take the form of “spiritualization”—a reinterpretation of the prophecy so that it has been fulfilled. For instance, Bainbridge (1997) notes that when Charles Taze Russell of the Jehovah’s Witnesses apparently failed to predict Christ’s return in 1874, he argued that Christ had indeed returned invisibly. Likewise, Tumminia (1998) studied the Unarius Academy of Science in El Cajon, California, over a period of 5 years (1988–1993). Failed prophecies were reinterpreted in terms of past lives and reincarnation, thus allowing denial of the failure of prophecy in terms of experiencing its fulfilment in a more spiritual sense. Both historical and contemporary participant observation studies of diverse prophetic groups—such as the Baha’i sect (Balch, Farnsworth, & Wilkins, 1983), a Mormon sect called the Morrisites (Halford, Anderson, & Clark, 1981), and the contemporary Lubavitcher Hasidic movement (Dein, 2001)—reveal that members continue to struggle with their beliefs and membership within groups, sometimes become disillusioned, and occasionally leave groups. However, they always rationally struggle with the meaning of prophecies that become not simply false, but problematic.

One common interpretation is that failed prophecies are a test of faith (Hardyck & Braden, 1962; Tumminia, 1998). Again, however, the struggle is always rational and meaningful from an insider’s perspective. As Dein (2001, p. 399) notes, individuals within a prophetic religious group “are not a group of fanatics who follow doctrine without question. They are sane people trying to reason their way through facts and doctrine in the pursuit of understanding.” Finally, as Bader (1999) has noted, the theoretical task is to propose testable hypotheses that not only clarify under what conditions failed prophecy will have specific effects, but also specify which members will leave a group if they perceive prophecy to have failed. Research Box 8.3 presents the results of a contemporary study of a religious group, Lubavitcher Hasidism, in which the complexities of apparently failed prophecy are explored in the tradition of Festinger’s classic study.

PROCESSES INVOLVED IN CONVERSION AND SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Contemporary research has been guided by a focus upon gradual conversion to new religious movements and to spiritual transformation outside of religious institutions. In addition to typologies, numerous investigators have presented models of the process of conversion or transformation. Some are formal in scope and propositional in nature (Gartrell & Shannon, 1985). The majority are qualitative models that have been inductively arrived at and used to organize the empirical literature (Kwilecki, 1999; Lofland & Stark, 1965; Rambo, 1993); it is not clear that such models can be easily submitted to empirical tests capable of falsifying them (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1989; Kuhn, 1962; Masterman, 1970; Richardson, 1985b). Most models share a recognition that conversion and spiritual transformation involve complex processes in which a variety of factors must be considered. In general terms, we can identify these factors under four headings: context; precipitating events; supporting activities; and finally participation/commitment. This is obviously an area in which the new paradigm needs to be embraced, especially in terms of interdisciplinary cooperation utilizing longitudinal methods.

RESEARCH BOX 8.3. What Really Happens When Prophecy Fails? (Dein, 2001)

Simon Dein, a nonreligious Jew, lived in the Stamford Hill Lubavitcher Hasidic community in England over a 3-year period (1992–1995). While working part-time as a physician, he studied the ways in which Lubavitchers dealt with illness. Beginning in 1993, intense messianic fervor emerged in the community. Dein interviewed 30 Lubavitchers (24 were males, and the majority of these were rabbis).

The Lubavitcher movement is a worldwide movement of Hasidic Jews who emphasize feelings over intellect and emphasize that one's thoughts should be continually upon God. They believe that their spiritual leader (*zaddik* or *rebbe*) is a perfectly righteous man. In accordance with traditional Jewish teachings, Lubavitchers believe that in each generation there is a potential messiah (*moshiach*). However, although each *zaddik* is a potential messiah, the *zaddik* himself may not realize this potential because the generation is unworthy of him.

Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson became the leader of Lubavitcher Hasidism in 1951. He has been described by Lubavitchers as the “most phenomenal Jewish personality of our time” (quoted in Dein, 2001, p. 390). He became an intense focus of the Lubavitchers, many of whom suggested that he was the messiah. Rebbe Schneerson (or simply “the Rebbe,” as he was called) did little to diminish this expectation. For instance, in April 1991 he stated, “Moshiach’s coming is no longer a dream of a distant future, but an imminent reality which will very shortly become manifest” (quoted in Dein, 2001, p. 391).

The Rebbe’s statements had profound effect on the Stamford Hill Lubavitchers. A “Moshiach Awareness” caravan that toured Britain was held; public discussions were held on messianic issues; and, while never publicly identifying the Rebbe as the messiah, many Lubavitchers privately acknowledged that he was. Others expressed doubt. As one Lubavitcher told Dein, “The Rebbe may be Moshiach, but I am unsure. I hope he is” (p. 393). The Rebbe died on June 12, 1994, having been comatose after a stroke and on a respirator since March 1994. His death was widely reported in the news media. After his death, several themes arose among the Lubavitchers. Many believed that he would be resurrected. Others emphasized his continual spiritual presence in the world. All continued to hope and pray for the messianic arrival. Lubavitchers began to visit the Rebbe’s tomb, and miracle stories continue about people who have visited his grave. Some Lubavitchers noted that although the Rebbe was a potential messiah, the generation did not possess enough merit to warrant his coming. Others simply admitted that they had been wrong—that only God knows when the messiah will come. Dein notes that the Lubavitchers have adapted an apparently failed prophecy in complex ways that have not only preserved, but enhanced, their commitment to messianic prophecy.

Context

Conversion and spiritual transformation always take place within a context. The term “context” is broad and vague enough to incorporate historical, social, cultural, and interpersonal situations that make conversion or transformation possible. For instance, Wallace (1956) noted that historical figures such as Jesus, Muhammed, and Buddha have become foci of revitalization movements. Within varieties of North American Protestantism, we have already seen how Paul’s conversion has served as a prototype for a model of transformation that permits the expected “born-again” experience associated with conversion or intensification experiences. Yet the cautionary note that this is only one model of conversion/transformation is now well substantiated by empirical research. Research Box 8.4 presents a study of conversion within Islam, in which emotional, Pauline-type experiences are neither modeled by the religion nor typically reported by converts. Clearly, the context of Islamic culture does not facilitate such experience.

Included among the contextual factors facilitating religious conversion are purely social and cultural phenomena that alter the probability of conversion. For instance, Bulliet (1979) has argued from a historical perspective that conversion to new religions follows the typical S-curve established to characterize diffusion of innovation in cultures. Psychologists will readily recognize the S-curve as a summated normal “bell curve.” What is important for studies of conversion is Bulliet’s classification of those who converted at various points in history along the curve. Using the history of Islam as his example, he described the first 16% who converted as the “innovators” (2.5%) and “early adopters” (13.5%). Then came the 34% constituting the “early majority,” followed by the next 34%, the “late majority.” Finally, the remaining 16% who converted were described as the “laggards” (Bulliet, 1979, pp. 31–32). Figure 8.1 illustrates Bulliet’s classification curve.

Bulliet’s theory has been operationalized and tested for the historical dominance of Islam in various cultures, but this model could be empirically tested within other histori-

RESEARCH BOX 8.4. An Empirical Study of Conversion to Islam (Poston, 1992)

Poston attempted to obtain questionnaire responses from 20 Muslim organizations. Only 8 of these 20 responded at all, and from these 8, only 12 completed questionnaires were obtained. Poston notes that this is typical of Muslims (at least in North America), who are suspicious of research into their beliefs and practices. By contrast, Christians and members of many new religious movements in North America readily cooperate in completing questionnaires on reports of their conversion experiences.

Reverting to reports of conversion experience in Islamic publications, Poston was able to obtain 72 testimonies of conversion, 69% of which were from males. Classifying these testimonies, Poston found that most converts (57%) had been raised as Christians. Only 3 of the 72 converts reported an emotional, Pauline-type conversion in which supernatural factors were perceived to account for the conversion. All but one of the converts were seekers who sought out a variety of religious options before becoming converted to Islam, with 21% stating the reasonableness of the faith as the motive for conversion, and 19% giving the universal brotherhood of all as the reason.

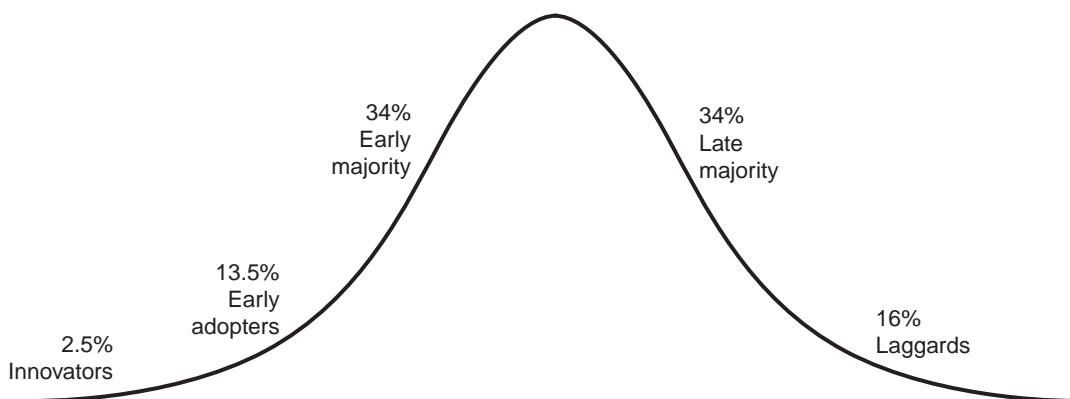


FIGURE 8.1. A bell curve model of conversion types based upon time of conversion relative to percentage of population converted. Data from Bulliet (1979, pp. 31–33).

cal contexts as well. What is important is the fact that the social-psychological processes of conversion may vary, depending upon the historical moment at which one converts to a religion and its dominance at that time in the culture. The kinds of persons and the processes by which they convert to new religious movements may vary as such movements gain ascendancy within the culture. Bulliet's historical perspective can be linked to other models of conversion, particularly those sensitive to the varieties of conversion motifs. Research Box 8.5 presents a study of British converts to Islam, interpreted in terms of the conversion motifs of Lofland and Skonovd (1981).

Precipitating Events

The effort to dichotomize theories of conversion/transformation often focuses upon whether or not precipitating events can be identified, and if so, within what time frame they operate. We have seen how proponents of sudden conversions often cite crises or emotional events as the turning point. Yet as Rambo (1993) has noted, crises can vary in length, scope, and duration. Proponents of gradual conversion/transformation emphasize interpersonal processes and the active seeking of meaning and purpose over a longer time interval as key factors (Gerlach & Hine, 1970).

The use of the conversion/transformation motifs discussed earlier allows for many variations, compatible with the existing empirical literature. There are many pathways to conversion and transformation, varying in length, scope, and nature (Heirich, 1977). For instance, crisis-precipitated conversions, including the affective and coercive motifs, vary widely among themselves in terms of duration, intensity, and scope (Straus, 1979). Furthermore, a crisis may be intrapsychic or interpsychic; the former often refers to some variety of personal stress, the latter to some variety of social strain (Seggar & Kunz, 1972). Likewise, actively seeking meaning and purpose (as in the experimental and intellectual motifs) varies in the range and nature of meaning sought, as well as in the motivation for seeking such meanings (Rambo, 1993). It may be, as Gerlach and Hine (1970) have shown, that some individuals gradually employ new systems of rhetoric that allow them to see themselves and the world

RESEARCH BOX 8.5. Conversion Motifs among British Converts to Islam
(Köse & Loewenthal, 2000)

Köse and Loewenthal (2000) studied 70 contemporary British converts to Islam. Köse, a male Muslim, interviewed each convert; both he and a female psychologist then independently rated the interviews in terms of the six conversion motifs of Lofland and Skonovd (1981). Their results are summarized in the following table.

Motif ^a	Males	Females	Factors significantly associated with conversion motif
Intellectual	38	12	Cognitive concerns before conversion
Mystical	9	1	Sufism; new religious movements
Experimental	28	14	None
Affectional	28	18	Sufism; marriage; being female
Revivalist	0	0	(Not applicable)
Coercive	3	0	None

^aMotifs are not mutually exclusive; actual numbers, not percentages, are reported in this table. These investigators note that the conversion motifs of Lofland and Skonovd (1981) allow for a shorthand representation of complex religious autobiographies that permits them to be linked to normative features of conversion. They also note that the antecedents of conversion vary with conversion motifs. It is also noteworthy that revivalist conversion, which is associated with the classical paradigm largely derived from Christianity, does not apply at all to converts to Islam.

transformed. Similarly, in a study that employed a comparison group to look at differences among Catholic Pentecostals, Heirich (1977) found that converts were most likely to be persons introduced to the group by friends or spiritual advisors who facilitated the gradual use of new religious attributions in the process of conversion. Nonconverts were not introduced to the group by friends or spiritual advisors and failed to acquire the appropriate language (attributions or rhetoric) of conversion. Thus mundane and even chance factors can precipitate conversion (Gooren, 2007, p. 351). Straus (1979) has documented how several converts to Scientology managed to seek and find beliefs, and to enter groups that allowed them to convert themselves by “creative bumbling.”

Thus no one process of conversion applies to all conversion motifs. Generalizations concerning the conversion process are highly suspect if proffered as other than hypotheses for empirical investigation. Furthermore, it is not clear how the nature of the religious group to which a person has converted interacts with whatever general conversion processes have been empirically proposed. For instance, Seggar and Kunz (1972) found that one widely cited process model of religious conversion accounted for only 1 of the 77 cases of conversion to Mormonism in their study. Likewise, compensatory models of religious conversion must be tempered by the empirical assessment of the consequences of conversion, which are typically positive (Richardson, 1995). This is the case even when the conversion is to religious groups that remain marginal to the larger culture. Research Box 8.6 reports a study evaluating the legitimacy of conversion based upon the factors that precipitated conversion.

RESEARCH BOX 8.6. Evaluating the Legitimacy of Conversion Based upon the Five Signs in Mark 16:17–18 (Hood, Williamson, & Morris, 1999)

Judgments regarding the legitimacy of conversion experiences can be expected to be based either upon prejudice or upon reasoned, rational rejection of certain practices. The serpent-handling sects of Appalachia practice all five signs specified in Mark 16:17–18—casting out demons, laying hands upon the sick, speaking in tongues, handling serpents, and drinking poison. A sample of 453 undergraduate psychology students were asked to evaluate the legitimacy of individuals' hypothetical conversion experiences, in terms of each of the five signs. As anticipated, results indicated that both prejudiced and rational rejection of conversion was associated with the two most extreme signs—serpent handling and drinking poison. Prejudiced rejection included stereotyping, negative affect, and specific behavioral intentions to avoid associating with converts.

However, when the effects of rational rejection were controlled for, there remained a strong relationship between prejudice and the evaluation of the legitimacy of conversion, including stereotyping. Conversion based upon serpent handling and drinking poison was still less accepted than conversion based upon casting out of demons, speaking in tongues or the laying of hands upon the sick. The relevance of separating prejudice from rational rejection is important, given the legal repercussions for serpent-handling sects in many states. It may be the case that even reasoned disagreement with serpent-handling sects masks an underlying prejudice, especially since knowledge of this tradition is largely available only from stereotyped presentations of these sects in the mass media.

Ullman (1982) made empirical comparisons of conversion processes across different religious groups. Emotional factors, rather than cognitive factors, differentiated converts to all four religious groups from nonconverts. This was not a direct test of the relative contribution of cognitive and emotional factors in conversion, given that all converts were selected according to criteria that included actual changes in religious identity but excluded such changes when they were made for interpersonal reasons, such as marrying a spouse in the new faith. We have already noted the role of interpersonal factors in some conversion motifs, especially those unlikely to be precipitated by crises or emotional factors. In addition, all four of Ullman's groups cultivated intense, emotional experiences, perhaps biasing the sample toward an affective conversion motif. Still, Ullman's study is one of the few empirical studies that have used appropriate measurement procedures to compare converts to a variety of religious groups with matched controls. Some highlights of this research are presented in Research Box 8.7.

Supporting Activities

The classification of conversion motifs is helpful in directing research into factors in the conversion process that have long been ignored. Among these are interpersonal relationships between a potential convert and what Rambo (1993) refers to as the "advocate." The advocate is often a friend who initiates and sustains the potential convert in the group. Sometimes simple factors (such as marriage) convert one partner. Much of the literature has documented the importance of social networks in facilitating conversion, especially among noncommunal

RESEARCH BOX 8.7. Emotional versus Cognitive Factors in Precipitating Conversion
(Ullman, 1982)

Ullman studied 40 white, middle-class individuals raised as Jews and Christians, who had converted from 1 to 10 months previous to the study. Half the converts were male and half female. They were compared on the basis of both objective measures and in-depth interviews to each other and to 30 controls (nonconverted subjects). All converts actually changed religious denomination. The four converted groups consisted of 10 subjects each, who were now Orthodox Jews, Roman Catholics, Hare Krishnas, and Baha'i adherents. The major differences between converted and nonconverted groups were on emotional, not cognitive, indices. Among the major significant differences between all converts and the control group were a greater frequency of both childhood and adolescent stress, as well as a greater frequency of prior drug use and psychiatric problems, among the converted subjects. Converts recalled childhoods that were less happy and filled with more anguish than those of nonconverts. The emotions recalled for adolescence followed the childhood patterns, with the addition of significant anger and fear in adolescence for the converts but not the nonconverts. Converts also differed from nonconverts in having less love and admiration for their fathers, and more indifference and anger toward them. Differences among the converted groups were less relevant than the consistency across all converted groups, suggesting that similar processes operated regardless of the faith to which a subject converted.

religions. For instance, Snow and Machalek (1984, p. 182) found that the vast majority (from 59% to 82%) of Pentecostals, evangelicals, and Nichiren Shoshu Buddhists that they studied were recruited through social networks.

Much of the research has focused upon how social networks may facilitate gradual emotional conversions by the mere fact that intensive interaction among group members increases the likelihood of affective bonding among the members (Galanter, 1980; Snow, Zurcher, & Ekland-Olson, 1980, 1983; Stark & Bainbridge, 1980a; Straus, 1979). Jacobs (1987, 1989) has reintroduced the analogy of conversion and falling in love into the contemporary literature on conversion to groups with charismatic leaders. William James (1902/1985) used the same analogy, as did Pratt (1920), who went so far as to state that "In many cases getting converted means falling in love with Jesus" (p. 160). Cartwright and Kent (1992) have noted that new religious movements provide alternative pathways to intimacy and love within a familial perspective.

More psychologically oriented social psychologists have also focused on affective bonding, operationalized more rigorously in terms of attachment theory (discussed in Chapter 4). Individuals with the less secure types of attachment may exhibit higher rates of sudden conversions in adolescence or adulthood, regardless of the religiosity of their parents (Kirkpatrick, 1992, 1995; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). Kirkpatrick (1997) has provided one of the few longitudinal studies of this issue, in which he demonstrated that women readers of a Midwest newspaper surveyed approximately 4 years apart were more likely to report a changed relationship to God at the second assessment if they had insecure rather than secure attachment styles. Insecure-anxious women were most likely to report a conversion experience within this 4-year period. Granqvist (2002a) has suggested that the attachment literature can clarify some of the relationships between gradual conversion (or the contemporary paradigm)

and sudden conversion (or the classical paradigm). Secure attachment leads to the gradual acceptance of the religiosity or nonreligiosity of parents. When there are religious changes, they are likely to be gradual and associated with loving and intimate God images. However, among the insecure attachment types, the influence of parental religiosity is minimal. Religious changes are likely to be sudden and associated with a distant and unloving image of God. In these types, the image of God serves as a compensatory attachment figure. Thus much of the attachment literature parallels the sociological literature of relationships. Once again, the literatures of sociological and psychological social psychology have focused upon similar concerns, although unfortunately these are not often cross-referenced. In addition, Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle (1997, p. 120) have noted how the attachment literature "seems to lend clear support to the psychodynamic view of religious conversion."

Thus various theories converge to suggest that religious conversion can be compensatory for psychological deficiencies linked to childhood experiences. For instance, Oksanen's (1994) meta-analysis of 25 studies sampling a total of over 4,500 converts found considerable support for the view that, however interpreted, conversion can be seen as serving a compensatory function for difficulties in interpersonal relationships with significant others (in either adulthood or childhood). However, as the data reviewed earlier suggest, by no means are all conversion experiences compensatory. Furthermore, qualitative studies often suggest correctives to exclusively quantitative research. For instance, Streib (2001b) has used qualitative/biographical research to study both converts and deconverts to new fundamentalist religious movements. He has found "no typical sect biography and no typical set of motivational factors" (p. 235). Furthermore, although childhood trauma and anxiety were identified in fundamentalist biographies, they were found in nonfundamentalist biographies as well (Streib, 2001b). Likewise, Zinnbauer and Pargament (1998) found that persons reporting spiritual conversions were similar to nonconverts who had become more religious. The only difference between the two groups were that spiritual converts reported more postconversion life transformation. Thus psychologists ought to be sensitive to the extent to which qualitative studies may add depth and clarification to purely measurement-based approaches (Streib, 2001a; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1998). What is clear is that various theoretical and methodological orientations are beginning to converge and to clarify how individual differences in interpersonal styles (whether attachment-based, psychodynamically based, or sociologically based) may affect the conditions under which conversion may be sudden or gradual, and compensatory or not.

Social networks may also function to facilitate more cognitively motivated conversions, by providing interpersonal support for world views associated with what amount to cognitive reformulations of converts' sense of themselves and others. Religious converts not only use more religious attributions, but use those associated with their new group. For instance, Beckford (1978) has demonstrated the process by which Jehovah's Witnesses converts gradually come to cognitively assess the world in light of a master attribution scheme consistent with Jehovah's Witnesses' theology. One rhetorical indicator that conversion is occurring is the utilization of such a master attribution scheme, which both defines and produces conversion. Interacting within a given social network supports the scheme and serves to differentiate the newly emerging convert. It is the new religious attribution scheme that permits a biographical reconstruction of the transformed self. Often such reconstructions are solidified by participation in appropriate rituals confirming one's conversion (Boyer, 1994; Morinis, 1985).

The more sociologically oriented research on rhetorical indicators of conversion meshes nicely with psychologically oriented measurement-based research on cognitive change among converts. For instance, Paloutzian and colleagues have demonstrated an increase in scores on a measure of purpose in life for converts, as compared to nonconverted controls or controls who were unsure they were converted (Paloutzian, 1981; Paloutzian, Jackson, & Crandell, 1978).

Participation/Commitment

It is not likely that conversion as a process can be identified in temporal terms as having been completed once and for all. After conversion, commitment and participation can be expected to vary. It is not uncommon for converts to new religious movements to follow “conversion careers,” joining and leaving a variety of religious groups over time (Richardson, 1978b). Bird and Remier (1982) note that only a small percentage of converts to new religious movements remain members of one movement. Furthermore, participation in religious groups is not necessarily higher among converted individuals than among those born and socialized into the groups (Barker & Currie, 1985).

DECONVERSION AND RELATED PHENOMENA

The concept of “conversion careers” makes it clear that for some converts, a variety of conversion experiences can be expected. This especially characterizes converts to new religious movements, the majority of whom can be expected to leave within a few years. “Deconversion” is the term most typically used to identify this process. Compared to the massive research literature on conversion, few studies of deconversion exist, and the few existing studies are of fairly recent origin. For instance, Wright (1987) could document only three studies of deconversion published prior to 1980.

Not surprisingly, the literature on deconversion parallels that for conversion and spiritual transformation. With the exception of the special case of “brainwashing” discussed in Chapter 9, most studies of deconversion have been done by sociologists using participant observation or descriptive research strategies. Assessment is often carried out via interviews, either structured or open-ended, with former members. Most studies of deconversion have focused upon defectors from new religious movements, paralleling the tremendous literature on new religious movements and conversion discussed above. Unlike the literature on apostasy, the deconversion literature focuses upon the processes involved in leaving religious groups, not simply correlates and predictors of leaving. Heinz Streib and his colleagues have begun the cross-cultural study of deconversion in a series of ongoing studies at the University of Bielefeld, Germany (Streib et al., 2009, pp. 43–48). Before we present his work, however, we need to explore its roots in the study of new religious movements, largely in the American context.

Deconversion within New Religious Movements

Skonovd (1983) studied former members of fundamentalist Christian groups, as well as of Scientology, the Unification Church, the People’s Temple, and various Eastern groups. He

identified a process of deconversion consisting of a precipitating crisis, followed by review and reflection, disaffection, withdrawal, and a transition to cognitive reorganization. His model, however, does not distinguish between voluntary and involuntary leaving—an issue of concern, given the debate on deprogramming discussed in Chapter 9.

Wright (1986) studied matched samples of those remaining and those voluntarily defecting from the Unification Church, Hare Krishna, and a fundamentalist Christian group. He focused upon precipitating factors that initiated the process of deconversion. Among those identified were breakdown of insulation from the outside world, development of unregulated interpersonal relationships, perceived lack of success in achieving social change, and disillusionment. Wright's research parallels conversion research, in that both emotional and cognitive factors can trigger the process of deconversion, and the process itself can be sudden or gradual. Furthermore, he identified different modes of departure, based upon the length of time people were committed to a group. Most of those who were members for 1 year or less (92%) left by quiet, covert means. Those who were members for more than a year left by either overt means or direct confrontations, often emotional and dramatic in nature ("declarative" means).

Downton (1980) has documented the gradual process of deconversion from the Divine Light Mission (the sect associated with Guru Maharaj Ji). Intellectual and social disillusionment predominated. The breaking of bonds within the group occurred only as new bonds were established outside the group. Galanter, Rabkin, Rabkin, and Deutsch (1979) found that converts to the Unification Church who had not completely severed nonsanctioned emotional attachments within the group were likely to deconvert even when they believed in the doctrine of the group.

Jacobs (1989) studied 40 religious devotees, most of whom were involved in either charismatic Christian, Hindu-based, or Buddhist groups. All groups had charismatic leaders, were patriarchal in orientation, and had structured hierarchies with rigid disciplines of behavior and devotion. The 21 male and 19 female participants were predominantly middle-class, white, and well educated. Among the 40 deconverters, both social disillusionment and disillusionment with the charismatic leader were major reasons cited for discontent leading to deconversion, as noted in Table 8.5. Jacobs (1989) notes that the total process of deconversion for these individuals required severing ties both with the group and with the charismatic leader. The total process of deconversion included a period of initial separation, often accompanied by an experience of isolation and loneliness; this was followed by a period of emotional strain and readjustment, culminating in the reestablishment of identity outside the group.

Descriptive studies of deconversion, like those on conversion, run the risk of confounding the natural history of groups with causal processes assumed to operate in them (Snow & Machalek, 1984). Furthermore, investigators tend to avoid measurement in favor of utilizing subjective accounts of deconversion, placed within descriptive systems proposed by the investigators as explanatory. Few tests of these models have been undertaken. Longitudinal research is virtually absent. Finally, no studies have compared subjects who have deconverted from several religious groups to see whether the same process of deconversion occurs each time.

As described briefly in Chapter 5, Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1997) studied 24 "amazing apostates" and "amazing believers." They referred to them as "amazing" because they were selected from extremes in a sample of over 4,000 college students. The amazing believers came from nonreligious or religious backgrounds; the amazing apostates came from reli-

**TABLE 8.5. Sources of Disillusionment
among 40 Deconverters**

Source	%
<u>Disillusionment with a charismatic leader and his actions</u>	
Physical abuse	31
Psychological abuse	60
Emotional rejection	45
Spiritual betrayal	33
<u>Social disillusionment</u>	
Social life	75
Spiritual life	50
Status/position	35
Prescribed sex roles	45

Note. Adapted from Jacobs (1989, pp. 43, 92). Copyright 1989 by Indiana University Press. Adapted by permission.

gious backgrounds and turned to agnosticism or atheism. The apostates had deconverted gradually and, unlike the believers, felt no need to proselytize about their newfound unbelief (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1997, p. 232). Hunsberger (2000) characterized the apostates as having succeeded in a hard-won fight for autonomy and personal identity—a finding with remarkable parallels in a study by Davidson and Griel (2007, p. 213) on the exit narratives of ultraorthodox Jews who took pride in their courage to leave a tradition into which they had been born. Unlike conversion to fundamentalist groups, there are no “scripts” that those who deconvert can follow as they struggle to transform themselves outside of clear religious norms. They are part of what Heelas, Woodhead, Steel, Szerszynski, and Trusting (2005) identify as a spiritual revolution where religion is yielding to spirituality.

Heinz Streib’s Bielefeld Deconversion Project

Heinz Streib and his colleagues have taken the lead at the University of Bielefeld, Germany, in making deconversion a recognized area of research in the social-scientific study of religion. In two complementary studies conducted over a 4-year period with research teams in two countries, Streib and his colleagues used mixed methods to compare deconverts from new religious movements with those who stayed within religious traditions in North America and Germany (Streib et al., 2009). Among the objective measures used were an instrument based on the famous five-factor model of personality (McCrae, 1992), and the Well-Being and Growth Scale developed by Ryff and Singer (1996). Also administered to all participants were independently derived measures of fundamentalism. Qualitative measures included open-ended interviews with in-tradition members, and faith development interviews with all deconverts and a matched sample of in-tradition members from the same group.

The use of mixed methods allowed comparison quantitative and qualitative data to complement one another in illuminating the complex dynamics of deconverting from relatively new religious groups (in terms of German culture). From the qualitative data, Streib

and his colleagues identified four major types of deconversion narratives: (1) “the pursuit of autonomy,” primarily motivated by seeking independence, personal freedom, and growth; (2) “debarred from paradise,” primarily characterized by an original crisis-precipitated conversion now followed by disillusionment and abandonment; (3) “heroes, survivors, and victims,” primarily characterized by a crisis and associated with increased self-reflection; and (4) “finding a new frame of reference,” similar to intensification experiences in conversion. Like spiritual transformation, deconversion is a process that occurs gradually over time. Deconverts in both Germany and America are characterized by low authoritarianism and an openness to experience that leads them to identify themselves as more spiritual than religious.

A provocative summary of the quantitative data reveals cultural differences suggesting that deconversion is a growth-oriented process for Americans, who seek autonomy and personal growth (as indicated by higher subscale scores on the Ryff–Singer measure) in what is an open religious marketplace. However, for Germans, deconversion is associated with lower scores on the Ryff–Singer subscales measuring environmental mastery, personal relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. The combined results suggest that for Germans, given a more limited religious “marketplace,” deconversion is associated with a more problematic status—indicative, perhaps, of personal crises associated with deconversion. In the United States, given the different religious culture, deconversion is (as shown in other studies cited above) associated with positively evaluated aspects of personal growth and freedom of religious choice, including identification as spiritual but not religious. These data are consistent with research indicating that authoritarianism is associated with religion but not with spirituality (Wink, Dillon, & Prettyman, 2007). Perhaps if spirituality is linked to openness (Saucier & Skrzypinska, 2006), religion may be linked to both conscientiousness and agreeableness in the five-factor model, as well as a need for closure (Saroglou, 2002a). Furthermore, it is not the case that individual spirituality is narcissistic, insofar as those who identify themselves as more religious than spiritual are also socially compassionate (Wink, Dillon, & Fay, 2005).

The Streib-headed Bielefeld deconversion project best parallels Rambo’s (1993) model of conversion and spiritual transformation discussed above. Both Streib and Rambo accept the complexity of the processes involved in conversion, spiritual transformation, and deconversion, and refuse to proclaim a single overarching narrative or monocausal mechanism. This is in the best spirit of the call for a new paradigm, of which mixed methods are one essential component. Both Germans and American deconverts score low on measures of religious fundamentalism and high on openness to experience in the five-factor model. On the other hand, one must not underestimate the psychological value of remaining within a faith tradition. For instance, in Germany, in-tradition members most clearly showed high scores on the Ryff–Singer subscales measuring purpose in life, positive relations with others, and environmental mastery, while their higher scores on all aspects of the five-factor model except openness suggest a stability and meaning provided by those who remain committed to a faith tradition, even one that is authoritarian in nature.

The balance between tradition and transformation is an integral part of any religious dynamic (Peterson, 1999), and the two-factor solution of the five-factor model measure has direct relevance to the current debate between religion and spirituality (Streib, 2008). For instance, generally values relate to religion more powerfully than personality factors (Saroglou, Delpierre, & Dernelle, 2004; Saroglou & Muñoz-García, 2008; Schwartz, 1992). Personality as measured by the five-factor model does show a fairly consistent pattern across

many studies (Saroglou, 2002b). Openness is most consistently unrelated or negatively to religion, while agreeableness and conscientiousness are positively related to religion. Also, religious fundamentalism tends to be negatively correlated with openness (Saroglou, 2001). The possibility of a higher-order two-factor solution to the five-factor model measure suggest why this pattern exists. Agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability (neuroticism reverse-scored) form one factor associated with stability, and openness and extroversion form another factor associated with plasticity (DeYoung, 2006; DeYoung, Peterson, & Higgins, 2002). Streib et al. (2009) identify the factors as “traditionalism” and “transformation.” They postulate that religion is more associated with traditionalism, while spirituality is more associated with transformation.

The tension between maintaining tradition and encouraging transformation is likely to be part of the personality substrate that may provide the motivational basis for conversion and spiritual transformation. For instance, Streib et al. (2009) suggest that persons high in openness in more restricted religious traditions explore the limits of the tradition and then are motivated to begin a likely gradual process of deconversion associated with slightly elevated faith development scores. On the other hand, those lower in openness find satisfactory meaning and purpose in life within a tradition. This interpretation is not inconsistent consistent with numerous studies relating the five-factor model to religion, but provides a dynamic model for the tension between tradition and transformation that has been masterfully explored by Peterson (1999) as the personality basis for what he terms the architecture of belief.

Finally, the measure of the five-factor model employed in this research is a complex instrument that, in addition to the commonly employed five domains or factors, allows the identification of six facets to each domain; in turn, each facet is related to eight basic behavioral, affective, and cognitive tendencies. This results in 240 items, which can yield a more nuanced understanding of personality correlates of religiosity, as Aguilar-Vafaie and Moghanloo (2008) have demonstrated with a sample of Shiite Muslims. None of the studies of conversion, deconversion, or spiritual transformation that have employed this instrument have yet focused upon the more subtle and nuanced use of the measure when facets and the full conceptual basis of the five-factor model are utilized. Streib et al.’s finding that deconverts had slightly elevated faith development scores is also consistent with Jindra’s (2008) finding, using Oser’s development theory of religious judgment stages (discussed in Chapter 4), that conversion and deconversion narratives follow closely trajectories of religious judgment.

Disengagement within Mainstream Religious Groups

Although most of the research on deconversion has focused upon new religious movements that are sectarian or cult-like in nature, most religious participation in North America is within denominational religious groups. The Streib et al. (2009) study described above is the most ambitious study to date of deconversion from what, in the United States at least, are largely mainstream religious groups. However, these groups have long been noted to have transitional memberships. As a general pattern, participation in religious groups waxes and wanes. Probably 80% of denominational members withdraw at some point in their lives, only to return at some later point (Roozen, 1980). Thus only a minority of persons socialized into religious groups in North America ever truly reject religious identity or participation. As we have noted, the percentage of apostates in the United States has remained fairly constant

at about 7%. This means that well over 90% of the U.S. population belonging to a religious group engages in some form of religious participation, whether this takes place at a church, mosque, or synagogue.

However, the frequency of this participation fluctuates. For instance, Albrecht, Cornwall, and Cunningham (1988) mailed questionnaires to a stratified random sample of 32 active and 45 inactive families in each of 27 different Mormon wards (similar to congregations). Seventy-four percent of the active families and 44% of the inactive families responded. Phone follow-ups to the inactive families raised their participation rate to 64%. Two measures of disengagement were used: (1) behavior (a period of 1 month or more of no church attendance), and (2) belief (a period of at least 1 year when the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints was not an important part of a family's life). Summarizing the results for every 100 families revealed that 74 became disengaged in terms of either behavior (55) or belief (19). Only 4 families remained engaged nonbelievers; only 22 remained engaged believers. Of the 55 families that were disengaged nonbelievers, 31 returned to church participation (Albrecht et al., 1988; see also Albrecht & Cornwall, 1989). These data are consistent with studies of disengagement and reengagement among Catholics (Hoge with McGuire & Stratman, 1981). They are also consistent with the studies of denominational switching and the cycling of religious participation discussed in Chapter 9. However, in light of the historical context within which new religious movements have emerged, it appears that many disengaged from mainstream religion have explored new religious movements as one form of reengagement.

Baby Boomers and Disengagement/Reengagement

As noted in earlier chapters, several investigators have been concerned with what has been called the "baby boomer" generation. Although not precisely defined, this generation includes those raised in the 1960s in North America during a period of intense social upheaval (Roszak, 1968). Associated with this upheaval was the emergence of new religious movements, competing with and often congruent with a variety of countercultural movements (Tipton, 1982). Participants in these countercultural movements were largely youths reared in mainstream religious traditions. For instance, Roof (1993) found that two-thirds of all baby boomers reared in mainstream religious traditions dropped out or disengaged from mainstream religious participation in their late adolescence or early youth. The average ages of disengagement for different birth cohorts are presented in Table 8.6.

Roof used a commercial firm to conduct focused group interviews with subjects from randomly digit-dialed samples. Households in four states (California, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and Ohio) were sampled. A 60% participation rate was obtained from an initial

TABLE 8.6. Average Age of Disengagement by Birth Cohort

Birth cohort	Average age at disengagement
1926–1935	29.4 years
1936–1945	25.1 years
1946–1954 (older baby boomers)	21.1 years
1955–1962 (younger baby boomers)	18.2 years

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TABLE 8.7. Baby Boomers' Reengagement in Mainstream Religion

Normative criteria	% reengaged
Single, no children, not settled	14 (<i>n</i> = 51)
Married, no children, not settled	16 (<i>n</i> = 50)
Married, children, not settled	52 (<i>n</i> = 71)
Married, children, settled	54 (<i>n</i> = 124)

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sample of 2,620 households. Baby boomers were defined as those born between 1946 and 1962 (*n* = 1,599; 61% of sample). The sample was further divided into older boomers (1946–1954; *n* = 802) and younger boomers (1955–1962; *n* = 797). Follow-up interviews were conducted with older boomers, and eventually 64 in-depth, face-to-face interviews and 14 group dialogues were conducted with these participants (Roof, 1993).

As discussed in Chapter 5, religious disengagement tends to follow a pattern that includes religious socialization and participation, followed by youthful rebellion and departure, and subsequently by return. Thus high rates of disengagement among boomers would not be surprising; nor would a return of most of these to mainstream religious participation. Indeed, Roof found that a return to mainstream religion occurred as expected for many of those who were disengaged. Furthermore, categorizing participants by the extent to which they were part of the mainstream culture (in terms of having settled into a community, married, and had children) indicated that the more normalized a subject's current lifestyle was in terms of the dominant culture, the more likely the subject was to have returned to religious involvement, as noted in Table 8.7.

The fact that those who disengage from religion tend to return as they participate more fully in the dominant culture is readily understandable in terms of life cycle theories of socialization. As noted in earlier chapters, youth is a time for exploration and rebellion—or, in more psychological terms, a time in which one searches for identity (Erikson, 1968). However, it is also the case that theories of social change suggest the relevance of youthful participation in radical social movements aimed at altering society (Keniston, 1968, 1971; Roszak, 1968). Kent (2001) has marshaled considerable empirical evidence to support the thesis that youthful political protest is often followed by attraction to mystical religions.² Whereas religious denominations tend to be at ease with the dominant culture, religious sects and cults are at tension with at least some aspects of this culture, as discussed in Chapter 9. New religious movements are likely to appeal to individuals not committed to the dominant culture, and thus may recruit members whose initial protest was expressed in political terms (Kent, 2001). Montgomery (1991) has argued that the spread of new religions is facilitated when the new religions either are a threat to society or come from a source other than the society; they

²However, the conversion to religious frames may have been only temporary for many boomers who were protesters. For instance, Whalen and Flacks (1989) studied 17 political activists convicted for a Bank of America bombing in 1970. The majority did turn temporarily to countercultural religions, but eventually resumed political activities, although in a less extreme form.

provide sources of identity and resistance for those alienated from the dominant culture. Although Montgomery's theory applies to the emergence of new religions within a historical context and focuses upon macrosocial relations, it also applies to the emergence of new religions within a culture where a dominant culture opposes a subculture—a phenomenon characteristic of the 1960s in North America (Tipton, 1982). The subculture is likely to accept new religious movements that promulgate behaviors and beliefs at odds with the dominant culture, as sects and cults do.

One empirical prediction that is congruent with these macrosocial assumptions is that exposure to countercultural values should make a person more susceptible to new religious movements and/or to disengagement from mainstream religion. Roof's research provides data relevant to this claim. Using an index of exposure to the 1960s counterculture, Roof found that the preference for sticking to mainstream cultural expressions of faith varied as a function of such exposure, as did willingness to explore other teachings and religions. These results are summarized in Table 8.8.

The high rate of former drug use among members converted to new religious movements is well documented. In some new religious movements, the rate of former drug use is reported to be almost 100%. For instance, Volinn (1985) used in-depth interviews and extensive participatory observation to study 52 members of an ashram in New England. Forty-seven of these admitted to smoking marijuana, and 46 had used it 50 times or more. Likewise, all but 8 admitted to using LSD, but only 6 had used this more than 50 times, and 14 had used it only "once or twice" (Volinn, 1985, p. 152). Other investigators have documented former drug use among converts to new religious movements. Among new religious movements Judah (1974) has documented abandonment of drug use among converts to Hare Krishna; Galanter and Buckley (1978) have obtained similar results for converts to the Divine Light Mission; Anthony and Robbins (1974) have documented abandonment of drug use among converts to Meher Baba; and Nordquist (1978) also found such outcomes for converts to Ananda, a "New Age" community in Sweden.

The low rates of illicit drug use among members of mainstream religions have long been established (Gorsuch, 1976), and both mainstream religions and new religious movements discourage the use of illicit drugs. However, it appears that prior drug experience varies

TABLE 8.8. Responses to the Question "Is It Good to Explore the Many Differing Religious Teachings, or Should One Stick to a Particular Faith?" as a Function of Exposure to the 1960s

Exposure to 1960s index	Explore many teachings	Stick to faith
0	49%	39%
1	60%	32%
2	63%	23%
3	80%	14%

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^aExposure-to-1960s index: "Did you ever: 1. Attend a rock concert? [67% yes]; 2. Smoke marijuana? [50% yes]; 3. Take part in any demonstrations, marches, or rallies? [20% yes]." For each positive response, 1 point was scored.

according to whether one is a member of a mainstream denomination or a new religious movement, whether sect or cult. In denominational religion, norms and beliefs serve to decrease the probability of illicit drug use among participants. However, among those who use illicit drugs, spiritual seeking can result in conversion to new religious movements that then discourage illicit drug use. Several investigators have described new religious movements as providing an alternative to drug experiences. Some argue that conversion can even be a new form of addiction (Simmonds, 1977a); new religious converts may simply substitute one addiction for another. Others, such as Volinn (1985), have focused upon the spiritual experiences of converts to new religious movements as meaningful alternatives to illicit drug "highs."

It would appear that with few exceptions, institutional forms of religion—whether denominations, sects, or cults—tend to discourage drug use. An interesting exception is the Native American use of peyote (LaBarre, 1969). Yet many who utilize drugs outside of religion define themselves as spiritual seekers. Roof (1993) noted that among his baby boomers, those most exposed to the counterculture of the 1960s were least likely to be conventionally religious, but most likely to define themselves as spiritual. Eighty-one percent of those scoring highest on his index of exposure to the 1960s defined themselves as spiritual, whereas 92% of those who scored zero on his index defined themselves as religious. Not surprisingly, 84% of those scoring highest on the exposure-to-the-1960s index were religious dropouts (Roof, 1993).

THE COMPLEXITY OF CONVERSION, SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION, AND DECONVERSION

It has been well over half a century since Allport (1950, p. 37) claimed that "no subject within the psychology of religion has been more extensively studied than conversion." However, despite the massive empirical literature—first from psychologically oriented and more recently from sociologically oriented social psychologists—no simple conclusion can be reached that has any degree of empirical validity. Clearly, conversion, spiritual transformation, and deconversion all can entail significant changes in persons, even if changes in basic personality functions are unlikely. The questions of precisely how and why these changes occur demand systematic programs of research (Paloutzian et al., 1999, p. 1048). Such programs are unlikely to be useful if they are not guided by theories or models as complex as the empirical realities they hope to illuminate. In this sense, the call for a new paradigm in the psychology of religion (noted throughout this text) is once again to be emphasized.

With this complexity in mind, Rambo (1993) has proposed the integrative model most consistent with the call for the new paradigm. His model utilizes insights from anthropologists (Berkhofer, 1963), missiologists (Tippett, 1977), and sociologists (Lofland & Stark, 1965). It is not simply developmental, although it does propose stages or sequences that can serve as a heuristic model. Unlike those of many purely psychological approaches, the stages or sequences are neither unidirectional nor invariant. The stages are interrelated in complex dialectical ways that allow them to be interactive, so that not only can early stages influence later stages, but these in turn can influence earlier ones (Paloutzian et al., 1999). Finally, we have added spiritual transformation to Rambo's single use of conversion as it is implicit in his model. The model is summarized in Table 8.9.

TABLE 8.9. An Integrative Model for Conversion/Transformation

Stages or facets of the process	Factors that must be assessed in this stage
Stage 1: Context	Factors that facilitate or hinder conversion/transformation. These include cultural, historical, personal, sociological, and theological factors.
Stage 2: Crisis	May be personal, social, or both.
Stage 3: Quest	Intentional activity on part of individual.
Stage 4: Encounter	Recognition of alternative spiritual or religious option. May be facilitated by individual ("advocate") or institution (missionary activity).
Stage 5: Interaction	Extended engagement at many levels with new religious/spiritual option.
Stage 6: Commitment	Identification with new spiritual or religious reality.
Stage 7: Consequences	Conversion/transformation as a result of new commitment, including beliefs, behaviors, and identity.

Note. See Rambo (1993) and Paloutzian, Richardson, and Rambo (1999).

OVERVIEW

Conversion has occupied the interest of social scientists since the beginning of the 20th century. The early research was dominated by psychologists, who focused upon adolescence and sudden emotional conversions. The classic paradigm for conversion was fashioned after Paul's experience. Gradual conversion were recognized to occur and were linked to an active search for meaning and purpose, but were seldom studied except to be contrasted with sudden conversions.

In the early 1960s, sociologically oriented social psychologists began to study conversion and spiritual transformation as a phenomena linked to new religious and spiritual movements. They have focused upon gradual conversion/transformation, postulating models of the conversion/transformation process most typically derived from participant observation or interview studies.

Studies employing cognitive dissonance theory have shifted the focus from researchers' and outsiders' claims about failed prophecy to insiders' perspectives on how such prophecy becomes interpreted in ways to maintain group commitment and cohesion. Studies are beginning to look at the conditions under which different individuals may leave prophetic groups to which they have converted.

Deconversion is emerging as a phenomenon closely linked to conversion. In the United States, relatively few individuals remain apostates without any institutional religious involvement; most who leave return to religion at some point in the life cycle. This typi-

cally occurs when they are married, have children, and settle in an established community. However, spiritual seekers may remain outside religion altogether and identify themselves as either “more spiritual than religious” or “spiritual but not religious.” Deconversion from a new religious movement is likely to be a gradual process of disillusionment, both with the religious group and with its leader, but can occur suddenly as well. It remains to be explored the extent to which deconversion is a mirror image of either conversion, spiritual transformation, or both.

Relationships between Individuals and Religious Groups

Religious revelation aims to liberate the world from the night in which it appears to be immersed; it would appear that one now welcomes, however, the inverse revelation.

Between you and God there stands the church.

Amish values, Amish limits, and the Amish definition of success cannot be grafted onto American culture. It would be pointless to imitate their use of bonnets, buggies, and kerosene lamps. The value of the Amish lies, rather, in making clear limits of some kind and in their insistence in defining for themselves the limits within which they will live.

Muslim traditionalists are not fantasizing when they identify divorce, abortion, more open sexual experimentation, sexually transmitted diseases, and women's demands for equality in the workplace and in decision-making as threats to traditional values.

When a society would turn its eyes away from the deepest questions of responsibility, brainwashing becomes an explanation that avoids the responsibility of looking inward.¹

The process of becoming religious continues to intrigue social scientists and to foster both theoretical and empirical debate. The simple fact that persons are not born religious means that they must become religious if they are to be religious. The process of becoming religious entails numerous possibilities. Persons may be born into a family with a particular faith commitment and simply be socialized to adopt that faith as their own. These individuals are those whom William James (1902/1985) dubbed the “once-born,” as discussed in Chapter 8. On the other hand, persons may be born into one faith tradition and later change to another. Those born outside any faith tradition may later choose to commit to one. Those previously

¹These quotations come, respectively, from the following sources: Vergote, 1997, p. 240); statement attributed to the bishop presiding at the trial of Joan of Arc, quoted in Stobart (1971, p. 157); Olshan (1994, p. 239); Awn (1994, p. 76); and Schefflin and Opton (1978, p. 50).

committed may fall away. Persons may have a series of different faith commitments throughout their lives. Some may simply engage in an interminable quest, in which spiritual issues absorb their interest but never find a resolution. And some may reject or abandon religion altogether. Much of this flux is the subject matter of religious conversion; converts are James's (1902/1985) "twice-born."

Yet this individual religious change does not take place in a vacuum. The maintenance of faith, as well as conversion, is not an individual affair. Those with faith tend to seek companions in a social context within which their faith may be both shared and practiced. In this flux of individual religious change also lie the rise and fall of churches and the growth and decline of denominations. In addition, the emergence of novel religious forms from within established groups creates sects, and from without creates cults. James (1902/1985) typifies the psychologist's propensity to emphasize religious experience in individual terms, as we have discussed in Chapter 8. The renowned philosopher Whitehead (1926) even went so far as to define religion in terms of what individuals do with their solitude. There is a rich conceptual literature linking spirituality and solitude (Koch, 1994; Storr, 1988). As we have seen in Chapter 8, there are also many empirical data supporting a spirituality that is more closely linked to solitude than to tradition. Yet it remains true that religion has an inherently social dimension. Even solitude is a retreat from the social and takes with it the very language shared by others within which private thoughts are possible (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

THE CLASSIFICATION OF RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Although it may be true that psychologists are particularly prone to define religious commitments in terms of individuals, it remains abundantly clear that these are shared and under varying degrees of organizational control. Whitehead's (1926) focus on the great solitary images of religious imagination—Muhammed brooding in the desert, Buddha resting under the Bodhi tree, and Christ crying out from the cross—is balanced by the fact that such solitary religious figures maintain their importance within great traditions maintained by generations of the faithful, organized into "churches" or "denominations" and "sects." Furthermore, novel forms of religious commitment centered upon newly identified charismatic figures are likely themselves quickly to take an organizational form, however unstructured, if they are to survive. These are the religious "cults." Hence, to be either traditionally or innovatively religious is to be related in some fashion to a religious group. The solitary religious figure is a myth reconstructed and abstracted from the organizational forms that both define this figure and give him or her meaning. The classification of these religious forms has been of much interest to the more sociologically oriented psychologists of religion. Of the various classification schemes proposed, the most influential has been "church-sect theory."

CHURCH-SECT THEORY

Church-sect theory was never intended as a theory of origins, and hence it is a bit surprising that it has so dominated the empirical literature on both established and new religious movements. Furthermore, as Dittes (1971b) has noted, the careers of Troeltsch's church-sect theory and of Allport's theory and measures of Intrinsic versus Extrinsic religion (discussed in Chapter 2) have numerous parallels. Both theories have dominated their conceptual and

empirical literatures; both have numerous critics; and both have, in Dittes's phrasing, "some considerable promise of surviving their obituaries" (1971c, p. 382).

A common criticism shared by these two theories is the confounding of evaluation with description. This often entails implicit claims to "good" and "bad" religion—whether in terms of organizational structure, as in Troeltsch's theory, or in terms of religious motivation, as in Allport's theory (Dittes, 1971b; Kirkpatrick & Hood, 1990). As we note later in this chapter, religious cults have to a large extent shared the burden of various pejorative connotations. They are typically perceived as "bad" religion. As social psychologists, we must explore the empirical reasons for such connotations. To do so requires an empirical grounding of the relationship between forms of religious organizations and their dominant or host cultures. In this section, we draw upon the roots of church–sect theory and attempt to show how these have influenced the sociologically oriented social-psychological literature. Only a few would argue against the importance of church–sect theory (Robertson, 1975; Snook, 1974). We hope that our discussion of this theory's roots in the work of Troeltsch will demonstrate both its relevance and its usefulness in organizing contemporary empirical studies on the social psychology of religious organizations (Hood, 2003b; Streib, 2008).

Origins of Church–Sect Theory

The main source of church–sect theory in modern social psychology has been Reinhold Niebuhr's (1929) work on the social sources of denominationalism. Denominations are what many persons think of as "churches"—groups commonly accepted as legitimate religious organizations within their host cultures. Most people identify themselves by reporting their denominational membership (if they are Christians) when asked for their religious identification. Thus, as Wimberley and Christenson (1981) have noted, individual religious identity is largely synonymous with group religious membership.

Niebuhr's work is a modification and popularization of church, sect, and mysticism—three types of religious organizations articulated in Troeltsch's (1931) classic work *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*. Niebuhr's popularization significantly altered Troeltsch's conceptualizations. As discussed in Chapter 11, Niebuhr ignored Troeltsch's three-part typology (church–sect–mysticism) in favor of a two-part typology (church–sect). Furthermore, Niebuhr added a dynamic tendency to the theory: He suggested that persons who are dissatisfied with the commonness and permissiveness of churches as they successfully appeal to the masses seek more demanding criteria for membership. This exclusiveness creates a sectarian movement. Although Niebuhr thought that sects are unable to gain control from elites within churches, and hence that the direction of change is from church to sect, but not from sect to church, others argued against this. Johnson (1963, p. 543) argued that a shift from sect to church is theoretically "conceivable." Eister (1973) argued more forcefully for what he referred to as the "paradox of religious organizations": Dynamic processes produce sects from churches, but sects then tend to become like the churches they once criticized.

Niebuhr's modification of Troeltsch's typology is further confounded when it is recognized that Troeltsch's three-part typology was derived from two independent dichotomies elaborated by Max Weber (Gerth & Mills, 1946; Weber, 1922/1963). As Swatos (1976) has emphasized, Weber had two typologies: church–sect and mysticism–asceticism. Troeltsch's single typology of church–sect–mysticism was itself a modification intended both to simplify and to clarify his friend Weber's dual typologies. The extent to which Troeltsch's single typology is compatible with Weber's dual typologies is a matter of dispute among scholars. Stee-

man (1975) argues that Troeltsch's treatment of church–sect–mysticism at least approximates Weber's intent with his dual typology. On the other hand, Garrett (1975) argues that a significant disjuncture separates Weber's and Troeltsch's typologies, especially when consideration is given to mysticism.

For our purposes, it is important to emphasize that the Weber and Troeltsch theories share a crucial defining criterion that differentiates churches (denominations) from sects: Churches are inclusive, while sects are exclusive. By focusing upon the single criterion of degree of exclusiveness, church–sect theory can contribute to organizing the empirical literature in value-neutral terms. The criterion of exclusiveness is easily operationalized, and it permits us as social scientists to sidestep issues of evaluating “good” and “bad” religion.

The Empirical Tradition Influenced by Church–Sect Theory

Not surprisingly, contemporary social scientists have divided into two camps regarding church–sect theory. One camp continues the classical tradition of modifying church–sect theory and of debating its validity and value, mainly at the conceptual level (Eister, 1973; Johnson, 1963, 1971; Wilson, 1970). Most of the resulting classification systems are qualitatively derived, relying upon appeals to face validity. Few in this camp seek empirical verification of predictive consequences for their typologies. In the rare instances when these classifications have been empirically assessed, they have been found to be less than adequate. As Welch (1977, p. 127) has noted, “Few existing set classification schemes—both unidimensional and multidimensional varieties—are able to offer true discriminatory power when put to the empirical test.”

Members of the other camp have opted for more precise operationalization of their typologies, often employing quantitative procedures to construct their typologies (Eister, 1973; Finke & Stark, 2001; Johnson, 1963, 1971; Stark & Bainbridge, 1987; Wilson, 1970), and seeking systematic testing of hypotheses derived from these classifications. One of the most systematic efforts has been made by Stark (1985), whose model has moved the debate beyond mere conceptual criticisms to the testing of empirical hypotheses based upon operational measures.

Stark owes much to a now-classic paper by Johnson (1963), who first operationalized the essential difference between church and sect that he felt both Weber and Troeltsch set forth with varying degrees of explicitness. Churches are inclusive (e.g., accepting infant baptism) and are widely accommodating to their host cultures, seldom being at significant odds with their major values. On the other hand, sects are exclusive (e.g., often demanding adult baptism) and seek a religious purity that often puts them at odds with their culture. The universalizing tendency of the church type accommodates to the host culture, accepting many persons who meet only minimal criteria for membership. The perfectionist tendency of the sect type sets rigorous criteria for membership; as such, it is less accommodating to the host culture as it limits membership. Johnson (1963) operationalized these tendencies as follows: “A church is a religious group that accepts the social environment in which it exists. A sect is a religious group that rejects the social environment in which it exists” (p. 542; emphasis in original). Johnson further restricted church and sect to religious groups, stopping by definitional fiat the efforts to extend church–sect typologies to other groups (such as political ones) that some theorists have found useful (Robertson, 1975).

Stark and Bainbridge (1979, 1985, 1987) have refined Johnson's definition by further operationalizing acceptance and rejection according to degree of difference, antagonism,

and separation between a religious group and its host culture. In our view, the most fruitful operational indicator is the degree of difference, indicated by beliefs and behavioral norms, between sects and the dominant host culture. Salient differences are likely to lead to mutual rejection, but whether or not they do is an independent empirical question. Furthermore, antagonism is largely a corollary of different beliefs and behavioral norms. Difference itself can be operationally equated with subcultural deviance when the beliefs produce tension between religious groups and their host culture. Low-tension beliefs are congruent with being part of mainstream culture and characteristic of denominations (churches). Streib, Hood, Keller, Csöff, and Silver (2009) have classified religious groups as “oppositional,” “integrative,” or “accommodating,” depending on the extent to which they accept dominant host culture norms.

Given this operationalization of church and sect along a continuum of tension, embedded within a more general theory of religion, numerous novel hypotheses have been generated and empirically tested (Stark & Bainbridge, 1980b). Perhaps the most hotly disputed among these is the concept of a general religious economy, in which religious views must compete in an open market. As such, extreme sects become more successful (gain members) by reducing their tension with the host culture. Over time, sects tend to shed their other-worldly and perfectionist tendencies as they accommodate to the culture. They may, but are unlikely to, remain isolated instances of subcultural deviance. Thus, in the Stark and Bainbridge theory, churches reemerge from sects as essentially secularized religious groups—insofar as secularization is recognized to be a process of accommodation to the dominant host culture. In other words, they become acceptable forms of denominational religious expression.

Finke and Stark (2001) have refined this theory to argue that under conditions of free competition, religious organizations can gain membership by moving to increase or decrease tension with their host culture. Their argument rests on the assumption that participation in religious organizations approximates a bell-shaped curve. Degree of tension, defined as the degree of distinctiveness, separation from, and antagonism with the host culture, ranges from very low (“ultraliberal”) to very high (“ultrastrict”). Organizations at the extremes can only grow by moving toward the center; thus increasing tension facilitates growth at the more liberal end, whereas decreasing tension facilitates growth at the more sectarian end. Figure 9.1 presents the bell curve model of Finke and Stark.

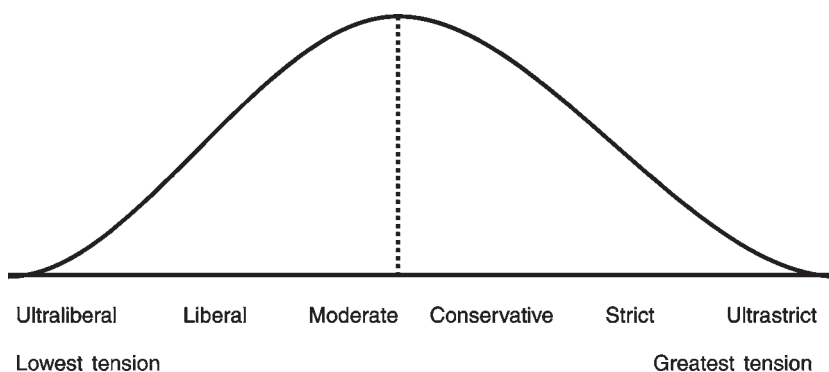


FIGURE 9.1. Hypothetical bell curve distribution of religious organizations. Data from Finke and Stark (2001, p. 177).

As Finke and Stark (2001, p. 176) note, “To the extent people seek religion . . . the demand is highest for religions that offer close relations with the supernatural and distinctive demands for membership, without isolating individuals from the culture around them.”

Thus, in North America, most religious people are members of congregations that fall somewhere between the extremes of the ultrastrict religious sects and the ultraliberal New Age and Unitarian–Universalist groups (Finke & Stark, 2001). Denominations predominate in the middle of the curve. However, this does not mean that only a “middle-of-the-road” religion can be successful. For instance, Williamson & Hood (2004) have documented that as the mainstream Church of God grew into denominational status, it abandoned its endorsement of serpent handling. However, the groups in Appalachia that refused to abandon the practice survived as “renegade” Churches of God. A similar process occurred with fundamentalist Mormon groups that refused to abandon the practice of polygamy, as did the mainstream Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Quinn, 1993).

Another novel hypothesis derived from Stark and Bainbridge’s general model of religion is that in similar religious markets, novel forms of religion can be expected to thrive. As we shall soon see, if cults are defined as novel religious organizations, cults can be expected to thrive precisely where churches or denominations are weak. This follows from the hypothesis that churches have already accommodated to the mainstream culture and that sects are unlikely to maintain for long a novel stance vis-à-vis the larger host culture, to which they also must accommodate to be successful. The hypothesis that weak church environments lead to increased probabilities of cult formation has yet to be fully empirically substantiated, but it remains as viable a hypothesis as it is controversial (Bibby & Weaver, 1985; Bruce, 1999; Wallis, 1986). Still, the tendency for sects to lead to churches is inherent in any view that, almost by definition, social groups that survive have accommodated to their culture to at least the degree that their survival is assured. Garrett (1975, p. 211) has referred to this tendency, most evident in Niebuhr, as the “Americanization of the Troeltschian typology.”

It is important to emphasize that although accommodation to the host culture can be identified as a secular move, it is inherent in the nature of religious organizations that they devise objective means to permit universality at the expense of ethical perfection. For instance, churches permit membership on the basis of minimal criteria that can be objectively specified. In Troeltsch’s (1931, Vol. 2, p. 993) terms, the church allows an “institutionalization of grace.” Sects can maintain exclusivity by rejecting members who can be objectified as “too worldly.” As such, a sect is a religious subculture by definition. Exclusivity both defines and characterizes sects as they emerge from churches. Yet they tend toward universality as they survive. Furthermore, religious subcultures, if sufficiently at odds with their host cultures and not in a process of accommodating to them, are likely to be targets of legal retaliation and control—something that has characterized the history of sects in the Western world (Johnson, 1963). It has also become a major issue with respect to the contemporary analysis of cults, as we shall shortly note. For now, it is sufficient to note that religious organizations are continually in dynamic processes of change, with individuals joining and leaving religious groups partly on the basis of their appeal to either sectarian (high-tension) or denominational (low-tension) characteristics. Research Box 9.1 presents data on this issue from a large sample of African Americans.

With church–sect theory, the useful empirical indicator is not simply a religious group’s accommodation to or rejection of the host culture, but how the host culture in turn reacts to the religious group. What empirically distinguishes churches and sects is the degree to which their host cultures seek to control and minimize the influence of particular religious groups.

RESEARCH BOX 9.1. Church–Sect Transitions among African Americans (Sherkat, 2001)

Sherkat hypothesized that among African Americans, preference for religious organizations should correspond to the dynamics implied by church–sect theory. Successful sects tend to lesson tension with their host culture as they become more accommodating of members' worldly behaviors and demand less of their total commitment. Sherkat hypothesized that within sects, generational differences are important factors for the transition of sects into churches and for the new formation of sectarian groups out of older churches.

Identifying birth cohorts ranging from those born before 1925 to those born between 1956 and 1980, Sherkat was able to identify a total sample of 5,075 African Americans from the 1972–1998 versions of the General Social Survey. Frequency of church attendance was reported for eight religious groups, including one group of traditionally “white liberal” churches (e.g., the Episcopal and Lutheran Churches) and another group of sects (e.g., Church of God in Christ, Pentecostal, and Holiness). For each religious group in each cohort, Sherkat identified the percentage of the cohort who were members of that group, and the percentage within each group who had switched to that group. He hypothesized that sectarian groups ought to gain membership among younger African American members but to lose membership among older church members, who should seek religious organizations that are less in tension with their host culture. Thus the sect–church–sect thesis ought to have empirically identifiable generational components. Sherkat demonstrated this via “cohort analysis,” a procedure that samples distinct age categories from the same groups over periods of time. Using this technique, Sherkat found that Methodists and Baptists accounted for 78% of the pre-1925 cohort, but for 19% less (59%) of the 1956–1980 cohort. On the other hand, sects accounted for 3% more of the youngest cohort than of the oldest cohort. For all groups, the results were as follows:

Religious group	Birth cohort							
	Pre-1925 (n = 1,009)		1925–1943 (n = 1,205)		1944–1955 (n = 1,419)		1956–1980 (n = 1,442)	
	% of cohort belonging group	% within group who switched to group	% of cohort belonging to group	% within group who switched to group	% of cohort belonging group	% within group who switched to group	% of cohort belonging to group	% within group who switched to group
“White liberal”	2.7	130	3.7	48	3.3	34	2.4	26
Methodist	17.2	129	11.8	31	10.3	27	6.4	13
Baptist	61.2	119	60	14	53.8	12	53	9
Sects	10.4	175	10.3	70	10.1	58	13.5	40
Nondenomina- tional	1.3	177	1.6	95	2.1	80	2	66
Catholic	4.6	148	7.1	31	8.9	22	9.6	12
Other	0.9	100	1.4	94	2.7	85	3.4	67
None	1.7	82	4.1	84	6.7	88	9.7	62

Note. Adapted from Sherkat (2001, p. 229). Copyright 2001 by Blackwell Publishing, Ltd. Adapted by permission.

(cont.)

RESEARCH BOX 9.1. *(cont.)*

Sherkat's study is important, in that it demonstrates that sectarian groups tend to grow by attracting religious "switchers." Forty percent of the sectarians in the youngest cohort, and 70% or more of those in the two oldest cohorts, were raised in some other religious group. However, in the traditionally "white" denominations, rates of participation were low and switchers constituted smaller percentages of the membership. Thus Sherkat notes that only high-commitment groups attract high-commitment switchers.

In many Western cultures, especially North America, the generally favorable attitude toward "religion" suggests that both churches and sects are likely to do fairly well. Churches, or what we might call mainline denominations, are likely to fare better than sects, but both accommodate enough to their host cultures to be acceptable in varying degrees. As Redekop (1974) has emphasized, the useful empirical task is to identify the specific aspects of tension with the host culture that create problems of retaliation. The bell curve model illustrated above places tension along a single dimension, but tension with the host culture is clearly a multidimensional construct. We first focus upon this issue in terms of denominational and sectarian forms of religion. In a later section, we explore it in terms of cults—the area where it has generated the majority of recent empirical research in the face of popular controversies.

Operational Indices on the Church–Sect Continuum

Johnson's operationalization of church–sect theory in terms of degree of tension with the host culture permits Troeltsch's typology to be placed upon a continuum. Religions enforcing norms that are sharply distinct from the more generally accepted norms of the host culture are relatively sectarian; those permitting members to participate freely in all aspects of secular life of the host culture are more church-like (Johnson, 1963). They occupy the large middle range of the bell curve model of Finke and Stark (2001). Bainbridge and Stark (1980b) have provided survey data consistent with Johnson's operationalization. Their data are taken from a sample of church members in four counties of northern California; our focus is upon responses from 2,326 members of different Protestant denominations. Denominations "intuitively" identified as sects included the Church of God, the Church of Christ, the Church of the Nazarene, Assemblies of God, and Seventh-Day Adventists (Bainbridge & Stark, 1980b, p. 107).² Mainstream Protestant denominations were classified into those more compatible (low-tension) and those less compatible (high-tension) with their host culture. Our focus is only upon low-tension denominations contrasted with high-tension sectarian groups. We have selected from the survey data certain behaviors permitted by most of secular society but differentially forbidden by religious groups. It ought to be the case that the more sectarian groups should more frequently forbid behaviors permitted by the host culture than more

²Certain groups (Gospel Lighthouse, Foursquare Gospel Church) classified as sects had too few respondents to be included in the statistical tables. We focus upon mainstream denominations only, contrasted with sects for which the sample size is sufficient. For additional details on the sample, the research instrument, and groups we have excluded, see Glock and Stark (1966, pp. 86–122).

TABLE 9.1. Comparison of Mainstream Protestant Denominations and Five Protestant Sects on Selected Behaviors and Beliefs

	Percentage of respondents endorsing behavior/belief					
	Mainstream Protestant (<i>n</i> = 1,032)	Church of Christ (<i>n</i> = 37)	Church of God (<i>n</i> = 44)	Church of the Nazarene (<i>n</i> = 75)	Assemblies of God (<i>n</i> = 44)	Seventh-Day Adventist (<i>n</i> = 35)
Behaviors						
Disapprove of gambling	62	100	89	92	98	97
Favor censorship	31	57	57	73	82	66
Disapprove of dancing	1	95	77	96	91	100
Beliefs						
Reject Darwin	11	78	57	80	91	94
Believe Devil exists	14	87	73	91	96	97
Believe Jesus will return	22	78	73	93	100	100

Note. Percentages must be cautiously interpreted, given the variation in sample sizes. Adapted from Bainbridge and Stark (1980b, pp. 111–112). Copyright 1980 by the Religious Research Association. Adapted by permission.

church-like religious groups (denominations) should do. Table 9.1 compares results from the low-tension mainstream Protestant denominations (grouped together) and the five Protestant sects on differences in some common cultural behaviors and beliefs.

The fact that more sectarian groups hold beliefs at odds with the dominant culture simply indicates one dimension of tension. To oppose dancing or drinking within the host culture, where they are approved and considered normal, separates sect members by belief and behavior from certain cultural activities. Likewise, to oppose such beliefs as the theory of evolution puts sect members at odds with normative educational forces in the culture. Even the support of more literal religious beliefs, such as the reality of the Devil or Christ's return, may put sect members at odds with other, more culturally congruent religions. In the comparisons in Table 9.1, the differences among the sectarian groups are never as large as those between all sectarian groups and mainstream Protestants. This supports the contention that sects are at odds with the dominant culture and with denominations within that culture.

Additional evidence for the usefulness of operationalizing sectarian religions by belief tension with their host culture can be gleaned from Poloma's (1991) interesting study of Christian Scientists. Here a single axis of tension, appropriate medical care, is of overriding importance. It is clearly the case that medical perspectives on physical illness dominate modern cultures; most persons seek medical treatment for illness. However, many persons use religious techniques such as prayer to facilitate healing. Several investigators have emphasized that spiritual healing is not as marginal in modern society as one might expect from the official dominance of medical perspectives. For instance, Johnson, Williams, and Bromley (1986) found that 14% of their sample of 586 adults claimed to have experienced a healing of a "serious disease or physical condition" as a result of prayer. Likewise, Poloma and Pendleton (1991) found that 72% of randomly chosen respondents from a Midwestern U.S. population believed that persons sometimes receive physical healing as a result of prayer. Nearly one-third of these (32%) claimed a personal experience of healing, and a third of this subsample (34%) claimed that the healing was of a life-threatening accident or medical problem. It is

clear that spiritual healing is a widely diffused belief and practice through a broad range of the general population (Poloma, 1991; Johnson et al., 1986).

Although Poloma (1991, p. 337) is correct in her general assessment that religious healing is widely practiced, it is important to note that prayer as an adjunct to orthodox medical treatment is not a significant source of tension with the dominant culture. For instance, Trier and Shupe (1991, p. 355) have shown that among participants randomly selected from telephone numbers in the Great Lakes area, prayer was commonly used as an adjunct to traditional, mainstream medical care. They found no evidence that prayer was used in lieu of traditional medical treatments. Furthermore, frequency of prayer was correlated positively with consulting a physician. Prayer is most frequently used in conjunction with and not in opposition to orthodox medical treatment (Gottschalk, 1973). As such, prayer for recovery is hardly sectarian in nature.

However, the use of prayer as an adjunct to medical treatment is a far cry from the articulation of a religious ideology that argues against both the concept of disease and the relevance of medical treatment to a cure. Christian Science is one religion that argues for healing in opposition to, not in conjunction with, orthodox medical treatment (Gottschalk, 1973). This is clearly a belief at odds with the dominant host culture, and even with mainstream Christian interpretations of spiritual healing by faith or miraculous intervention (Peel, 1987). Thus the sectarian nature of Christian Science can best be revealed when comparisons are made between the beliefs of Christian Scientists and mainstream Protestant Christians who claim to have experienced a spiritual healing.

In a follow-up study of the 1985 Akron Area Survey, Poloma and Pendleton (1991) contacted 97 of 179 potential participants who had agreed to be interviewed for another study. These were those who reported having “experienced a healing of an illness or disease as a result of prayer” (Poloma, 1991, p. 339). They were interviewed this time on the topic of spiritual healing. The vast majority of participants were “born-again” Christians (82%) and identified themselves as charismatic, Pentecostal, or both (86%). Two were Christian Scientists, who were later used to obtain an additional sample of 42 members of the Church of Christ, Scientist (Christian Science). Comparisons between the 95 mainstream Protestants and the 44 Christian Scientists on beliefs regarding spiritual healing revealed expected differences, as noted in Table 9.2.

TABLE 9.2. Differences between Mainline Christians and Christian Scientists in Beliefs about Spiritual Healing

Belief	Percentage of respondents endorsing belief	
	Mainline Christians (<i>n</i> = 44)	Christian Scientists (<i>n</i> = 95)
God always heals if faith enough	57	85
God withholds healing for spiritual good	72	10
Healing operates with fixed laws	69	95
God punishes evil with illness	24	0
God usually heals through doctors	73	12
God usually does not use divine healing	47	3

Note. All differences were significant at $p < .01$. Adapted from Poloma (1991, p. 341). Copyright 1991 by the Religious Research Association. Adapted by permission.

TABLE 9.3. Differences between Mainline Christians and Christian Scientists in Reasons for Seeking Medical Care and Medical Visits

	Percentage of respondents endorsing belief	
	Mainstream Christians (<i>n</i> = 95)	Christian Scientists (<i>n</i> = 44)
Likely would seek help for:		
Relief of headache	100	0
Flu-like symptom	5	6
Severe chest pain	76	10
Severe injury	76	5
Visited doctor within last year	88	10

Note. All differences were significant at $p < .01$. Adapted from Poloma (1991, p. 344). Copyright 1991 by the Religious Research Association. Adapted by permission.

It should be stated that these differences in beliefs in spiritual healing between Christian religious groups were found despite similarities in beliefs on other religious matters. For instance, the majority of both Christian Scientists and mainline Christians in Poloma's (1991) sample agreed that Jesus healed in order to show compassion and divinity, as well as to gain followers and to glorify God. Furthermore, in terms of actual reported medical practices, the majority of both mainline Christians and Christian Scientists practiced their beliefs—the former seeking and utilizing orthodox medical care, the latter much less likely to do so. Some comparisons are reported in Table 9.3.

As can be seen from Table 9.3, neither Christian Scientists nor mainstream Christians acted perfectly in conformity with their stated beliefs: 10% of Christian Scientists reported visiting a doctor within the last year, while an almost equal percentage of mainline Christians failed to visit one. Still, the Christian Scientists' rejection of orthodox medicine was related to very high rates of nonparticipation in its practices. Clearly, rejecting orthodox medicine is a point of tension that separates Christian Scientists from other Christians and from the mainstream culture as well.

ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS

The operationalization of tension with the host culture along a single continuum is useful, but it also can be misleading. Cultures are not homogeneous entities; they are not defined by a single set of norms. Cultures are heterogeneous, with conflicting and often incompatible norms existing simultaneously. In a word, cultures are pluralist. Some social scientists refer to this as "postmodernism" (Rosenau, 1992). Although little consensus exists on the meaning of this term, the fact that no single perspective dominates postmodern cultures suggests that tension with a culture must be defined in terms of opposition arising in significant power groups within the culture, which have vested interests in the support of particular norms. Deviation from norms whose enforcement is of little concern is less crucial than deviation from norms that arouses reactions from those with significant power within the host culture. More sectarian groups arouse reaction from the powerful, not simply because they harbor

different beliefs, but because they harbor different beliefs on a continuum considered salient or important to the powerful within the culture (Becker, 1963).

To take an obvious example, Christian Science, in opposing modern medical science, raises concern among the powerful in a culture dominated by belief in modern medicine. Numerous instances arise when parents from belief traditions such as Christian Science or the Jehovah's Witnesses, which oppose some or all of orthodox medicine, have children in need of medical care. Here, the confrontation between orthodoxy in medicine and the opposition to these powerfully sanctioned norms within sectarian traditions illustrates a significant tension. Outside of particularly specified religious alternatives, it is simply "common sense" that one treats disease by orthodox medical procedures. Yet common sense is but the culturally shared knowledge of reality defined within a tradition (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). The criteria for assessing claims to truth are often incommensurate between traditions. The very specifications of the criteria of judgment are themselves contextually bound. Thus the claim that medical treatment is "obviously" necessary for diseases does not simply affirm one reality, but rejects others, such as those articulated within Christian Science. The question of how to treat these issues empirically without imposition of value claims has long plagued the social sciences.

Before we address one possible resolution to this problem, we simply emphasize that the existence of differences between reality claims in which groups within the culture have dominant interests is not simply a source of identity, but one of conflict as well. To identify oneself as a Christian Scientist is both to belong to a group at odds with orthodox medicine and also to be at odds with the educational elite of the culture, who support and defend the perspective of orthodox medicine. It is almost axiomatic in the social sciences that strong identification of members with divergent groups increases prejudice, as measured by the social distance groups attempt to maintain from one another (Beit-Hallahmi, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Defining Sects versus Denominations in Terms of Change

All groups are in a continual process of change—denominations no less than sects. Cultures are in a continual process of change as well. However, the issue is whether changes within religious groups are in a direction compatible with the dominant culture (denominations) or not (sects). In most cases, the issue of congruence is a function of the meanings involved. We can identify this dynamic tension as a ratio between "restorative" and "transformative" efforts to maintain a tradition or shared system of meaning. Meanings are seldom if ever merely personal or idiosyncratic; they are almost always shared by some group, and at odds with those differentially shared by other groups (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Religions groups undergoing either restorative or transformative changes become sectarian if the dominant culture's commitments remain fairly constant or shift in a direction opposite to the religious group's concerns, respectively.

Both restorative and transformative tendencies exist in all organizations. Within religious organizations, the crucial social dimension is whether the norms that are maintained by either of these processes are sufficiently congruent with the norms that are strongly supported by the host culture. If they are congruent, the religious group has a church (denominational) form, which assures that its members are nonproblematic to the host culture. If they are not congruent, the group has a sectarian or cult-like nature, which assures that its members are problematic to the host culture. Buxant and Saroglou (2008, p. 39) refer to such

groups as “contested religious movements.” Of course, the issue is complicated by the fact that cultures are changing along with and in opposition to religious groups. Yet it is always the position of religious groups’ norms relative to cultural norms on issues of great salience that is the key to defining sects and denominations, and that probably conforms to the bell curve model presented earlier in Figure 9.1.

The Position of Sects within the Host Culture

Sects persist—but, as Bainbridge and Stark (1980b) have noted, an ongoing, functioning group that is problematic to the host culture is a deviant subculture by definition. Thus sects are best viewed as tolerable forms of religious deviance, created when religious groups differ significantly from their host culture on salient values. Sects are problematic to the dominant host culture’s interests, but are of the acceptable forms of religious identity characterized by the tolerance for diversity that is common in postmodern cultures (Rosenau, 1992).

Occasionally, sectarian practices become targets of legal sanction; however, within a culture that cherishes religious freedom, efforts to constrain sectarian religious practices are likely to meet with serious obstacles. This is particularly likely to be the case where religious freedom is a strong cultural tradition and where religion is a valuable label. As Richardson (1985a) has noted, being identified as a religion in the United States has numerous benefits, not the least of which is protection from government regulations that would prohibit otherwise problematic behaviors. Benefits include tax exemptions, as well as exemptions from civil rights legislation and many laws that govern business. For instance, religions can refuse to ordain women even in the United States, where women have achieved additional legal protection from discrimination based upon gender. No Catholic woman can bring a lawsuit on discrimination because she is refused the right to be a priest; nor can a fundamentalist woman appeal on legal grounds the refusal of ordination by her church. Yet religions risk losing their religious identification if they deviate too far from cultural norms for what constitutes a “religion.” As Greil and Robbins (1994) have noted, the law does not concern itself with claims to religious heresy, at least in the United States; this indicates that within broad limits, religious norms, even those at odds with the dominant culture, are to be protected. However, being protected by the law does not mean that tension with the host culture is minimized. In the United States, the legal acceptance of religious diversity knows few limits. Sectarian groups are allowed to exist and even to flourish as pockets of subcultural religious deviance, characteristic of the religious pluralism and dynamism of postmodern culture. Among the more curious of sectarian religious practices is the handling of serpents among the Holiness sects of Appalachia, as noted in earlier chapters of this book and described in more detail in Research Box 9.2.

When tensions are extreme and reactions to religious subcultures become more intense, tolerance for diversity is likely to find its limit. In India, fundamentalist Hindus, who continue the practice of *sati* despite its illegality, support a restorative sectarian movement unlikely to find sympathy from either men or women influenced by modernity. Yet the practice of *sati* is rooted in the belief that the untimely death of a husband is due to the failure of his wife to protect him, and hence she must sacrifice herself on his funeral pyre. Cases of the reemergence of *sati* and its defense by Hindu fundamentalists have generated much social-scientific commentary and analysis (Hawley, 1994a, 1994b). Here, the tension with most cultural views is extreme, despite the long tradition of *sati* as a minority movement within Hinduism. Legal repercussions in the interest of the dominant culture suggest a retaliation and an appeal to a

RESEARCH BOX 9.2. Serpent-Handling Sects (Hood, 1998; Hood & Williamson, 2008b)

Early in the 20th century in the rural South, George Hensley (and probably others independently) picked up a serpent in reaction to Mark 16:17–18: “And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” Hensley is widely credited with initiating the practice of serpent handling, unique as a form of religion in the United States. For a while the practice was normative in the Church of God, where Hensley was licensed. Later rejected as a practice by the Church of God, it became normative for Holiness sects in Appalachia. Often identified as “sign-following” sects and long predicted to disappear, these sects continue to outlive their obituaries. Preachers, with their serpent boxes ever present, handle deadly snakes—either when faith alone dictates it or, for some, when they feel they have a special experience of being “anointed.” Associated with serpent handling but less common is the drinking of poison, often strychnine or lye. Ninety deaths have been documented from serpent bites (Hood & Williamson, 2008b, pp. 239–244). Hensley himself was a victim, dying of a snake bite in 1955. Serpent bites are common, and among serpent-handling sects, opinions differ on whether one ought to seek medical aid if bitten. Although many Protestant sects practice some of the signs specified in Mark 16:17–18, only the Holiness sects of Appalachia follow all five signs. For instance, many Pentecostal groups speak in tongues (glossalalia) but reject serpent handling. The tension that serpent handling presents to a modern culture is obvious. Legal sanctions have been directed against the practice in some states, such as Tennessee. In other states, such as West Virginia, the practice carries no sanction. (For a listing of laws against serpent-handling sects, see Burton, 1993.) To the outsider, this obedience to the literal Biblical imperative is the major defining characteristic of these sects.

higher standard unlikely to be heard within the ideological surround of *sati* and its defenders.

In a similar vein, Islam has a long tradition of *jihad*, or holy war (Ruthven, 1984). Although it would be a mistake to think that Islam is inherently a violent religion, it would be equally inappropriate to fail to understand the conditions under which believers might feel justified in acting violently against those whom their tradition feels must be opposed. For instance, it is often claimed that violence in the expression of one’s faith (as in Islamic fundamentalist protest movements that utilize force) is necessarily fanatical and fueled by only negative characteristics, such as paranoia and authoritarianism (Dekmejian, 1985). However, empirical studies of actual violent protesters while still alive and imprisoned fail to support such claims. A well-known study by Saad Eddin Ibrahim (1980, 1982) focused upon participants imprisoned for Islamic militancy. Ibrahim (1980, p. 427) defined Islamic militancy as “actual violent group behavior committed collectively against the state or other actors in the name of Islam.” Members of two militant Islamic groups in Egypt (the Islamic Liberation Organization and Repentance of the Holy Flight) who had actually been imprisoned for Islamic militancy failed to confirm stereotypes related to any supposed personality characteristics of religious fanaticism. The prisoners were predominantly students or recent university graduates in the sciences and medicine, with median ages in the mid-20s, and clearly had achieved

greater educational success than their parents. They were motivated by Islamic ideals and felt justified in the use of force to obtain these ideals.

Similar justifications were claimed by Malcolm X in his quest for social justice as framed within the Black Muslim religion. Research Box 9.3 presents a study comparing attitudes toward Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. among lower-socioeconomic-status black and white males.

Hoffman (1995, p. 225) has presented a survey summary of Muslim fundamentalists' psychosocial profiles and concluded that the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism often leads to the discounting of its more violent sects as "crazy," even though such claims lack empirical grounding. It is unlikely that the willingness to use force to achieve one's aims is likely to be other than a source of tension with the host culture. However, such aims and

RESEARCH BOX 9.3. Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. as Cultural Icons
(Hood, Morris, Hickman, & Watson, 1995)

Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. (hereafter referred to as "Malcolm" and "Martin") both framed their protests against perceived injustice in religious terms. A major difference in the means they advocated to achieve their visions was in the justification of violence. Malcolm, taking the Black Muslim view, refused to reject violence as a means; Martin, taking the Christian view, did reject it. Hood and his colleagues reasoned that the acceptance of Martin and Malcolm would differ among culturally alienated lower-socioeconomic-status black and white males.

Using a semantic differential scale to measure both evaluative assessments (i.e., approval) and potentiality assessments (i.e., estimates of power) of Malcolm and Martin, they found that black and white males did differ as predicted. The following table presents the most relevant summary of these results.

	Evaluating rating		Potentiality rating	
	Martin	Malcolm	Martin	Malcolm
Black males				
Mean	36.19	44.66	33.02	46.17
<i>SD</i>	9.95	6.96	9.35	5.79
White males				
Mean	32.13	24.87	30.49	47.28
<i>SD</i>	9.81	7.76	8.06	5.26

Analyses of these data indicated that black males evaluated Martin more highly, and Malcolm much more highly, than did white males. On potentiality, both black and white males thought Malcolm much stronger than Martin. The investigators suggested that these data are consistent with the grudging preference of Martin over Malcolm among whites, precisely because Martin's rejection of violence made him less of a threat than Malcolm's willingness to use violence if necessary. Thus the justification of violence as a means is a clear source of tension for cults within their host cultures.

their forceful means can have meaningful religious justifications and make sense to some. Within the notion of an “ideological surround” (see Chapter 12 for a discussion of this concept), every action motivated by faith must be understood from the perspective of the actors involved, and not by some standard outside their perspective. Clearly, one major source of tension is the claim of these sects to a legitimate use of violence to achieve their aims, even when this is framed within a religious perspective (Kressel, 2007).

CULTS

If tension with the host culture on salient values best empirically defines a church–sect continuum, what about cults? The term “cult” has such a pejorative quality, especially in the popular media, that some investigators who have profitably utilized the concept in the past have begun calling for the elimination of the term “cult” altogether (Richardson, 1993). In one sense, it has become the sociological equivalent of psychopathology in the popular mind. Even the sociological literature on cults tends toward the dramatic and extreme, despite wide variations in the nature of cult beliefs and practices (Eister, 1973). Empirical studies of attitudes toward cults indicate that the majority of respondents have heard of Jonestown and Charlie Manson—names linked to the term “cult” in the popular media (Pfeifer, 1992, p. 538). It is as if all sects and cults were identified with the Hindu ritual of *sati*, or as if the sensationalized press descriptions of those who advocate Islamic *jihad* as mere “terrorists” were to be taken at face value. Yet death and violence are no more essential to cults than to other social groups.

Comparing Cults and Sects

Despite the fact that the cult type was never part of the theoretical development of church–sect theory, it is probably most useful to compare cults and sects. As Stark and Bainbridge (1979, p. 125) have argued, sects tend to rise from within existing religious groups and to move toward a new religious form. Schisms create sects by what we have termed either restorative or transformative movements. Hence sects are inherently religious protest movements. On the other hand, cults lack prior ties with religious bodies and tend to emerge afresh, often under the direction of a single charismatic leader. Cults are novel forms of religion, which, not surprisingly, are likely to emerge in tension both with established religious groups (such as churches and sects) and with the host culture. As such, we can expect that sects and cults share a rejection of their host culture or at least some aspects of their host culture, and are likely to be rejected by their host culture in turn. As with sects, there are belief differences between cults and their host culture. There are also likely to be close patterns of interaction among cult members, as well as retaliatory actions on the part of the host culture toward them—all of which create an even more clearly defined religiously deviant subculture for cults than for sects. This occurs not only because cults are novel and hence lack previous religious legitimation, but also because their leader is likely to be a solitary, powerful, charismatic figure. Indeed, many characterize cults as lacking a formal organizational structure and as largely controlled in an authoritative manner by their leaders (Ellwood, 1986; Wallis, 1974). Cults are often defined and identified by the names of their leaders, at least in the popular media. Hence we have the “Manson cult,” the “Jim Jones cult,” and the “Moonies” (after the Reverend Sun Myung Moon). As Barnes and Becker (1938, p. 22) have noted about

charismatic figures in general, "Charismatic domination is established through the extraordinary qualities (real or supposed) of the leader. . . . Law is not the source of authority; on the contrary, he [or she] proclaims new laws on the basis of revelation, oracular utterance, and inspiration."

Given the charismatic nature of cult leadership combined with the fact that cults (like sects) are in opposition to salient cultural values, there is often some confusion as to whether or not cults are truly "religions." The distinction between religious and secular groups has become blurred in the modern world. As Greil and Rudy (1990) have noted, many organizations are best conceived as parareligious or quasi-religious because they have mixed characteristics, some of which are sacred and some of which are secular. This applies, for example, to Alcoholics Anonymous, astrology, and many healing movements (Greil & Robbins, 1994; McGuire, 1992). In congruence with postmodern analyses, we should note that "religion" can be conceived as a category of discourse, negotiated by groups that would either desire to obtain or wish to refute the label. Although there are often benefits to the label (as noted above), there can be liabilities as well. For instance, Transcendental Meditation (TM) was successfully excluded from schools in the United States on the basis of a claim Maharishi Mahesh Yogi denied—namely, that TM was a religion (Greil & Robbins, 1994). Hence efforts to include TM as a secular activity in schools were rejected, based upon a court ruling that such practices were in fact religious in nature. Thus the category of religion must be negotiated between groups and a culture; some groups desire the label, but others do not want it (Greil, 1993).

However, as novel forms of religious identity, cults are likely to be severely challenged by mainstream culture. Pfeifer (1992) found that the vast majority of college students in his sample (82%) described "an average cult member" only in negative terms; not a single student used positive terms. He also randomly divided his subjects into three equal groups and had them respond to one of three vignettes describing three groups. None of these three groups were identified as cults, but each was selected based upon popular notions of alleged authoritarian structures and near-total environmental control of members, who are kept isolated from the wider society. The vignettes were identical except for the groups specified—either "Marines," "Moonies," or "priests." The vignette described a typical recruit, "Bill," at the relevant group facility (with only the identification of the persons surrounding him changed across the three vignettes) as follows:

While at the facility, Bill is not allowed very much contact with his friends or family and he notices he is seldom left alone. He also notices that he never seems to be able to talk to the other four people who signed up for the program and that he is continually surrounded by (Moonies, Marines, priests) who make him feel guilty if he questions any of their actions and beliefs. (Pfeiffer, 1992, p. 535)

Among several assessments in this study, participants were asked to select the term that best described the process Bill had undergone in order to reach the facility from among these terms: "initiation," "conversion," "brainwashing," "basic training," "resocialization," or "religious education." The most common term used to describe the process by which Bill was surrounded by Moonies was "brainwashing" (22 of 31, or 71%), whereas this term was used much less frequently to describe joining the Marines (15 of 34, or 44%) or the priesthood (10 of 34, or 29%). Still, as we shall see later in this chapter, "brainwashing" as a term to describe

conversion—especially conversion to unpopular groups—has become a major issue, dividing even professional psychologists. Likewise, when participants were asked to characterize cults on the basis of the degree to which they foster “psychological growth,” “community programs,” “child abuse,” or “brainwashing,” Pfeifer (1992) found that negative descriptive terms (“child abuse” and “brainwashing”) were seen to characterize cults, whereas neither positive term was seen as characteristic of cults.

In addition, the participants rated Bill on various indices on a bipolar scale, as summarized in Table 9.4. Inspection of this table indicates that Bill was generally perceived as less happy and responsible if he joined the Moonies, as well as likely to have been coerced into joining them and powerless to leave. Overall, he was also perceived to have been treated unfairly by the Moonies.

Pfeifer’s study paints a negative picture of the perception of both cults and cult members that is supported by previous research. Zimbardo and Hartley (1985, p. 114) found that the most typical descriptions of cults obtained from students using a semantic differential scale tended to be those with strongly negative connotations, such as “not worthwhile” (64%) and “crazy” (60%). Consistent with the need for cults, as novel forms of religious organization, to negotiate for the validity of their label as “religious,” more than one-fifth of these subjects identified cults as “nonreligious.”

In a more recent study, Olson (2006) utilized data from the Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey, a telephone survey of 2,426 adults conducted from December 2003 to May 2004. He asked the respondents, “Would you be comfortable if your neighbor joined a cult, a new religious movement, or a new Christian church?” The results for the 44% who responded are presented in Table 9.5. Clearly, the table reveals that these Midwestern Americans held negative views of cults and positive views of a new *Christian* church, with their views of new religious movements in between. Olson also found that the Nebraskans who responded to the interview felt that the government should have the right to regulate cults (56% “very” or “somewhat” agreed), but felt much less strongly about this for new Christian churches (13% “very” or “somewhat” agreed). Again, their views on regulation of new religious movements were in between (26% “very” or “somewhat” agreed). Olson’s findings are

TABLE 9.4. Mean Ratings of “Bill” Based upon Label of Group He Joined

	Marines	Moonies	Priests	
Positive process	4.41	5.22	3.97	Negative process
Happy	3.76	4.90	3.85	Unhappy
Intelligent	3.32	4.16	3.41	Unintelligent
Responsible	3.53	4.33	3.70	Irresponsible
Uncoerced	4.97	3.76	3.68	Coerced
Free to leave	6.03	6.06	5.29	Not free to leave
Treated fairly	3.55	3.55	4.71	Treated unfairly
Power to resist	4.17	5.19	4.29	Powerless to resist

Note. All ratings were made on a 7-point scale (1 = left-hand phrase, 7 = right-hand phrase). With the exception of “responsible–irresponsible,” differences among the three means were significant at $p < .05$. Adapted from Pfeifer (1992, p. 537). Copyright 1992 by Blackwell Publishing, Ltd. Adapted by permission.

TABLE 9.5. Response to the Question “How Comfortable Would You Be if Your Neighbor Joined a ...”

Response	Cult?	New religious movement?	New Christian church?
Comfortable			
Very	43 (5.2%)	236 (28.4%)	460 (59.9%)
Somewhat	84 (10.3%)	294 (35.4%)	221 (28.8%)
Uncomfortable			
Somewhat	314 (38.6%)	187 (22.5%)	36 (4.7%)
Very	348 (42.8%)	55 (6.6%)	11 (1.4%)
Don't know	23 (2.8%)	53 (6.4%)	36 (4.7%)
No response	2 (0.2%)	6 (0.7%)	4 (0.5%)
Total	814	831	768

Note. Adapted from Olson (2006, p. 100). Copyright 2006 by Blackwell Publishing, Ltd. Adapted by permission.

consistent with those of Pfeifer (1992), who argues that people hold schemas that stereotype cults and cult members. However, this does not mean that such schemas cannot be changed, as noted later in Research Box 9.5 (dealing with schemas of serpent handlers).

The problem of novel groups' negotiating to be labeled as “religious” is accentuated when these groups combine charismatic leadership with authoritarian structures that tend toward withdrawal from the dominant culture. For instance, Galanter (1989a) emphasizes the strong influence on behavior by norms supported by the attribution of divine powers to a cult leader. Richardson (1978a) emphasizes the oppositional nature of cults, which is exacerbated by the fact that they often derive their inspiration and ideology from outside the predominant religious and secular culture. Wallis (1974) has emphasized that cults need not always take their ideology from outside the dominant culture. Yet, as novel religious forms, cults clearly have an ideology at least distinct from the dominant culture. As Ellwood (1986) emphasizes, cults present a distinct alternative to dominant patterns in society, and the tension this creates is exacerbated when they are also led by charismatic persons who demand high degrees of commitment. Swatos (1981) emphasizes that the cult leader may be an imaginary figure, not a real one. Yet to focus religious novelty on a single figure, cultivating fierce commitment from members willing to withdraw from significant aspects of both religious and secular culture, is likely to create a powerful deviant subculture that must fight to be recognized as legitimately “religious.” There is considerable evidence that in western Europe, without the long tradition of separation of church and state that characterizes the United States, cults and new religions must struggle even harder to be recognized as legitimate religious groups (Richardson & Introvigne, 2001). For instance, in historically Roman Catholic Belgium, even Protestant groups are “contested religious movements” (Buxant & Saroglou, 2008, p. 268).

Thus models of sects as deviant religious subcultures may actually apply more forcefully to cults than to sects. As innovative deviant subcultures, cults stand in opposition to both the host culture and sects. Both sects and cults share the fact of tension with the dominant host culture, but cults more frequently emphasize separatist tendencies from a novel base and

hence are more likely to attract intense cultural rejection in turn. As we have seen, sects tend to emerge out of religious organizations. They are likely to find some support for their aims, whether restorative or transformative, from others within the dominant culture. By contrast, cults arise as original movements within the culture and are likely to solicit opposition both from established religions and from the secular host culture.

In a postmodern culture, the acceptance of pluralism creates some added degree of tolerance—a milieu somewhat favorable to both sects and cults (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1984; Rosenau, 1992). However, tolerance has its limits. This is especially the case in light of two factors. First, as Stark (1985) has emphasized, cults tend to appeal for recruits to members of weakened churches or to unchurched individuals. Thus, in terms of the religious marketplace, denominations are either losing members to cults or failing to attract as members those individuals from the secular culture who join cults. Second, the oppositional nature of cults is directed not only against the churches' claims to appropriate accommodation to the world, but against the sects' claims to renewed efforts to maintain an exclusive religious purity. Not surprisingly, these rejections of both churches and sects as well as secular culture foster retaliation in turn. Cults are unlikely to have an easy birth or a long life. As we shall see, retaliatory efforts have created recent "anti-cult" movements, both in the United States (Shupe & Bromley, 1985; Shupe, Bromley, & Oliver, 1984) and in Europe (Richardson & Introvigne, 2001; Robbins, 2001). Much of this movement has been aided and abetted by psychologists and psychiatrists who support the claims that cults utilize "brainwashing" to convert members against their will. We confront both of these issues, after we first give some consideration to the axis along which tension is likely to occur.

Bainbridge and Stark (1980a) have properly noted that the nature of a cult's dominant activity is likely to define its source of tension with the dominant culture. For instance, "client cults" provide personal growth and treatments for their members. Hence they are likely to be opposed by established groups that claim to provide the only legitimate avenue for these services. To give an analogy, Bergin (1980) has noted that psychiatrists and psychologists provide competing services long claimed to be the proper domain of the clergy, including the claim to be authoritative moral agents. Similarly, both London (1964) and Gross (1978) note that in secularized societies, mental health personnel often take the role previously reserved for religious healers. Likewise, Frank (1974) and Ellenberger (1970) have provided authoritative historical analyses of numerous similarities between religious and psychological systems of healing. Illich (1976) has documented the expropriation of health by orthodox medicine. Thus competition between client cults providing unorthodox treatments is likely to create significant tension with powerfully established medical and mental health groups, both of which are heavily sanctioned by the dominant culture.

Further exacerbation is readily understandable in light of the research of Kilbourne and Richardson (1984), indicating that both established therapies and new religious movements attract persons seeking to change identities and to find new meanings in life. However, cults seek to produce more radical change than orthodox therapies, adding to tension (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1984; Schur, 1976). In terms of an ideological surround, the very success of cults is likely to be seen as pathological by representatives of orthodox therapies. To cite but two extreme cases, who would argue for the validity of mass suicide indelibly associated with Jonestown, or the violent murders associated with the Charlie Manson "family"? Yet even in these cases, serious scholars have raised significant questions beyond the stereotype of madness and cults presented in the media. For instance, Zaehner (1974) has argued that Manson's

crimes are not merely an expression of psychopathology, but have a religious significance as well: "Charlie Manson was sane: he had been *there*, where there is neither good nor evil, and he had read and reread the Book of Revelation. These two facts explain his crime" (p. 18). Likewise, Hall (1989) notes that Jim Jones, who led the mass suicide in Jonestown, is not simply to be understood in psychopathological terms:

Ironically, Jones has become far more important for the society at large as a symbolic personification of evil than he has in any way to those who share some of the concerns that animated his movement. It is the opponents of Jim Jones who infused him with a charisma powerful enough to make him play the mythic role of scapegoat that cleanses the world of sin, even if they failed to acknowledge that the sin-offering of Jonestown had wider sources than the evil in Jones. (p. 311)

Thus we cannot ignore the religious relevance of even the most extreme of cult leaders. Feuerstein (1992) documents the relevance of madness as a category of the holy, especially for cult leaders. It is important to remember that religious extremism is also a normative part of religious history. We must be cautious not to identify all religion with cultural accommodations and compatibilities. Studies of contemporary militant movements worldwide under the broad umbrella of "fundamentalism" have shown that under appropriate conditions, militant action by religious groups is normative and cannot be attributed to the psychopathology of either leaders or followers (Marty & Appleby, 1994).

Using client cults as an example of an axis of tension identifies conflict between cults and orthodox healers that is not likely to engage massive cultural concern, except in isolated and highly publicized cases. However, an area of tension that cuts across diverse cultural groups and is perpetually a matter of intense concern is sexuality. A cult's violation of sexual norms is likely to elicit retaliatory responses from the dominant culture. We focus upon the social control of sexuality, since claims to legitimate forms of sexual expression have varied and continue to vary immensely, both within and between cultures. Yet few people have no opinion about what is appropriate.

Cults and Sexuality

Relating the control of sexuality to varieties of group formation and cohesion has a long history and firm theoretical grounding. Much of the social psychology of classical Freudian theory identifies group formation as being rooted in the control of sexuality and dyadic intimacy. As an inevitable dimension of tension with society, any form of sexuality can become problematic. The social and cultural history of sexuality is largely a religious history (Parinder, 1980; Steinberg, 1983; Tennant, 1903/1968). Gardella (1985) has shown how Christianity, especially in North America, promoted a view of sexuality that required it to be both innocent and ecstatic. In English-speaking North America, the celibacy of Catholic priests and nuns has been challenged as abnormal, as was that of the early Shaker communities in the United States (Foster, 1984). The polygamy of early Mormons was violently criticized by a monogamous culture that was also equally opposed to what was perceived as the sexual permissiveness of the early Oneida community, which fostered free sexuality between its members (Foster, 1984).

Although monogamy has been challenged by many religious groups, retaliation is often swift, especially toward groups that put their alternative sexual beliefs into actual practice.

Lewis (1989) recounts many instances of carefully constructed cultural atrocity tales directed at Catholics and Mormons, who were accused of using many different techniques of mind control to force persons to be either celibate (in the case of Catholics) or polygamous (in the case of Mormons). As we shall see, these historical instances applied to what are now mainstream religions have numerous parallels in contemporary retaliation toward cults. Lewis's discussion of atrocity tales directed at Catholics and Mormons is described in greater detail in Research Box 9.4.

Even mainstream religions have accommodated themselves to the acceptance of divorce and hence to a form of serial monogamy, seen by some as a form of polygamy. As Freud (1930/1961a, p. 61) noted, there is an antithesis between sexuality and civilization, given that "sexual love is a relationship between two people, in which a third can only be superfluous or disturbing, whereas civilization is founded on relation[ships] between large groups of persons."

Not surprisingly, theorists influenced by Freud have argued for the crucial importance of sexuality in all forms of group formation, not simply religious ones (Badcock, 1980; Marcuse, 1955). Thus we should not be surprised that religious cults are likely to arouse cultural wrath if they modify established norms of sexuality. Likewise, insofar as conversion to a mainstream religious commitment is one of the best predictors of delayed loss of virginity (as noted in Chapter 12), modification of sexual norms within cults is likely to incur retaliation

RESEARCH BOX 9.4. Catholic and Mormon Atrocity Tales (Lewis, 1989; see also Gardella, 1985)

The most popular book written in the United States before *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a pseudo-autobiography by one "Marie Monk" titled *Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery of Montreal*. With more than a quarter of a million copies sold between 1836 and the Civil War, the book told of licentious sex between priests and nuns; it also told of babies born to nuns and quickly baptized after birth, and bodily dissolved in lye. Despite being thoroughly discredited, this fraudulent text was part of an anti-Catholic genre fueled by exaggerated tales of genuine ex-nuns and of fallen priests that continues today. For instance, tales of priests forcing ladies to confess sexual sins in order to seduce them were common in English-speaking North America before and during the 19th century. *The Priest, the Woman, and the Confessional*, an 1880 book by C. P. T. Chiniquy, is an example of this genre.

If "unnatural" celibacy fueled atrocity tales against nuns and priests, "unnatural" polygamy fueled atrocity tales against Mormons. Paralleling Marie Monk's book was another fabricated story by Marie Ward entitled *Female Life among the Mormons*. Assuming that no conscientious females would accept polygamy, the text accused Mormon males of using hypnotic techniques to force females to accept a presumably unnatural wedded life. Like ex-nuns, ex-Mormon women told elaborately embellished stories accentuating the misery of women under Mormonism. These helped to enrage the larger culture to action against Mormons, ranging from vigilante justice to government action directed against Mormon leaders and practices.

The insistence by a culture that only wedded monogamy is sanctioned by God provides a context within which advocates of other religious sexual practices, whether celibacy or polygamy, must fight to gain legitimacy for these practices.

from mainstream churches heavily involved in the sexual socialization of adolescents. For example, the Unification Church has been accused by Horowitz (1983a, p. 181) of being a collectivist organization, and chided in particular for supporting arranged marriages in which persons were married who were "in some cases unfamiliar with each other up to minutes prior to the ceremony." Yet there is firm theological justification for such marriages within the Unification Church (Barker, 1984). Moreover, Lewis (1989) has shown that dyadic intimacy is a factor in cult defection, insofar as among spouses joining cults, the best predictor is that if one partner leaves the cult the other will also leave. Not surprisingly, then, the Unification Church attempts to exert control over dyadic matching in terms of the larger group's interests, as do other religious groups such as the Hare Krishna (Judah, 1974). However, in a culture in which both free choice and romanticism are presumed to direct dyadic selection, such novel controls on sexual expression are likely to be serious sources of tension (Gardella, 1985). Similar tensions have emerged in studies of celibacy within the Catholic Church. Sipe (1990, p. 293), based upon a limited study of priests who failed to maintain their vows of celibacy, rashly concluded that the Catholic Church supports an archaic anthropological model inappropriate in light of modern understandings of human sexuality. (See Chapter 12 for a discussion of clergy sexual abuse and the recent scandals within the Catholic Church.)

When sexuality is controlled in a manner permitting multiple partners (often several partners are sexually active with a cult leader), the challenge to sexual and religious cultural norms is even more obvious. Wangerin (1993) has documented how "flirty fishing," or the use of sexual favors to gain adherents, created significant tension for the otherwise fundamentalist Children of God/Family of Love. Further confounding their otherwise fundamentalist beliefs is the confusion they have created within fundamentalist circles by supporting masturbation and a generally masculine point of view regarding sexuality (Wangerin, 1993). Chancellor (2000) has written an oral history of this movement, based upon interviews with over 700 members; he has documented the tempering of their sexual views as they continue into subsequent generations. Jacobs (1984, 1987) has documented the fact that some male cults foster romantic idealization of the cult leader by female followers. This leads to what some perceive as sexual abuse and exploitation for those who fail to carry through their attachment to the cult leader. Then, much as in a more normative love relationship, the socioemotional bonds with both the group and the leader must be broken for defection from the cult to occur (as we will see in Chapter 12). With a charismatic male leader and a female follower, the process is accentuated, but similar processes operate in male followers as well.

THE ANTI-CULT MOVEMENT

In a partly tongue-in-cheek paper (a rarity in scientific journals), Kilbourne and Richardson (1986) described a new mental illness, "cultphobia." Although perhaps not to be taken seriously as a claim to defining a pathology, their effort was directed at "putting the shoe on the other foot" (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1986, p. 259). Richardson, a prominent sociologist and a lawyer involved in the study of new religious movements, has been a leader in arguing for researchers to abandon the term "cult" altogether, opposing his own earlier view in support of the concept (Richardson, 1978a, 1979, 1993). Much of his concern centers upon the well-documented fact that attitudes toward new religious movements are heavily influenced by the mass media, whose presentation of cults has been largely sensationalistic and heavily slanted in a negative direction (van Driel & Richardson, 1988). Few if any distinctions are

made between cults. For instance, Patrick and Dulack (1977, p. 11), activists in the anti-cult movement, have stated: "You name 'em. Hare Krishna, the Divine Light Mission, Guru Maharaj Ji, Brother Julius, Love Israel, The Children of God. Not a brown penny's worth of difference between any one of 'em."

The Empirical Study of Resistance to Cults

Empirically, the identification of resistance from groups within the culture is worthy of study. Thus we consider the pejorative connotation cults have acquired within the mass media an important empirical issue—one that is integral to the operationalization of cults as novel forms of subcultural religious deviance. The refusal to differentiate among cults is also worthy of empirical study. As Zimbardo and Hartley (1985) have noted, similar negative views of cults are held by adolescents, regardless of whether or not they have ever had any contact with recruiters for various cults. Yet, as Wallis (1976) has rightly noted, not all authoritative groups are the same. For instance, Scientology has authoritarian features, but most members hold down full-time jobs and limit their involvement in terms compatible with their occupation and domestic responsibilities.

The empirical study of hostility toward cults is only one aspect of general tolerance for deviance, which is often examined in political science studies of civil liberties (McClosky & Brill, 1983; Stouffer, 1955; Wilcox et al., 1992). Perhaps the most consistent finding is that education and tolerance are positively correlated. Although numerous challenges and modifications of this finding have been made in specific cases, it remains as a "most durable generalization" (Sullivan, Pierson, & Marcus, 1982, p. 29).

The study of tolerance for new religious movements is almost by definition a study for tolerance of cults. Despite a relatively small literature, empirical studies are congruent with the research on support for civil liberties (Bromley & Breschel, 1992; Robbins, 2001). Within a democratic culture, retaliation against new religious movements can be expressed by attitudes in favor of legal restrictions on cults (Delgado, 1982; Galanter, 1989b; Lifton, 1985; Stander, 1987). Several studies have used this operational indicator in either general or specific cases. For instance, Richardson and van Driel (1984, p. 413) found substantial agreement with the statement that "Legislation should be passed to control the spread of new religions or cults" in a telephone survey of 400 randomly selected voters in Nevada. However, they also noted that some respondents were confused by the phrasing of the question, wanting to control cults but not new religions (Richardson & van Driel, 1984, p. 417). This confusion is consistent with the problem already discussed of negotiating a religious identity for a novel group. Cults are often refused such a label, as many do not perceive them as legitimate religions (Greil, 1993). Thus, while there is generally strong support for the right of freedom of worship for all religions, the support is strongest among educated elites rather than the mass public; it is also tempered when the religions are seen to be too extreme, including cults, which may not be perceived as religious at all (McClosky & Brill, 1983).

When questions are more specific, the attitudes toward legal restrictions on cults are more illustrative. For instance, Bromley and Breschel (1992) utilized four specific issues to assess favorable attitudes toward cult legislation: a ban on cult recruitment of teenagers; the necessity for Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) surveillance of cults; the desirability of restricting solicitation by Hare Krishnas at airports; and the question of preventing the Reverend Moon from publishing a newspaper. Overall, they found that a majority of the mass public (66%), but a minority (25%) of the elites, approved of most items. Furthermore, the

more religiously involved respondents were more likely to support legislation to control cults. This is consistent with the tension that cults as novel religious forms are likely to have with both secular and sacred groups within mainstream culture. In addition, it is often claimed that claims of “brainwashing” and sexual abuse (especially of children) are often used without empirical documentation, in efforts to discredit cults (Richardson, 1999).

O'Donnell (1993) utilized a similar measure to assess attitudes toward restrictions on new religions. In addition, he added an item indicating opposition to Satan worship. Opposition to Satan worship is an important indicator of media influence on cult perception, since empirical research has failed to establish either that there is a large Satanic movement in North America or that Satan worship has any significant following or influence among adolescents (Richardson, Best, & Bromley, 1991; Swatos, 1992). O'Donnell's sample included a mass survey of 1,708 persons and an additional sample of 863 elites, selected from business, government, education, media, and religious leaders. O'Donnell used the five items as a single scale. The responses for the various groups are presented in Table 9.6. Not only did the academics within the elites have the greatest tolerance, but among the mass group, education was the best predictor of tolerance.

TABLE 9.6. Tolerance for New Religious Movements (Cults)

Group	Overall response (higher score = greater tolerance; 1 = yes, 2 = no)
Mass public ($n = 1,708$)	1.42
Elites ($n = 863$)	
Academics ($n = 155$)	1.87
Business ($n = 202$)	1.67
Government ($n = 106$)	1.74
Media ($n = 100$)	1.79
Religious leaders ($n = 300$)	
Ministers ($n = 101$)	1.58
Priests ($n = 100$)	1.60
Rabbis ($n = 99$)	1.68

Note. The survey items were as follows:

1. There should be laws to prevent groups like Hare Krishna from asking people for money at airports.
2. Followers of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon should not be allowed to print a daily newspaper in Washington, D.C.
3. It should be against the law for unusual religious cults to try to convert teenagers.
4. The FBI should keep a close watch on new religious cults.
5. There should be laws against the practice of Satan worship.

Each item was scored on a 2-point scale (1 = yes, 2 = no). The table reports the overall mean response for the five items. Adapted from O'Donnell (1993, p. 361). Copyright 1993 by the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Adapted by permission.

RESEARCH BOX 9.5. Changing Views toward Serpent-Handling Sects
(Hood, Williamson, & Morris, 2000)

It is well documented that serpent handlers have been stereotyped in the popular media, which provide the basis of most persons' "knowledge" about this tradition (Brickhead, 1997). In a quasi-experimental study, college students were presented with contemporary tapes of serpent-handling services—one in which serpent handling was both demonstrated and defended, and a comparison tape in which services were shown but handling was neither defended nor demonstrated. Participants were assessed before and after viewing the tapes on a measure of prejudice that included stereotyping, negative affect, and behavioral intentions. It also included three items to assess whether respondents thought the practice of serpent handling to be "unfortunate," whether they believed that those who practice serpent handling are sincere, and whether respondents supported laws restricting the practice. Results indicated that prior to viewing the tapes, all participants held generally prejudiced attitudes toward serpent handling, thought the practice to be unfortunate, thought the handlers insincere, and favored laws against handling serpents in church. Analysis showed that viewing a videotape of serpent handling and hearing the practice explained and defended influenced attitudes. All participants in this study continued believing the practice unfortunate and holding negative affect about it, as well as not wanting to be with handlers, regardless of which tape they viewed. However, only those who actually witnessed handling and its defense decreased their stereotyping and changed their views; they now expressed beliefs that serpent handlers are sincere and that they ought to be allowed to practice their faith without legal constraint. Thus factual presentation of information regarding religious groups can reduce stereotyping and change attitudes toward them.

Thus, within the study of new religious movements, tolerance has been found to follow the similar pattern of the "most durable generalization" noted for civil liberties in general. Research Box 9.5 reports an experimental study indicating that attitudes toward religious groups among educated elites can be changed by the presentation of factual material.

Still, we must confront a curious phenomenon proposed by some members of intellectual elites—one that medicalizes religious deviance and also suggests a basis for discounting much of the tolerance expressed by both elites and the educated masses toward religious cults. That phenomenon is coercive persuasion, or, in the inadequate vernacular of the popular media, "brainwashing." Here there has clearly been a clear advancement based upon empirical research, which, in Goldman's (2006) opinion, has reached at least "widespread agreement" (p. 89) if not unanimity.

The Question of Cults and Coercive Persuasion

The Medicalization of Deviant Religious Groups

The tendency for educated persons to be tolerant of new religious movements is confounded by controversies surrounding cults and the "medicalization of deviance." Although varying in precise meaning, this term generally refers to efforts to explain commitment to deviant groups in terms of dysfunctional or pathological processes (Conrad & Schnelder, 1980; Kitt-

rie, 1971; Szasz, 1970, 1983, 1984). Thus individuals are assumed to be unable to commit themselves freely to a new religious group. Conversion to cult beliefs and adherence to cult norms are interpreted as symptoms of illness or pathology. Not surprisingly, much of the support for this position comes from clinical psychologists and psychiatrists. For instance, in a series of papers, Clark and his colleagues (Clark, 1978, 1979; Clark, Langone, Schacter, & Daly, 1981) have claimed to clinically identify powerful mental coercion used by cults to create pathological commitments in converts. Likewise, Shapiro (1977) has claimed to have clinically identified a syndrome of “destructive cultism,” which includes such phenomena as loss of identity, behavioral changes, estrangement from one’s family, and mental control by the cult leader. Finally, Singer and her colleagues (Singer, 1978a, 1978b; Singer & West, 1980; Singer & Ofshe, 1990) have gained a considerable reputation for the clinical treatment of former cult members, whom they have described as “psychiatric casualties.”

In opposition to clinical claims are the claims of most empirical researchers, who have found no evidence that cults use unique methods or techniques in order to alter normal psychological processes. Some have seen the empirical response to exaggerated clinical claims as itself overstated. As a result of all this, much of the study of new religious movements has become highly politicized. The process has forced serious debate and disclaimers among investigators as to hidden motives involved in the study of new religious movements (Barker, 1983; Friedrichs, 1973; Horowitz, 1983a, 1983b; Robbins, 1983). This has led to concerns regarding the academic integrity of research on new religious movements in general (Wilson, 1983), as well as challenges to the integrity of researchers personally committed to controversial religions such as Wicca, often simply identified as witchcraft (Scarboro, Campbell, & Stave, 1994). In an article title, Segal (1985) has asked this serious question: “Have the Social Sciences Been Converted?” Others have noted that contemporary perspectives in the philosophy of science make distinctions between religious and scientific methods of knowing less distinct, blurring the boundaries of what many have tried to separate (Jones, 1994; Miles, 2007). The debate is most heated when claims to have identified a process of coercive persuasion unique to cults are linked to the popular but scientifically unwarranted concept of “brainwashing,” which is perhaps the one term that contributes most to the misunderstanding of cults (Zablocki & Robbins, 2001).

A History of the Concept of Brainwashing

The term “brainwashing” has entered the popular language as a summary term for some loosely defined techniques of coercive persuasion that presumably can make persons adopt beliefs and conform to behaviors they would normally reject. Anthony and Robbins (1994) note that the term was first popularized by Hunter, a U.S. journalist who worked for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). This journalist claimed to have identified powerful techniques of thought reform utilized by the Chinese Communists, for which he coined the word “brainwashing” (Hunter, 1951). Research agencies of several governments—including the Nazi SS and Gestapo; the U.S. Office of Strategic Services, forerunner of the CIA; and investigators in Stalinist Russia and Communist China—had been involved in research programs to find effective procedures to obtain information from interrogation of prisoners of war, and to find ways to alter the beliefs of individuals so they would be cooperative with captor governments.

Despite widely exaggerated popular press accounts of the effects of brainwashing techniques, it was quickly recognized that no government had discovered any such tech-

niques that were truly effective. Most efforts to alter beliefs utilized varieties of deception, often combined with the administration of drugs, or with techniques of coercion and force. Although compliance was easily produced by these crude techniques, true belief change was virtually nonexistent. "Compliance" simply means that persons conformed to demands to avoid pain and suffering within a totally controlled environment; however, their true beliefs did not change. Evidence for this was that behavioral compliance disappeared upon release from the environment. Of approximately 7,000 Korean prisoners of war subjected to harsh treatment techniques by the Chinese Communists, 30% died. Of the remainder, only 21 refused repatriation after secession of hostilities, and of these 21, 10 later changed their minds. Hence only 11 cases of over 4,500 survivors actually adopted Chinese Communist beliefs and refused ultimate repatriation (Anthony & Robbins, 1994). Not surprisingly, researchers given access to CIA material concerning all claims to brainwashing noted that no effective techniques existed, and that compliance produced by physical coercion, isolation, propaganda, peer pressure, and intense torture—in a context of total control combined with uncertainty about the future—involved no unknown social-psychological principles (Hinkle & Wolff, 1956). Indeed, the desired effects of mind change measured at repatriation indicated the complete failure of the presumed brainwashing. Thus responsible reviews of the facts indicate that no evidence exists for a technique using advanced psychological knowledge to alter a person's thoughts against his or her will.

Another phrase closely associated with brainwashing is "thought reform," a more adequate description of the Chinese Communists' intent. The term is closely linked to the research of Lifton (1961), a psychiatrist who studied Korean prisoners of war. Both thought reform and brainwashing are linked to what Schein, Schneier, and Barker (1971) have called "coercive persuasion." Although a scientifically inadequate popular literature extols the unlimited power of coercive techniques, the responsible scientific literature is consistent in agreeing (1) that such techniques can produce only limited attitude change and (2) that such change is highly unstable when controls on the immediate environment are lifted.

Two major varieties of coercive persuasion have been utilized in recent history, the Chinese and the European. Although the two forms overlap, as Somit (1968) has noted, their differences are evident in the extreme forms of expression. European-oriented techniques primarily emphasize obtaining confessions of guilt from presumably innocent persons, typically singly and in isolation. Chinese-oriented techniques focus upon efforts to change a person's total ideological orientation, typically in group situations where many are solicited as volunteers. The Chinese-oriented techniques have much in common with "totalism." Totalism seeks ultimate control of the individual through actual or threatened physical techniques of coercion and torture (see Arendt, 1979; Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1956). It is most often associated with totalitarian states. Totalism assumes the freedom of individuals to resist, and it does not postulate a unique technique or method that can make anyone (regardless of predisposing factors or strength of will) change ideological orientation. As such, it is what Anthony and Robbins (1994) refer to as a "soft determinism," quite compatible with theories of modern social science. Cults, like many other groups (both religious and secular), seek to attract persons with identifiable predispositions that can be manipulated in such a manner as to persuade the persons to become converts. Of course, such conversions remain intentional actions. They are not the process of some "hard determinant" such as brainwashing that abolishes the capacity to choose (Robbins, 2001). Although American social scientists have thoroughly discredited the concept of "brainwashing," it continues to be utilized as a legitimate concept in some Western European countries to control contested religions (Richardson &

Introvigne, 2001). This is particularly the case when religion is defined narrowly, so that new religious movements can be denied the label “religion” (Soper, 2001).

The popularization of a brainwashing model is compatible with neither the European nor the Chinese model of coercive persuasion, each developed independently. Although brainwashing is a thoroughly discredited concept, the broad basis of processes involved in coercive persuasion can be readily identified. They are empirically established and have removed the claim of “brainwashing” from contemporary concern with cults (Goldman, 2006, p. 90). Furthermore, the techniques of coercive persuasion that occur in some religious groups characterize any high-commitment group, whether religious or not.

Processes of Coercive Persuasion

Since techniques of coercive persuasion have developed from pragmatic sociopolitical concerns, they have not often been linked to broader theoretical views. Overstated efforts to link a particular technique to a theory, such as Sargent’s (1957) appeal to Pavlovian theory, are neither adequate to the totality of coercive persuasion nor supported by sufficient empirical evidence to be generally acceptable. Our summary of the components involved in coercive persuasion focuses only upon what is shared across several responsible efforts to reconstruct, from historical and personal accounts, the processes involved in this kind of influence (Anthony & Robbins, 1994; Bromley & Richardson, 1983; Lifton, 1961; Robbins & Anthony, 1980; Somit, 1968).

1. *Total control and isolation.* Persons are isolated (individually or in small groups), under the absolute control of authorities.

2. *Physical debilitation and exhaustion.* Persons are physically exhausted and debilitated. Causes can include constant interrogation and/or continual prodding from peers, as well as sleep and food deprivation. In extreme cases, physical torture and starvation may be used.

3. *Confusion and uncertainty.* Personal belief systems and entire ideological orientations are challenged. Persons’ uncertainty about their own fate is linked to uncertainty concerning their beliefs and values.

4. *Guilt and humiliation.* A sense of guilt and personal humiliation is induced by a variety of techniques. All are directed at making a potential convert feel unworthy if he or she persists in maintaining present commitments.

5. *Release and resolution.* An absolute framework provides only a single “out.” Suicide is prohibited. Only by compliance or full conversion can individuals gain release from the isolation, pain, guilt, and confusion induced in them by their persuaders.

It is readily apparent that coercive techniques of persuasion are seldom of an all-or-none nature. It is best to talk about degrees of coercive persuasion, ranging from the extremes of the techniques applied to prisoners of war, to the middle-range examples of draftees into the military, and then to the minimal extremes (say, a religious summer camp to which parents may send a reluctant child). Although the degree of compliance is rather straightforwardly linked to degree of control, actual conversion or internalization of beliefs is less clearly empirically understood. What is certain is that conversion is much rarer than compliance under any system of coercive persuasion. However, as Somit (1968) has noted, compliance achieved by extreme coercive persuasion has its own limits:

To be successful it demands a uniquely structured and controlled environmental setting and an inordinate investment in time and manpower. Despite the cost entailed, its effectiveness is limited to individual subjects or, even under the optimum conditions, to a small group of persons. (p. 142)

Coercive Persuasion/"Brainwashing" and Cults: A Contemporary Appeal to a Discredited Process

It is readily apparent that popular interest in new religious movements and cults cannot be explained by such pseudoscientific concepts as brainwashing. Nor has the term been thoroughly discredited in the contexts within which it was first applied, since no powerful psychological technique to mandate beliefs or behaviors exists. Techniques of coercive persuasion are readily identifiable and work by methods well established in the social sciences. Yet these techniques are variously associated with a variety of groups and in no sense differentially or uniquely characterize cults.

For some, the popularity of new religious movements to which close friends or relatives convert is troublesome. Yet serious issues of value and lifestyle differences are sidestepped by essentially rhetorical schemes directed at delegitimizing cults. The Unification Church has been a particular target of such schemes (Robbins, 1977). For others, new religious movements can be discredited if an explanation for conversion can be offered that denies it was voluntary. Pseudoscientific terms such as "snapping" (Conway & Siegelman, 1978) and "mentacide" (Shapiro, 1977, p. 80) have been coined. Not only do such terms lack real scientific credibility; claims to a "cult syndrome" have never been substantiated, even in terms of the data provided by the most passionate champions of the claim. For instance, despite the popular appeal of one text—*Snapping: America's Epidemic of Sudden Personality Change* (Conway & Siegelman, 1978), which claims to document a "cult withdrawal syndrome"—few of the claims have withstood scientific scrutiny (Kilbourne, 1983; Kirkpatrick, 1988; Lewis & Bromley, 1987). Yet such claims are widely reported in the popular media, paralleling for new religious movements what historically occurred in terms of political ideologies (Verdier, 1977). This medicalization of the process of conversion is only part of the larger issue of the medicalization of deviance, which Robbins and Anthony (1979) have termed the "medicalization of religion." In a word, however thoroughly discredited the concept of brainwashing may be, the acceptance of brainwashing is the major way in which those who oppose conversion to cults have attempted to circumvent what would otherwise be rights of choice protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (Anthony & Robbins, 1992).

This contemporary appeal to a discredited process follows the similar fallacious reasoning used previously to discredit political views. Applied to cults, as novel (and hence, to some, threatening) religious views, brainwashing or "snapping" implies that a person's ability to withstand such practices is severely limited. Comments offered to support a person's conversion to cult beliefs and practices are used as criteria of mental aberration, rather than as evidence of a successful search for an alternative religious view by a competent individual. When doctrines are viewed as symptoms of pathology, the process by which the individual was coerced to adopt such views is the target of concern, not the content of the beliefs or the religiously informed lifestyle the beliefs support. The right to choose even unpopular alternatives is denied to converts if the rhetorical strategies of those who would pathologize the process are successful (Robbins & Anthony, 1979).

Ironically, a largely self-fulfilling prophecy of what the rhetoricians of brainwashing fear most is realized in the anti-cult movement, portions of which support “deprogramming.” Deprogrammers utilize many of the techniques of coercive persuasion to undo the presumed effects of brainwashing. The fact that cults appeal disproportionately to the young, and to others who are often in opposition to mainstream culture, fuels the anti-cult movement (Barker, 1986). Almost by definition, youths are abandoning the faiths of their parents (whether these are secular or religious) to join cults. As discussed in Chapter 5, interpersonal factors are an important factor in religious conversion. Not surprisingly, then, parent–youth conflict is both a motivating factor for conversion to cults and often a consequence of such conversion (Pilarzyk, 1978).

Parent–youth conflict plays a major role in deprogramming controversies, in which often parents must be granted legal rights to remove their children forcefully from cult groups. These legal issues are complex in their own right, and are confounded by the courts’ need to evaluate scientific claims that are hotly disputed among those who defend or oppose cults as expert witnesses (Beckford, 1979; Delgado, 1977; Lemoult, 1978; Robbins, 1985; Zablocki & Robbins, 2001). Paradoxically, this has led to several studies of the process of deprogramming, as there are no identifiable studies on the processes of “brainwashing” presumably utilized by some of the more controversial cults (Kim, 1979). Although some have tried to sensationalize deprogramming as a new rite of exorcism (Shupe, Spielman, & Stigall, 1977) and to depict anti-cultists as themselves pathological (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1986), such rhetoric among researchers is best taken as empirical evidence the necessity of paying serious attention to issues of the ideological surround, which inevitably inform social-scientific research. The actual empirical techniques of deprogrammers are no less mysterious than are coercive persuasive techniques. The ability of deprogrammers to isolate their subjects, with extensive control over their environment, permits them to utilize established procedures to reconvert cult members. Kim (1979) has summarized this process as involving three steps: (1) motivating the persons to “unfreeze” their commitment to the cult; (2) providing information that requires the reevaluation of cult beliefs in light of the beliefs to which the persons are to be “reconverted”; and (3) obtaining a “refreezing” of the supported perspective to which the persons are now recommitted.

Cults’ Actual Ability to Retain and Recruit Members

Ironically, despite controversies surrounding cult practices, the majority of cult members are not likely to stay converted. As we have noted in Chapter 8, most converts to new religious groups are “seekers” who explore a variety of beliefs and lifestyles, many associated with the new religious movements. Most cults, by their very nature, can be expected to appeal permanently only to a minority of followers. The inability of any group in a pluralist society to maintain complete social isolation, totally regulate its members’ lifestyles, channel dyadic intimacy, and articulate and defend one authoritative ideology (to cite but a few examples) assures that cults will have high rates of turnover (Wright, 1987). Furthermore, most voluntary defectors from cults feel neither angry nor duped over the experience. Most feel wiser for the experience, even though they were unwilling to stay cult members. Table 9.7 indicates the results of a survey of 45 members who voluntarily left cults.

Not only do cults have significant voluntary turnover of members; their ability to recruit members through coercive techniques is severely limited, especially in a society where civil liberties are protected. For instance, in Galanter’s (1989a) study of Unification Church induc-

TABLE 9.7. Responses of 45 Voluntary Defectors from Three Cults

Response category	<i>n</i>	%
Felt angry	3	7
Felt duped/“brainwashed”	4	9
Felt wiser for experience	30	66
All other responses	8	18

Note. The three cults were the Children of God/Family of Love, Hare Krishna, and the Unification Church (*n* = 15 each). Adapted from Wright (1987, p. 87). Copyright 1987 by the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Adapted by permission.

tion workshops, those who agreed to attend were followed in terms of the success of eight of these workshops to persuade attendees actually to join. Of 104 participants in the workshop, 71 dropped out within 2 days; another 29 dropped out between 2 and 9 days; and an additional 17 dropped out after 9 days. Only 9 workshop participants actually stayed over 21 days to join the Unification Church. Thus Galanter (1989a) found that even among persons self-selected to be receptive to recruitment workshops where mild degrees of coercive persuasion were used, the vast majority failed to join. Barker (1984) replicated Galanter's findings with a sample of over 1,000 workshop participants in London 1 year later. She noted that after 2 years far fewer than 1% of workshop participants were associated with the Unification Church, despite the fact that workshop participants were likely to be favorably predisposed to the Unification Church and presumably were the targets of powerful coercive techniques (Johnson, 1979). Contrary to media claims, the failure to successfully recruit large numbers of persons who voluntarily stay with deviant religious groups is typical of all cult recruitment and retention efforts.

Part of the consensus of research on contested religious groups is that most persons who are recruited by such groups never actually join, and that the majority of those who do leave within a year (Goldman, 2006). Thus Goldman (2006, pp. 91–92) recommends that social scientists reclaim “cult” as a legitimate term and educate the public about the factual characteristics of such contested religious groups. Likewise, Stark (1996) has emphasized that insofar as cults are cohesive spiritual groups that demand personal sacrifice and are in high tension with their host cultures, it is easy to dismiss them by claiming they have powers over members that in fact they do not possess. Voluntary submission to high-commitment groups that utilize coercive techniques has long characterized religious groups. Sorokin (1954/2002, pp. 309–355) has described how these techniques were effectively utilized in medieval monastic communities. Poloma and Hood (2008), in a 4-year study of a contemporary cult group in Atlanta, Georgia, demonstrated the failure of the cult to produce changes in homeless persons (except for limited behavioral compliance when the homeless individuals were voluntarily confined in order to receive shelter and food).

Cults: Discussion and Summary

The research on cult recruitment suggests that the controversy surrounding new religious movements is not simply an issue of the processes employed to attract and convert members.

It is more likely one of the significant tensions that mainstream religious and secular groups have with novel religions, which solicit and legitimate diverse interpretations and modes of confrontation with sacred and symbolic realities. Hence, even in the most extreme cases, we must be careful not to naively utilize and uncritically accept delegitimizing modes of explanation for perspectives different from our own (Barker, 1984). The tendency to explain away beliefs and practices distant from our own through labels for the processes presumed to be operating, which need not take the content of beliefs into account, is a pervasive tendency in the social sciences. Yet, as Kroll-Smith (1980) has shown, even the most private experiences of members of deviant religious groups are influenced by normal social-psychological processes. Several studies show that conversion to new religious groups helps individuals adapt to social and cultural change, of which these groups by definition are a part (Lebra, 1970; Turner, 1979; Weigert, D'Antonio, & Rubel, 1971). Even converts to deviant religious groups are often socialized by the process of conversion to accept other mainstream cultural values (Johnson, 1961). In addition, deviant religious groups socialize people into subcultures within which otherwise maladaptive behaviors are functional (Lewellen, 1979). Also, we cannot underestimate the power of such variant religious bodies to reconceptualize commonly accepted social realities, so that they both justify participation in, and legitimate the continuance of, what to mainstream culture are at best puzzling but acceptable instances of subcultural deviance (Festinger, Riecken, & Schachter, 1956; Weisner, 1974). This is particularly true of many of the practices of cult leaders, whose behaviors to an outsider appear to be no more than trickery, chicanery, or pathology (Feuerstein, 1992).

The failure of cults to be differentially associated with pathology must be emphasized. It has not yet been confirmed empirically that cults either attract or produce pathology when pathology is judged independently of the cults' own behavioral norms. For instance, Galanter (1983, 1989a) notes that deviant sects actually avoid recruiting persons who show obvious pathological characteristics. Likewise, Ungerleider and Welish (1979) have documented the absence of obvious pathology in former and current members of a variety of cults. Finally, Taslimi, Hood, and Watson (1991) failed to substantiate previous claims to pathology in a follow-up study of former members of a fundamentalist Jesus commune, Shiloh. Furthermore, the earlier claims about the presumably maladaptive characteristics of these members while in the Jesus commune failed to account appropriately for the fact that objective indices of maladaptive behavior must be judged within the particular context; behaviors that were otherwise less functional outside the commune may have been adaptive for members inside the commune (Richardson, Stewart, & Simmonds, 1979; Simmonds, 1977b). In fact, Robbins and Anthony (1982) have critically reviewed the relevant empirical literature and concluded that members of deviant religious groups are socially integrated on many criteria:

1. Likely termination of illicit drug use.
2. Renewed vocational motivation.
3. Mitigation of neurotic distress.
4. Suicide prevention.
5. Decrease in anomie/moral confusion.
6. Increase in social compassion/responsibility.
7. Decrease in psychosomatic symptoms.
8. Improved self-actualization.
9. Clarified sense of identity.
10. Generally positive problem-solving assistance.

Finally, it must be emphasized that judgments of the relative value of identities and lifestyles are inevitably beyond the ability of social sciences to resolve factually. Efforts to set criteria for authentic spiritual choices must be individually and collectively made, but their existential base is never simply resolved by factual descriptions or explanations of the processes by which such choices are made. Although research clearly demonstrates that identities linked to divergent social groups increase the prejudice of such groups toward one another, the ability of groups to identify superordinate goals (which can only be achieved by the cooperation of all groups) reduces conflict and prejudice (Sherif, 1953). Thus the seeking of superordinate goals that transcend religious groupings and require the collective effort of all to achieve is a worthwhile project, however ambitious it may be, if prejudices and conflicts among religious groups are to be reduced (Anthony, Ecker, & Wilbur, 1987).

SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES IN RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION

Are Religion and Mainline Religious Groups Doomed to Extinction?

It has been over 40 years since two of the major researchers in the sociology of religion raised the issue of whether or not North America was entering a post-Christian era (Stark & Glock, 1968). A major factor in their questioning was survey research documenting a decline in what many perceived as core Christian beliefs—most centrally, the belief in the divinity of Christ. Stark and Glock (1968) provided a pessimistic prediction for mainline Christian denominations:

As matters now stand we can see little long-term future for the church as we know it. A remnant church can be expected to last for a long time if only to provide the psychic comforts which are currently dispensed by orthodoxy. However, eventually substitutes for even this function are likely to emerge leaving churches of the present with no effective rationale for existing. (p. 210)

In a similar vein, the renowned anthropologist Wallace (1966) argued that all supernatural beliefs are doomed to extinction, presumably along with the churches that rely upon such beliefs for the effectiveness of their rituals.

However, associated with predictions of the eventual extinction of churches and supernatural beliefs are two assumptions that can be seriously questioned. One is that religious beliefs and church attendance are heavily correlated, and hence that changes in the one can be used to infer changes in the other. It is assumed that people who change religious beliefs are likely to lower their rate of church attendance, or that persons who lower their rate of church attendance have probably changed beliefs. Yet belief and attendance are far from perfectly correlated, and one can be a very poor predictor of the other (Demerath, 1965). Second, the evidence (largely derived from Gallup Poll data) suggesting declines in church attendance is confounded by variations within denominational groups. For instance, Greeley (1972) documented an increase in church attendance among Catholics, associated with a decrease in commitment to orthodox Catholic beliefs. There is no paradox in these findings when we realize that persons attend churches for a variety of reasons, many of which are only marginally related to belief issues. Furthermore, we have noted earlier that as denominational attendance falters, sectarian and cult commitments are likely to increase, so that

overall levels of religious group participation may remain strong. Yet before we accept evidence for the decline in mainstream denominations, it behooves us to consider denominations that are similar to the sects and cults in terms of ideological and behavioral strictness, even though their norms are less in tension with the dominant culture than are the more extreme norms of either sects or cults.

The Kelley Thesis and Iannaccone's Modification of It: Strictness Contingencies

While many social scientists were predicting doom for traditional Christian denominations, one investigator burst onto the scene with a book that stimulated much controversy and continues to generate empirical research. Kelley (1972) argued that overall decline in church attendance, especially among North American Protestants, masked two contradictory trends: The more liberal and ecumenical denominations were declining in membership, while the more conservative and fundamentalist denominations were increasing in membership. Ironically, then, the more a religious group was accommodating itself to mainstream culture, the less effectively it was maintaining its membership.

Kelley's thesis is more relevant to the strictness of religious groups in the enforcement of their beliefs and behavioral norms than to their strictness in the content of the beliefs they profess. However, strict groups are likely to be sectarian in nature, demanding a purity that the more lenient denominations relax as they universalize and welcome a diverse membership, which itself is accommodating to the pluralism of mainstream modern or postmodern culture. More sectarian groups demand a seriousness and strictness that are inappropriate to broader universalizing tendencies. Hence Kelley's thesis is compatible with our earlier discussion of sects as acceptable forms of subcultural deviance, and of cults as more problematic forms of religious deviance that elicit cultural retaliation. However, in Kelley's thesis the stricter denominations, the sects, and the cults are the ones increasing in membership, at the cost of the more liberal denominations. The simplicity of his thesis can be seen in his ordering of religious groups along a gradient of seriousness or strictness. Denominations that strictly enforce norms taken seriously by their membership tend toward exclusiveness; this differentiates them from mainstream denominations, which cannot (by the very nature of their beliefs and behavioral tolerance) be strong religions, according to Kelley (1972). Another way to identify this gradient is along a continuum from most exclusive (serious/strict) to most ecumenical. It is this continuum that is hypothesized to correlate with church attendance and growth. This gradient applies primarily within the Christian tradition, not across traditions, although Kelley does include Black Muslims and Orthodox Jews in his gradient for the Christian tradition. However, with these exceptions, only Christian groups are ordered; other traditions would need their own gradients (Kelley, 1972). Kelley's exclusive–ecumenical continuum is presented in Figure 9.2.

Kelley's thesis is strongly stated. Though it needs conceptual refinement, it does have the merit of identifying the postulated determinants of church growth in terms capable of empirical investigation. Several studies have tested Kelley's basic thesis in regard to particular denominations or churches, with some degree of success (Bouma, 1979; Perry & Hoge, 1981). Empirical refinements have suggested that Kelley's thesis applies not to the recruitment of new members, but to the maintenance of adult members and to the retention of children as they mature and stay as adult members of the congregation (Bibby, 1978; Bibby & Brinkerhoff, 1973). Others have argued that not only exclusive groups maintain high mem-

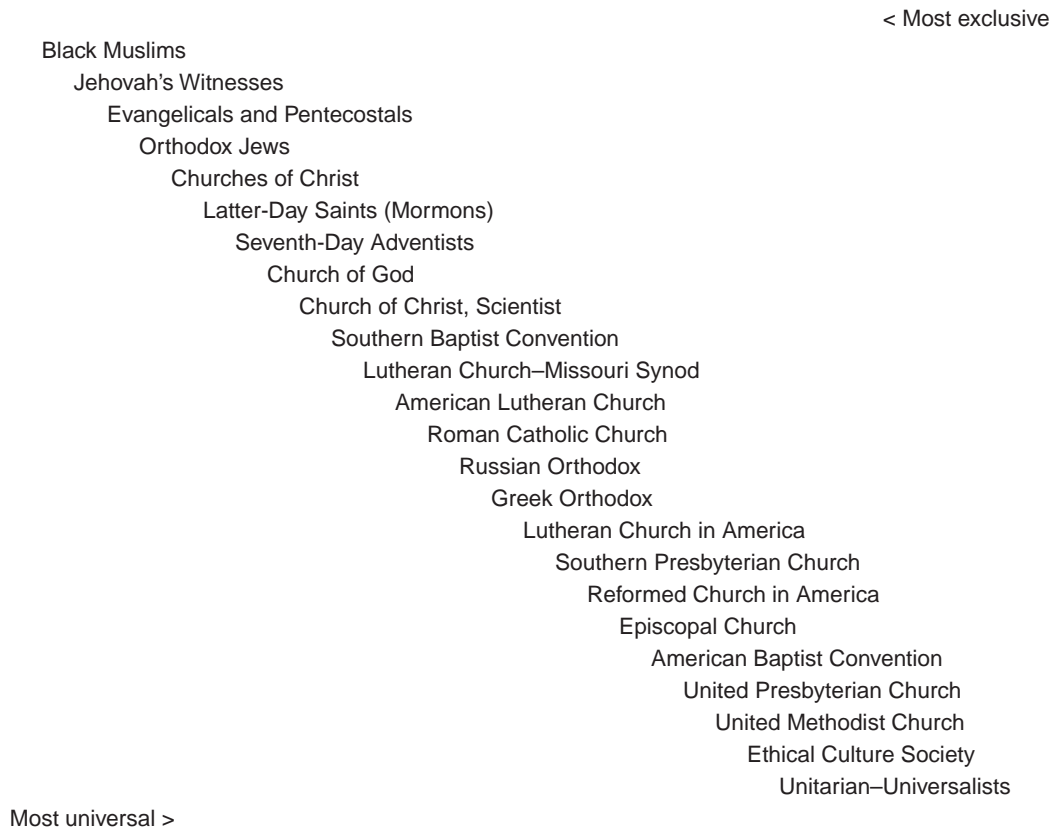


FIGURE 9.2. Kelley's exclusive–ecumenical continuum. Reprinted from Kelley (1972, p. 89). Copyright 1972 by HarperCollins Publishers. Reprinted by permission.

bership and attendance rates, and thus that Kelley's thesis is far from a general covering law (Tamney, 2002).

Still other investigators have focused upon a modification of Kelley's thesis. Unlike Kelley, Iannaccone (1994) has focused upon organizational strength rather than simply growth. He has also operationalized strictness in terms of the costs of organizational membership, and has avoided a potential tautology by using as indicators of "cost" only activities defined as being outside normal church activities. Furthermore, Iannaccone (1996) has persuasively argued the methodological limitations of testing the Kelley thesis across denominations, arguing instead that a fair test of the thesis requires comparing strictness within groups of the same denomination. Olson and Perl (2001) found support for Iannaccone's modification of the Kelley thesis across five different denominations. Although strictness did not systematically correlate with measures of religious commitment within denominations, it did across denominations. The results are presented in Table 9.8.

Although empirical investigation is continuing, Kelley's thesis and especially Iannaccone's modification of the theory (in terms of both its conceptualization and the most appropriate statistical procedures to test the theory) suggest that strictness does indeed lead to

TABLE 9.8. A Test of Iannaccone's Modification of the Kelley Thesis, Using Data within and across Five Denominations

Denomination (<i>n</i> = 125 each)	Correlations of strictness with measures of religious commitment				
	Strictness ^a		Time commitment ^b	Receipts of congregation ^c	Mean \$ donation ^d
	Mean	<i>SD</i>			
Assemblies of God	3.04	0.92	0.19*	0.09	0.00
Southern Baptist	2.63	1.18	−0.07	−0.11	−0.19*
Catholic	0.15	0.44	−0.02	−0.02	−0.13
Lutheran	0.15	0.44	−0.02	0.00	−0.03
Presbyterian	0.31	0.67	0.28**	0.00	−0.07
All denominations combined	1.36	1.49	0.67***	0.38***	0.33***

Note. Adapted from Olson and Perl (2001, p. 761). Copyright 2001 by Blackwell Publishing, Ltd. Adapted by permission.

^aStrictness was assessed with these questions: "Does your congregation teach abstinence from certain foods? Alcohol and/ or tobacco? Gambling? Certain forms of entertainment? Other (specify)?" Range of scale was from 0 to 5 (most strict).

^bHours spent attending, planning, and leading church activities *outside* church services.

^cTotal dollars for church budget, divided by number of households in church.

^dAs self-reported in 58% response rate (*n* = 10,903) from 18,750 mailings (30 per congregation). **p* < .05. ***p* < .001.

****p* < .0001.

greater religious commitment, if not simply church growth. However, growth and strictness are not unrelated. Research Box 9.6 indicates that in the Amish tradition, growth and strictness are dynamically interrelated insofar as strictness may aid in retaining children within the tradition and hence may contribute to church growth. The focus upon strictness forces consideration of the problem that has been a major focus of this chapter—the dynamic processes involved in tensions between religious groups and their cultures.

ATHEISTS, AGNOSTICS, AND SECULARISTS

It would be a mistake to think that individuals who, to use Wuthnow's (1998) terms, either "dwell" within religious groups or become spiritual "seekers" exhaust the possible dynamics of the relationships between individuals and religious groups. Fuller (2001) reminds us that there have always been people whom he identifies in modern terms as "neither religious nor spiritual." Fuller estimates their total in the contemporary United States to be about 15%. These persons include atheists, agnostics, and secularists. In many European countries, their numbers are larger than in the United States; psychologists should thus be cautioned against a too easy reductionism of religious experiences to built-in biological tendencies (Chapter 3) or to natural tendencies selected by evolution (Chapter 8).

One simple descriptive fact is that persons raised in homes where religion is absent tend to remain unaffiliated with religion when they mature. Table 9.9 summarizes data collected by Streib (2007) on people in several countries who were raised without religion and who remained unaffiliated.

However, the fact that persons are unaffiliated with any religion does not necessarily mean that they are not spiritual seekers. Those identified as "spiritual but not religious" have always played a role in American culture. Fuller (2001) refers to them as the "unchurched"

RESEARCH BOX 9.6. Four Amish Traditions (Kraybill, 1994)

The Amish are not simply a homogeneous group, and their tension with modern culture varies among the different Amish affiliations. Ninety percent of all Amish belong to one of four affiliations. Three of these emerged from the original Old Order Amish, founded in 1809. Kraybill identifies the first of these newer affiliations, the Swartzentrubers, as “legendary for their stubborn traditionalism” (1994, p. 55). For instance, indoor bathrooms are still strictly forbidden in this order of the Amish, founded in 1913. A dispute over the shunning of Andy Weaver for affiliating with a Mennonite group led to a second new Amish affiliation in 1952. In 1968, a third new affiliation emerged, whose members were more accommodating to modern culture. In Kraybill’s terms, these New Order Amish developed “a more rational and individualist understanding of Christian faith” (1994, p. 57). Where reliable data are available, they support the fact that the stricter the Amish affiliation, the greater the ability to retain children, as noted in the following table.

	Swartzentruber	Andy Weaver	Original Old Order	New Order
Degree of traditionalism	Extreme	High	Moderate	Low
Estimated no. in affiliation	2,500	2,750	14,400	2,750
Average no. of children	<i>a</i>	5.9	5.1	4.9
Percentage of children affiliated with Amish	90	95	86	57
Percentage of families retaining all their children	<i>b</i>	95	88	72

Note. Data from Kraybill (1994, pp. 57, 73).

^aNot reported, but estimated to be generally larger than in the other three affiliations.

^bNot reported, but estimated to be 90–95% by local informants.

and estimates their present numbers as 21%. He also notes that the recent “discovery” of these groups by social scientists fails to take into account that they have always been integral to U.S. religious history. By contrast, genuine atheists, agnostics, and secularists are rare in America but fairly common in many western European countries.

Keysar and Kosmin (2007, p. 18) note that from 1999 to 2001, the number of Americans reporting no religious identification doubled. They report statistics from the 2001 American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), a nationally representative telephone survey of over 50,000 Americans, described in Chapter 6. The ARIS data revealed that 14% of these Americans claimed “none” when asked for their religious identification, and that only 1% of those rejecting religion gave a positive secular alternative such as “humanist.” In addition to this 14%, 5% of the respondents refused to answer the question about religious identification, summing to 19%. Of this 19%, 5% either agreed or strongly agreed that God does not exist (Keysar & Kosmin, 2007, p. 19). However, persons who self-identified as atheists accounted for only 1%, suggesting that persons who do not believe God exists nevertheless do not necessarily identify themselves as atheists. For some, it is not necessary to reject a belief in God; they are simply socialized not to believe.

TABLE 9.9. Cultural Variations in Percentages of Persons Raised without Religion Who Remained Unaffiliated

Country	1991 data		1998 data	
	Raised without religion	Remained unaffiliated	Raised without religion	Remained unaffiliated
United States	3.5%	6.7%	5.2%	13.8%
New Zealand	11.7%	30.2%	15.8%	29.1%
Great Britain	5.6%	32.8%	10.3%	45.85%
Ireland	0.0%	1.7%	0.1%	5.6%
Italy	0.4%	6.1%	1.5%	7.6%
Austria	2.7%	10.1%	3.5%	11.8%
Netherlands	22.0%	55.4%	23.7%	58.1%
Germany (West)	5.5%	10.6%	7.4%	15.3%
Germany (East)	41.9%	64.3%	52.7%	68.7%
Russia	88.5%	68.2%	85.1%	35.3%

Note. Percentages are proportions of respondents answering “None” to the questions “In what religion were you raised?” and “What is your current religion?” Adapted from Streib (2007, p. 149). Copyright 2007 by Brill. Adapted by permission.

Pasquale (2007) studied persons in the U.S. Northwest who were unchurched but defined themselves in a variety of ways. Table 9.10 provides the descriptors with which Pasquale’s respondents chose to identify themselves. It also indicates for each group the extent to which they rated themselves as “spiritual” and “religious” on a 9-point scale. Inspection of Table 9.10 reveals first, regardless of self-identification, all groups rated themselves as more spiritual than religious; however, all groups were low on both ratings. Second, Pasquale (2007, p. 53) notes members of these groups used the term “spirituality” in a nontranscendent sense. This is important as we can identify two dimensions of spirituality. One affirms what we might call “vertical transcendence,” while the other affirms “horizontal transcendence.” For instance, persons who reject God may nevertheless be involved in ecological movements, indicating an interconnectedness that is purely horizontal or immanent. Likewise, as S. M. Taylor (2007) has demonstrated in her study of Catholic nuns involved in the environmental movement, there can be a simultaneous affirmation of both vertical and horizontal transcendence.

In a survey conducted between August 2007 and January 2008 in India, 1,100 persons (predominantly male) who held doctorates from 130 universities and research institutes were studied by Keysar and Kosmin (2008). As would be expected in Indian culture, the majority (66%) were Hindu. Only 10% described themselves as atheist, agnostic, or secular (Keysar & Kosmin, 2008, p. 268). Despite this, only 26% agreed with the statement “I know God exists and I have no doubts about it.” When asked “To what extent do you think of yourself as spiritual?”, only 11% responded “not at all,” while 57% rated themselves as 5 or above on a 7-point scale. However, when the respondents were asked what “spiritual” meant, there were wide variations, indicating both vertical and horizontal transcendence. Table 9.11 presents the categories into which responses were coded.

Thus, in cultures as diverse as the United States and India, there is evidence that identification as “spiritual rather than religious” is on the rise and that, as Charles Taylor (2007) has recently argued, we are in a secular age. Secularism characterizes much of western Europe,

TABLE 9.10. Self-Rated "Spirituality" and "Religiosity" among Various Identified Unchurched Persons

Descriptors respondents applied to themselves	Mean self-description as "spiritual" (0 = not at all; 8 = very much)	Mean self-description as "religious" (0 = not at all; 8 = very much)
Naturalistic (<i>n</i> = 38)	2.46	0.84
Agnostic (<i>n</i> = 33)	2.09	1.03
Scientific (<i>n</i> = 58)	2.05	0.95
Humanist(ic) (<i>n</i> = 89)	2.03	0.97
Secular(ist) (<i>n</i> = 56)	1.97	0.89
Atheist(ic) (<i>n</i> = 58)	1.60	0.81
Anti-religious (<i>n</i> = 27)	1.56	0.78
Skeptical (<i>n</i> = 44)	1.43	0.86

Note. Adapted from Pasquale (2007, p. 53). Copyright 2007 by the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture. Adapted by permission.

but is an emerging force in the United States as well (Houtman & Aupers, 2007; Keysar & Kosmin, 2007). Although to be secular is not necessarily to be an atheist, "atheist," "agnostic," and "secular" are all ways in which individuals identify themselves as neither religious nor spiritual in a vertically transcendent sense. As Keysar (2007) has cautioned, social scientists must be careful not to lump all who identify themselves as "unchurched" or "nones" into one homogeneous group. In a secular age, they are worthy of study in their own right.

The psychological study of those who never develop a belief in God or who come to reject a belief in God is just beginning. Lepp (1963, p. 11) reminds us that atheists tend to be absolute in their lack of belief, rejecting not just God, but all gods, spirits, or higher beings. For instance, in their study of adult atheists in the San Francisco Bay Area, Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006, p. 35) asked the participants whether or not they believed in seven classic

TABLE 9.11. Responses to the Question "What Does 'Spiritual' Mean?" by Predominantly Male Hindus Holding Doctorates

Response	%
Commitment to higher human ideals, such as peace, harmony, or well-being	34%
A higher level of human consciousness or awareness	31%
Sensitivity to a force that connects all (living) things	16%
Contact with forces or entities that exist beyond nature	10%
A purely emotional or psychological sense of connection with others and/or nature	9%

Note. *N* = 1,100. Adapted from Keysar and Kosmin (2008, p. 14). Copyright 2008 by the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture. Adapted by permission.

attributes of divine beings. The 253 respondents responded “no” to 1,758 of 1,771 possibilities (7×253)! Hunsberger and Altemeyer were also surprised that, like fundamentalists, atheists could be ethnocentric and dogmatic (depending on the measures used). However, the novel dogmatism measure of Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006, p. 136) was rejected by some atheists who had a chance to comment on the study, and the results for ethnocentrism probably reflect no more than individuals’ general tendency to favor people who believe as they do. One distinction that separated these atheists from a comparative sample of Manitoba fundamentalists was their lack of a need to proselytize. Obviously, Christian fundamentalists have a textual mandate to spread the gospel (Hood, Hill, & Williamson, 2005), so this difference is to be expected. However, one must be careful not to conclude that atheists are necessarily different from believers on all spiritual matters. For instance, in their study of over 16,000 youths between 13 and 15 years of age in England and Wales, Kay and Francis (1999) noted that while only 4% of the atheists believed agreed with the statement “I believe that Jesus really rose from the dead,” as compared to 67% of the theists (p. 15), nearly identical percentages (30% and 31%, respectively) agreed with the statement “I believe it is possible to contact spirits of the dead” (p. 16).

In a classic study, Leuba (1916, 1934) presented data that successful biological and physical scientists (the latter included physicists and mathematicians) tended towards atheism. Using data randomly selected from *American Men of Science*, Leuba demonstrated that scientists had high rates of disbelief in God and immortality. Furthermore, such disbelief was higher among the more eminent or “greater” scientists. Many years later, Larson and Witham (1998) replicated Leuba’s study, using a sample of eminent scientists as operationalized by membership in the prestigious U.S. National Academy of Sciences. Leuba’s data and Larson and Witham’s replication are presented in Table 9.12.

What is most striking about the data in Table 9.12 is that disbelief in a personal God has continued to rise among eminent scientists. Most of the 1998 respondents clearly rejected belief in a personal God. If we define this as atheism, then eminent American scientists are outliers with respect to the American public. In a nationwide survey conducted from May 8

TABLE 9.12. Comparison Data for Eminent Scientists: Leuba Data (1916, 1934) and Larson and Witham Replication (1998)

Belief	1914	1933	1998
Belief in personal God			
Personal belief	28%	15%	7%
Personal disbelief	53%	68%	72%
Agnosticism	21%	17%	21%
Belief in immortality			
Personal belief	35%	18%	8%
Personal disbelief	25%	53%	77%
Agnosticism	44%	29%	23%

Note. Percentages are rounded to nearest whole number and thus need not total 100%. Adapted from Larson and Witham (1998, p. 313). Copyright 1998 by the Nature Publishing Group. Adapted by permission. The sums in excess of 100% are possible because doubt and personal disbelief are not treated as mutually exclusive.

to August 13, 2007, by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2008) among a representative sample of more than 35,000 adults in the United States, 98% of Protestants and 97% of Catholics affirmed belief in God. Although for most Protestants and Catholics this belief was in a personal God, for a significant minority the belief was in an impersonal force, not a personal God (19% of the Protestants, 29% of the Catholics). Contrary to Beit-Hallahmi's (2007) equation of Jewish self-identification with atheism, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2008) survey indicated that 83% of Jews believed in God, but that at least 50% saw God as an impersonal force; the latter figure was similar to that for Hindus.

The results of the Leuba (1916, 1934) and Larson and Witham (1998) surveys are difficult to interpret without further information, especially qualitative data. First, it would be interesting to look at the eminent scientists who did believe in a personal God and compare them to those who did not. Second, the rejection of a personal God does not necessarily entail a rejection of an impersonal force that many identify with the term "God." Although the implication is that education, especially scientific education, may negate belief in God, the issue is too complex to resolve simply with survey data. Third, asking scientists about belief in a personal God may be a psychologically loaded question. As one participant in the Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006, p. 136) study commented, the denial of a belief in God may be no more than disillusionment with a naively theistically conceived God. We need to understand more fully exactly which definition of "God" these scientists were rejecting.

Lepp (1963) has made a case for the multidimensional nature of atheism. To cite but two of his examples, atheism can be the result of principled reason (such as in Marxism) or the result of a neurotic denial of God. Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006, p. 53) note that 76% of their San Francisco Bay Area atheists once believed in God. However, many simply came to see such beliefs as false, as documented in the same authors' study of "amazing apostates" (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1997). Thus, as with conversion and spiritual transformation, we can postulate at least two ways to reject belief in a personal God. One is a neurotic denial of God, linked to the same type of attachment issues that characterize conversion. Such denials are likely to be stress-related and sudden, paralleling religious conversion (Buxant & Saroglou, 2008). Koster (1989) has made the case for a neurotic denial of God in his psycho-historical study of four great atheists (Charles Darwin, Aldous Huxley, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud). In each case, he finds a consistent pattern of a weak, submissive son, unsure of his goals and desires. The victimized son attempts to flee from his unhappy family situation and, in so doing, shakes off apathy and confusion. In maturity, he sees himself becoming like his father and thus turns to self-hatred and self-destruction. All this is dynamically involved in the denial of the father.

Although Koster's thesis is speculative, it has been supported by clinical studies of neurotic atheism being associated with defective fathering (Vitz, 2000). Vitz applies the theory of absent or defective fathering to numerous historical exemplars of atheism. Thus, just as insecure attachment histories may characterize belief in God (Buxant & Saroglou, 2008), they may also play a role in disbelief in God. Novotni and Petersen (2001, p. 171) suggest a dynamic model in which an option in the recognition of difficult situations is to blame God, then to recognize that one must not blame God; that is followed by repression and emotional distancing, resulting in the denial of God. Such models are empirically testable and suggest a form of "emotional atheism" (Novotni & Petersen, 2001, p. 38). Exline and her colleagues (Exline & Martin, 2005; Exline & Rose, 2005) have taken the lead in the empirical study of anger toward God and of spiritual struggles that can lead to atheism or at least to doubts

about God's existence. Their research in many ways is an empirical compliment to the psychoanalytic work of Vergote (1997, pp. 207–278) on varieties of belief and unbelief associated with the Christian notion of God.

Comparative studies of the psychological processes involved in belief and denial of God are appropriate and seem to remind social scientists of the dangers of the genetic fallacy: Psychological factors involved in the acceptance or rejection of belief in God are incapable of answering the ontological question of God's existence. However, a criticism of most current theories of neurotic atheism is that they focus upon males and their fathers, with little theoretical speculation concerning females. In addition, the theories are more advanced than the empirical data that might support them.

Moreover, as with deconversion, denial of belief in a personal God may be a function of principled reason that simply finds no need for a personal God. Atheism is positively associated with education and tolerance, and need not imply a neurotic denial of God (Beit-Hallahmi, 2007). Rejection of a personal God can thus be a gradual process of education or of socialization within a culture in which secularism is dominant, such as parts of western Europe. Thus, as with conversion, deconversion need not at all involve a personal crisis resulting from a neurotic rejection of God (Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006; Streib et al., 2009). Atheism as a result either of primary socialization or of secondary socialization (i.e., a previous belief in God is rejected) can involve a gradual spiritual transformation without vertical transcendence (Comte-Sponville, 2007; Elkins, 2001). For many, "science" stands as an alternative to "religion." Current debates often associated with "cultural wars" pit metaphysical options against one another. We have warned our readers in Chapter 2 against reducing belief (or disbelief) in God to simply psychological processes. It is likely that the same processes that operate in belief operate in disbelief. Furthermore, it is obvious that culture cannot be ignored. It is a simple fact that cultures that minimize belief in God socialize individuals to seek meaning in other ways, some of which are clearly purely secular (C. Taylor, 2007). If many are both spiritual and religious, and others are spiritual but not religious, it is likely that more research will have to focus upon the emerging group that is neither religious nor spiritual in any vertical transcendent sense (Kosmin & Keysar, 2007). These are the atheists, agnostics, and secularists.

OVERVIEW

The contemporary debate over forms of religious expression is as old as religion itself. The long tradition of church–sect theory suggests that religious organizations are in a constant process of change—some adapting to cultural changes, and others trying to resist change. The temptation to postulate unique psychological processes involved in religions distant from one's own is unlikely to be fruitful. Individuals committed to cult and sect forms of religion struggle no less for significance and meaning in their lives than do those committed to more mainstream forms of religious faith. This, combined with the discussion in Chapter 11 on the emergence of forms of spirituality in opposition to religion, suggests that the empirical study of the dynamics within and between religious groups has a certain future.

The claim that unique psychological processes must be involved in the maintenance of religious groups in tension with their culture is as conceptually unenlightened as it is empirically ungrounded. Polemical terms such as "brainwashing" are clearly less than use-

ful. If we maintain the concept "cult," it is because accurate descriptions of phenomena are crucial in science, and perhaps even more so in the social-scientific study of less popular forms of religion. We ought not to abandon terms whose usefulness is only threatened by popular ignorance. The fact that, in the end, evaluations must be made is all the more reason to make them only with descriptions of religious groups that are fair and accurate.

Finally, psychologists of religion can no longer ignore the rising numbers of persons who are neither religious nor spiritual. Although self-identified atheists remain rare in the United States, they are more frequent among eminent scientists and in western European cultures that are already strongly secularized. The psychological processes involved in the rejection of God are likely to mirror those involved in the acceptance of God; however, the ontological question of God's existence cannot be answered by those whose task is purely psychological.

Religious and Spiritual Experience

If any one individual ever personified what is means to be “spiritual but not religious,” it was William James.

The very beginning, the intrinsic core, the essence, the universal nucleus of every known high religion . . . has been the private, lonely, personal illumination, revelation, or ecstasy of some acutely sensitive prophet or seer.

Belief, ritual, and spiritual experience: these are the cornerstone of religion, and the greatest of them is the last.

Therefore, let’s consider the proposal that when our volunteers journeyed to the further bonds of DMT’s [*N,N*-dimethyltryptamine’s] reach, when they felt as if they were *somewhere else*, they were indeed perceiving different levels of reality. The alternative levels are as real as this one. It’s just that we cannot perceive them most of the time.

I’d see serpent handling, and . . . I thought, “Oh, Lord, I’d like to feel that. I’d like to feel what they’re feeling.”

If humans were no longer taught any religions, they would, I think, spontaneously create new ones from the content of ecstatic experiences, combined with bits and pieces transmitted by language and folklore.¹

The study of religious and spiritual experience can be perplexing, partly because so much time and effort can be wasted on defining precisely what is meant by “experience.” Gadamer (1986, p. 310) argues that the concept of experience is “one of the most obscure we have.” At a common-sense level, we are aware that experience is something other than mere action or behavior. Yet it would be odd indeed to think of experience without any action involved—for even to do nothing is to do something. Similarly, experience is not simply thought or belief, even though we are often thinking when we have an experience. Finally, many people try to

¹These quotations come, respectively, from the following sources: Fuller (2001, p. 130); Maslow (1964, p. 19); Lewis (1971, p. 11); Strassman (2001, p. 315; emphasis in original); Rachelle (“Shell”) Martinez Brown, quoted in Brown and McDonald (2000, p. 73); and Goodman (1988, p. 171).

equate experience with emotions or feelings. Yet feelings and emotions are only part of what we sometimes mean by experience; they cannot be equated with the experience. Experience refers to a total way of reacting or being and cannot be reduced to its parts, even if such parts could be identified. To experience is to identify some totalizing aspect of life—an event or episode that is “experienced.” Perhaps we can say of experience what Saint Augustine is reputed to have said of time: We know what it is until we are asked to *say* what it is.

What then of *religious* or *spiritual* experience? It often is opposed to being dogmatic in the negative sense of the mere insistence on particular beliefs. Gadamer (1986) argues that

the experienced person proves to be ... someone who is radically undogmatic; who, because of the many experiences he [or she] has had and the knowledge he [or she] has drawn from them is particularly well equipped to have new experiences and to learn from them. The dialectic of experience has its own fulfillment not in definitive knowledge, but in the openness to experience that is encouraged by experience itself.
(p. 319)

Gadamer more than anticipated the distinction between religion and spirituality that characterizes much of the contemporary psychology of religion, as we have noted throughout many chapters. Religion provides meaning and closure for many persons (Saroglou, 2002a). Thus, specifically religious experiences constitute a more restricted range than the diversity that characterizes spiritual experiences (Streib, 2007). This parallels the distinction between religious conversion and spiritual transformation (discussed in Chapter 8) and anticipates the distinction between religious and spiritual mysticism (discussed in Chapter 11).

Although Gadamer (1986) speaks of experience in general, it would appear that religious or spiritual experience identifies something particular. Religious experience distinctively separates, from the vast domain of experience, that which is perceived to be *religious*; spiritual that which is perceived to be *spiritual*. Thus we psychologists are free to identify religious experience as experience that is acknowledged within a faith tradition as religious. Religious traditions define the distinctively religious for the faithful. What is religious within one tradition may not be so within another. With the possible exception of mystical experience (discussed in Chapter 11), it is probably not fruitful to define religious or spiritual experiences by their inherent characteristics. There may be no experience that is either religious or spiritual *sui generis*. Whether an experience is religious or spiritual depends upon the interpretation of the experience. It is in this sense that even if what is experienced is both immediately present and unquestionable to the experiencing subject, the epistemological value of the experience is dependent upon discursive meanings that entail public interpretations (Sharf, 2000). Only then can they, in Taves’s (2009) phrase, be “deemed religious” (or spiritual). Interpretations provide meanings not inherently obvious to those who stand outside the tradition that provides the context for meaningfully identifying any particular episode as religious. As psychologists, we often study retrospective accounts of experience that are linguistically framed as specifically religious. Almost any experience humans can have can be interpreted as an experience of God (Leech, 1985). As Yamane (2000) notes, narration is dependent upon a loose relationship between experience and its linguistic representation, so that an experience not initially described as religious may be so described on subsequent reflection. However, it is within a linguistic community that claims to religious experiencing are ultimately judged (Williams & Faulconer, 1994). Spiritual experiences are less clearly framed and open to a wide variety of subjective interpretations.

The subjective nature of spiritual experience has led some to argue that the quest for spiritual experiences outside of religious traditions is motivated only by narcissism. The highly popular book *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah, Marsden, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1996) became the second-best-selling sociological work in history (Yamane, 2000, 2007). In it the pseudonymous Sheila Larson gave rise to the term “Sheilaism” used by Larson to describe her own faith. Yamane has noted if she had today’s language available to her during the interview, she “surely would have offered up the contemporary mantra, ‘I’m spiritual, not religious’” (2000, p. 183). However, Wink and his colleagues have shown that spiritual but not religious persons have a healthy narcissism that includes an acceptance of others (Dillon & Wink, 2007; Wink, Dillon, & Fay, 2005; Wink, Dillon, & Prettyman, 2007). Likewise, in-depth phenomenological studies of “New Age” believers have revealed that one of the consequences of their spiritual seeking is the realization of a greater capacity of love (Hane-graaff, 1998; Harvey, 1997; Sutcliffe & Bowman, 2000). Greenwald and Harder (2003) found that self-effacing altruism and a loving connection to others were two of four factors that emerged from ratings of 122 adjectives to describe spirituality. Thus research using a variety of methods suggests that the individuality associated with spirituality is not a selfish narcissism focused upon the self, but rather a quest for self-realization that includes acceptance and concern for others without a need to impose a single consistent set of beliefs to frame one’s spirituality. The individuality associated with spirituality is one that fosters acceptance of self and others.

CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS IN DEFINING RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

As we have noted in Chapter 2, James’s (1902/1985) classic work *The Varieties of Religious Experience* has continued to influence psychologists since it was initially delivered as the Gifford Lectures at the beginning of the 20th century. Although we can speculate about the varying reasons why this book has remained in print since its first publication, the simple fact remains that James set the tone for contemporary empirical work in the psychology of religious *experience* that is nonreductive (Hood, 2000a). More than one psychologist has noted that if James were writing today, his lectures would undoubtedly be titled *The Varieties of Spiritual experience* (Gorsuch & Miller, 1999). Likewise, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, Fuller (2001) holds William James to be the exemplar of what it means to be “spiritual but not religious” (p. 130).

James’s Formula for Religious and Spiritual Experience

James’s definition of religious experience for the purposes of the Gifford Lectures clearly revealed his sympathy for the extreme forms of religious and spiritual experience. James defined “religion” as “*the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men, in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine*” (James, 1902/1985, p. 34; emphasis in original). The presence of something divine within all religious traditions can be debated. Buddhism is often cited as an example of a faith tradition without a god (Hong, 1995). However, one need not equate something divine with belief in God or in supernatural beings. James’s clarification of what he meant by “divine” makes the case for the near-universal application of this concept. As he saw it,

the divine is “such a primal reality as the individual feels compelled to respond to solemnly and gravely, and neither by a curse nor a jest” (James, 1902/1985, p. 39). Thus, influenced by James’s notion of divinity, religious and spiritual experience—ultimately, the experience of the solitary individual—is placed at the forefront of the psychology of religion. James’s Gifford Lectures minimized both belief and behavior. Yet in these justly famous lectures, James was parsimonious in his conclusion regarding the value of religious and spiritual experiences in general. As he perceived it, the infinite variety of religious and spiritual experiences can be subsumed under a simple formula: discontent and its resolution. Placed in the context of individual lives, responses to the divine are resolutions. Studies derived from documents similar to those solicited and used by James support this sweeping generalization. However, as we shall see, the issue may be confounded by the methodology of focusing upon personal declarations of religious and spiritual experience. As noted in Chapter 1, the resolution of discontent is an appealing formula that can mask the often complex relationships between religion and coping, as well as religion and mental health.

Varieties of Religious and Spiritual Experience: Research from the Hardy Centre

Perhaps most congruent with the Jamesian tradition of the use of personal documents to understand religious and spiritual experience has been the work associated with what was originally known as the Religious Experience Research Unit of Manchester College, Oxford University. Alister Hardy achieved scientific accolades as a renowned zoologist. Yet his lifelong interest in religious and spiritual experiences led him upon retirement from his career in zoology to form a research unit in 1969 devoted to the collection and classification of such experiences. For this work, he was awarded the Templeton Prize for research in religion. Hardy’s basic procedure, stemming from his zoological training, was to solicit voluntary reports of religious/spiritual experiences and to attempt to classify them into their natural types. Typically these reports were solicited via requests in newspapers, as well as newsletters distributed to various groups, mostly in the United Kingdom. Requests were not simply for the more extreme and intense types of experiences favored by James, but for more temperate experiences as well. Often individuals simply submitted experiences unsolicited. In *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, Hardy (1979) published an extensive classification of the major defining characteristics of these experiences from an initial pool of 3,000 experiences. Research in the Alister Hardy tradition continues in association with the Amida Research Institute at the University of Wales, Lampeter (see www.amidatrust.com/pdfs/ARI_research_quest.pdf).

Hardy’s major classifications included sensory or quasi-sensory experiences associated with vision, hearing, and touch; less frequent, but still fairly common, were reports of paranormal experiences. Most common were cognitive and affective episodes, such as a sense of presence or feelings of peace (Hardy, 1979). It seems that there is little agreement about exactly what might constitute the common characteristics of religious or spiritual experiences. Perhaps the term “experience” is simply too broad for agreement to be expected across diverse samples and investigators. There may be no common elements that all religious or spiritual experiences share. The focus, then, must be upon not simply religious or spiritual experience, but the varieties of experience that are interpreted as such (Taves, 2009). It is better to think of these experiences in light of Wittgenstein’s (1945–1949/1953) notion of “family resemblance.” We can identify the family resemblance among experiences we classify as religious or spiritual, but not by finding a single criterion they all must share. What makes an experience religious or spiritual are clearly not the discrete, isolated components

that can be identified in any experience. As Leech (1985) has argued, hardly any experience could fail to qualify as “religious” or “spiritual” under some framework. An exception to this may be mysticism, as discussed in Chapter 11.

Anomalous Experiences and Counterintuitiveness

What is “religious” or “spiritual” for some is merely “anomalous” for others. Earlier investigators identified anomalous experiences within a fiercely reductionistic frame, often attributing them to “magical” (e.g., erroneous) thinking (Zusne & Jones, 1989). The philosopher Strawson (1959) has identified two characteristics that mark the metaphysics of individuals, and cognitive scientists (especially anthropologists heavily influenced by evolutionary theory) have suggested that there are two basic cognitive mechanisms related to each of the metaphysical options articulated by Strawson. One is the existence of material objects, described in Strawson’s language by “M-predicates.” M-predicates include descriptions of material objects’ mass and volume, as well as the fact that matter occupies space. However, “P-predicates” uniquely apply to persons. They include such things as intent and purpose. Individuals or persons, in Strawson’s metaphysics, can be described by both M- and P-predicates. However, some objects (e.g., statues) are purely material, and no P-predicates apply to them. In religious and spiritual traditions, the claim is that some persons (ghosts, gods) have no material bodies and are thus described in purely P-predicate terms.

Cognitive scientists have argued that persons have evolved cognitive mechanisms to identify both material and animate objects. Furthermore, the basic “default” position is that if in doubt, one assumes that the object is animate. For instance, if one is uncertain that the object is a large rock or a bear, it is safest (has survival value) to assume it is a bear until further information disconfirms it. Thus, as Guthrie (1993, 1996) notes, the tendency to anthropomorphism is part of our evolutionary makeup and is the process by which nonexistent religious or spiritual beings are created. In this view, such beings have no independent ontological status.

Perhaps the most completely reductionist theorist in this area is Boyer. Not only has he identified what he calls the “naturalness of religious ideas” (Boyer, 1994), but he has identified the cognitive mechanisms by which (to paraphrase the title of his book) he claims that religion [is] explained (Boyer, 2001). The basic assumption is that counterintuitiveness is what is involved in spiritual or religious experiences. There are a limited number of “supernatural templates” (Boyer, 2001, pp. 77–78) that create religious and spiritual beings and events by the application of counterintuitive properties to them. However, there are limits to the nature and type of counterintuitive properties that a person, animal, or object can have. For instance, if a ghost is to be credible, it can walk through a wall, but it must have other characteristics associated with “real” persons to be believable. Thus what makes something counterintuitive is that one cannot infer anything further from the counterintuitive property. For instance, as Hinde (1999, p. 72) notes, no other inference follows from the claim that ghosts walk through walls. However, for real objects and persons, knowing one fact allows other inferences (e.g., “If someone can see me, I can hide from their view”). Boyer claims that the list of “spiritual templates” created by counterintuitiveness is quite limited. Table 10.1 presents this list, which in Boyer’s (2001, p. 78) view, is exhaustive.

Boyer argues that this very limited range of templates constitutes the cognitive basis for the diverse contents of mythology, science fiction, cartoons, and religious/spiritual writing. Thus, as other cognitive scientists have done, Boyer “explains” religions by an evolutionary

TABLE 10.1. Boyer's Catalogue of Supernatural Templates

Counterintuitiveness applied to:	Examples
Persons ^a	
Physical properties	Ghosts, gods with immaterial bodies
Biological properties	Gods that do not grow old or die
Psychological properties	Unblocked perception; prescience
Tools and artifacts	
Biological properties	Statues that "bleed"
Psychological properties	Statues that "hear" what you say

Note. Data from Boyer (2001, pp. 78–79).

^aAnimals can also have all these properties.

process that mixes two cognitive mechanisms selected for survival value—one to identify physical objects (M-predicates), and the other to identify animate objects that might be potential predators (P-predicates). This ultimately reductive view of religion and spirituality simply asserts that persons are predisposed to postulate counterintuitive agents, especially when ambiguous stimuli are framed within cultural predispositions that support such conclusions (Atran, 2002; Bloom, 2004). The claim to have identified a basic cognitive process that creates both gods and cartoons with equal ontological status is clearly offensive to adherents of many faiths. It can be contrasted with cognitive claims to preparedness that are nonreductive, as discussed in Chapter 4. Other methodological approaches would limit the reductive claims of cognitive scientists.

Research informed by phenomenological methods keeps open the possibility of nonreductionist views of even the more extreme anomalous experiences (Porpora, 2006). For instance, the editors of one book (Cardena, Lynn, & Krippner, 2000b) identify anomalous experiences as those that, though perhaps experienced by a substantial segment of the population, are nevertheless believed to deviate from ordinary experience or from the usually accepted definitions of reality (Cardena, Lynn, & Krippner, 2000a, p. 4). These experiences need not be identified as religious or spiritual, but clearly many often are. Examples include out-of-body, near-death, past-life, mystical, and paranormal experiences. These experiences often gain added meaning when they are embedded in religious/spiritual discourse that both explains and legitimates them (Taves, 2009). This applies even to hallucinatory experiences, as the history of modifications in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) shows.

Despite the fact that the DSM is suspect both theoretically and scientifically (Kirk & Kutchins, 1992), it is in widespread normative use in at least North America. In its last several revisions, moreover, it has included cautions about identifying hallucinations and possession experiences as pathological if there is normative support for these practices. This was made especially clear in DSM-III-R:

When an experience is entirely normative for a particular culture—e.g., the experience of hallucinating the voice of a deceased in the first few weeks of bereavement in various North American Indian groups, or trance and possession states occurring in culturally approved ritual contexts in much of the non-Western world—it should not be regarded as pathological. (American Psychiatric Association, 1987, p. xxvi)

In DSM-IV and its text revision, DSM-IV-TR, a hallucination is defined only as “a sensory perception that has the compelling sense of reality of a true perception but that occurs without external stimulation of the relevant sensory organ” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 823); it is not automatically deemed to be an indication of mental illness. DSM-IV and DSM-IV-TR also simply caution that “a clinician who is unfamiliar with the nuances of an individual’s cultural frame of reference may incorrectly judge as psychopathology those normal variations in behavior, belief, or experience that are particular to the individual’s culture” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. xxxiv).

Williams and Faulconer (1994) have persuasively noted the fallacies involved in definitional efforts to determine the “pathology” of religious or spiritual beliefs. The consequences are immense once one realizes that such beliefs are less characteristic of an individual and more cultural or subcultural ways of interpreting experiences. If so, psychological processes, even “pathological” ones, cannot be used to reductively explain away religiously or spiritually interpreted phenomena. Perhaps one of the most controversial examples is illustrated by responsible investigators’ refusing to dismiss reports of alien abduction experiences (hereafter abbreviated as AAEs) out of hand. Clearly, AAEs are likely to raise problems for those who think that the umbrella of religious/spiritual discourse opens too wide when it legitimates such experiences. Yet Research Box 10.1 shows how even claims to unidentified flying object (UFO) sightings and AAEs are difficult to explain exhaustively by psychological processes if one simply frames experiences in a manner suggesting that they might be true. Such experiences are beginning to gain significant subcultural support (Appelle, Lynn, & Newman, 2000; Skal, 1998). As such, it is less profitable to ask what causes these experiences then to try to understand the experiencing of the world from within a tradition, culture, or subculture that validates and finds meaningful what others can only describe as anomalous experiences from within their own perspective.

Exhaustive efforts to classify religious or spiritual experiences would not have appealed to James, who preferred to let the experiences speak for themselves, unfettered by what he would probably have seen as the tyranny of classification schemes. However, Hardy’s conclusions (reached ostensibly independently of James) are interesting, as they are precisely what James concluded much earlier. Both James and Hardy affirmed the evidential value of religious/spiritual experiences as at least hypotheses suggesting the existence of a transcendent reality variously experienced. As for the psychological consequences, the power of prayer is acknowledged; early childhood experiences are considered significant; and feelings of safety, security, love, and contentment are regarded as concomitants of religious/spiritual experience. Few such experiences are negative. By the very understanding of religion, at least in the West, experiences attributed to God must be ultimately positive (Spilka & McIntosh, 1995).

Other studies of voluntarily submitted reports of religious and spiritual experience are not inconsistent with either James’s or Hardy’s claims (Ahern, 1990; Hardy, 1966; Hay, 1987, 1994; Laski, 1961; Maxwell & Tschudin, 1990). However, much of this research favors a methodology that probably biases the simple conclusion that such experiences are resolutions of discontent. This research probably solicits reports of such experiences congruent with a simple, if not naïve, view of religion. These reports are often evaluated by persons committed to a positive assessment of religious or spiritual experience. Few negative experiences are reported, and almost none that were inconsequential or failed to produce positive fruits are volunteered. In this sense, asking persons to report religious or spiritual experiences may be tapping general cultural views (especially in cultures heavily influenced by the Judeo-

RESEARCH BOX 10.1. Do Certain Anomalous Experiences Have Religious or Spiritual Import, and Could They Be True? (Various Studies)

A controversial issue in the study of religious or spiritual experience is the persistent finding that individuals who report such various experiences also report various paranormal experiences (Zollschan, Schumaker, & Walsh, 1995). Furthermore, studies employing survey data reveal that the reports of paranormal experiences have antecedents and structures similar to those in the reports of other ecstatic experiences commonly accepted as religious or spiritual (Fox, 1992; Yamane & Polzer, 1994). Paranormal experiences are a subclass of anomalous experiences. Among those who study anomalous experiences, the perception of unidentified flying objects (UFOs) and their more recent elaboration into “alien abduction experiences” (AAEs) have begun to generate a considerable body of scientific curiosity. Jung (1958/1964), while referring to the citing of UFOs as “visionary” (p. 315) or “symbolic” (p. 387), nevertheless cautioned that psychology alone cannot exhaust the explanation for such sightings. More recently, investigators such as Strassman (2001) have suggested that certain chemicals affecting brain receptor sites for serotonin may elicit awareness of dimensions of reality in which reports of AAEs become possible as actual events. However, as with many religious or spiritual experiences, psychologists are more likely to be comfortable with explanations within the mainstream of realities that other psychologists are likely to accept. For instance, Skal (1998) has noted that the term “flying saucer” came into vogue only after newspaper headlines in June 1947, when a Boise, Idaho pilot named Kenneth Arnold described nine strange objects flying near Mount Rainier as moving “like a saucer if you skipped it across the water” (quoted in Skal, 1998, p. 204). Newspaper headlines reported “flying saucers,” and quickly individuals began to reporting sighting of them. Thus cultural expectations based upon journalistic headlines that actually were in error might have played a role in shaping what have become common sightings of “UFOs.” Instead of moving “like saucers,” they became identified as “flying saucers.”

Apparently even less plausible than the existence of UFOs are claims to AAEs, which typically include being captured and taken aboard a UFO and being subjected to physical, mental, and spiritual examinations before being returned to earth (Bullard, 1987). Other more extreme claims may include the taking of tissue samples, the implantation of objects into the body, and even the birth of alien-hybrid babies (Jacobs, 1992). As fantastic as these claims appear, explanations must accept the fact that the reports of such experiences are no more frequent among mentally ill people than among those without mental illness (Jacobson & Bruno, 1994; Parnell & Sprinkle, 1990). Among the most plausible and least controversial explanations for these reports are fantasy proneness or boundary deficits; using culturally available scenarios derived from film and other media sources; confusing subjective experiences with objectively real events; suggestibility and hypnosis (especially when such reports are “recovered” in therapeutic encounters using hypnosis); sleep disorders; and various possible psychoses in at least a minority of cases (Appelle, Lynn, & Newman, 2000). However, the fact that AAEs often contain “theophanies” (the receipt of explicit religious or spiritual messages) links them to other experiences that are more common within mainstream faith traditions. Lest skeptics too quickly consider these experiences to be simply bizarre manifestations that are exhaustively explainable by the social sciences, they might be cautioned that those who have studied these experiences in depth have found that the dismissal of their truth or reality, as with many claims to more mainstream religious experiences, is more difficult than one might at first think (Appelle, 1996; Strassman, 2001; Skal, 1998). It has been more than half a century since Jung said of UFOs (much less AAEs), “If military authorities have felt compelled to set up bureaus for collecting and evaluating UFO reports, then psychology, too, has not only the right but also the duty to do what it can to shed light on this dark problem” (1958/1964, p. 416).

Christian tradition) that such experiences are “good” and resolve problems. For instance, Lupfer and his colleagues have demonstrated that attributions are likely to be made to God only for events with positive outcomes (Lupfer, Brock, & DePaola, 1992; Lupfer, DePaola, Brock, & Clement, 1994). Although their research applies primarily to conservative Christians, other research suggests the general tendency among all believers to attribute to God only experiences with positive outcomes (Spilka & McIntosh, 1995).

However, not all religious, quasi-religious, or spiritual experiences may be positive in nature, and not all may be entirely culturally determined. For instance, Hufford (1982) has extensively investigated the “Old Hag” phenomenon common to Newfoundland. According to Newfoundland folk legend, what some might be tempted to dismiss as merely a nightmare is in fact a direct supernatural encounter with the Old Hag, a being who produces night paralysis and terror. This experience occurs in at least 15% of the population (Hufford, 1982, p. 245). One succinct description of the experience was given by a 20-year-old university student Hufford interviewed: “You are dreaming and you feel if someone is holding you down. You can do nothing, only cry out. People believe that you will die if you are not awakened” (quoted in Hufford, 1982, p. 2). Hufford notes that although culture affects the way the experience is described, it does not determine the experience itself. The experience is likely to occur in hypnogogic sleep states and is not associated with pathology (Hufford, 1982). Table 10.2 shows that while cultural knowledge about the Old Hag is related to having the experience, people unfamiliar with the cultural knowledge about the experience nevertheless also report it. Thus cultural knowledge does not alone account for the report of this experience. After 10 years of study, Hufford concluded: “The content of the experience cannot be satisfactorily explained on the basis of current knowledge” (1982, p. 246).

TABLE 10.2. The Old Hag Experience: The Relationship between Cultural Knowledge and Personal Reports of the Experience, and a Description of the Experience

Reporting of personal Old Hag experience as a function of accurate cultural knowledge in a sample of 93 Newfoundland students

	Reporting experience	Not reporting experience
Accurate knowledge	15.1% ($n = 14$)	24.7% ($n = 23$)
Inaccurate knowledge	7.5% ($n = 7$)	52.7% ($n = 49$)

Description of the Old Hag experience

Primary features (definitive)

1. Subjective impression of wakefulness
2. Immobility variously perceived (paralysis, restraint, fear of moving)
3. Realistic perception of actual environment
4. Fear

Secondary features (experiences contain at least one of these, often more)

1. Supine position
2. Feeling of presence
3. Feeling of pressure
4. Numinous quality
5. Fear of death

Note. Data from Hufford (1982, pp. 25, 30).

Hufford's (1982) sympathetic study of the Old Hag phenomenon, as well as research on AAEs, suggests that the study of religious and spiritual experiences is moving toward careful descriptions of such experiences from the perspective of those who have them—and toward the possibility that even the reality claims of seemingly bizarre experiences may have validity. For instance, Laubach (2004) has suggested the term “psychism” as a descriptive term that covers a wide range of anomalous and counterintuitive experiences. From the perspective of the experiencer, such experiences are psychic intrusions into the stream of consciousness that are interpreted as not originating within the self's normal information channels (Laubach, 2004, p. 242). Person who experience psychism give them the same evidential force as sensory experiences and hence subjectively confirm their esoteric beliefs. That many of these are rejected by mainstream religious traditions accounts for the fact that many who are spiritual but not religious accept highly subjective experiences and beliefs that confirm them in opposition to communal practices and conformity. As with some spiritual transformations, psychisms are self-authenticating (Paloutzian, Swenson, & McNamara, 2006). However, as noted in Research Box 10.2, even psychisms can be sustained by a process of social support.

RESEARCH BOX 10.2. Accepting the Reality of Psychic intrusions
(Romme & Escher, 1989, 1996)

A patient diagnosed with schizophrenia, who heard voices and who had read Jaynes's (1976) book postulating a “bicameral mind,” was intrigued with the fact that there once was strong cultural support (as in ancient Greece) for what psychiatrists often dismiss today as mere hallucination. Appearing on Dutch television with this patient, Romme and Escher invited those who heard voices to contact them. This sampling procedure, like that of Hardy as described earlier in the text, was far from scientific. Yet it did reveal how a self-selected sample of persons (450) described coping with what some might dismiss as only auditory hallucinations, but are experienced as psychic intrusions.

Some of the people who responded to Romme and Escher's invitation were interviewed in depth concerning their process of adaptation to the voices they heard. For the approximately one-third of persons who successfully coped with voices, the general process of successful adjustment followed a clearly identified pattern that fell into three main phases:

Phase I (startle): Voices appear suddenly, often following stress. Persons may panic. They often feel confused and powerless. Persons struggle, try to avoid the voices, or try to make the voices disappear.

Phase II (organization): Persons begin to adjust to voices. There are great individual differences. Some common techniques of adjustment include ignoring negative voices or deciding to listen to them only at certain times. Positive voices are listened to more frequently, and a person may even respond to them.

Phase III (stabilization): Persons accept voices, and often find that they can have positive influences. Voices are integrated into an otherwise normal life.

Limits and Transcendence: The James–Boisen Formula

Before looking at particular studies of specifically religious experience, we are going to suggest the wisdom of James's simple formula for religious experience. For while James is most often noted for his insistence on the richness and diversity of religious experience, he also suggested that a resolution of a previously experienced uneasiness is the thread from which all religious experience is woven. James is not alone in this.

Boisen (1936, 1960) noted that what distinguishes religious experience from otherwise intense, but pathological, experience is that religious experience is a resolution of what would otherwise be a devastating defeat. For Boisen as for James, it is not the nature of the experience that defines it as religious, but its results. Religious experiences, like some pathological experiences, force a confrontation with great personal disharmony. But there is a difference: the outcome. A religious experience marks the successful resolution of an inner conflict defined in transcendental terms. A limit has been reached and meaningfully transcended.

This James–Boisen formula meshes nicely with both theological and psychological perspectives in which the concepts of limits and transcendence are related (Corssan, 1975; Johnson, 1974). In the simplest sense, a total involvement and awareness of limits produce the discontent and disharmony (James's uneasiness or discontent) that creates the possibility of transcendence. It is the very confrontation with limits, however conceived, that can produce despair and the tragedy of defeat if such limits are oppressively interminable—or joy and the ecstasy of transcendence when such limits are overcome. This is the sense in which Bowker (1973) has emphasized that the psychological origin of the sense of God must be rooted not in the particulars of experience, but rather in terms of content that meaningfully points to limits to be surpassed. In this sense, God is always “beyond,” and the psychology of religious experiencing is the experience of this “beyondness” through the transcendence of previously experienced limits.

We have a rather basic perspective within which to organize the empirical literature on religious experience. It can be traced back to James's notion of discontent and resolution, but only if we keep in mind the fact that both discontent and resolution are *interpretations* rooted in James's definition of religion. In a fundamental sense, religious experience is the meaningful transcendence of limits of the resolution of discontent, rooted in a sense of the divine. Not surprisingly, then, religious experience is almost infinite in its varieties. It is the *understanding in a religious vocabulary* of the process of discontent and its resolution that makes an experience religious (Taves, 1999).

Sundén's Role Theory

If there is a typicality to religious experience, it comes from the uniformity of interpretation found within particular faith traditions. These traditions define what are relevant religious experiences. The experience of being religious varies across traditions. Perhaps most compatible with this perspective is the work of the Swedish psychologist Sundén (see Holm, 1995; Holm & Belzen, 1995). His theory of religious experience is truly social-psychological in nature. Most important for our present purposes is Sundén's conclusion that religious traditions, particularly in the form of sacred texts, provide the templates or models that make *religious* experience possible. In other words, the interpretation or perception of events in terms modeled by stories from sacred texts is what makes experience religious. Without knowledge of a religious tradition and its sacred texts, religious experiences are not possible. For

example, many would not associate the handling of serpents with religion. However, in some southern Appalachian churches, serpent handling is a religious experience perceived to be in obedience to God's will as one of the five signs specified in Mark 16:17–18. These “sign-following” churches obey what they perceive to be God's will. Signs of obedience include speaking in tongues, casting out of demons, laying hands upon the sick, handling serpents, and the drinking of poisonous substances (Brown & McDonald, 2000; Burton, 1993; Hood, 1998; Hood & Williamson, 2008a, 2008b; Kimbrough, 1995; Pelton & Carden, 1974).

Serpent Handling as a Religious Experience

In 18th-century North America, “rattlesnake gazing,” or staring at snakes in the wild, was a common practice. Settlers, strongly informed by Biblical narratives, found in rattlesnake gazing a significance that attributed supernatural powers to this “agent of Satan.” As one historian of popular religiosity (Lippy, 1994, p. 79) notes, “a people familiar with the biblical story of the serpent's tempting of Eve might well be predisposed to assume that the rattlesnake and other serpentine creatures did indeed possess supernatural power.” However, rattlesnake gazing was never practiced as a religious ritual or acknowledged by any formal religious denominations.

At the turn of this century, Holiness sects in Appalachia emphasized numerous Biblical texts (e.g., Mark 16:17–18; Luke 10:19) by which the handling of serpents gained a religious significance. In its early history, the Church of God championed serpent handling as one of the “five signs” (Williamson, 1995). In obedience to their interpretation of scripture, believers handled serpents, or (with reference to Luke 10:19) walked upon them. Serpent handling was popularized by George Hensley, who modeled the handling of serpents in churches. Later abandoned by the Church of God (whose members continue to practice some of the signs, such as speaking in tongues), the practice persists in Holiness sects throughout Appalachia. In Sundén's role theory, both the scriptural text and the modeling of this text in actual practice permit believers to handle serpents as a religious act (Hood & Kimbrough, 1995). In addition, in terms of our notion of limits and transcendence, the actual handling of serpents in services permits a transcendence of the real possibility of death that lies at the rational basis of the fear of handling rattlesnakes and other vipers (Hood, 1998; Hood & Kimbrough, 1995; Hood & Williamson, 2008b). Whether serpent handlers are bitten or not, whether they live or die, they believe that they live and act in obedience to God's word based upon their understanding of the Bible (Hood, 1998). Research Box 10.3 presents a study that focuses upon the experience of serpent handling from the believers' own perspective.

The example of serpent handling illustrates one criticism of the study of religious experience in North American psychology. It is a criticism leveled against James and to some extent inherent in the appeal to “experience.” In general, it would appear that the demand to describe “experience” is a plea to identify something unique, intense, or exceptional in one's life. “What did you experience?” is one of those questions that focus on extremes, much as the expletive “What an experience!” is likely to identify something exceptional in one's life. In one of the early critiques of James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Crooks (1913) bemoaned James's fascination with the extreme and unusual in religious experience, at the expense of the more common experiences characteristic of religion. In a similar vein, Starbuck (1904) urged other psychologists of religion to avoid a focus upon the extremes in religious experience. The echoes of such criticism are still heard today, but largely fall upon deaf ears. It would appear that for many social scientists, ordinary piety and the commonplaces

RESEARCH BOX 10.3. What Is It Like to Handle a Serpent? (Williamson & Pollio, 1999)

Williamson and Pollio taped sermons by serpent handlers, delivered spontaneously immediately after the handling of serpents. Eighteen sermons were analyzed for their basic thematic contents. Five themes emerged, all understood within the context of a powerfully embodied experience of handling serpents in obedience to the believer's understanding of such passages in the Bible as Mark 16:17–18 and Luke 10:19.

Theme I: The experience of anointment or feeling moved by God to handle the serpent.

Theme II: The reality of being in the presence of death. A common phrase that preachers use is “There is death in these boxes” (the serpent boxes in which serpents are carried to church and contained when not being handled).

Theme III: Feeling of uniqueness and of separation between “us” (believers who handle serpents) and “them” (others who do not handle serpents or even ridicule believers who do).

Theme IV: The power of true knowing. The experience of being special, of understanding truly God's word and of living what they often identify as “the good way.”

Theme V: Intense joy and affective pleasure, most typically identified as “joy unspeakable.”

As Williamson and Pollio note, if one simply assumes truth to be perspectival, their phenomenological approach and the identification of meaningful themes in the experience of serpent handling allow a researcher “to see the world as the religious practitioner sees it, unaffected (as far as possible) by theories external to the practitioner's belief and experience” (1999, p. 216).

Note. Adapted from Williamson and Pollio (1999, pp. 208–213). Copyright 1999 by Blackwell Publishing, Ltd. Adapted by permission.

of religious experience are as James saw them—the duller religious habits. What fascinated James most were the more passionate expressions of the extremes of religious experience. Little has changed in this regard since *The Varieties*. The empirical literature has a Jamesian focus, if not in method, in terms of the topics that have elicited interest and study.

THE BODY IN RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

In her presidential address to the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Meredith McGuire (1990, p. 284) posed this interesting question: “What if people—the subjects of our research and theorizing—had material bodies?” McGuire answered her own rhetorical question by noting three broad themes in which the social sciences might better appreciate what she aptly termed the “mindful body” (p. 285): in the experience of self and others; in the production and reflection of social meanings; and in the body's significance as the subject and object of power relations. Although McGuire's concern is more sociological than psychological, her appeal to reconsider the body is useful for psychologists who tend to reduce the

body to the study of physiological processes. This is a particularly pernicious tendency in the psychology of religion.

Perhaps one of the most shortsighted views of religious and spiritual experiences is to assume that such experiences are merely emotional. The “merely” here has a negative connotation; it suggests that since what is perceived as religiously or spiritually meaningful is physiological in origin, it can be discounted. James (1902/1985) identified such disclaiming views as “medical materialism”:

Medical materialism finishes up Saint Paul by calling his vision on the road to Damascus a discharging lesion of the occipital cortex, he being an epileptic. It snuffs out Saint Teresa as an hysteric, Saint Francis of Assisi as a hereditary degenerate. George Fox's discontent with the shams of his age, and his pining for spiritual veracity, it treats as a disordered colon. (p. 20)

The point, of course, is not that physiological processes may not be involved in religious or spiritual experiences, but that some psychologists think the identification of the physiological processes involved in such an experience “reduces it away.” Yet no experience is identical to the processes involved in its occurrence. This is not to say that physiological processes such as arousal may not be involved in some aspects of religious experiencing. What is crucial is that such arousal be appropriately identified as part of a broader context, which is identified as religious or spiritual because of other than merely physiological processes. The consideration becomes not simply arousal, but arousal contextualized and interpreted.

Taves (1999) has shown that from Wesley to James, North American Protestantism has struggled with evaluating the legitimacy of religious experiences based upon what is known about how they can be elicited. Her basic categories involve two dimensions: supernatural versus natural origins, and religious versus secular interpretations. Those who interpret experience religiously and attribute it to a supernatural origin are essentially religious apologists doing religious psychology. Those who interpret experience in secular scientific terms and attribute them only to natural causes are doing what she calls the psychology of religion. The interesting effort to interpret natural experiences in religious language is what Taves (1999, p. 348) refers to as the “mediating” tradition—an effort that can be linked to William James and the desire to establish a comparative scientific study of religion in general.

Physiological Arousal and Religious/Spiritual Experience

It has long been noted that when persons describe their experiences, there are often large physiological components to their descriptions. It appears that as embodied selves, human beings must have feelings to claim to have experienced something. Yet in a critical survey of current psychological theories of feeling, Hill (1995, p. 355) flatly states that “there are no general overarching theories of affect guiding research on religious experience.” However, in the conceptual literature on religious experience, there is a broad-based theory that has generated considerable discussion. It is essentially a social-constructionist theory, which argues that there are no natural emotions. Emotions are constructed, interpreted, and recognized according to cognitive interpretations of physiological arousal. Much of this theory is based upon the psychological research of Schachter (1964, 1971) and his two-factor theory of emotion.

Within the conceptual literature on religious/spiritual experience, Proudfoot (1985) has focused upon Schachter's two-factor theory of emotion as providing a conceptual critique in support of constructionist theories of such experience. Schachter's theory essentially argues that the identification of an emotional experience requires both physiological arousal and a cognitive framework within which to identify the meaning of the arousal. Neither alone is sufficient to determine an emotional experience. In other words, persons tend to know how they feel or what they experience in terms of two quite different processes: (1) what the arousal circumstances were (external, perceptual, or cognitive factors), and (2) what internal physiological processes the persons are aware of. Hence the labeling of physiological arousal is not due just to physiological arousal *per se*, but to the specific circumstances in which the physiological arousal occurs. In this view, otherwise unanticipated physiological arousal may be labeled as "fear," "awe," or "anger," depending upon the circumstances in which it occurs. Proudfoot (1985) relies upon Schachter's theory to defend the thesis that experience cannot be religious or spiritual until and unless it is identified and interpreted as such. For instance, consistent with Sundén's role theory (discussed above), without religious training and instruction to provide a context for interpretation, one cannot have a religious experience.

In a now classic study, Schachter and Singer (1962) injected a drug, epinephrine (adrenaline), into persons participating in an experiment they were told was intended to test the effects of a vitamin compound on vision. In fact, half the participants received an injection of epinephrine, which reliably produces increased respiration and heart rate, slight muscle tremors, and an "edgy" feeling. The other participants received a placebo (saline solution), which produces no physiological feelings. Hence the experimenters could be fairly assured that only the experimental group would experience physiological arousal. The participants in the experimental group were further divided into three groups: One group was told truthfully what physiological effects to anticipate; one group was misinformed and told to anticipate numbness, itching, and perhaps a headache; one group was given no information.

Contextual cues were then provided for all persons in the experiment. The cues were provided by "stooges" of the experimenter, who were in the room with the real subjects, presumably as participants in the experiment. The stooges acted either euphoric or angry.

Results of the experiment were generally as predicted and support a cognition-plus-arousal theory of emotional experience. Persons who experienced no physiological arousal (the placebo [saline solution] group), or who were given correct information as to expectations, did not use environmental cues to label their emotions. On the other hand, those with incorrect information or no information tended to interpret their emotions to be congruent with the cues—as euphoric when the stooge acted euphoric, and as angry when the stooge acted angry. Both observation (through one-way mirrors) and self-report measures were used in this study. In both experimental groups, physiological arousal was generally properly identified (e.g., change in heart rate). The placebo group reported no physiological changes. Hence Schachter and Singer argued that, given a situation of unanticipated physiological arousal, external cues (in this case, the stooges' feigned emotional behavior) influence the labeling of what emotion is occurring. Whether it is labeled as angry, happy, or sad depends upon the context for unanticipated physiological arousal. Specific emotions are thus socially constructed.

Since its inception, Schachter's two-factor theory has generated much debate (see Kemper, 1978; Marlasch, 1979; Plutchik & Ax, 1967). Despite major methodological criticisms

of the Schachter and Singer (1962) study, its importance for a theory of religious/spiritual experience is that physiological processes per se cannot account for emotional experiences; cognitions must also occur, at least in ambiguous circumstances (Azari, 2006; Hill & Hood, 1999b).

It is important to note that Schachter's theory gives a place to both cognition and physiological arousal. More recently, theorists have begun to champion more extreme views that minimize the role of physiology in emotions. For example, the almost purely cognitive view of Lazarus (1990) is that emotions are organized psychophysiological reactions. The organization requires cognitive appraisal. Thus, without cognition or appraisal, emotions are impossible; they are merely unspecified physiological activation. However, the relevance of cognition-arousal theories such as Schachter's, and the more cognitive appraisal theories such as Lazarus's, is that the articulation of experience gains religious or spiritual relevance from the tradition within which experience gains its validity. As Taves (1999) argues, language matters. How an experience is described and narrated is an integral part of what it means to have this experience, rather than some other. The more one is knowledgeable about a tradition, the more one can experience what it is the tradition defines as religious or spiritual. Sundén's role theory meshes nicely with the cognitive aspect of these theories, insofar as familiarity with religious texts and traditions is the rich source for appraisals that a situation is religiously relevant. Traditions provide the relevant cognitions.

In our own view of limits and transcendence, cognition-arousal and appraisal theories suggest that physiological arousal may be a factor initiating feelings that become meaningfully religious or spiritual only if other appropriate conditions are met. The relevant question is this: Under what conditions will physiological arousal be interpreted religiously or spiritually? Modern research suggests what James long ago insisted: When a person interprets an experience as religious or spiritual, one must in the end look at the immediate content and context of religious/spiritual consciousness. However, much of the research literature on religious and spiritual practices has been more concerned with aspects of arousal than with the context in which arousal is interpreted. Both prayer and meditation have been studied in terms of the state of the brain's arousal during these practices.

Meditation and Prayer

The activities of prayer and meditation have in common an effort to withdraw from normal waking consciousness and a concern with attention to another reality, often considered to be transcendent. Of course, we must be careful with language here: Prayer and meditation are affirmed by devout individuals to be meaningful confrontations with a "deeper" or "higher" reality, or perhaps, as in the case of Zen, simply a full appreciation of reality as it is. For instance, Preston (1988) has shown how converts to Zen are socialized into an interpretation of reality that is based upon nonconceptual meditative techniques, which demand attentiveness to reality presumably as it is, in and of itself.

Naranjo and Ornstein (1971) distinguish between "ideational" and "nonideational" mediation. The former encourages and utilizes imagery that is common within a tradition; the later seeks an imageless state and avoids attention to unwanted imagery that may occur during meditation. The fact that much imageless meditation is widely recognized as a spiritual practice has contributed to the psychophysiological study of meditation. Rather than assess either verbal reports or behavior, investigators have focused upon physiological mea-

tures, particularly of brain activity. This has proven a particularly useful technique for studying persons who are otherwise apparently “just sitting.”

We have noted in Chapter 3 the preliminary status of any strong claim to have identified physiological determinants of religious or spiritual experience. Seeking a precise physiology of either prayer or meditation may be one of those chimerical tasks that serve to satisfy those who will accept the reality of religious or spiritual things only if they can identify their bodily correlates. Experience is no more “real” because one can identify its physiological correlates than it is the case that identical physiological correlates of meditative states mean that the experiences are necessarily the “same.” The experience of mediation or prayer is more than its physiology (Azari, 2006).

Sundén thought that his role theory was particularly useful in addressing the question “How are religious experiences at all psychologically possible?” (Wikstrom, 1987, p. 390). Jan van der Lans (1985, 1987) utilized Sundén’s theory in a study of students selected to participate in a 4-week training course in Zen meditation. They were told simply to concentrate on their breathing for the first 14 sessions. Then they were told to concentrate without a focus upon any object—a method called *shikantaza* n Zen. Participants were divided into those with ($n = 14$) and those without ($n = 21$) a religious frame of reference, based upon intake interviews. Instructions varied for each group: The religious group was told to anticipate experiences common in meditation within religious traditions, and the control group was told to anticipate experiences common in meditation used for therapeutic purposes.

Dependent measures included writing down every unusual experiences after each daily session, and by filling out a questionnaire on the last day of training that asked subjects specifically whether they had had a religious experience during meditation. The daily experiences were content-analyzed according to a list of 54 experiences categorized into five types: bodily sensations; fantasies, illusions, and imagery (hallucinations); changes in self-image; new insights; and negative feelings. Responses per category were too low for any meaningful statistical analyses. However, the number of persons reporting a religious experience during their Zen meditation varied as a function of presence or absence of a premeditative religious frame. Half of the religious participants reported a religious experience during meditation, while none of the control group (those without a premeditative religious frame) did. In addition, all participants were asked a control question at the end of the study: Had their meditations made them feel more vital and energetic? The groups did not differ on this question.

The conclusion we may draw from this research is that the actual practice of meditation elicits a specifically religious experience only for those with a religious frame of reference. If we assume equivalent meditative states in both groups (e.g., achievement of alpha states), the meaningfulness of such a state is dependent upon the interpretative frame one brings to the experience. Of course, a paradox is that within Zen, interpretative frames are minimized; hence this research employed a technique more compatible with prayer within the Christian tradition, in which interpretation plays a more significant role (Holmes, 1980). Still, it is clear that experience, meaningfully interpreted, is dependent upon whatever framework for interpretation can be brought to or derived from the experience. Sundén’s role theory simply argues that familiarity with a religious tradition is the basis from which religious experiences gain their meaningfulness—and without which *religious* experiences are not possible.

Whereas Zen mediation emphasizes contemplation without an object, Deikman (1966) empirically investigated contemplative meditation, in which the emphasis is upon focused concentration upon a single object. What is important about Deikman’s work is that contem-

plative meditation is often associated with the mystical tradition, in which the goal is a state of unity that is devoid of content or imagery. This is introvertive mysticism, as discussed in Chapter 11. However, it is also known that various experiences are likely to occur as one concentrates, including imagery of various sorts. Much of this imagery is readily understandable in the psychology of perception as afterimages, stabilized retinal images, and hypnogogic imagery. If not interpreted as meaningful, such imagery is largely irrelevant; it is left as minimal experience without meaning. However, if such experiences are specifically interpreted to be distractions and not part of one's meditative goal, such experiences have no inherent religious meaning and are only clues that one has yet to reach the desired imageless state. Furthermore, to focus upon such imagery will distract achievement of the imageless, introvertive mystical state.

Deikman's study was unusual, in that it reported the results of a prolonged series of meditative sessions derived primarily from two subjects. They simply sat in comfortable chairs and for 30 minutes focused attention upon a blue vase. Contemplative meditation requires that one simply contemplate the meditative object, without attention to thoughts or peripheral sensations. In Deikman's study, no religious object was used as a meditative object; hence, in term of Sundén's theory, religious frames of reference were unlikely to be elicited. Deikman's study was thus phenomenological—that is, an effort to provide a clear description of whatever appeared to the subjects' consciousness. Wulff (1995) notes that phenomenological studies try to reclaim for psychology the preeminence of experience. Deikman's (1966) study and the Williamson and Pollio (1999) study of serpent handlers (see Research Box 10.3) are among the few studies that have attempted to reclaim experience for psychology. Each provided careful descriptions and documentation of phenomena that were not all expected by the subjects or easily interpreted as *merely* subjective phenomena. These studies have left open the possibility that contemplative meditation and serpent handling allow an openness to experience that permits other aspects of reality to be revealed.

Other descriptive studies of meditation and of serpent handling likewise reveal a rich variety of experiences, many of which cannot simply be dismissed as subjective states (Goleman, 1977, 1988; Hood, 1998; Naranjo & Ornstein, 1971). It may be that phenomenological methods are the most appropriate for descriptively exploring experiences that often have religious or spiritual importance (Hood, 2002b; Hood & Williamson, 2008b). As Wulff (1995, p. 197) has stated, "Indeed, systematically appropriated and developed by even a handful of investigators, phenomenological psychology could revolutionize the field."

One of the earliest topics in psychology, and one that continues to occupy the interests of psychologists of religion, is the efficacy of prayer. However, it is only recently that psychologists have become interested in empirical (much less experimental) studies of prayer, which Heiler (1932) argued to be central to religion. Since there are few firm data on which to base a theory of prayer, it is not surprising for Janssen, de Hart, and den Draak (1990) to note that "no convincing psychological theory [of prayer] exists."

Part of the problem is that instead of focusing upon the content and phenomenology of prayer, researchers have focused upon its correlates. Galton (1869), one of the earliest measurement psychologists, argued persuasively on the basis of statistical analysis that prayer has no demonstrable objective benefits. However, he argued just as persuasively for the beneficial effects of prayer on subjective well-being. The shift to a focus upon subjective well-being in prayer research has been helpful for the study of religious experience in two senses. First, subjective well-being involves experience—how one feels or reacts to situations as a function

of prayer. Second, few religionists or scientists would find a test derived from a subject's own wishes to be very meaningful, and thus there has been a shift away from study of the mere efficacy of prayer in objective terms. The scientists find such studies deficient because people obviously cannot wish the world to conform to their desires in any efficacious sense, and few researchers would bother to think further empirical tests of such hypotheses worthwhile. The religionists find such theorizing inadequate because mature faith in virtually every tradition is likely to be seen as shifting from requesting that a person's own will be done to asking that the divine will be done. In the latter case, apparently unanswered prayers (outcomes not corresponding to those requested) can be successfully interpreted as meaningful in terms of a more mature reflection upon the nature of faith, as emphasized by Godin (1968, 1985).

Poloma and her colleagues have made significant contributions to the contemporary empirical study of prayer (Poloma & Gallup, 1991; Poloma & Pendleton, 1989). Not only have they reliably measured several types of prayer (colloquial, meditative, petitionary, and ritualistic), but they have focused upon the more psychologically meaningful measures of (1) experiences during prayer and (2) subjective consequences of prayer. Thus much of Poloma and colleagues' work is in the quality-of-life tradition, which meaningfully assesses the subjective aspects of human experience (Poloma & Pendleton, 1991).

"Quality of life" is a multidimensional construct that includes existential well-being, happiness, life satisfaction, religious satisfaction, and negative affect (reverse-scored). Prayer is also multidimensional, with various types of prayer differentially relating to experienced quality of life. For instance, meditative prayer is most closely related to religious satisfaction and existential well-being. On the other hand, only colloquial prayer predicts the absence of negative affect, whereas ritual prayer alone predicts negative affect (Poloma & Pendleton, 1989). Thus not simply frequency of prayer, but the nature and type of prayer, determine the experiential consequences of prayer.

Another contribution of Poloma and her colleagues is to focus upon the measurement of actual experiences during prayer. Poloma's prayer index is presented in Table 10.3. This index consistently correlates with quality of life, regardless of the objective status of those who pray. Thus in the specific case of variables used in religion, assessing objective outcomes may be less relevant than assessing subjective ones, as others have noted (Brown, 1966, 1994). Specifically, in research on prayer, Brown (1966, 1968) has noted that the belief in the objective efficacy of even petitionary prayer decreases with age and spiritual maturity.

TABLE 10.3. Poloma's Index of Prayer Experience

-
1. How often during the past year have you felt divinely inspired or "led by God" to perform something specific as a result of prayer?
 2. How often have you received what you believed to be a deeper insight into a spiritual or Biblical truth?
 3. How often have you received what you regarded as a definitive answer to a specific prayer request?
 4. How often have you felt a strong sense of God during prayer?
 5. How often have you experienced a deep sense of peace and well-being during prayer?
-

Answer options: ____ once or twice, ____ monthly, ____ weekly, ____ daily.

Note. Adapted from Poloma and Pendleton (1989, p. 53). Copyright 1989 by the Religious Research Association. Adapted by permission.

This turn away from attempting to document the physical consequences of prayer makes work such as Loehr’s (1959) on the efficacy of prayer on plant growth less worthy of critical methodological commentary than irrelevant. It is simply the wrong kind of issue to address. If the focus is upon the change in intentionality, consciousness, or affect of those who pray, then the focus of prayer is rightly on its subjective quality.

In this regard, both Poloma and her colleagues, and Hood and his, have derived remarkably similar factors in their multidimensional approach to the measurement of prayer. Table 10.4 presents their similar factor structures, which are remarkable for their independent derivation—one by a team of sociologists, the other by a team of psychologists. Furthermore, the high reliability of all scales suggests the robust nature of the multidimensional criteria of prayer that Poloma’s and Hood’s groups have both identified.

Both Poloma’s and Hood’s groups have noted that “contemplative” (Hood’s term) or “meditative” (Poloma’s term) praying—a nonpetitionary attempt merely to become aware of God—leads to unique experiences. For instance, Poloma and Pendleton (1989, p. 43) note that with the exception of life satisfaction, each of their quality-of-life measures relates to only one type of prayer. Consistent with our focus on subjective experience, meditative prayer relates most closely to an existential quality of life. Similarly, Hood and his colleagues found

TABLE 10.4. Poloma’s and Hood’s Prayer Factors Compared

Poloma’s four factors ^a	Hood’s four factors ^b
<u>Meditative (alpha = .81)</u>	<u>Contemplative (alpha = .82)</u>
How often do you spend time just “feeling” or being in the presence of God?	When you pray or meditate, how often do you seek to be one with God or ultimate reality?
How often do you spend time worshipping or adoring God?	When you pray or meditate, how often do you seek a perfect harmony
<u>Ritualistic (alpha = .59)</u>	<u>Liturgical (alpha = .81)</u>
How often do you read from a book of prayers?	When you pray or meditate, how often do you recite sacred phrases or words?
How often do you recite prayers that you have memorized?	When you pray or meditate, how often do you read from sacred texts?
<u>Petitionary (alpha = .78)</u>	<u>Petitionary (alpha = .90)</u>
How often do you ask God for material things you might need?	When you pray or meditate, how often do you seek blessings for others?
How often do you ask God for material things your friends or relatives may need?	When you pray or meditate, how often do you seek forgiveness for yourself?
<u>Colloquial (alpha = .85)</u>	<u>Material (alpha = .65)</u>
How often do you ask God to provide guidance in making decisions?	When you pray or meditate, how often do you seek material things for yourself?
How often do you talk with God in your own words?	When you pray or meditate, how often do you seek material things for others?

^aAdapted from Poloma and Pendleton (1989, p. 48). Copyright 1989 by the Religious Research Association. Adapted by permission.
^bAdapted from Hood, Morris, and Harvey (1993). Adapted by permission of the authors.

that contemplative (Poloma's meditative) prayer related most strongly to measures of mystical awareness (a feeling of unity), religiously interpreted for intrinsically religious individuals who prayed (Hood, Morris, & Watson, 1989). On the other hand, extrinsically religious individuals who prayed had disruptions of both religious and nonreligious imagery during contemplative prayer—suggesting the inability to quiet the mind and eliminate images. Furthermore, they did not experience a sense of unity, as intrinsically religious participants did. Thus it may be that different interpretations of experience reflect actual differences during experience, as well as differences in the types of prayer intrinsically and extrinsically religious persons engage in.

Although more research is clearly needed, it is readily apparent that the shift away from the study of the efficacy of petitionary prayer is a step in the right direction. Brown (1994, pp. 45–46) has argued that if one restricts prayer to the narrow view of merely “asking for things,” then prayer is perhaps more characteristic of unbelievers. Faber (2002) argues that a naturalistic understanding of prayer links it to magical behavior as understood in contemporary anthropology. Measurement-based research has clearly established the multidimensionality of prayer, and future research will undoubtedly contribute to a deeper understanding of the subjective experience of prayer. Although the empirical study of prayer is an established part of the psychology of religion (Francis & Astley, 2001), no generally agreed-upon theory of prayer has emerged (Gorsuch, 2008). In this sense, theories such as Sundén's role theory will become more relevant, as knowledge of traditions and texts is required to illuminate the meaningfulness of prayer within the communities of those who pray. Ladd and Spilka (2002) are developing a cognitive theory of prayer capable of empirical testing, others are focusing on the specific process of praying. Research Box 10.4 reports one of the few empirical studies of the needs stated for prayer, the content of prayer, and its effects.

Bänziger, Janssen, and Scheeps (2008) have replicated the research reported in research Box 10.4 with a large sample ($N = 1,008$) of Dutch participants. In addition, they identified four types of prayer (meditative, religious, impulsive, and petitionary). These two studies are significant in showing that even in a highly secularized society such as the Netherlands, individuals continue to pray. However, the nature of prayer for the unchurched is different. For instance, the meditative prayer of Poloma and Hood is directed toward closeness to God, whereas Bänziger et al. (2008, p. 261) note that the unchurched individuals' meditative prayer is focused upon themselves.

Altered States of Consciousness

At the other extreme from phenomenological and introspective descriptions of consciousness are studies that focus upon neurophysiological states. Part of their appeal is the obvious scientific legitimacy of “hard” data—the pure descriptive facts of identifiable physiological processes. Three areas have gained some considerable influence among those interested in the psychology of religion.

The catchall phrase “altered states of consciousness” rapidly emerged in the 1960s for what has become a loosely knit area in which the focus is upon the empirical study of experiences previously assumed to be pathological or anomalous (Berenbaum, Kerns, & Raghavan, 2000; Reed, 1974; Zusne & Jones, 1989). Included in this area are such phenomena as hypnosis, dreaming, meditation, drug experiences, and several other “fringe” topics (e.g., parapsychology and near-death experiences). Much of this literature is more popular than academic. Until recently, the serious academic study of such experiences has assumed that

RESEARCH BOX 10.4. A Content Analysis of the Praying Practices of Dutch Youths
(Janssen, de Hart, & den Draak, 1990)

In 1985, a sample of 192 Dutch high school students was asked to respond to three open-ended questions regarding prayer: (1) “What is praying to you?”, (2) “At what moments do you feel the need to pray?”, and (3) “How do you pray?” Using a computer technique to analyze the content of the response to these three questions, Janssen and colleagues were able to summarize prayer structure according to the following sentence: “Because of some reason, I address myself to someone in a particular way, at a particular place, at a particular time, to achieve something.” They diagrammed this sentence as follows:

	2. Action (predicate)	
	3. Direction (indirect object)	
	4. Time (adverbial adjunct 1)	
1. Need	5. Place (adverbial adjunct 2)	7. Effect
(conditional adjunct)	6. Method (adverbial adjunct 3)	(direct object)

The percentages of content references to each structural category for the four most frequent citations within that category were as follows^a:

1. *Need* (83%): personal problems (60%); sickness (23%); happiness (20%); death (16%).
2. *Action* (83%): talk/monologue (38%); talk/dialogue (36%); ask/wish (33%); meditate (22%).
3. *Direction* (60%): God/Lord (80%); Spirit/Power (13%); Someone (11%); Mary/Jesus (2%).
4. *Time* (20%): evening/night (90%); day (8%); dinner (8%); anytime (5%).
5. *Place* (34%): bed (86%); home (11%); church (11%); outside (9%).
6. *Method* (55%): alone (55%); prayer, formal (17%); low voice (19%); aloud (4%).
7. *Effect* (37%): help/support (38%); favor (34%); remission (13%); rest (10%).

^aPercentages for the seven structural aspects are based upon $n = 192$. Percentages for content within each structure are based upon the number of participants who reported that structural aspect. See the Janssen et al. paper, p. 102, Table 1.

such experiences have no objective validity. However, among sympathetic researchers there has been a shift in attitude: The experiences themselves are positively valued and assumed to have ontological validity. In other words, previous efforts to provide reductive explanations of such experiences are now overshadowed by descriptive efforts to explore the meaning and validity of these experiences, including their objectivity (Berenbaum et al., 2000). Much of this is incorporated into modern “transpersonal psychology”—an area yet to be clearly defined or to have general academic and research support among mainstream psychologists (Greenwood, 1995). However, it is apparent that investigators are beginning to study empirically a wide variety of experiences that are immensely relevant to religion and spirituality. Much of this research promises to enliven the psychology of religion by including within the discipline phenomena that religious traditions take seriously.

Tart (1975) has been extremely influential in linking transpersonal psychology and altered states of consciousness. Basically, an altered state of consciousness is characterized by an introspective awareness of a different mode of experiencing the world. Loosely speaking, for example, everyone experiences dreaming as an altered state of consciousness relative to the normal waking state. Each altered state of consciousness has a typical pattern of functioning, recognized as such by the person. Hence things that might seem strange or bizarre are not really so when they are recognized as normal for that particular state of consciousness. Furthermore, persons move in and out of various states of consciousness. In Zinberg's (1977) view, there are alternate states of consciousness, not simply one normal and appropriate state of consciousness. Generally, it is assumed that the more open to experience one is, the more states of consciousness one can experience. More controversial is Tart's claim that knowledge is state-specific—in other words, that it is derived from, and appropriate to, a particular state of consciousness and may not be applicable to other states. Thus many religions are seen as state-specific sciences, with knowledge claims that are valid only within the parameters of the experiences and interpretations provided by these traditions. This parallels the concept of “ideological surround,” discussed in Chapter 12. In a sense, new religious movements represent the sociological counterpart to the psychology of alternate states of consciousness.

Although much of transpersonal psychology (especially the claim to state-specific knowledge) is controversial, the concept of altered states of consciousness is often supported by a physiological base. Most typically, this consists of identifying alterations in neurophysiology that are assumed to be associated with altered states of consciousness. None of these models have achieved any degree of consensus, and most are at best speculations, in neurophysiological terms, about processes assumed to underlie various altered states of consciousness. Perhaps most often cited is Fischer's (1971, 1978) cartography of mental states linked to a continuum of arousal. This continuum ranges from hypoaroused tranquility, to normal everyday consciousness, to arousal, to hyperarousal, and finally to ecstasy. Although extensive discussion of the neurophysiology of consciousness is beyond the scope of our concerns, the important point is that neurophysiological correlates (verified or not) have given altered states of consciousness a respectability within mainstream science, especially insofar as consciousness is studied as a brain process. This respectability comes at the same time that others are affirming the much more controversial claim that the objects revealed in such altered states of consciousness cannot be dismissed as merely subjective phenomena.

As new technologies emerge to allow noninvasive neurophysiological measurement of ongoing experience, neurophysiological correlates of more typical religious and spiritual experiences can be identified, as we have noted in Chapter 3. The research by Azari et al. (2001) discussed in Research Box 3.2 provides additional support for the claim that religious/spiritual experience is a cognitive attributional phenomenon that often includes a causal claim as to its origins (Proudfoot & Shaver, 1975; Proudfoot, 1985). It also demonstrates that much of the speculation regarding the neurophysiological correlates of religious and spiritual experience is likely to be effectively tested in laboratory conditions with a variety of new technologies.

Speaking in Tongues (Glossolalia)

“Glossolalia,” or speaking in tongues, is a universal religious phenomenon (May, 1956). Jaynes (1976) asserts that it is always a group phenomenon and that it fits well into the general bicam-

eral paradigm, including the strong cognitive imperative of religious belief in a cohesive group, the induction procedures of prayer and ritual resulting in the narrowing of consciousness (trance), and the archaic authorization of the divine spirit in a charismatic leader. Whereas Jaynes (1976) asserts the musical and poetic nature of glossolalia, Samarin (1972) finds it to be merely a meaningless, phonologically structured human sound. Lafal, Monahan, and Richman (1974) dispute the claim that glossolalia is meaningless. Hutch (1980) claims that glossolalia aims to amalgamate the sounds of laughing and crying—signs of both the joy and pain of life. Early psychologists attributed glossolalia to mental illness, but modern researchers have made a strong conceptual case for distinguishing glossolalia from what are only superficial clinical parallels (Kelsey, 1964; Kildahl, 1972). Empirically, glossolalia is normative within many religious traditions, including some Pentecostal and Holiness denominations in the contemporary United States. Thus it is not surprising that empirical studies comparing glossolalic with nonglossolalic controls have consistently failed to find any reliable psychological differences, including indices of psychopathology, between the two groups (Goodman, 1972; Hine, 1969; Malony & Lovekin, 1985; J. T. Richardson, 1973). However, it is also true that, as Lovekin and Malony (1977) found in their study of participants in a Catholic charismatic program of spiritual renewal, glossolalia *per se* may not be particularly useful in fostering personality integration.

The real focus of research has been on whether or not glossolalia occurs only in a trance or an altered state of consciousness. The anthropologist Goodman (1969) has documented the cross-cultural similarity of glossolalic utterances. She attributes this similarity to the fact that glossolalia results from an induced trance. The trance state itself, for neurophysiological reasons, accounts for the cross-cultural similarity of glossolalia (Goodman, 1972). Her model of the induction of a trance state follows closely Jaynes's general bicameral paradigm (Goodman, 1988). She argues for induction techniques generated by religious rituals in believers. This trance state produces an altered perceptual state in which previous limits are transcended. One participant in her research stated the case for limits and transcendence quite succinctly: "At first you feel that you have come to a barrier, and you are afraid. All of a sudden you are beyond it and everything is different" (quoted in Goodman, 1988, p. 37). This altered perceptual state is identified by Goodman as the "sojourn." It is followed by dissolution, or the return to ordinary perceptual states, and by the joy and euphoria of having had this sacred experience.

Samarin (1972) has challenged Goodman's cross-cultural data on the grounds that all her samples were from similar Pentecostal settings, even though the data were collected within different cultures. Samarin also points out that patterns identified in typical Appalachian Mountain settings are similar to those found in glossolalia. This is the case, even though such preaching does not occur in a trance state; hence there is no reason to infer that glossolalia can only be elicited in trance states. This view is also supported by Hine (1969). More recently, however, Philipchalk and Mueller (2000) demonstrated increased activation of the right hemisphere relative to the left in a small sample of participants who allowed infrared photography before and after speaking in tongues. The opposite was found before and after reading aloud. These data suggest the activation of the right hemisphere in glossolalia, and not necessarily the existence of a trance state.

Obviously, the outcome of the debate on whether or not trance states are necessary for such religious experiences as glossolalia or serpent handling is partly conceptually clouded (Hood & Williamson, 2008b, pp. 102–116). It would require a clear operational definition

of glossolalia at one level and a clear operational definition of trance at another level to test whether the two covary, much less to see whether glossolalia can only be elicited in a trance state. Although such research has yet to be done, the debate has been useful as another instance of religious experience's gaining a foothold in mainstream social science by raising issues of possible physiological correlates. It is assumed that since such physiological processes can be identified in hard scientific terms, the experiences they facilitate have at least that validity. Of course, once again, for religiously committed individuals, such faint praise is less than sufficient. Experience attributed to the gods or to one's God must have more reality than the physiological conditions that facilitate them. A participant observation study of glossolalia, conducted over many years in Scandinavian countries and presented in Research Box 10.5, suggests that trance is not a necessary condition for glossolalia to occur.

The issue of whether or not trance states are required for glossolalia is paralleled in participant observation studies of serpent handlers. Williamson (1995) has emphasized that serpent handlers have historically been associated with denominations such as the Church of God, which once sanctioned *both* serpent handling and glossolalia. Based upon extensive participant observation on serpent handlers, Hood (1998) has noted that some handlers believe that faith alone is sufficient for handling serpents, while others argue that only when "anointed" should one handle serpents. Anointing is the case that most closely parallels the

RESEARCH BOX 10.5. Sundén's Role Theory and Glossolalia (Holm, 1987b)

Holm is among the foremost researchers who have focused upon the social and contextual factors that facilitate glossolalia. He collected recordings of hundreds of Pentecostal meetings in Scandinavian countries over several years. He thus studied speaking in tongues within religious contexts where it was normative. He found that there were few linguistic impediments to producing glossolalia, and thus that a trance state was not necessary for one to speak in tongues. However, he also noted that a trance state could remove social inhibitions and hence facilitate glossolalia in some Pentecostals.

Relying heavily upon Sundén's role theory, Holm conducted in-depth interviews with 65 Pentecostals. Glossolalia is modeled both by relevant Biblical texts regarding the Pentecost story, and by others in services who speak in tongues. Individuals must wait for this experience to occur as a true "baptism of the Holy Spirit" and not attempt to produce the experience themselves. Holm noted that approximately two-thirds of his sample first spoke in tongues at some kind of religious meeting. Other believers' speaking in tongues, combined with an initiate's readiness to have this experience as a model in text and practice, produces the "gift of tongues." The emotional excitement that accompanies this experience is a function of a true "baptism of the Holy Spirit" and a religious sense of its presence. Subsequent doubts as to whether or not the glossolalia was perhaps self-produced are allayed by church members and authorities who assure its validity. Repeated glossolalic experiences confirm and solidify what can now be routinely experienced. It is important to note that in Holm's sample, 12 persons never spoke in tongues. Personality factors such as inhibitions (and perhaps neurophysiological factors as well) suggest that even with appropriate readiness and both textual and actual modeling, the experience is not available to all.

Note. See also Holm (1991, especially pp. 142–145) and Hood (1991).

RESEARCH BOX 10.6. Electroencephalogram of a Believer When Anointed (Woodruff, 1993)

In Holiness sects, as in many Pentecostal groups, anointment by the Holy Ghost is believed to occur when the spirit of God possesses an individual. Anna Prince, a member of a serpent-handling Holiness sect, partly defined anointing as follows: “It’s a spiritual trancelike strand of power linking humans to God; it’s a burst of energy that’s refreshing, always brand new; it brings on good emotions. One is elated, full of joy” (quoted in Burton, 1993, p. 140). The famous serpent handler Pastor Liston Pack stated, “The anointing is hard, real hard to explain; and ‘cause if I was to tell you that you had to feel just like me, I might tell you wrong, you see, but if you didn’t know me, you would think I was havin’ a stroke or some-thin’ tremendous was takin’ place” (quoted in Burton, 1993, p. 140).

At researcher Thomas Burton’s request, Liston Pack agreed to be videotaped and to have electroencephalographic (EEG) recordings taken while he was in an anointed state. Michael Woodruff did the recording and interpretation of the recordings. His four major conclusions were as follows: (1) Liston Pack’s EEG showed no abnormal clinical signs; it was neither a self-induced epileptic seizure nor brought on by some unknown state. (2) Liston Pack had a great deal of control over his mental state, given his ability to prepare for anointment in a laboratory setting among skeptical scientists. (3) There was a sudden conversion from alpha to beta when anointment began, with beta predominant throughout the experience. The EEG was that of an aroused individual, but was accompanied by observations of an individual having a religious experience. It was *not* similar to that of a Zen monk in contemplation. (4) Overall, the EEG patterns of Liston Pack were more similar to patterns found in hypnosis than in meditation. However, Woodruff cautions that self-hypnosis is only a hypothesis worthy of further study and ought not to be confused with self-delusion.

claim to trance. That believers can handle serpents through either faith or anointing supports the claim that trance is not necessary for serpent handling, as it is not necessary for glossolalia. In one unique study, a serpent handler in an anointed state agreed to be videotaped and to have his electroencephalogram (EEG) taken. Research Box 10.6 presents the result of this study.

RELIGIOUS IMAGERY: THE RETURN OF THE OSTRACIZED

It has been over 40 years since a distinguished psychologist prophesied the “return of the ostracized” to psychology (Holt, 1964). The “ostracized” that Holt spoke of was imagery, and its return has fostered the development of the psychology of religion in two ways. First, as Bergin (1964) has emphasized, it has helped shift the emphasis from psychology as the study of behavior to psychology as the study of inner experience. Second, it has fostered interest in religious experience, given the unquestioned centrality of imagery within the world’s great faith traditions (LaBarre, 1972b). Imagery as a central fact of much human experience often gains unique relevance when interpreted religiously. The spontaneous presence or cultivated facilitation of imagery is central to many religious traditions. However, before we discuss religious imagery, we must briefly consider the issue of hallucinations.

Hallucinations

Recent studies question the existence of hallucinations as a unique phenomenon. Fischer's (1969) identification of a perception–hallucination *continuum* is supported by a massive literature suggesting that hallucinations are not simply characteristic of organic deficiencies and are not necessarily psychopathological (Bentall, 1990, 2000). As noted earlier in this chapter, DSM-IV-TR defines a hallucination simply as “a sensory perception that has the compelling sense of reality of a true perception but that occurs without external stimulation of the relevant sensory organ” (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 823). There is some debate as to whether or not to include as hallucinations perceptions that are felt to be internal rather than external in origin; DSM-IV-TR does not make a distinction between these (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p. 823). In many cultures, hallucinations are positively valued and are understood as meaningful. Al-Issa (1977) argues that the effort to classify experiences as “real” or “imaginary” is a preoccupation of Western psychiatrists, while Bourguignon (1970) has documented the meaningfulness of hallucinations in more than 60% of her sample of 488 societies worldwide. Thus whether or not an image is hallucinatory depends upon cultural and social factors, not simply neurophysiology. Furthermore, hallucinations are common in normal or nonhospitalized populations. Tien (1991), using DSM-III-R criteria for the lifetime presence of hallucinations, found that between 11% and 13% of a randomly selected general population had experienced them at some point. This percentage range corresponds closely to that found in a survey done well over 100 years ago in Great Britain (Sidgewick, 1894). Thus, as critical reviews of the literature by Bentall (1990, 2000) clearly show, hallucinations are neither inherently pathological nor uninfluenced in either content or evaluation by culture. Psychologists have most typically studied auditory hallucinations, and as Research Box 10.7 notes, a consensus has been reached as to their explanation.

Cultural and social processes facilitate the reporting of imagery, whether or not it is defined as hallucinatory (Al-Issa, 1977, 1995; Bentall, 2000; Bourguignon, 1970). One major influence on the content of hallucinations is religion. For instance, as Kroll and Bachrach (1982) have documented, visions in the Middle Ages had almost exclusively religious content. Religions have also long been noted for their interest in fostering such activities as prayer and meditation, which either are aimed at or indirectly facilitate the elicitation of religious imagery (Clark, 1983; Larsen, 1976; Pelletier & Garfield, 1976). Similarly, apparently spontaneous experienced imagery possesses great significance when it is sanctioned as meaningful within religious traditions. For instance, Catholicism makes a distinction between a “vision” and an “apparition” that parallels psychological distinctions between “imagery” and “hallucinations.” Volken (1961) notes that apparitions are perceived as “exterior” and are a special case of visions within Catholicism. A purely secular person would be tempted to call an apparition a hallucination, suggesting that it therefore has less objectivity than a “real” perception. However, social scientists have gained some insight into factors influencing the reports and sanctions of images of both Mary and Jesus, two dominant figures within the Christian tradition—whether these reports are considered apparitions, hallucinations, or simply images.

Images of Mary within the Catholic Tradition

Several investigators have focused attention upon reports of images of the Virgin Mary associated with the Roman Catholic faith tradition. We use the term “image” in a neutral sense,

RESEARCH BOX 10.7. Are Auditory Hallucinations Misattributions of Inner Speech?
(Bentall, 1990, 2000)

Bentall (2000) has summarized what he refers to as a “widespread consensus” about the nature of auditory hallucinations. Basically, auditory hallucinations are identified as misattributions of inner speech. “Inner speech” has long been identified as a normal psychological process; it refers to the internal dialogue people use to regulate or evaluate their own behavior. At about 3 years of age, children begin to regulate their behavior by talking out loud to themselves in the same fashion they have been talked to by their primary caregivers. Children then learn to talk to themselves quietly—a form of subvocalization. Subvocalization is a common part of normal development.

Bentall (1990, 2000) summarizes much physiological research indicating that the onset of self-reported auditory hallucinations corresponds to identifiable subvocalizations, regardless of whether subvocalizations are recorded by measuring muscle movements or by using sensitive electromyographic measures. Bentall summarizes other research indicating that the areas in the brain involved in speech are activated during the report of auditory hallucinations. Furthermore, the content of auditory hallucinations has been shown to match the content of actual recorded subvocalizations. Since the onset and content of auditory hallucinations correspond to those of subvocalizations, an individual who hallucinates may be making a misattribution—attributing to an external source what in fact is produced internally.

A psychologist of religion might hypothesize that religious belief influences not only the content of hallucinations, but perhaps their form as well. For instance, Catholics may be more likely to report visual hallucinations, while Protestants may be more likely to report auditory hallucinations. In any case, the study of hallucinations among religiously devout individuals within a cultural context is much needed and should help clarify the role of belief and expectations in legitimating, if not offering ontological options for, what otherwise are simply misattributions.

to cover both the possibility that such occurrences are hallucinations (nonveridical perceptions) or apparitions (veridical perceptions accepted with the Catholic tradition). In either case, social-psychological factors clearly determine both the frequency of the reports of such experiences, their acceptance as authentic by the Catholic Church, and the differential appeal of the cult of the Virgin Mary. Much of this research has been stimulated by the work of Carroll (1983, 1986).

Catholics have long accepted the worship of Mary as part of their faith tradition. Included in this worship is the recognition by the Catholic Church of apparitions of the Virgin Mary throughout history. Modern apparitions have ranged from the Miraculous Medal of the Immaculate Conception in France in 1830 to the visions at Medjugorje in the former Yugoslavia in 1981 (Perry & Echeverría, 1988). Sociological studies have focused upon the factors that influence the Catholic Church to accept only *some* reported apparitions of Mary as legitimate. For instance, Warner (1976) provides critical historical documentation in support of her claim that sanctioning apparitions of the Virgin Mary has often been linked with official support for sexual suppression. Perry and Echeverría argue that apparitions have been used both to facilitate social control on the part of the Catholic Church and to boost

national prestige. Their latter claim is congruent with Carroll's (1983, 1986) claim that even when countries have similar frequencies of reports of Marian apparitions, such as Spain and Italy, social and political factors have led to differential legitimization of the apparitions by central church authorities.

More relevant to the empirical psychology of religion is the fact that Carroll's theoretical orientation is largely classical Freudian theory, in which it is assumed that repressed sexual desires largely account for hallucinations and fantasies. Thus Carroll treats all apparitions of the Virgin Mary as hallucinations, differentially legitimated by central church authorities. His empirical efforts focus upon predicting characteristics of Marian apparitions from history in terms of classical Freudian theory. His thesis can be readily summarized in three major claims.

First, the Catholic doctrine of the Virgin Mary incorporates three beliefs: Mary was virginally conceived, her maidenhead (hymen) was never ruptured (*in partu* virginity); and Mary remained a lifelong virgin. Thus Mary is unique in religious mythology in that she is a perpetual virgin, totally devoid of sexuality. In Freudian theoretical terms, Mary symbolizes sexual denial.

Second, Carroll provides demographic and historical data to document that the cult of Mary is strongest in countries when the machismo complex is most common. The machismo complex essentially entails fierce sexual domination of women by men, often strongly culturally supported.

Third, Carroll provides anthropological and ethnographic data to show that in areas when the Mary cult and the machismo complex are strongest, males come from father-ineffective families. In Freudian terms, father-ineffective families assure strong and delayed attachment to the mother on the part of her male children. Using Freudian Oedipal theory, Carroll argues that males strongly attached to their mothers have intense erotic repressions that can effectively be expressed in attraction to the cult of the Virgin Mary. The idealized Virgin Mary represents the denial of sexual attraction to one's mother; the machismo complex displaces eroticism onto other women, who are treated primarily as sex objects; guilt is assuaged by attraction to the passion of Christ, in which the male identifies with the need for punishment. Thus sexual sublimation accounts for the appeal of the cult of the Virgin Mary.

Carroll's provocative thesis is rare in the psychology of religion, as it incorporates historical, anthropological, ethnographic, and social-historical facts into a single, coherent theoretical framework. It has also led to several empirical studies. For instance, Carroll utilized Walsh's (1906) extensive identification of Marian apparitions associated with the Catholic Church that included those officially recognized by the church, as well as those not legitimated. All apparitions from the years 1100 to 1896 for which three empirical criteria could be documented resulted in a sample of 50 (see Carroll, 1986, pp. 225–226, for a list of these). The three empirical criteria were as follows: (1) The seer was in a waking state; (2) the seer both heard and saw Mary; and (3) the image of Mary was not provided by a identifiable physical stimulus. Assuming sexual sublimation to foster susceptibility to Marian hallucinations (apparitions), Carroll predicted that the seer should be unmarried (and hence likely to be celibate). Table 10.5 presents the results of Carroll's study for 45 of the 50 separate apparitions for which the celibacy status of the seer could be assumed. Inspection of this table shows that 94% of the seers could be assumed to be celibate; this supports the sublimation thesis. Of course, one cannot be assured that every unmarried seer was celibate, but the available data do suggest that married and assuredly noncelibate seers were unlikely to report apparitions for the years studied (1100 to 1896).

TABLE 10.5. Assumed Celibacy Status of Seers at Time of Their First Apparition of the Virgin Mary

Status	<i>n</i>	%
Assumed celibate		
Clerics	18	40
Unmarried		
Child	8	18
Adolescent	9	20
Adult	8	18
Assumed not celibate		
Married	2	4

Note. Adapted from Carroll (1983, p. 210). Copyright 1983 by the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Adapted by permission.

What of women seers?² Freudian theory suggests that sexual sublimation applies to females as well as males. In the female case, identification with Mary on the part of females permits expression of repressed sexuality, since a daughter obtains the father by identifying with her mother. Although Freudian Oedipal theory is controversial (Shafranske, 1995), Carroll’s use of this theory does lead to specific, empirically testable predictions. In this case, Carroll predicted that the gender of the seer would relate to whether or not apparitions of Mary would contain additional male figures (such as Jesus or adult male saints). He based this prediction upon the fact that males desire exclusive possession of the mother and do not want father figures present. Since females identify with the mother in order to obtain access to the father, they should want father figures present. Classifying the same 50 apparitions noted above, this time for gender of the seer, permitted Carroll to cross-tabulate this with whether or not male figures were present in the reported Mary apparitions. These results are presented in Table 10.6 for the 47 of the 50 seers for whom the gender and adulthood of male figures appearing with Mary could be clearly identified. Inspection of this table indicates that most apparitions studied did not have adult males in them. However, a gender effect was clearly identified for males; that is, males were unlikely to report a male present in their Marian apparitions. For females, a male was as likely to be present as not to be present. Most

TABLE 10.6. Relationship between Sex of Seer and Likelihood of at Least One Adult Male in a Marian Apparition

Sex of seer	Male in Marian apparition?			
	Yes		No	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Male	2	7	25	93
Female	10	50	10	50

Note. Although these data are significant according to Fisher’s exact test (one-tailed), $\phi = .35, p < .05$, the cases were probably not independent, since earlier apparitions probably influenced later ones. Data from Carroll (1986, p. 145).

importantly for Carroll's thesis, females were much more likely to report apparitions with males present than were males, whose Marian apparitions seldom included other adult male figures (Carroll, 1986).

If we assume Marian apparitions to be hallucinations (non-sensory-based imagery), then Carroll's theory argues that psychological factors predispose individuals to experience hallucinations that may be compatible with religious traditions legitimating such imagery in the form of apparitions. Thus religious tradition and psychological dispositions may interact to allow a powerful experience for some, which, when formally sanctioned by the authorities of the tradition, become powerful vicarious experiences for others within that tradition as well. They can believe through faith what the original seers have experienced firsthand. A test of Carroll's thesis, using a sample of Protestant males and preference for images of Mary and Christ, is presented in Research Box 10.8.

Studies of hallucinations or apparitions of the Virgin Mary have important conceptual relevance for the empirical study of religion. What is crucial is the fact that the meaningful status of imagery varies with the context within which it is interpreted and with the nature of the ontological status the image is given (Bettelheim, 1976; Klinger, 1971; Singer, 1966; Watkins, 1976). Anthropological studies of apparitions have rightly cautioned against ignoring the cultural context of apparitions. Apolito (1998, p. 24) warns against Carroll's "relentless psychological reductionism" and states that visionary realities are complex constructions that are more than mere "hallucinations." Yet Carroll's work remains a provocative frame within which psychological factors can be shown to operate as at least one part of a complex phenomenon sanctioned with the Catholic tradition.

Visions of Christ

If Marian apparitions are largely restricted to the Catholic tradition, visions of Jesus Christ occur within both Catholicism and Protestantism. Wiebe (1997, 2000) has made an extensive study of such visions reported by 30 living visionaries. Like much of the other research on visions, his sample is largely unrepresentative and certainly not an adequate scientific sample from a specified population. Yet, as with Hardy's and Hufford's work (described earlier in this chapter), the value of Wiebe's work is in his effort to provide extensive detailed descriptions of visions from the perspective of the visionaries. Although a social scientist is likely to be reluctant to claim any non-natural basis for religious imagery, it is interesting that careful phenomenological descriptions of imagery experiences—whether they are called hallucinations, apparitions, or visions—reveal that psychologists have yet to explain them fully. Wiebe discusses efforts to explain visions of Christ in three broad areas (supernaturalistic, mentalistic, and neurophysiological). However, as Hufford (1982) concludes in regard to the Old Hag phenomenon, Wiebe (2000) concludes that "These visions elude adequate naturalistic explanation . . . and continue to provide a profound sense that a reality that does not belong to our world has been manifested" (p. 139). Lundmark (in press) has noted this in a case study of a dying woman who experienced a vision of Jesus. Thus, as in popular studies of both Marian apparitions (Garvey, 1998) and encounters with Jesus Christ (Sparrow, 1995), the belief that a reality has been encountered—that a figure has actually been seen that cannot be dismissed as merely a hallucination—is an essential part of the experience. Rodney Stark (1999) has proposed a general theory of revelations, which places the often limited psychological study of visions or hallucinations within a broader social context. His model, which is empirically testable, is presented in Table 10.7.

RESEARCH BOX 10.8. An Empirical Test of Carroll's Psychoanalytic Theory of Apparitions
(Hood, Morris, & Watson, 1991)

Carroll's thesis that sexual sublimation is involved in the male attraction to the cult of the Virgin Mary in Roman Catholicism was tested by Hood et al. in a sample of non-Catholic, Christian males. Independent samples of raters were used to identify (1) crucifixes ranked according to the degree of Christ's suffering they represented, and (2) artistic renderings of the Virgin Mary ranked and rated for (a) eroticism and (b) nurturing quality. Four crucifixes reliably varying in degree of suffering expressed (and one plain cross, as a control) were used as stimuli. Five pictures of the Virgin Mary, reliably varying in erotic and nurturing quality (with one identified as *equally* nurturing and erotic, as a control) were also used. These stimuli were then rated for personal preference by 71 non-Catholic males, all of whom either agreed or strongly agreed on a 5-point Likert scale that "My whole approach to life is based upon my religion." These males had also taken a measure developed by Parker (1983; Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979) to measure self-recalled maternal bonding. This was used as a measure of strong attachment (ambivalently erotic and nurturing) to one's mother.

Participants were taken one at a time into a room in which the crucifixes and the cross were mounted on one wall, and the pictures of the Virgin Mary were mounted on another wall. They were first seated in front of the wall on which the crucifixes and cross were randomly numbered and hung, and were asked to take a moment to contemplate them. They then answered the question "Which cross or crucifix best expresses what Christ means to you?" followed by "Which cross or crucifix next best expresses what Christ means to you?" This was continued until one remained, and participants were asked, "Why did you not choose this cross/crucifix?" A similar procedure was then followed as participants were seated in front of the wall with the five pictures of the Virgin Mary.

Consistent with the theory of the role of sexual sublimation in reports of Marian apparitions, Hood et al. predicted that males strongly but ambivalently attached to their mothers would have a preference for (1) a suffering Christ and (2) the ambivalently erotic/nurturing Virgin Mary representation. Results supported these predictions. The more males recalled ambivalent and strong attachments to their mothers as measured by the bonding scales, the more likely they were to prefer a suffering Christ figure and the ambivalent Virgin Mary figure. In terms of Freudian theory, the ambivalent attraction to one's mother also involves the unconscious sense of guilt and the identification with a Christ who suffers painfully. Freudian theory is often controversial and susceptible to varying interpretations. It is best viewed as one interpretation of any set of data—even those proposed as a test of Freudian theory, as in this study of Carroll's speculative theory.

TABLE 10.7. Stark's General Model of Revelations

-
1. Revelations will tend to occur in cultures that support communication with the divine.
 2. A wide variety of mental phenomena can be interpreted as communication with the divine.
 3. Most revelations are confirmatory (i.e., they support existing beliefs within the tradition).
 4. There are individual differences in the ability to receive revelations.
 5. Novel revelations are likely to come from devout believers who perceive shortcomings within their tradition.
 6. Social crisis increases the probability of perceiving shortcomings within one's tradition.
 7. During periods of social crisis, the number of persons both receiving and accepting revelations is maximized.
 8. Confidence that one has received a revelation is increased to the extent that others accept the revelation.
 9. Revelations are more likely to be accepted from members of intense primary groups.
 10. Further revelations are likely if the recipient is reinforced.
 11. Increased revelations and reinforcement increase the probability of novel or heretical revelations.
 12. As religious movements become successful, they attempt to curtail novel revelations.
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Note. Data from Stark (1999, p. 308).

The Facilitation of Religious Imagery

Religious imagery plays a role in many religious traditions and is of immense relevance to any empirical psychology of religion. Much of the more clinical and conceptual literature in the psychology of religion—for instance, the literature associated with Jungian, object relations, and transpersonal theory—explores images in depth (Beit-Hallahmi, 1995; Greenwood, 1995; Halligan, 1995). Experimental study of imagery has also been of interest in the long tradition of studies of “sensory deprivation” or isolation. As we shall see, restricting external perception enhances the probability of imagery. Not surprisingly, psychologists have sought ways to enhance both solitude and isolation to facilitate the occurrence of imagery.

Few contemporary psychologists would dispute Pylyshyn's (1973, p. 2) claim that “imagery is a pervasive form of human experience and is of utmost important to humans.” Indeed, as both Shephard (1978) and Lilly (1977) have noted, situations of isolation, solitude, and focused concentration often elicit unanticipated and undesired imagery that can disrupt ongoing activities. Examples of such situations include focusing upon a radar scope, attending to concerns during space travel, and surviving during prolonged periods of isolation. Thus it is not surprising that early experimental studies of isolation, using isolation tanks, often documented imagery that was disruptive and disturbing to research participants (Lilly, 1977; Zubeck, 1969). The very phrase “sensory deprivation” emphasizes the negative. However, within many religious traditions, withdrawing from “worldly” perceptions and “turning within” have long had a valuable and privileged status. For instance, some forms of both prayer and meditation involve withdrawal from external sensory attention, which may produce imagery that is religiously meaningful. LaBarre (1972a, p. 265; emphasis in original) has gone so far as to claim:

Every religion in historic fact, began in one man's "revelation"—his dream or fugue or ecstatic trance. Indeed, the crisis cult is *characteristically* dereistic, autistic, and dreamlike precisely *because* it had its origins in the dream, trance, "spirit" possession, epileptic "seizure," REM sleep, sensory deprivation, or other visionary state of the shaman—originator. All religions are necessarily "revealed" in this sense, inasmuch as they are certainly not revealed consensually in secular experience.

Although LaBarre's position may be extreme, it does emphasize the obvious relevance of imagery to religious traditions. It is thus curious that sensory isolation research has neither focused upon the elicitation of imagery with religious samples nor concerned itself with the specific elicitation of religious imagery among samples, whether religious or not.

The exclusion of external sources of stimulation in isolation studies led early investigations to coin the term "sensory deprivation." Many assumed that the images present in such studies must be hallucinations. However, early isolation ("deprivation") studies produced exaggerated results that are now readily identifiable largely as artifacts of the experimental setting (Zubeck, 1969). In particular, the use of isolation tanks provided the means to control external sources of stimulation. A typical isolation tank is an enclosed, soundproofed, and lightproofed container filled with magnesium salt solutions, heated to external body temperature (34.1°C), and adjusted for specific gravity so that a person simply floats partly submerged. The uniqueness of the isolation tank situation, combined with excessive experimental forewarnings and precautions, elicited panic and bizarre reactions in some participants. However, as studies progressed, it was discovered that if participants were knowledgeable (i.e., were initiated into the experiences likely to be facilitated by the isolation tank), negative reactions became exceedingly uncommon. Instead, participants explored the variety of experiences common to altered-states research in an almost universally positive fashion (Lilly, 1956, 1977; Lilly & Lilly, 1976; Suedfeld, 1975). Most importantly for our interests is the imagery elicited in isolation tank experiences—imagery that is seldom appropriately identified as merely hallucinatory (Suedfeld & Vernon, 1964).

Imagery is readily elicited in isolation tanks if participants are relaxed and unfearful, and if they are given specific instructions to attend to internal states, contents, and processes. Unstructured phenomena such as focused or diffuse white light, as well as various geometric forms and colors, are common and rapidly explainable by the psychology of perception. For instance, spontaneous neural firing in the retina, a common phenomenon, is attended to in isolation studies and hence becomes a part of conscious awareness. Some of these phenomena are common in meditation and prayer, as discussed above.

More detailed instructions and time in the isolation tank can lead to more meaningful images—some similar to hypnagogic imagery, and other similar to meaningful figures not unlike those found in dreams. Both the report and content of imagery are heavily influenced by set and setting (Jackson & Kelly, 1962; Rossi, Sturrock, & Solomon, 1963). As in psychedelic research, hallucinations are rare in isolation tanks. Persons do not see images they mistakenly expect to exist in time and space, as they would see objects of everyday perception. However, with appropriate set and setting, participants do experience imagery that has ontological significance. The imagery is not simply dismissed as "subjective." In this sense, isolation tanks can facilitate genuine religious experiences. Research Box 10.9 reports one study in which set and setting were used to facilitate religious experiences under isolation tank conditions.

RESEARCH BOX 10.9. Sensory Isolation and the Elicitation of Imagery
(Hood & Morris, 1981b)

Hood and Morris utilized an isolation tank to provide a setting in which the elicitation of imagery could be facilitated. The isolation tank was 7.5 feet long, 4 feet high, and 4 feet wide. The tank contained a hydrated magnesium sulfate solution with a density of 1.30 grams/cc, a depth of 10 inches, and a temperature of 34.1°C (approximate external body temperature). Participants were totally enclosed in the tank, which was also soundproofed and light-proofed. The tank itself was in a small soundproofed room. Participants were nude in the tank and floated there for 1 hour.

A person can expect a variety of imagery phenomena under isolation conditions, including geometric forms, light, and images of meaningful figures. As part of the appropriate ethical concerns in doing such research, participants were forewarned to anticipate such experiences. However, participants were also instructed to try to control their images.

In a double-blind procedure, half the participants were instructed to try to imagine religious figures, situations, and settings, while the other half were instructed to try to imagine cartoon figures, situations, and settings. Thus the researchers attempted to encourage specific imagery among religious types, for whom such imagery should be relevant. Furthermore, it was predicted that intrinsically religious persons would report more religious imagery, based upon the assumption that their participation in religion is more devoutly experientially based than that of extrinsically religious persons. Twenty intrinsically and 20 extrinsically religious participants had been selected for their extreme scores on either the Intrinsic or Extrinsic religious orientation scale.^a Results of this study are presented in the table below.

Reported imagery	Set condition	Religious type			
		Intrinsic		Extrinsic	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Religious figures	Cartoon	2.10	0.86	1.10	0.32
	Religious	3.10	0.74	1.90	0.74
Cartoon figures	Cartoon	2.30	0.95	2.50	1.27
	Religious	1.30	0.68	1.50	0.71
Meaningful figures	Cartoon	2.30	0.95	2.30	1.06
	Religious	2.00	1.16	2.50	0.97
Geometric forms	Cartoon	2.40	1.08	1.60	0.70
	Religious	2.00	1.05	2.30	0.82
Light	Cartoon	2.30	1.16	2.10	0.88
	Cartoon	2.10	0.74	2.90	0.57

Note. From Hood and Morris (1981b, p. 267). Copyright 1981 by the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Reprinted by permission.

(cont.)

RESEARCH BOX 10.9. *(cont.)*

Statistical analyses of these data revealed that there was no overall tendency for either religious group to report more imagery when the images were those well documented to occur under isolation conditions (e.g., geometric forms, meaningful figures, light). However, under the set conditions, intrinsically religious persons reported more cued religious imagery than extrinsically religious persons did, while the groups did not differ in cartoon imagery. Thus the report of more religious imagery under cued conditions was not a function of the intrinsic participants' greater tendency to report imagery. Indeed, the intrinsic participants even reported more religious imagery under the cartoon cue than extrinsic participants reported religious imagery under the religious cue. That these results were are not simply functions of demand characteristics (with intrinsic participants more sensitive to reporting more religious imagery when cued) is supported by additional work in which intrinsic participants did not report more religiously relevant imagery than extrinsic participants when asked to give religious responses to Rorschach cards.

^aThe intrinsic participant group had an Intrinsic scale mean of 38.9 ($SD = 4.01$) and an Extrinsic scale mean of 26.4 ($SD = 5.12$). The extrinsic participant group had an Extrinsic scale mean of 35.4 ($SD = 3.93$) and an Intrinsic scale mean of 20.9 ($SD = 4.22$). The Allport and Ross (1967) scales were used.

Other researchers have begun to explore ways to experimentally induce imagery and other forms of religious experience. Masters and Houston (1973), noted for their pioneering work on the varieties of psychedelic experience, have developed a mechanical device to induce altered states of consciousness. Essentially a suspended platform that responds to the slightest movement, the device is claimed to induce a trance state rapidly in most subjects. With proper set and setting, individuals report imagery and similar experiences. Once again, the relevant point is that when investigators take a serious interest in the elicitation of experiences, participants, especially when selected for their interest and sensitivities, may report significant religious experiences.

In a similar vein, Goodman (1990) claims to have discovered 30 specific body postures that can reliably elicit altered states of consciousness. These postures are derived from ancient cave drawings as well as from anthropological research. Unique in Goodman's research is her claim that these specific body postures elicit states of consciousness in which perceptions of an expanded reality are accessible. Although her thesis is controversial, it is clearly empirically testable. Again, the issue is that sympathetic researchers are taking seriously not simply the induction of altered states of consciousness, but the ontological reality of what is revealed in the experience. In this sense, the psychology of religion is forced to confront religious claims as it explores the reports of individuals whose experience may have evidential force.

ENTHEOGENS AND RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

It has long been recognized that many religions have employed various naturally occurring and synthetic substances in their religious rituals. However, until the discovery of psychedelic drugs, it was rather arrogantly assumed that concern with the facilitation of experi-

ence by drugs was the domain of anthropology and sister disciplines concerned with less “advanced” religions. In a new and controversial discipline with the cumbersome name “archeopsychopharmacology,” researchers combine ancient texts and artifacts with contemporary cross-cultural studies of the use of naturally occurring psychedelic substances to speculate on the origins of religions. For example, Allegro (1971) contends that the origin of the Judeo-Christian tradition may have been heavily influenced by altered states facilitated by the use of naturally occurring psychedelic substances, such as the mushroom *Amanita muscaria*. So influenced, too, Wasson (1969) argues, was the sacred *Soma* of the ancient Indian text *Rig Vedat* by the use of a mushroom with psychedelic properties, the fly agaric. Merkur (2000, 2001) argues that the manna of the Old Testament was bread containing ergot, a naturally occurring psychoactive fungus. He also argues that within the Judeo-Christian tradition, Philo of Alexandria, Rabbi Moses Maimonides, and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux referred to special meditations to be practiced when taking psychoactive substances. Shanon (2008) argues that five powerful experiences in Moses’s life parallel experiences known to be facilitated by naturally occurring entheogens common to the Middle East. Dannaway, Piper, and Webster (2006) have traced the use of psychoactive preparations of ergot in a variety of religious traditions, including Persian, Greek, Jewish, and Islamic sects. Beckstead (2007) and Peterson (1975) have documented the use of entheogens by Joseph Smith and his earliest Mormon converts. Indeed, Kramrisch, Otto, Ruck, and Wasson (1986) argue that *all* religions originated from the use of naturally occurring entheogens. Finally, Wasson, Hofmann, and Ruck (1978) have argued that an ergot similar to LSD was integral to the Eleusinian mystery cults of ancient Greece, and from there influenced Western philosophy. More conservatively, Fuller (2000) has carefully documented the use of drugs throughout American religious history.

There is little doubt that the facilitation of altered states of consciousness by entheogens is one of the ways that those likely to identify themselves as spiritual can lay claim to a significance for the particular experiences that in Taves’s (in press) terminology are “deemed religious.” Although the widely speculative theories of archeopsychopharmacology cannot be empirically confirmed, they have raised a crucial question at the center of the social-scientific study of religion and the more general study of entheogens: Can entheogens facilitate or produce religious/spiritual experiences? Those who argue the case most persuasively prefer the term “entheogens” to now outdated terms such as “psychedelics” to describe plants or chemical substances that facilitate primary religious experiences (Forte, 1997). It is the term we currently prefer, especially as we focus upon the facilitation of religious/spiritual experience by means of chemical substances. (The facilitation of specifically mystical experiences by entheogens is discussed in Chapter 11.)

The literature on the psychology of entheogens is immense, easily running to several thousand studies. Much of the U.S. research has been stopped by legislation against these drugs, so that Rättsch (1990, p. 2) has concluded: “Since the beginning of the 1970s, there has been little new research into psychedelic substances.” Although Rättsch’s claim must be qualified—given both the significant current research by anthropologists and ethnobotanists with naturally occurring plants around the world, and the study of entheogens in European countries (where laws are more flexible)—the measurement-based empirical study of entheogens has clearly been drastically curtailed by U.S. drug laws. However, there nevertheless remains an extensive body of research on psychedelic drugs (Lukoff, Zanger, & Lu, 1990). Selective reviews are readily available, including the general overall review by Aaronson and

Osmond (1970), Dobkin de Rios's (1984) cross-cultural survey, and Barber's (1970) methodological review. Masters and Houston's (1966) review focuses upon the varieties of psychedelic experience, while Lukoff et al. (1990) focus upon religious and transpersonal states facilitated by psychedelic drugs. Finally, Roberts and Hruby (1995) have produced a useful bibliographic guide to entheogens.

Curiously, very few studies to date have used religious variables for directly assessing the religious or spiritual importance of entheogens, despite a vast, often contentious conceptual literature on chemical substances and religion. Although the archeopsychopharmacological speculations of Wasson and his colleagues may be extreme, their basic assumption has been common within both psychological and religious studies. It has long been noted that there is an obvious similarity between various religious/spiritual experiences and drug-induced experiences. Before the turn of the 20th century, in fact, Leuba (1896) argued that religious experiences in advanced traditions must be invalidated, because of their similarity to drug-induced states in less advanced traditions. The essentials of Leuba's argument were later advanced by Zaehner (1972), who argued that because an experience is drug-induced, it cannot be genuinely religious. These largely conceptually based debates have done little to advance a scientific understanding of the possible religious or spiritual importance of entheogens. One can no more invalidate an experience because its physiology is known than one can invalidate physiology because its biochemistry has been identified. As Weil (1986) has emphasized, the similarity of psychedelic substances found within plants, animals, and the human brain suggest that any simple distinction between natural and artificially induced states is arbitrary.

Our concern is with the religious and spiritual significance of chemical substances. In particular, we focus upon the question of whether or not some chemicals can induce or be used to facilitate a religious/spiritual experience. We include as "entheogens" such drugs as LSD, mescaline, and psilocybin, since in both scientific studies and street use, reports indicate similar psychological experiences from these drugs (Aarson & Osmond, 1970; Stevens, 1987; Wells & Triplett, 1992). However, as Brown (1972) cautions, drugs that produce similar psychological effects need not have identical biochemical properties.

The term "psychedelic," the most common precursor to "entheogen," has a controversial history (Stevens, 1987). Debates over the common name for the class of drugs we are discussing have produced a range from "hallucinogenic" to "psychotomimetic" to "psychedelic" to "entheogen." "Hallucinogenic" is the most inadequate term, since hallucination is one of the *least* common responses to psychedelic drugs (Barber, 1970). Although these drugs do produce various visual and imagery effects, whether users' eyes are open or closed, they do not produce perceptions that have no external stimulus (hallucinations). "Psychotomimetic" was the term favored by early researchers who thought that this class of drugs produces psychoses or psychotic-like states. Given the cultural evaluation of psychoses, the negative connotations of "psychotomimetic" are obvious; however, it is well established that the ability of psychedelics to elicit sudden psychoses in otherwise normal persons is highly exaggerated (Barr, Langs, Holt, Goldberger & Klein, 1972). "Psychedelic" was the term most favored by those who favored the "mind-manifesting" aspect of these drugs. It is the most common term today, despite its positive connotations among participants in the 1960s deviant drug culture and its still-current association with the illicit street drug culture (Stevens, 1987). As noted above, those who prefer to focus upon the religious significance of these plants and chemical substances prefer the term "entheogens."

For well-established physiological reasons, entheogens can be expected to produce reliable alterations in visual and other imagery, which to informed and stable participants are likely to be interesting objects of conscious exploration (Durr, 1970; Strassman, 2001). Meaningful images that occur under the influence of these substances, with the user's eyes closed, are not typically attributed to the object expected to exist in the world (in the sense that if the user were to open his or her eyes, the object would be in physical reality). Likewise, when the user's eyes are open, alterations in perception of objects are noted as perceptual alterations of existing objects, not changes in the actual physical objects or the perception of objects that in fact are not real. However, the user's ability to interpret perceptions in terms of a meaningful frame can transform his or her perception of the world. In Sundén's theory, a religious frame should enhance the power of entheogens to facilitate religious experiences. With an appropriate religious set and setting, entheogens can facilitate religious experiences, insofar as one under the influence of these substances may for the first time see the world in terms appropriate to a particular system of meaning. In this sense, the "other-worldly" property of entheogens is well established and provides their obvious link to religion. Religious beliefs often assert realities and possibilities of experience that are quite foreign to everyday secular experience. In addition, as noted in Chapter 9, religions often encourage such experiences in believers (or, at a minimum, urge believers to respect these experiences in others).

Masters and Houston (1966) found that under the influence of entheogens, religious imagery was quite common, even when many participants did not identify themselves as having a "religious" drug experience. For instance, religious architecture was one of the most common images reported, but Masters and Houston (1966) claim that this was more a sense of aesthetic appreciation than a genuine religious interest. Still, the commonality of religious imagery in their sample of 206 subjects is impressive. These data are presented in Table 10.8.

The frequent report of religious imagery is likely to be a function of set and setting, long known to be major determinants of the content of imagery elicited by entheogens (Barr et al., 1972; Barber, 1970). In light of Sundén's role theory, we would expect that if given the appropriate familiarity with religious frames, many substance-facilitated experiences would be experienced as religious. It would be naive to claim that religious experiences are substance-specific effects. Rather, the power of entheogens to facilitate religious or spiritual experience lies in the extent to which states of consciousness, altered by chemical substances, are seen as relevant in religious/spiritual terms. Within U.S. culture, the ironic fact is that mainstream religions sends mixed signals relative to religious experience—often encouraging and validating experiences when interpreted as originating in God, but discouraging and invalidating experiences that are known to be chemically facilitated. The fact that many participants in studies using entheogens experience religious imagery and use religious language to describe otherwise secular imagery (e.g., cosmological events) is difficult to assess. Masters and Houston (1966) noted that the use of sacramental or religious metaphors was a common practice for their participants, even though genuine religious or spiritual experiences may have been rare. Here the problem is how to judge the genuineness of any experience; obviously verbal reports of religious imagery and religious language are, even in Sundén's theory, necessary but not sufficient criteria for religious experience.

Grof (1980) has argued that the therapeutic use of entheogens often provides a set and setting that encourage the report of religious and transpersonal experiences. Many of these experiences are interpreted in terms of Jungian theory, which is particularly favorable to describing religious imagery. Thus would expect religious imagery in LSD psychotherapy

TABLE 10.8. Spontaneous Religious Imagery Elicited by Entheogens

Imagery	%
Overall religious imagery of some kind ($n = 206$)	96
Specific religious imagery	
Architecture, such as temples, churches	91
Sculpture, paintings, stained-glass windows	43
Symbols, such as cross, yin and yang, Star of David	34
Mandalas	26
Persons, such as Christ, Buddha, and saints	58
Devils and demons	49
Angels	7
Abstract imagery interpreted religiously	
Numinous visions, such as pillars of light, God in the whirlwind	60
Cosmological imagery, such as heavenly bodies, galaxies	14
Religious rituals	
Christian, Jewish, and Muslim rites	8
Oriental rites	10
Ancient rites (such as Greek, Egyptian, Mesopotamian)	67
Primitive rites	31

Note. Adapted from Masters and Houston (1966, p. 265). Copyright 1966 by Robert Masters and Jean Houston Masters. Adapted by permission.

sessions to be common and to increase if the set and setting are made even more explicitly religious—for instance, by having religious symbols in the therapeutic room. Leary (1964) compared the reported LSD experiences of clients of two different therapists—one who used an explicitly religious context for therapy, and one who did not. These data are presented in Table 10.9. Inspection of this table indicates that the evaluation of the LSD experience as the greatest personal experience was a function of religious context; in addition, whether an experience was interpreted as religious or not was clearly affected by the religious context of the therapy. Although these results confound possible differences in therapists with set/setting differences, if we assume that therapists in religious contexts are global contextual factors, having a religious context clearly facilitates a religious experience. Research Box 10.10 presents a study in which autobiographical accounts of various experiences, including hallucinogenic drug experiences, were shown to differ reliably in the way they were described.

Although the hostility of mainstream religion to the use of entheogens is well documented, the irony is that entheogens have relevance to the range of experiences typically called “religious” or “spiritual.” It is a mistake not to acknowledge the possibility that chemically facilitated states of consciousness may have ontological validity. Indeed, identifying them as religious or spiritual both contextualizes them and gives them such validity. However, the mere elicitation of a single experience, however “religious” or “spiritual,” probably lacks sustained life-transforming power if it is not contextualized within some tradition. Roszak (1975, p. 50; emphasis in original) has argued that the focus upon specific behaviors or experiences elicited as “religious” can be distorting:

TABLE 10.9. LSD Therapy Experience as a Function of Religious Set/Setting

	Percentage of clients saying yes	
	Therapist A, using no religious context (<i>n</i> = 74)	Therapist B, using religious context (<i>n</i> = 96)
Felt LSD was greatest personal experience	49	85
Felt LSD was a religious experience	32	83
Felt a greater awareness of God, higher power, or ultimate reality	40	90

Note. Data from Leary (1964, p. 327).

RESEARCH BOX 10.10. The Language of Altered States
(Oxman, Rosenberg, Schnurr, Tucker, & Gala, 1988)

Oxman and his colleagues collected 94 autobiographical accounts of personal experiences. The texts were divided into four categories: schizophrenic experiences; drug-induced hallucinogenic experiences; mystical/ecstatic experiences; and autobiographical controls (identified as personally important experiences). The texts were coded into 83 lexical categories by means of standardized computer programs.^a The four groups were significantly different in word frequencies in 49 of the 83 lexical categories. Using lexical content to classify the three altered states of consciousness and the control experiences indicated that the altered states of consciousness were more different from one another than similar. Schizophrenic experiences were characterized by an abnormal illness experience associated with a negative self-evaluation. Drug-induced hallucinogenic experiences were characterized by positively aesthetically experienced visual and auditory phenomena. Mystical/ecstatic experiences were characterized by life-altering encounters with God, associated with a sense of power and certitude. When discriminant-function analysis was employed, 84% of the experiences could be correctly identified by their word frequencies. The authors assumed that the actual experiences were different, given that different words were used to describe the experiences.

^aThese were the General Inquirer Computer Content Analysis Program and the Harvard-111 Psychosociological Dictionary (see Stone, Dunphy, Smith, & Ogilvie, 1966).

The temptation, then, is to believe that the behavior which has thus been objectively verified is what religious experience is *really* all about, and—further—that it can be appropriated as an end in itself, plucked like a rare flower from the soil that feeds it. The result is a narrow emphasis on special effects and sensations: “peak experiences,” “highs,” “flashes” and such. Yet even if one wishes to regard ecstasy as the “peak” of religious experience, that summit does not float in midair. It rests upon tradition and a way of life; one ascends such heights and appreciates their grandeur by a process of initiation that demands learning, commitment, devotion, service, sacrifice. To approach it in any hasty way is like “scaling” Mount Everest by being landed on its top from a helicopter.

Stevens (1987) has documented the history of the original “psychedelic movement” and its failure to have mind-altering substances accepted for sacramental use within a religious frame. In this sense, the “psychedelic movement” must be judged in terms of the cultic and sectarian movements discussed in Chapter 9. However, exceptions include some Native American religions, whose long history of sacramental use of peyote demonstrates that entheogens can be incorporated into religious frameworks and used to facilitate experiences whose meaning is truly religious (Bergman, 1971; LaBarre, 1969). It is also possible that entheogens are prime triggers of mystical experiences under appropriate set and setting conditions, as discussed in Chapter 11.

The cultural bias against entheogens not only has affected serious study of these chemicals, but has made it difficult to take a balanced view of the range of their effects (Forte, 1997; Walsh, 1982). Furthermore, several reviewers have argued that typical double-blind studies are particularly inappropriate ways to investigate entheogens, especially since participants who are assigned to the control conditions are likely to be immediately aware of this fact (Bakalar & Grinspoon, 1989; Yensen, 1990). Many researchers have supported the view that ingestion of psychedelic substances on the part of researchers is a valid (and, some claim, necessary) method of study. Such self-involvement has plagued the history of the “psychedelic movement” in the United States and promises to fuel future controversies in which research on entheogens and religion/spirituality takes on many of the characteristics of religious movements, as discussed in Chapter 9.

OVERVIEW

Religious and spiritual experience is as varied as the interpretations individuals can bring to their lives. It is less relevant to seek the common elements of religious and spiritual experiences than to find higher-order abstractions for identifying a class of varied phenomena. The James–Boisen formula that religious experience is a successful resolution of discontent is basic to most faith traditions. However, few studies have placed such experience within a context to determine its functionality over time. The particulars of discontents and resolutions are provided by Sundén’s role theory, which not only allows tradition, text, and practice to model appropriate perceptions and interpretations that facilitate religious experiences within a faith tradition, but permits longitudinal studies needed for true tests of the James–Boisen formula.

Common religious/spiritual practices, such as prayer and meditation, have been studied in terms of the physiological correlates and subjective contents of these experi-

ences. Speculations as to the neurophysiology of dramatic religious experiences, such as glossolalia and hallucinations, demand additional empirical investigation. Dynamic theories illuminating processes involved in determining the content of hallucinations have been tested and promise to foster both controversy and additional research.

Religious imagery has returned as a focus of study, with new psychological orientations offering interpretations of imagery that are sympathetic to faith traditions concerned with their reality. Entheogens remain of interest, despite legal impediments in the United States to research. The fact that religious and spiritual imagery can be facilitated by entheogens, in the appropriate set and setting, assures the continued relevance for the psychology of religion of techniques to alter states of consciousness.

Mysticism

In Hinduism, in Neoplatonism, in Sufism, in Christian mysticism, in Whitmanism, we find the same recurring note, so that there is about mystical utterances an eternal unanimity which ought to make a critic stop and think and which brings it about that the mystical classics have, as has been said, neither birthday nor native land.

How can an individual human claim union with God without compromising divine transcendence and elevating the creature beyond its proper status? Are not claims to union inherently blasphemous?

According to our yogic traditions, *samadhi* means complete awareness of God, or to put it in less religious terms, *samadhi* means that your mind and the mind of the universe are, for a time, merged in an absolute ecstatic union.

The fascination of the subject of mysticism is not, I suggest, simply a fascination with some intense psychological experiences for their own sake, but rather because the answers to each of these questions are also ways of defining or delimiting authority.

The breadth and intensity of the interest in mysticism during the last half of the twentieth century have given rise to many different interpretations of mysticism and many conflicting theories about it.

This problem of the secularized interpretation of amorphous mystical experiences has been raised repeatedly since the Enlightenment.¹

The focus upon mysticism in this chapter highlights the central role that mystical experience has occupied in conceptual discussions of religion for over a century. The claims of mystics dominate contemporary discussions concerned with the evidential value of religious experience. “Evidential force” and “evidential value” are the phrases most linked to debates as to whether or not religious experiences such as mysticism provide sufficient grounds for asserting the truth of various religious beliefs (Clark, 1984; Davis, 1989; Swinburne, 1981). For some, mystical experience cannot support a belief that one has united with God or expe-

¹These quotations come, respectively, from the following sources: James (1902/1985, p. 324); McGinn (1989, p. vii); Lenz (1995, p. 215); Jantzen (1995, p. 1); Ruffing (2001, p. 1); and Scholem (1969, p. 16).

rienced ultimate reality. For others, mysticism is an experience that provides sufficient warrant for belief in God or ultimate reality; for these latter individuals, mystical experience has evidential force. As Katz (1977) notes, those who assert the evidential force of mystical experience provide an ecumenical umbrella under which diverse religious claims can be sheltered as simply different expressions of one fundamental truth. This avoids the embarrassing particulars of religious experiences, which, like the particulars of religious belief expressed in dogmatic terms, tend to separate one faith from another (Schuon, 1975). Although as social scientists we need not address theological or philosophical debates directly, our methods and analyses cannot avoid philosophical and religious implications. As both Jones (1994) and Miles (2007) have noted, science and religion are not identical, but neither can they be categorically separated or viewed as mutually exclusive orientations.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES IN THE STUDY OF MYSTICISM

The theological and philosophical literature on mysticism is extensive (see Hood, 2005b, 2006; McGinn, 1991). Our concern as social scientists is restricted to the aspects of these literatures that have direct relevance for empirical research. Of immediate concern is the clarification of the nature of mystical experience, as well as of its relationships to other forms of religious experience.

According to Thorner (1966), mystics claim that the perceptual referent in religious experience is a unity within the world. This unity is not linked to any one perceptual object; instead, all objects are unified into a perception of totality or oneness. However, the mystical experience of a unity within the world emphasized by Thorner is only one form of mysticism. Following Stace (1960), we refer to this as “extrovertive mysticism.” We contrast extrovertive mysticism with another form of mysticism, “introvertive mysticism.” This is an experience of unity devoid of perceptual objects; it is literally an experience of “no-thing-ness.” Perceptual objects disappear, and a pure consciousness devoid of content is reported. Forman (1990a) has referred to this as “pure consciousness experience.” What is important for now is that only extrovertive mysticism has as its perceptual referent a unity that transcends individual, discrete objects of perception. There are discrete objects of perception, but they are all seen unified in their particularity as nevertheless one. The unity in extrovertive mysticism is with the totality of objects of perception; the unity in introvertive mysticism is with a pure consciousness, devoid of objects of perception. Stace (1960, p. 131) has suggested that extrovertive mysticism is a less developed form, perhaps preparatory to introvertive mysticism. Forman (1990a) argues that extrovertive mysticism is a higher form of mysticism to which introvertive mysticism is only preparatory. Hood (1989) has argued that extrovertive mysticism is likely to follow upon introvertive mystical experience, but he does not claim it to be a “higher” experience. The conceptual arguments as to whether these are two separate mysticisms has important consequences for empirical research. As we shall see, if introvertive and extrovertive mysticism can be measured, the relationship between the two can be studied as an empirical issue. Yet, whether the experience of unity is introvertive or extrovertive, it is this experience that by scholarly consensus uniquely characterizes mysticism (Hood, 1985, 2003a, 2006). Although social scientists cannot confirm any ontological claims based upon mystical experience, they can construct theories compatible with claims to the existence of such realities. Hodges (1974) and Porpora (2006) have argued that the scientific taboo against

the supernatural can be broken, as long as hypotheses about the supernatural can be shown to have empirical consequences. In Garrett's (1974) phrase, "troublesome transcendence" must be confronted by social scientists as much as by theologians and philosophers.

There is no reason why scientists cannot include specific hypotheses derived from views about the nature of transcendent reality in empirical studies of religious experience, as long as specific empirical predictions can be made. The source of the predictions may reference even the unobservable and the intangible. All that is required is that there be identifiable empirical consequences. As Jones (1986) has stated the case,

Invoking Occam's Razor [i.e., the philosophical principle that the best explanation of an event is the simplest one] to disallow reference to factors other than sensory observable ones is question begging in favor of one metaphysics building up an ontology with material objects as basic. (p. 225)

Jones echoes the classic claim of William James that mystics base their experience upon the same sort of processes that all empiricists do—direct experience. James would restrict the authoritative value of mystical experience to the person who had the experience, but would view it as a hypothesis for the social scientist to investigate (Hood, 1992a, 1995c). However, mystics are united in the belief that such experiences are real, and many nonmystics are convinced of the reality of the experience even if they personally have not had it. Thus, as Swinburne (1981) argues, mystical experience is also authoritative for others:

... if it seems to me I have a glimpse of Nirvana, or a vision of God, that is good grounds for me to suppose that I do. And, more generally, the occurrence of religious experience is *prima facie* reason for all to believe in that of which the experience was purportedly an experience. (p. 190)

Social scientists are often too quick to boast that their own limited empirical data undermine ontological claims. Religious traditions cannot be adequately understood without the assumption that transcendent objects of experience are believed to be real and foundational to those who experience them (Hood, 1995a). It is also possible that not only are they believed to be real, but that they are in fact real as well. Furthermore, their reality may be revealed in experience. Carmody and Carmody (1996, p. 10) define "mysticism" as "a direct experience of ultimate reality." This definition remains a hypothesis capable of empirical investigation. To presuppose otherwise is less persuasive than once thought. Bowker (1973), after critically reviewing social-scientific theories of the sense of God, has noted that it is an empirical option to conclude that at least part of the sense of God might come from God. In our terms, religious views of the nature of the Real suggest ways in which it can be expressed in human experience. This can work in two directions, both deductively and inductively. Deductively, one can note that if the Real is conceived in a particular way, then certain experiences of the real can be expected to follow. Thus we can anticipate that expectations play a significant role in religious experience, often confirming the foundational realities of one's faith tradition. Inductively, we can infer that if particular experiences occur, then the possibility that the Real exists is a reasonable inference—a position forcefully argued by Berger (1979). Thus we can anticipate that experiences, some unanticipated, may lead some to seek religions for their illumination. O'Brien (1965) has gone so far as to include in his criteria for a mystical experience that it be unexpected. Religious traditions adopt both options in confronting mystical

and numinous experiences. In this sense, a rigorous methodological atheism is unwarranted in the study of religious and mystical experiences (Porpora, 2006).

Not surprisingly, then, mystical experiences have long been the focus of empirical research and provocative theorizing among both sociologists and psychologists. We first explore classic efforts to confront these experiences. These classic views are of more than historical interest, as they set the range of conceptual issues that continue to plague the contemporary empirical study of mysticism. Our focus upon classic views is not exhaustive. We focus upon representatives of three major social-scientific views regarding mystical experience: as erroneous attribution, as a heightened state of awareness, and as evolved consciousness.

REPRESENTATIVE CLASSICAL VIEWS OF MYSTICISM

Mysticism as Erroneous Attribution

Preus (1987) has emphasized that the classical social-scientific theorists of religion, with only a few exceptions, had little doubt that they could provide genuine reductive explanations of religion. Such explanations purported to replace religious attributions with purely secular claims to processes involved in mystical experience as illuminated by science. Furthermore, it was commonly assumed that once the social sciences illuminated the true nature of religious experience, then religious claims based upon such experiences would lose much of their persuasive force.

The early psychologists of religion could not help confronting mysticism in light of this assumption. The mystical claim to have experienced God could not be uncritically accepted by psychologists. Much of the scientific validity of psychology was seen to rest upon its ability to provide scientific explanations for spiritual and religious claims. Thus, despite the fact that in the popular mind psychology was seen as a spiritual discipline, most psychologists saw the public interest in spiritual matters as a way to help develop the science of psychology, if psychology could explain the spiritual in natural-scientific terms (Coon, 1992; Taves, 1999). In *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism*, Leuba (1925) provided one of the earliest physiological theories of mysticism. Considerably less sympathetic to religion than William James was, Leuba insisted that mystical experience could be explained in physiological terms. He also insisted that no transcendental object is necessary for mystical experience, and that only physiological processes and a natural-scientific framework can illuminate these experiences. He was one of the first psychologists to argue forcefully that mystical experience provides no evidential force for religious beliefs. Mystics do not encounter God in their experience, Leuba claimed; rather, mystics use their beliefs to interpret their experience, ultimately erroneously. His now-classic study of mysticism was echoed in the general French tradition of the emerging discipline of psychiatry, in which mental states—including many religious ones interpreted by those who experienced them—were understood in terms of their origins in physiological and psychological processes that were often deemed pathological. Charcot, who was part of this French tradition, heavily influenced Freud, whose attitude toward religion was complex but ultimately unsympathetic.

In *The Future of an Illusion* (1927/1961b), Freud argued that religious *beliefs* are illusory—the products of wishes, rather than responses to the reality of the world. Later, he responded to a criticism of the Nobel laureate Romain Rolland that he had focused only upon

religious belief and had underestimated the value of religious *experience*. Rolland found the essence of religion in what he termed the “oceanic feeling,” or a state of unity with the world (mysticism); Rolland claimed validity for this feeling, independent of Freud’s devastating challenge to religious beliefs. Freud’s response in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930/1961a) was that this feeling is not originally religious, but only later becomes attached to religious beliefs. The actual “oceanic feeling” is only a recollection of an infantile state, perhaps of unity with the mother. Mysticism is thus a regression to an earlier infantile state. Thus mystical experience does not provide evidence for unity with the world or even with God; it is simply a feeling attached to religious beliefs that God exists and can be experienced. The religious beliefs themselves are not simply illusional, but delusional as well. Religion is thus a double error: an erroneous belief in the existence of a God, and the erroneous interpretation of regressive experiences as evidence of union with God. Thus Freud was one of the first theorists to argue that there is no essential relationship between mystical experience and religious beliefs. Current criticism of Freud’s view of mysticism, especially based upon claims that he misunderstood the oceanic feeling of Rolland (Parsons, 1999) and that mystical experience is not inherently regressive (Hood, 1976a), allow for nonpathological views of mysticism even within classical Freudian theory (Hood, 1992b; Parsons, 1999). The empirical issue of the relationship between mysticism and psychopathology is discussed later in this chapter.

Leuba and Freud represent examples of genuine explanations of mysticism, if one assumes that the experience is capable of being reductively explained by either physiological processes (Leuba) or psychological processes (Freud). Basic to both views is that persons who believe they have confronted or merged with transcendent objects are wrong. Similar arguments have been made by sociologists. For instance, Durkheim (1915) argued for mystical experience as the apprehension of individuals’ dependence upon a transcendent object; however, that object is society, not a divine being or reality. The genuine experience of being part of a larger unity is correct, but a misattribution applies this to God instead of its real origin, society. Thus any theory that claims to explain experiences of union with the Real by processes that can be identified as purely physiological, psychological, or social must claim to interpret mysticism by misattribution. A corollary is that when individuals realize the true source of their experience of union, the religious quality (in terms of transcendent claims) will disappear.

Mysticism as Heightened Awareness

Although most early social scientists reveled in the apparent power of psychology to explain religion in general and mystical experiences in particular, William James best represented the paradoxical position of the emerging science of psychology. Hood (1992a, 1995c) has traced the efforts of James to avoid religious concepts, such as the soul, in developing psychology as a natural science. In *The Principles of Psychology* (1890/1950), James saw no need for the concept of a soul or for any transcendent dimension to human consciousness; however, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/1985), James noted that the facts of mystical experience require a wider dimension to human consciousness. He favored Myers’s (1903/1961) notion of a subconscious, in which James argued that a wider self may emerge. Furthermore, he argued that this natural process may be one in which the human self merges with God. Thus, although the empirical facts cannot prove the existence of a God, mystical experience

provides the basic experiential fact from which God as a genuine “overbelief” to explain the process is a viable hypothesis. Mystical experiences thus have reasonable evidential force, in James’s view (Hood, 2000a, 2002a).

James’s views created much controversy among early psychologists, who were anxious to separate psychology from religious views associated with the science in the popular mind. But James’s insistence that mystical experiences are valid forms of human experience—incapable of being reductionistically explained by either physiological or psychological processes—provided a counter to the emerging natural-scientific and psychoanalytic psychologies, which denied the possibility that religious experiences may have a truly transcendent dimension (Hood, 2002a; Taves, 1999). James’s view was simply that one may encounter God in mystical experiences, regardless of the processes identified by the scientists that are operating during the experience. In terms used previously, science cannot rule out that a mystical experience is an experience of the Real or of a foundational reality that may be necessary for the experience to occur. At a minimum, the *belief* in the reality must be there. As James stated in his notes for his lectures on mysticism in *The Varieties*, “Remember, the whole point lies in really believing that through a certain point or part in you you coalesce and are identical with the Eternal” (quoted in Perry, 1935, Vol. 2, p. 331).

Mysticism as Evolved Consciousness

Evolutionary theory has been a continuous influence on psychology since its inception, and, as we have done in several chapters, we once again propose it as a major paradigm for the psychology of religion (Kirkpatrick, 2005). Mysticism has been proposed by some as a form of consciousness that is evolving, much as consciousness has evolved from the nonreflective consciousness that characterizes animals to the reflective consciousness that characterizes people. Not only are persons aware, but they are aware that they are aware; that is, they can reflect upon their awareness. Bucke (1901/1961) is most closely identified with the theory that following upon reflexive awareness in the evolution of consciousness is a cosmic consciousness or mystical state of awareness of unity with the cosmos. He documented the increased presence of individuals over time whom he saw as examples of persons expressing this cosmic consciousness. Basic to his theory is the notion that cosmic consciousness is evolving in the human species, becoming more frequent (even though by citing as exemplars of mystics such persons as Buddha and Christ, Bucke made the absolute frequency of mystical experience quite rare in any population). Nevertheless, as opposed to theorists who described mysticism as pathological or as a union with a religiously defined transcendent object, Bucke saw cosmic consciousness as the natural, advanced form of consciousness toward which the human species is evolving. As consciousness evolves, it evolves into a mystical consciousness. The philosopher Bergson (1911) gave the major impetus to evolutionary theories of mysticism by identifying mystical experience with the direct awareness of the evolutionary process itself (*élan vital*), which he saw as the basis of all life. Kolakowski (1985) has argued that sociological studies of mysticism both support and are compatible with Bergson’s linking of mystical experience and his *élan vital*—a point worth emphasizing in terms of the tendency of many psychologists of religion to provide reductive evolutionary views of religious and mystical experience. Another mystical evolutionary view that is consistent with a nonreductive religious view is found in the work of de Chardin (1959).

Alister Hardy (1965, 1966) proposed that a cosmic consciousness is gradually emerging within the human species as a whole. His theory provides a thoroughly naturalistic basis for

mystical experiences as evolved forms of consciousness. Unlike Bucke, Hardy assumed that mystical states are common. Late in his life, after his retirement from a career in zoology, he began soliciting reports of religious experiences and initiated efforts to provide a classification system of them. We have mentioned his empirical work in Chapters 8 and 10, and we discuss it further in the section on survey research below.

Perhaps the most mystical of the dynamic theorists, Jung, offered a different twist to evolutionary theories of mysticism. Indeed, many have claimed that Jung's entire psychology is inherently mystical. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that in terms of evolution, Jung's theory assumes that archetypes are evolutionarily based tendencies to experience the world in particular ways. When imagined, experience is archetypal and has a "numinous" sense (Jung, 1954/1968); that is, it provides an awareness of a "holy other" beyond nature, with which one is felt to be in communion. The archetypes are collectively shared as profound religious symbols, inherent in the human psyche. Thus one who follows Jung expects numinous experiences to occur in everyone, whether or not they are expressed in religious language. In Catholicism, the symbols are objectively protected and identified; in Protestantism, the symbols are allowed to emerge outside of institutional controls (Jung, 1938). Yet even when these experiences occur in dreams outside of religious interpretations, as normal processes inherent in the human psyche, only the absence of their report is problematic. Jung had the following sentence carved in the arch to his home: *Vocatus atque non vocatus deus aderit*. The sentence has been variously translated, but a good English rendering is "Whether called or not, God will be present."

Our task in the remainder of this chapter is to focus on the empirical literature. As we shall see, many of the issues raised in the classical and conceptual literatures on mysticism are paralleled in the empirical literature. By interrelating these two, we hope to contribute to what McGinn (1991, p. 343) has termed the "unrealized conversation" between social-scientific investigators and those involved in the history and theory of mystical traditions.

THE EMPIRICAL STUDY OF MYSTICISM

Central to any empirical study of mysticism is measurement based upon operationalized terms. There are almost as many definitions of "mysticism" as there are theorists. Over 100 years ago, Inge (1899) evaluated at least 26 definitions of it and concluded that no word in the English language had been employed more loosely. Not surprisingly, much of the current conceptual literature on mysticism debates various definitions and classifications of mysticism—often, obviously, on the basis of prior theological or religious commitments. For instance, Zaehner (1957) argued for a clear distinction between "theistic mysticism" and other forms of mysticism, primarily on theological grounds. Likewise, in an often-cited example, the renowned Jewish scholar of mysticism Buber (1965) referred to his own experience of an "undivided unity," which he had thought to be union with God, but later felt to be an inappropriate interpretation. In a similar vein, James (1902/1985) refused to give serious consideration the considerably refined classification systems of mystical states associated with the Catholic mystical tradition, believing them to be primarily driven by theological considerations unrelated to actual experience. The Protestant theologian Ritschl claimed that neo-Platonism had so influenced the history of mysticism that it had become the theoretical norm for mystical experience, and that the universal being viewed as God by mystics

is a “cheat” (quoted in McGinn, 1991, pp. 267–268). Finally, feminist theorists have accused both authorities within mysticism and scholars who study mysticism of falsely universalizing perspectives that, when deconstructed, can be seen as efforts to silence women—including accepting “ineffability” as a criterion of mysticism precisely so that women can say nothing of their experience (Jantzen, 1995).

From this sampling of views, it is clear that any definition of mysticism is likely to encounter conceptual criticism. However, at the empirical level, it is clear that the distinction between experience and its interpretation and/or evaluation carries some weight. Thus, even in the case of Buber cited above, an experience of unity can be identified, regardless of how it is interpreted. The measurement of mysticism is possible once some operational indicator is identified. A considerable consensus exists that an experience of unity is central to mystical experience. Indeed, debates on mysticism often center on precisely how this unity is to be interpreted. Accordingly, measurements of mysticism identifying an experience of unity that is variously interpreted are quite congruent with the conceptual literature. They can also provide empirical tests of some of the issues central to that literature.

There are three major ways in which mysticism has been operationalized and measured in empirical research:

1. Open-ended responses to specific questions intuitively assumed to tap mystical or numinous experiences. These responses may then be variously coded or categorized.
2. Questions devised for use in survey research. Of necessity, these questions are brief, limited in number, and worded in language easily understandable for use in surveys of the general population. However, they are relevant as indicators of both a numinous sense of presence and an experience of unity.
3. Specific scales to measure mysticism.

As we shall see, how mysticism is operationalized and measured is related to the kinds of data provided to answer the various questions about mysticism. Accordingly, we discuss empirical studies in terms of the predominant operational and measurement strategies employed.

Studies Using Open-Ended Responses to Assess Mystical Experiences

Laski's Research

One of the more curious mainstream references in the empirical study of mysticism is Laski's (1961) research on ecstasy—curious, because of its severe methodological inadequacies. Laski, a novelist untrained in the social sciences, became interested in whether or not the experience of ecstasy she had written about in a novel was experienced in modern life. Initially using a convenience sample of friends and acquaintances sampled over a period of 3 years, she essentially asked persons to respond in an interview to the primary question: “Do you know a sensation of transcendent ecstasy?” (Laski, 1961, p. 9). If she was asked to explain what was meant by transcendent ecstasy, she told her respondents to “Take it to mean what you think it means” (Laski, 1961, p. 9). It only took 63 persons to produce 60 affirma-

tive responses, perhaps because of the highly educated and literary nature of Laski's friends (20 of the 63 identified themselves as writers). Laski's own belief was that the transcendent ecstasy is most likely to be related to a family of terms that includes "mysticism," "oceanic feeling," and "cosmic consciousness" (1961, p. 5). However, an attempt to replicate her interview results with a sample distributed through mailboxes to 100 homes in a working-class area of London resulted in only 11 returns, with only 1 of these responses answering affirmatively the reworded question: "Have you ever had a feeling of unearthly ecstasy?" (Laski, 1961, pp. 526–533). We need only note here that different methods with different samples radically alter the nature of the data one may collect!

Thus Laski's 1961 text primarily analyzed responses obtained from her 60 interviews and from comparisons to 27 literary and 24 religious excerpts from published texts (selected for their intuitive demonstration of ecstatic experiences similar to those reported by the interview group). Her work is an extensive discussion of various means of classifying and identifying the nature of these experiences, primarily in terms of the language used to describe them. Laski's own limited data-analyzing skills were balanced by her perceptive analysis of language. The citations of the primary texts and interviews make it easy for the reader to judge the value of Laski's own analyses. Her conclusions raise several issues that have been the focus of more rigorous studies, including those with children and adolescents discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

Among Laski's conclusions is that transcendent ecstasy is a subset of mystical experience, defined and demarcated by the language used to describe it. It can be of three subtypes: experience of (1) knowledge, (2) union, or (3) purification and renewal. It is transient, and is triggered or elicited by a wide variety of circumstances and contexts. Generally, it is pleasurable and has beneficial consequences. However, it need not have unique religious value or provide evidential force for the validity of religious beliefs. Laski's own preference was to interpret transcendent ecstasy as a purely human capacity to experience joy in one's own creativity. She concluded that in both the past and the present, those who believe that they have experienced God are indeed mistaken; they have made a misattribution (Laski, 1961, pp. 369–374).

Social scientists continue to cite Laski's work, less for its methodological rigor than for its powerful description and analysis of instances of mystical experience. The assumption of many that mysticism is a rare phenomenon, characteristic of only a few, is belied by Laski's work. Her examples ring true to many persons' experiences, as we shall see. Furthermore, her interview procedures and her willingness to use the participants' own terms and language to analyze experiences have parallels in modern phenomenological research (Wulff, 1995).

Hood's Research

Open-ended responses to specific questions such as the ones we have been discussing can yield massive amounts of material, difficult to summarize. Statistical rigor and classification often yield to a rich descriptive presentation. However, such studies can be used to test empirical hypotheses as well. Hood (1973b) selected two extreme groups from a sample of 123 college students who responded to Allport's Intrinsic and Extrinsic religious orientation scales. The 25 highest-scoring subjects on each scale (Intrinsic mean = 41.8, SD = 2.9; Extrinsic mean = 49.2, SD = 3.7) were invited to participate in interviews regarding

their “most significant personal experience.” The 41 subjects who participated (20 “intrinsic subjects” and 21 “extrinsic subjects”) described a wide variety of experiences, few of which were explicitly identified as religious. However, coding experiences for their mystical quality on five criteria revealed that, as predicted, intrinsic subjects’ most significant personal experiences were reliably coded as mystical more frequently than were extrinsic subjects’ most significant personal experiences (see Table 11.1). This held not only for the total, global assessment of mysticism, but for each of the five criteria used to identify mysticism. Despite the wide diversity of actual experiences (from childbirth to drug experiences), these could be coded as mystical more often for intrinsic subjects than for extrinsic subjects. It is important to note that few participants spontaneously described any experience as mystical; coders using theory-derived criteria categorized experiences as mystical or not. The role of language in defining experience from both first- and third-person perspectives is complex and is a topic of intense conceptual debate (Hood, 2006; Jantzen, 1995; Katz, 1992; Scharfstein, 1993). Yet at the purely empirical level, Hood’s study indicates that experiences can be reliably coded as mystical by independent raters using theory-based criteria, even if the respondents themselves do not identify their experiences as mystical.

TABLE 11.1. Most Significant Personal Experiences Coded for Mystical Criteria in Intrinsic and Extrinsic Persons

Mystical criteria	Intrinsic (<i>n</i> = 20)	Extrinsic (<i>n</i> = 21)	Chi-square	Contingency coefficient ^a
Total				
Mystical	15	3		
Nonmystical	5	18	13.0***	.49
Loss of self				
Yes	14	3		
No	6	18	10.9***	.46
Noetic				
Yes	17	3		
No	3	13	7.6**	.39
Ineffable				
Yes	19	4		
No	1	17	21.0**	.58
Positive				
Yes	19	12		
No	1	9	6.0*	.36
Sacred				
Yes	18	6		
No	2	15	13.8***	.56

Note. Adapted from Hood (1973b, p. 446). Copyright 1973 by the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Adapted by permission.

^aUpper limit of contingency coefficient = .71

p* < .02. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

Research by Thomas and Cooper and by the Hardy Centre

However, if individuals affirmatively respond to an item measuring mysticism, does it mean that their experience was mystical as judged by others? Thomas and Cooper suggest that it may not be so. In two studies (Thomas & Cooper, 1978, 1980), they had persons from colleges, religious groups, and civic organizations respond to one of the items most frequently used in survey research (to be discussed below) to assess mystical experience. The item was “Have you ever had the feeling of being close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself” (Thomas & Cooper, 1978, p. 434). Research Box 11.1 discusses these two studies in greater detail.

The findings of Thomas and Cooper are supported by classifications of the religious experiences solicited from and sent in to the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, as described in Chapter 10. Much as Alister Hardy collected and classified samples of plankton during his career as a zoologist, numerous samplings from over 5,000 reports of religious experience at the Hardy Centre have been collected and variously classified. The most extensive classification is based upon the initial 3,000 cases Hardy collected. Variations occurred in the wording of the appeal for reports of such experiences, depending on the source of publication. In some cases, brief descriptions from literature were given to illustrate the type of experience in which the researchers were interested (Hardy, 1979, p. 18). Most common was this one in a pamphlet widely circulated in the United Kingdom:

All those who feel they have been conscious of, and perhaps influenced by, some Power, whether called God or not, which may either appear to be beyond their individual selves or partly, or even entirely, within their being, are asked to write a simple account of their feelings and their effects. (Hardy, 1979, p. 20)

Not surprisingly, Hardy and his colleagues found that the reports of the materials submitted defied easy classification: “So many of them were a mixture of widely different items” (Hardy, 1979, p. 23). Hardy’s own elaborate classification system, composed of 12 major categories (most with numerous subclassifications), yielded a total of 92 classifications. Some of these referred to the development and consequences of the experience, and did not describe the experience proper. Each experience was rated for the presence or absence of any classification category. Most relevant to our concerns in this chapter are those experiences that were coded in terms of mystical or numinous criteria. Few were: The most specific mystical category, “Feeling of unity with surroundings and/or with people,” characterized only 168 of the initial 3,000 experiences coded, or 5.6% (Hardy, 1979, p. 26). The most numinous classification, “Sense of presence (not human),” characterized 369 or 12.3% of these 3,000 reports (Hardy, 1979, p. 27). Thus, despite the fact that Hardy felt his appeal would yield reports of evidential value—akin to spiritual reports in the Bible and accounts by mystics—only a small minority of the experiences were either mystical or numinous when coded for relevant criteria by independent raters. For instance, Hay (1994) has identified six major types of religious experiences in the Hardy archives, only one of which is “experiencing in an extraordinary way that all things are One” (Hay, 1994, pp. 21–22).

Hay’s Research

Hay and Morisy (1985, p. 14) asked a random sample of 266 residents of Nottingham, England, a version of the Hardy appeal: “Have you ever been aware or influenced by a presence

RESEARCH BOX 11.1. Measurement and Rates of Mystical Experiences
(Thomas & Cooper, 1978 [Study 1], 1980 [Study 2])

In Thomas and Cooper's first study, only young adults ages 17–29 were used (44 males, 258 females). In the second study, 305 persons representing three different age groups—17–29 years ($n = 120$), 30–59 years ($n = 110$), and 60 years and older ($n = 75$)—responded to the same survey question. In each study, those who answered “yes” went on to describe their experience in open-ended fashion, and raters coded the responses to place them in one of the categories described below. The percentage who answered “yes” was identical in both studies and is typical for survey research (34%). However, when the open-ended descriptions were analyzed for frequency and type of experience reported, all experiences were reliably placed into one of four response categories derived from a portion of the initial sample.

The frequencies and types of experiences reported, based upon open-ended descriptions to “yes” responses to the question “Have you ever had the feeling of being close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself?”, were as follows. (Note that these percentages are based on n 's of 302 for Study 1 and 304 for Study 2; coder agreement was 94% overall for both studies.)

Type 0: No experience (Study 1, 66%; Study 2, 66%). Respondents answered “no” to question.

Type 1: Uncodable (Study 1, 8%; Study 2, 10%). Respondents answered “yes,” but responses were irrelevant or could not be reliably coded.

Type 2: Mystical (Study 1, 2%; Study 2, 1%). Responses included expressions of such things as awesome emotions; a sense of the ineffable; or a feeling of oneness with God, nature, or the universe.

Type 3: Psychic (Study 1, 12%; Study 2, 8%). Responses included expressions of extraordinary or supernatural phenomena, including extrasensory perception, telepathy, out-of-body experience, or contact with spiritual beings.

Type 4: Faith and consolation (Study 1, 2%; Study 2, 16%). Responses included religious or spiritual phenomena, but without indications of either extraordinary or supernatural elements.

Despite minor variations in frequencies of experience categories between these two studies (perhaps because of the larger age range in Study 2), there is remarkable agreement not only in the identical percentage of affirmative responses in both studies, but also in the fact that the *least* frequent content category for the open-ended responses was mystical.

The importance of these two studies is that if affirmative responses in a single-item survey question are accepted at face value, many diverse experiences may be clustered together. In terms of our specific concern with mystical experiences, no more than 2% of the 34% who responded to the survey question presumed to be a measure of mysticism actually described mystical experiences in open-ended descriptions. The criteria for mysticism compatible with those typically cited in the conceptual literature—such as an ineffable sense of union with God (personal) or the universe (impersonal)—were not evident. Thus survey items to assess mysticism may do so poorly according to more rigorous criteria, and may overestimate the actual rates of reported mystical experience in samples.

or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?" Of the 172 who consented to be interviewed, 72% (124) answered "yes." Eliminating 17 of these (who apparently misunderstood the question or who could not describe the experience) left 107 persons who were able to describe in detail the experience (or the most important experience, if they had more than one). Using the respondents' own language, the researchers classified the experiences into one of seven categories as follows: presence of or help from God (28%), assistance via prayer (9%), intervention by presence not identified as God (13%), presence or help from deceased (22%), premonitions (10%), meaningful patterning of events (10%), and miscellaneous (8%) (Hay & Morisy, 1985, p. 217). Although these categories were purely provisional, once again it is evident that persons who were responding to particular questions were in fact reporting a wide range and type of experiences. This was true even though the specific wording of the Hardy appeal used in this study was field-tested and assumed to draw out both the mystical and numinous qualities of religious experience. Yet no mystical experiences could be coded (except perhaps if included under "miscellaneous"), and only 28% were explicitly numinous in terms of a sense of presence identified with the holy (God).

In a similar study, Hay (1979, p. 165) found a high (65%) affirmative response rate to whether an individual could ever remember "being aware of or influenced by a presence or a power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self." Respondents were 100 randomly selected students in a postgraduate teacher certificate course at Nottingham University, England. Despite the fact that the question was worded to cover mystical or numinous experiences—by focusing upon whether the experience was of a personal ("presence") or impersonal ("power") nature—classification of extended interviews in which affirmative respondents described their experience yielded only 32 of 109 (29.4%) experiences that were clearly either mystical or numinous. These were 10 (9.2%) experiences of unity (mystical experience), and 22 (20.2%) experiences of an awareness of God (numinous experience). Consistent with the work of Vernon (1968) cited below, Hay (1987) also found that 24% of the atheists or agnostics responded affirmatively to this question, compared with 36% of the population as a whole.

Summary of Studies Using Open-Ended Responses

Overall, we can conclude that open-ended responses to specific questions presumed to elicit reports of mystical experiences reveal little of scientific value, beyond the fact that individuals (from children through senior citizens) readily report such experiences. The richness of their reports varies with their linguistic capacities. They cannot be taken as uncritical evidential value for the realities they describe, and they may be highly influenced by personal concerns of those making such reports. Finally, depending on investigators' own classification interests, such reports can be almost interminably classified and cross-referenced. This means that first-person descriptions of experience are unlikely to correspond closely to third-person classifications of these same experiences. However, this research tradition does remind us that responses to such questions, even if reliably quantified, mask a rich subjective variation of immense importance to those whose experiences are studied.

Survey Research

Emerging simultaneously with, and influenced by, open-ended reports of mystical experience are survey studies. As noted earlier, such studies use a few specific questions, often

answered simply “yes” or “no.” What survey studies lose in terms of the range and depth of description of experiences, they gain in terms of identifying the frequency and reporting of such experiences in the general population. Their results are also easily quantified and allow correlations with a wide variety of demographic and other variables to provide a distinctive empirical base that complements merely conceptual discussions of these experiences. We focus here on the body of survey research that has asked questions intended by the researchers to be direct measures of mystical experiences. Fortunately, several surveys have used identical questions over several years and even within different cultures, so some comparisons over time and cultures can also be made, at least at the descriptive level.

One caution must be noted before we begin, however. Intercorrelations among different items to measure mystical experiences across different surveys are not available. Although we can anticipate positive correlations, it is not clear that this will always be the case; nor can we be certain of the magnitude of such correlations. Hence each item must be judged in itself as an operational measure of the experience in question. Four major questions have dominated the majority of surveys covering since 1960. Accordingly, we summarize these data in terms of the survey questions used, each identified by the name most closely associated with the formulation of the initial question. Therefore we have the Stark, Bourque, Greeley, and Hardy questions.

The Stark Question

In their sampling of churches in the greater San Francisco area in 1963, Glock and Stark asked, “Have you ever as an adult had the feeling that you were somehow in the presence of God?” (Glock & Stark, 1965, p. 157, Table 8-1). With a sample size just under 3,000 respondents (2,871), 72% answered “yes.” Because the question specifically emphasized a *feeling* of God’s presence, it was presumed to tap religious experience rather than belief. Not surprisingly, the majority of religiously committed, institutionally involved persons answered “yes.” Only 20% of all Protestants sampled ($n = 2,326$) and 25% of all Catholics sampled ($n = 545$) answered “no.”

Vernon (1968) isolated a small sample of 85 persons who indicated “none” when asked about religious commitment. In this sample of “religious nones,” 25% nevertheless answered the Stark question affirmatively. Thus, even among those with no institutional religious commitment, a significant minority of adults reported experiencing a sense of God’s presence.

The Bourque Question

In a series of surveys, Bourque and her colleagues utilized the following question to assess religious experience: “Would you say that you have ever had a ‘religious or mystical experience’—that is, a moment of sudden religious awakening or insight?” (Back & Bourque, 1970, p. 489). They also cited results from three Associated Press surveys using this question; these surveys were conducted in 1962, 1966, and 1967 in the United States. Over time, the percentage of persons answering “yes” increased from 21% in 1962 ($n = 3,232$) to 32% in 1966 ($n = 3,518$) to 41% in 1967 ($n = 3,168$). Gallup (1978) used this item in a U.S. national survey in 1976 and found that 31% answered affirmatively in a sample of 1,500. More recently, Yamane and Polzer (1994) reported the results of two Gallup surveys in 1990—one in June and one in

September, each using a sample of 1,236—and found a stable affirmative response frequency of 53%.

Thus, over a period exceeding a quarter of a century, representative samples of persons in the United States reported having a religious or mystical experience, defined as a moment of sudden religious awakening or insight. The range of affirmative responses was large (from 21% to 53%), but lower than the typical affirmative response to the Stark question.

Bourque (1969; Bourque & Back, 1971) also created an index of religious experience composed of three questions—the Stark and Bourque questions already noted, plus a third: “Have you ever had a feeling of being saved in Christ?” In a sample of 3,168, a total of 990 (31%) answered affirmatively to all three questions; 794 (25%) to any two; and 566 (18%) to at least one (Bourque & Back, 1971, p. 10).

The Greeley Question

Another question widely used in survey research and accepted as an operational measure of reported mystical question is associated with the work of Greeley (1974). The question most typically used is “Have you ever felt as though you were close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself?” It has been administered as part of the General Social Survey (GSS) of the National Opinion Research Center. The GSS is a series of independent cross-sectional probability samples of persons in the continental United States, living in noninstitutional homes, who are 18 years of age and English-speaking. It was found that overall, in a GSS sample of 1,468, 35% of the respondents answered “yes” to this question (Davis & Smith, 1994).

Hay and Morisy (1978) administered a similar question to a sample of 1,865 in Great Britain and found that 36% answered in the affirmative. In the two studies by Thomas and Cooper (1978, 1980) discussed above, the 34% affirmative responses revealed few responses that were truly mystical when independently coded for criteria of mysticism. On the other hand, Greeley (1975, p. 65) found that a very high percentage (29%) of those who positively answered his question agreed with “a sense of unity and my own part in it” as a descriptor of their experience. Thus most of the 34% answering “yes” to the Greeley question also appeared to accept a mystical description of unity as applying to the experience. It may be that, methodologically, checking descriptors of experience increases the positive rate of mystical experiences over spontaneous descriptions of the experiences in open-ended interviews.

In a survey of 339 persons, McClenon (1984) found the lowest affirmative response rate to the Greeley question (20%). More recently, Yamane and Polzer (1994) analyzed all affirmative responses from the GSS to the Greeley question in the years 1983, 1984, 1988, and 1989. A total of 5,420 individuals were included in their review. Using an ordinal scale where respondents who answered affirmatively could select from three options—“once or twice,” “several times,” or “often”—yielded a range from 0 (negative response) to 3 (often). Using this 4-point range across all individuals who responded to the Greeley question yielded a mean score of 0.79 ($SD = 0.89$). Converting these to a percentage of “yes” as a nominal category, regardless of frequency, yielded 2,183 affirmative responses, or an overall affirmative response rate of 40% of the total sample who reported ever having had the experience. Independent assessment of affirmative responses for each year suggested a slight but steady decline. The figures were 39% for 1983–1984 combined ($n = 3,072$), 31% for 1988 ($n = 1,481$), and 31% for 1989 ($n = 936$).

The Hardy Question

As noted above, Alister Hardy's interest in religious experience focused methodologically on soliciting open-ended responses from persons to both literary examples and descriptions of religious experiences. The most common description used by Hardy (noted above) was slightly modified by Hay and Morisy and used in several survey studies.

The precise wording of the Hay and Morisy question was "Have you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?" (1978, p. 207). Their survey was conducted in Great Britain. Respondents were chosen from a two-stage stratified sample: names randomly drawn from the electoral register, supplemented with names drawn at random of nonelectors from the households of the selected electors. In their sample of 1,865, 36% answered affirmatively to the question. In the more restricted sample of 172 homes in an industrial area of England (described earlier), Hay and Morisy (1985) found the high affirmative response rate of 72%. The high rates were probably a function of face-to-face interviews, which have been shown to increase the number of affirmative responses to survey questions dealing with religious experience. However, Hay (1994) also found a 65% affirmative response rate to his version of the Hardy question in a random sample of postgraduate students at Nottingham University, England. He extensively interviewed respondents regarding their experiences, but the actual affirmation of the experiences occurred before the interview. It may be that anticipating a discussion of reports of religious experience increases the rate of such reports. Hay (1994, p. 8, Table 3) also cites a study by Lewis, in which a high affirmative response rate to the Hardy question was obtained in a British sample of 108 nurses from two different hospitals in Leeds. Again, face-to-face interviews may have been a factor increasing response rates.

In a Gallup sample of 985 British citizens, Hay and Heald (1987) found a rate more typical of other general surveys using the Hardy question: 48% of their sample responded affirmatively to the question. This closely matches the 44% rate found in previously unpublished data based upon an Australian sample of 1,228 by Morgan Research (the Australian affiliate of the Gallup Poll organization) and cited by Hay (1994, p. 7). A survey in the United States of 3,000 sampled produced a 31% affirmative response rate, closely matching the 35% response rate produced in a sample of 3,062 from the Princeton Research Center (1978, cited by Hay, 1994) a few years earlier. Hay (1994, p. 7, Table 1) also cites two unpublished Gallup Polls commissioned by the Hardy Centre in 1985, indicating a 33% affirmative response to the Hardy question in a sample of 1,030 in Britain, and a 10% higher rate (43%) for a similar sample of 1,525 in the United States. Finally, Back and Bourque (1970) reported three different Gallup surveys done in the United States, with affirmative response rates to the Hardy question of 21% in 1962 ($n = 3,232$), 32% in 1966 ($n = 3,518$), and 41% in 1967 ($n = 3,168$).

Thus surveys from 1962 through 1987 in the United States, Britain, and Australia suggest a fairly wide range (21–72%) of affirmative responses to the Hardy question. However, when the higher rates obtained from anticipated in-depth interviews are ignored, the affirmative response rates average in the 35–40% range for the Hardy question—paralleling fairly closely those for the Greeley and Bourque questions, and for the Stark question when the respondents are not restricted to church or synagogue members. Thus, overall, it appears that 35% of persons sampled affirm some intense spiritual experience, felt by the researchers to measure mystical and/or numinous experience. At a minimum, then, the reports of such experiences have been clearly and conclusively established by survey studies to be statistically quite common among normal samples. What are we to make of these reports?

Most survey studies have included additional questions and demographic characteristics that can be correlated with the reports of religious experience. No simple pattern has emerged from the studies mentioned above, and unfortunately each study must be considered in terms of its sampling and the statistical models used. The range of data analysis is large, from naïve to state-of-the-art sophistication. The major consistent findings are easily summarized: Women report more such experiences than men; the experiences tend to be age-related, increasing with age; they are characteristic of educated and affluent people; and they are more likely to be associated with indices of psychological health and well-being than with those of pathology or social dysfunction. Thus Scharfstein's (1973) "everyday mysticism" is supported by survey research in affirming the commonality of mysticism among both institutionally and noninstitutionally committed religious persons within the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

Several studies have focused upon the communication patterns of persons who have such experiences, noting that these persons do *not* talk about their experiences with others. Even Tamminen (1991, p. 62) noted this among his Scandinavian sample; the failure to communicate such experiences starts in childhood, as we have discussed in Chapter 4. This may well account for the persistence of the belief that such experiences are uncommon. The irony is that at least one-third of the population claims to have such experiences, but few people talk about them publicly. This hidden dimension of religious experience is well documented and can be clarified by other studies, to be discussed below. However, before we discuss these studies, one cautionary note is needed—one that confronts the issue of the language and experience central to much of the conceptual and empirical literature on mysticism.

A Cautionary Note: Mysticism and the Paranormal

Since its inception, North American psychology has been linked in the popular mind with psychic phenomena. As Coon (1992) has documented, many founding North American psychologists fought hard to separate the emerging science of psychology from "spiritualism" and "psychic," to which it was connected in the popular mind. Few psychologists, then or now, believe in the reality of parapsychological phenomena. Hood (1994, 2000a) has identified religion and parapsychology as perhaps the most controversial research area in the psychology of religion.

Yet within research on mysticism, several empirical facts emerge that are problematic. Several of the key theoreticians and empirical researchers have explicitly linked mysticism to parapsychology, with varying degrees of sympathy to both. These include such major figures as Greeley (1975), Hardy (1965, 1966), and Hood (1989, 2008a). Historians have also documented the relationship of paranormal phenomena to the history of religious experience in North American Protestantism (Coon, 1992; Taves, 1999). Second, in classifications of open-ended responses to single-item questions to measure mysticism, one of the most common code categories is "paranormal." Thus many persons who affirm what the researcher assumes to be a mystical or numinous item are in fact reporting paranormal experiences, such as telepathy, clairvoyance, or contact with the dead. Third, survey studies of mysticism commonly include items to assess paranormal experiences. For instance, paranormal experiences are included in the 1984, 1988, and 1989 GSS data. In virtually every survey, paranormal and mystical experiences are positively correlated: Persons who report paranormal experiences often report mystical experiences as well, and vice versa. Seldom is only one

type of experience reported. Further support for this claim is that factor analysis of survey items including mysticism and paranormal experience indicate that extrasensory perception, clairvoyance, contact with the dead, and mysticism form a single factor; this means that these are empirically measuring one thing in the popular mind. Thalbourne and his colleagues propose the term “transliminality” to account for the common factor underlying all these experiences (Thalbourne, Bartemucci, Delin, Fox, & Nofi, 1997; Thalbourne & Delin, 1999). If we exclude *déjà vu* experiences, which are also included in survey studies but neither conceptually nor empirically linked to paranormal experiences, the pattern of affirmative responses is as high as or higher than the range of affirmative responses to religious items. As an example, Table 11.2 compares the distribution of affirmative responses to three items assessing paranormal experiences with the distribution of such responses to the Greeley question about mysticism.

Clearly, Table 11.2 reveals that reports of parapsychological experiences are at least as common as those of mystical experiences. This fact, combined with the strong intercorrelation among parapsychological and religious items that in a general sample often yield a single factor, suggest that what is being tapped in these surveys is some assertion of experiencing a reality different from that postulated by mainstream science (Targ, Schlitz, & Irwin, 2000; Thalbourne et al., 1997; Thalbourne & Delin, 1999). However, the nature of that reality is open to serious question. We have seen that open-ended responses to survey questions yield a wide range of experiences. It is likely that some respondents simply want to affirm experiences that offer evidential support not only for alternative beliefs, but also for their own self-importance. Furthermore, it is likely that to tease out separate reports of such experiences as mystical and numinous experiences would require studies of sophisticated populations for whom such distinctions can be made, in terms of both conceptualizations and actual experience. However, it would seem that sampling from religiously committed persons would best

TABLE 11.2. Comparison of Affirmative Responses to Four Questions about Mystical or Paranormal Experiences in 3 Years of the GSS

Year	Extrasensory perception	Clairvoyance	Contact with the dead	Mysticism
1984	<i>n</i> = 1,439 67%	<i>n</i> = 1,434 30%	<i>n</i> = 1,445 42%	<i>n</i> = 1,442 41%
1988	<i>n</i> = 1,456 64%	<i>n</i> = 1,440 28%	<i>n</i> = 1,459 40%	<i>n</i> = 1,451 32%
1989	<i>n</i> = 922 58%	<i>n</i> = 983 23%	<i>n</i> = 991 35%	<i>n</i> = 988 30%

Note. The four questions asked were as follows:

Mysticism: Have you ever felt as though you were close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself?

Extrasensory perception: Have you ever felt as though you were in touch with someone when they were far away from you?

Clairvoyance: Have you ever seen events that were happening at a great distance as they were happening?

Contact with the dead: Have you ever felt as though you were in touch with someone who had died?

Adapted from Fox (1992, p. 422). Copyright 1992 by the Association for the Sociology of Religion. Adapted by permission.

allow distinctions between the religious and parapsychological experiences often associated with religion but perhaps best independently identified. For instance, the conceptual literature on mysticism clearly separates paranormal experiences from mystical ones. Measurement studies that find a common factor such as the one noted above may need more sophisticated samples to separate responses to parapsychological and mystical items. Moreover, many religious traditions carefully dissociate themselves from what they would term “occult” practices.

Some empirical evidence for this view is that when samples are carefully selected for their religious identification, paranormal experiences are infrequently cited (if at all) as instances of religious experiences. For instance, Margolis and Elifson (1979) carefully solicited a sample of persons who were willing to affirm that they had had a religious experience that the researchers accepted as indicating some personal relationship to ultimate reality. Forty-five respondents were then carefully interviewed about their experiences; to avoid interviewer bias, a structured format was employed. The 69 experiences described were content-analyzed, yielding 20 themes. These were then factor-analyzed, yielding four factors—the major one of which was a mystical factor “very similar to the classical mystical experience described by Stace and others” (Margolis & Elifson, 1979, p. 62). Two of the other three factors (a life change experience factor and a visionary factor) were clearly religious experiences. One factor, vertigo experience, was a loss of control experienced negatively, often triggered by drugs or music. No paranormal experiences were reported. Thus it is likely that survey questions worded to avoid religious language probably elicit a variety of experiences, including paranormal ones, that otherwise would not be identified as religious by the respondents.

However, in a survey study in the San Francisco Bay Area, Wuthnow (1978) found not only that the majority of all respondents claimed to have experienced paranormal phenomena, but that those affirming that they had “ever been in close contact with the sacred or holy” were the most likely to report paranormal experiences. The conceptual literature on mysticism is replete with discussion of traditions that warn against confounding paranormal and mystical experiences, even though they are often related both empirically and historically (Coon, 1992; Hood, 2000a; Taves, 1999; Zollschan, Schumaker, & Walsh, 1995). It is unlikely that members of the general population make such distinctions, because they usually lack either the experiential base or the conceptual sophistication to make such distinctions. As Yamane and Polzer (1994) have argued, religiously committed persons may be quite adept at distinguishing religious experiences from other types of intense or anomalous experiences. Of course, some people outside mainstream religious traditions may define paranormal experiences as “religious,” or more likely by the more general term “spiritual.” It is likely that the specific presence or absence of the term “God” in survey items produces different results, in that persons committed to a mainstream religion are most likely to respond to religious language and to make distinctions among various experiences based upon religious knowledge.

For instance, Orenstein (2002) used data from Project Canada, which polls a representative sample of Canadians every 5 years. Using 1995 data based upon 1,765 cases, he found that persons who reported conventional religious beliefs were *more* likely to report paranormal beliefs. He concluded that some amount of religious belief is a necessary condition for belief in the paranormal. However, religious belief should not be equated with religious participation: Orenstein found that among those who were religious (church, etc.) attenders, there was a decreased belief in the paranormal. Thus it was among religious believers who were not

religious attenders that belief in the paranormal was strongest. He suggests that this finding is characteristic of a postmodern spiritual journey (Orenstein, 2002, p. 310)—something that we discuss in more depth below when we confront the issue of distinctions between “religion” and “spirituality.”

Clearly, avoiding religious language in survey questions encourages the reporting of a wider range of experiences. Likewise, it is important to distinguish between religious belief and nonreligious attendance. Many religious believers are not religious attenders and are more likely to identify themselves as “spiritual but not religious,” as we discuss more fully latter in this chapter. Teasing out reports of experiences from a whole host of complex factors affecting their reporting requires more complex techniques than the methodology of survey research permits. Some of these issues have been explored in more measurement-based studies, many of which are correctional. However, there are also more laboratory-based and quasi-experimental studies. These permit even more precise identification of determinants of the reports of mystical experience.

Measurement Studies

Academic psychology of religion remains heavily committed to what Gorsuch (1984) has called the “measurement paradigm.” It continues to influence the new multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm proposed for the psychology of religion (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). One goal of measurement is to create reliable scales from clearly operationalized concepts. Many have thought that religious experiences, particularly the mystical varieties, cannot be reliably measured. However, two approaches to their measurement have been reasonably successful and have been used in several studies.

The Religious Experience Episodes Measure: The Influence of James

One approach to measurement of mystical experiences has been to operationalize and quantify what might be called the “literary exemplar approach” of many of the more open-ended studies discussed above. Laski and Hardy gave particular examples of experiences and asked respondents whether they had ever had an experience like the one described. Hood (1970) essentially systematized this procedure in constructing the Religious Experience Episodes Measure (REEM). He selected 15 experiences from James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, presented them in booklet form, and had respondents rate on a 5-point scale the degree to which they had ever had an experience like each of these. Hood’s approach standardized the experiences presented to research subjects, and allowed a quantification of the report of religious experience by summing the degree of similarity of one’s own experiences to those described in the REEM. Rosegrant (1976) modified the REEM by rephrasing “the elegant 19th century English” (p. 306) and reducing the number of items from 15 to 10. Examples of REEM items as modified by Rosegrant are presented in Table 11.3.

Both Hood’s initial version and Rosegrant’s modified version of the REEM have high internal consistencies, suggesting that the experiences described cluster together. Unpublished factor analysis of the REEM also yields a single factor. Overall, the use of explicit or implicit religious language suggests that the REEM is best used with religiously committed samples. It also reflects religious experience perhaps most common in North American Protestant experience—a common criticism leveled against James’s classic text, from which items for the REEM were selected. Holm (1982) found it difficult to make a meaningful translation

TABLE 11.3. Items from the Modified REEM

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>To what extent have you ever had an experience like this?</u></p> <p>God is more real to me than any thought or person. I feel his presence, and I feel it more as I live in closer harmony with his laws. I feel him in the sunshine, or rain, and my feelings are best described as awe mixed with delirious restfulness.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Or like this?</u></p> <p>I would suddenly feel the mood coming when I was at church, or with people reading, but only when my muscles were relaxed. It would irresistibly take over my mind and will, last what seemed like forever, and disappear in a way that resembled waking from anesthesia. One reason I think that I dislike this kind of trance was that I could not describe it to myself; even now I can't find the right words. It involved the disappearance of space, time, feeling, and the things I call my self. As ordinary consciousness disappeared, the sense of underlying essential consciousness grew stronger. At last nothing remained but a pure, abstract, self.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Or like this?</u></p> <p>Once, a few weeks after I came to the woods, I thought perhaps it was necessary to be near other people for a happy and healthy life. To be alone was somewhat unpleasant. But during a gentle rain, while I had these thoughts, I was suddenly aware of such good society in nature, in the pattern of drops and every sight and sound around my house, that the fancy advantages of being near people seemed insignificant, and I haven't thought about them since. Every little pine needle expanded with sympathy and befriended me. I was so definitely aware of something akin to me that I thought no place could ever be strange.</p>

Note. From Rosegrant (1976) as adapted from Hood (1970). (Also see Hill & Hood, 1999a, pp. 222–224.) Copyright 1976 by the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Reprinted by permission.

of the REEM into Swedish, and had to create a version of the REEM appropriate to Swedish culture by selecting Nordic tales.

Hood (1970) initially created the REEM to test the hypothesis that intrinsically religious persons would score higher on such a measure than extrinsically religious persons would. In a sample of college students, this hypothesis was supported, with intrinsic persons scoring significantly higher on the REEM than extrinsic persons. These findings are compatible with the survey research described above, in which religiously committed persons are often identified to have high rates of reported mystical experiences. It further suggests, however, that among religiously committed individuals, intrinsic persons have higher scores (and hence perhaps report more experiences) than extrinsic persons. Using Allport's Intrinsic and Extrinsic scales to create a fourfold typology, based upon median splits on the Intrinsic and Extrinsic scales, indicated that "indiscriminately pro" (IP) persons (with high Extrinsic/high Intrinsic scores) could not be distinguished from intrinsic persons on the basis of their REEM scores. Likewise, "indiscriminately anti" (IA) persons (with low Extrinsic/low Intrinsic scores) could not be distinguished from extrinsic persons on the basis of their REEM scores. Survey researchers have often worried about "false positives" and "false negatives" in their surveys. How do we know that persons who report experiences are telling the truth? Some might not have had the experiences they report (false positives). On the other hand, how do we know that persons denying these experiences are telling the truth? Some may refuse to admit experiences they have had (false negatives).

In this study, Hood (1970) linked the methodological problem of distinguishing between intrinsic and IP persons and between extrinsic and IA persons with the possibility that IP persons often represent false positives and IA persons represent false negatives with respect to reports of mystical experience. The basis for this hypothesis is that Allport believed the indiscriminate types to be motivated by conflicting stances with respect to religion: IA persons may deny religious impulses they may in fact feel, while IP persons may feign religious impulses they may not actually experience. It is this sort of dynamic and conflictual process that Allport and Ross (1967, p. 442) felt would make the indiscriminate categories potentially of significant research interest and of “central significance” for Allport’s theory.

In a second study, Hood (1978b) replicated the relationship between Allport’s fourfold typology and REEM scores. This time, using Rosegrant’s modification of the REEM and categorizing persons according to their religious type produced similar high REEM scores for intrinsic and IP persons and similar low scores for extrinsic and IA persons, as indicated in Table 11.4.

In order to directly test the possibility that the indiscriminate categories might represent false positives (in the case of IP persons) and false negatives (in the case of IA persons), Hood had interviewers in a double-blind condition conduct a bogus interview that included nearly 40 personal and religious questions. These served as baseline data and also served to mask the key final question, which was prefaced by the comment that many of the preceding questions were designed to tap whether or not one had ever had a mystical experience. Persons were then asked whether they had in fact ever had such an experience. The answer to this key question, whether “yes” or “no,” was then analyzed with a “Stress Analyzer,” a device that measures stress by means of detecting small voice tremors. Each subject’s stress level was measured by comparing the affirmation or denial of mystical experience to the baseline levels of stress in response to the bogus inventory. The numbers of persons affirming and denying mystical experiences, and the numbers showing stress when responding, are reported in Table 11.5 according to religious type.

As predicted, the proportions of persons affirming mystical experiences were similar in the intrinsic and IP groups, as were the proportions denying mystical experiences in the extrinsic and IA groups. However, intrinsic persons as a group expressed little stress when affirming mystical experiences, while IP persons showed much stress. The case was less clear for extrinsic persons. Still, more than half the IA persons exhibited stress, and while many did so when reporting mystical experiences, it may be that indiscriminate persons (whether

TABLE 11.4. REEM Scores According to Religious Type

Religious type	Score
Intrinsic ($n = 31$)	Mean = 48.81, $SD = 12.21$
IP ($n = 46$)	Mean = 50.89, $SD = 14.79$
Extrinsic ($n = 39$)	Mean = 39.51, $SD = 17.07$
IA ($n = 31$)	Mean = 39.13, $SD = 18.8$

Note. $F(1, 143) = 15.69, p < .05$; post hoc comparisons grouped according to significant differences *between* clustered categories, at least $p < .05$. Categories *within* parentheses did not differ: (IP, I); (IA, E). Adapted from Hood (1978b, p. 426). Copyright 1978 by the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Adapted by permission.

TABLE 11.5. Affirmation and Denial of Mystical Experience and Associated Stress by Religious Type

Religious type	Mystical experience		Stress level	
	Affirming	Denying	High	Low
Intrinsic ($n = 46$)	28	3	3	28
IP ($n = 31$)	40	6	31	15
Extrinsic ($n = 39$)	3	36	8	31
IA ($n = 31$)	12	19	18	13

Note. There was an error in the original article: The numbers for mystical experience for the extrinsic group were reversed. All differences were significant at least at $p < .05$ for all groups except the IA group for both mystical experience and stress. Adapted from Hood (1978b, p. 427). Copyright 1978 by the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Adapted by permission.

pro or not) indicate stress when talking about their religion (or lack of it), due to their conflictual stance with respect to religion. In any case, the large number of IP persons affirming mystical experiences with great stress is consistent with the possibility that they are “false positives,” attempting to appear religious by reporting experiences they believe they should have had but perhaps have not had.

However, it is also possible that as Rosegrant (1976, p. 307) found, stress is often associated with the report of mystical experience; this was indicated by a .29 ($p < .05$) correlation between REEM scores and a measure of stress in a nature setting with 51 students. Although Rosegrant did not measure religious orientation in his study, it may be that the *lack* of correlation between mysticism and a measure of meaningfulness used in his study indicates that mystical experiences are experienced as stressful only when subjects are asked for a meaningful religious framework for interpretation. Consistent with this claim is that mystical experience as measured by the REEM is not only higher among intrinsically oriented persons, but also among religious denominations with strong norms for eliciting and interpreting mystical experiences.

Rosegrant's finding that mystical experiences as measured by the REEM were associated with stress experiences in a solitary nature setting may be misleading. It is unlikely that stress per se should serve to elicit mystical experience. Rather, the incongruity between anticipatory stress and setting stress is postulated to be a likely trigger of mysticism. In a study to test this hypothesis specifically in a nature setting, Hood (1978a) administered Rosegrant's modification of the REEM to 93 males who, as part of the requirements for graduation from a private high school, participated in a week-long outdoors program. One portion of this program entailed having students “solo.” Each student was taken alone by Hood into a wilderness area; was issued minimal equipment (a tarp, water, and a mixture of nuts and candy for food); and was then left to spend the night in solitude. Various students were taken out over a five-night period, regardless of weather conditions. As some indication of the power of this experience, 29 of the 93 participants “broke solo,” meaning that they returned to camp before dawn. Before each outing, anticipatory stress was measured by having the students fill out a measure of subjective stress. In addition, setting stress was fortuitously varied by the fact that some students soloed on nights when there were strong rain and thunderstorms. Table 11.6 presents the means on the REEM for participants in this exercise, according to

TABLE 11.6. Mean REEM Scores for Participants under High- and Low-Stress Nature Solo Conditions, According to Anticipatory Stress Levels

Anticipatory stress	Setting stress	
	High	Low
High	32.44 (<i>SD</i> = 12.75) (<i>n</i> = 16)	52.83 (<i>SD</i> = 14.72) (<i>n</i> = 12)
Low	51.43 (<i>SD</i> = 9.37) (<i>n</i> = 21)	42.07 (<i>SD</i> = 4.95) (<i>n</i> = 15)

Note. Adapted from Hood (1978a, p. 283). Copyright 1978 by Blackwell Publishing, Ltd. Adapted by permission.

anticipatory stress and setting stress conditions. Appropriate statistical tests indicated not only that set–setting incongruity elicited higher REEM scores, but that it made no difference whether the incongruity was between high anticipatory stress and low setting stress or low anticipatory stress and high setting stress. Either incongruity would work.

Subcultural differences in the emphasis upon and support of intense religious experiences should also be reflected in REEM scores. Hood and Hall (1977) had anthropologists select five REEM items deemed “culturally fair” in order to compare four samples. All participants were Catholics and were matched for education, gender, age, and socioeconomic status. The four groups were Native Americans, acculturated Mexican Americans (spoke English 100% of the time), less acculturated Mexican Americans (spoke Spanish at least 25% of the time), and European Americans. As hypothesized, the two groups whose subcultures encourage intense experiences (Native Americans, less acculturated Mexican Americans) had higher REEM scores than either European Americans or acculturated Mexican Americans. The matching on relevant variables suggest that differences in the REEM scores reflect genuine subcultural differences in either the experiences themselves or the reporting of such experiences.

Several investigators have postulated that mystical and other intense religious experiences are related to and perhaps often elicited by hypnotic trance states. For instance, Gibbons and Jarnette (1972) suggest that at least some religious experiences may be trance states induced by stimuli outside awareness. Both historians (Taves, 1999) and anthropologists (Lewis, 1971) have long argued for the similarity between hypnotic and religious ecstatic states. Hood (1973a) found a correlation between the original form of the REEM and the Harvard Group Scale of Hypnotic Susceptibility (Shor & Orne, 1962) of .36 ($p < .01$) in a sample of 81 fundamentalist Protestants willing to be hypnotized. This is consistent with the finding that fundamentalist Protestants who report significant conversion experiences are also hypnotically suggestible (Gibbons & Jarnette, 1962), and with the historical linkage of hypnosis with Protestant conversion experiences in North America (Taves, 1999). Perhaps the loss of sense of self reported in mystical experience parallels the loss of self in hypnotic states. However, we must be careful *not* to equate mysticism and hypnosis on the basis of similar processes that might operate in both.

It is also worth hypothesizing that the wide diversity of triggers or conditions facilitating mystical experiences (as noted in survey and other studies) may have in common the fact that an individual fascinated by any given trigger experiences a momentary loss of sense of self,

being “absorbed” or “fascinated” by his or her object of perception. Tellegen and Atkinson (1974) have proposed “absorption,” or openness to absorbing and self-altering states, to be a trait related to hypnosis. The only empirical study using both their measure of absorption and a measure of mysticism is a study by Mathes (1982) relating mysticism, absorption, and romantic love. Unfortunately, Mathes did not report the correlation between mysticism and absorption. However, in his study, a measure of romantic love (Rubin, 1970) was correlated with mysticism for both males and females. This is consistent with being fascinated or “absorbed” by the object of interest in both experiences. It is also consistent with the fact that both love and sexuality are frequently cited as triggers of mysticism in open-ended questionnaire and survey studies.

The relationship between mysticism and hypnosis has been negatively interpreted, particularly by psychodynamically oriented investigators. Both hypnotic susceptibility and intense religious experiences, especially mystical ones, are interpreted either as regressions to early states of ego development or as signs of weak adult ego development (Allison, 1961; Owens, 1972). Both Hood (1985) and Parsons (1999) have noted that claims to a relationship between weak ego development and religious experience are derived from primarily a priori theoretical commitments of dynamic theorists that not only are conceptually unwarranted, but lack empirical support. In the only direct empirical test of a relationship between weak ego development and intense religious experience, both the conceptual and empirical inadequacies of this hypothesized relationship were demonstrated.

Hood (1974) administered the most psychometrically sophisticated measure of ego strength (Barron’s [1953] ego strength scale) to a sample of 82 college students who also took the initial 15-item version of the REEM. Overall, there was a significant negative correlation ($r = -.31$) between the REEM and Barron’s scale, appearing to support the claim that intense experience is related to weak ego strength. However, part of the problem is conceptual, in that Barron’s scale contains several religiously worded items; these religiously worded items are scored so that agreement indicates weak ego strength. This suggests a conceptual bias against religious experience, so that one can simply assume that many religious beliefs reflect poor ego development and then use them as a measure of weak ego strength. Hood separated Barron’s scale into two parts: the religiously worded items and the residual, nonreligiously worded items. Correlating these with the REEM yielded markedly different results, as noted in Table 11.7.

TABLE 11.7. Correlations between the REEM and Barron’s Total Ego Strength Scale, Religiously Worded Items, and Residual Items

	Nonreligiously worded items	Religiously worded items	REEM
Total ego strength scale	.47*	.93*	-.31*
Religiously worded items		-.46*	-.55*
Nonreligiously worded items			-.16

Note. Adapted from Hood (1974, p. 66). Copyright 1974 by the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Adapted by permission.

* $p < .01$.

Inspection of this table is instructive in two senses. First, negative correlations, supposedly indicating weak ego strength among persons reporting mystical experiences, were found with religiously worded items scored to indicate weak ego strength! This link reveals the conceptual basis of these items, and confounds many supposedly empirical findings. Removing the religious items removed any significant relationship between weak ego strength and religious experience. Furthermore, a nondynamically oriented measure developed for use in survey research revealed that among a sample of 114 college students, those with higher adequacy in psychological functioning as measured by this index had significantly higher REEM scores than those with lower adequacy as measured by this index.

Thus not only is there little conceptual or empirical support for the claim that weak ego strength must characterize persons who have intense religious experiences; such persons may be *more* psychologically adequate than those who do not report such experiences. This latter claim is consistent with the normality of the report of mystical and numinous experiences noted in survey studies, and also with theories that are more sympathetic to religion. For instance, Maslow's (1964) popular theory of self-actualization postulates that more actualized persons are most likely to have and report "peak experiences" (Maslow's term for mystical and other related experiences). Although his theory has generated little rigorous empirical research to support this claim, it serves as a useful conceptual counter to dynamic theories that postulate a relationship between regression and religious experience, for which there is also little rigorous empirical support.

The Mysticism Scale (M Scale): The Influence of Stace

James was the source for the range of experiences, both numinous and mystical, selected for the REEM. One criticism of the REEM is that while it does contain both numinous and mystical experiences according to the criteria discussed earlier, it is not particularly theory-driven. However, this is not the case with the Mysticism Scale (M Scale; Hood, 1975). It was developed as a specific operationalization of Stace's (1960) phenomenological work, in which he identified both introvertive and extrovertive mysticism and their common core. It is commonly employed as the most widely used empirical measure of mysticism (Lukoff & Lu, 1988).

Prior to the development of the M Scale, Stace's criteria of mysticism had influenced assessments in psychedelic research seeking to document the ontological validity of experiences elicited under drugs. Stace's criteria were developed under the assumption of causal indifference. That is, the examples used by Stace were accepted as mystical, whether elicited under drug conditions or not (Stace, 1960, pp. 29–31). Research Box 11.2 presents a summary of, and follow-up data from, what is perhaps the most famous study in the psychology of religion—Pahnke's (1966) Good Friday experiment.

THE JOHN HOPKINS STUDY

In a recent study, Griffiths, Richards, McCann, and Jesse (2006) sought to advance the Good Friday study. This benchmark study was a significant advance over Pahnke's (1966) study for several reasons. First, it was a highly sophisticated (double-blind, between-groups, crossover) design conducted at a major American university. Thirty entheogenic naïve volunteers received psilocybin and methylphenidate (Ritalin) in counterbalanced order over two sessions. Meth-

RESEARCH BOX 11.2. Drugs and Mysticism: Pahnke's "Good Friday" Experiment
(Pahnke, 1966; Doblin, 1991)

In the psychology of religion's most famous and controversial study, Pahnke, as part of his doctoral dissertation, administered the drug psilocybin or a placebo in a double-blind study of 20 volunteers, all graduate students at Andover–Newton Theological Seminary. The subjects met to hear a broadcast of a Good Friday service after they had been given either psilocybin (experimental group) or nicotinic acid (placebo group). Participants met in groups of four, each consisting of two experimental subjects and two controls matched for compatibility. Each group had two leaders assigned, one of whom had been given psilocybin. Immediately after the service and then 6 months later, participants were administered a questionnaire, part of which consisted of Stace's specific common-core criteria of mysticism.

Nearly a quarter of a century later, from November 1986 to October 1989, Doblin contacted the original participants in the experiment. By either phone or personal contact, he was able to interview nine of the control participants and seven of the experimental participants from the original study. In addition, he was able to administer Pahnke's questionnaire to them. Thus we have the responses on Stace's criteria of mysticism immediately after the service, then 6 months later, and finally nearly 25 years later. Assigning each score as the percentage of the possible maximum for that criteria, according to Pahnke's original procedure, yields the following results.

Stace category	Original Pahnke study				Doblin follow-up study (nearly 25 years later)	
	Immediate		6 months later			
	Exptls. (n = 10)	Controls (n = 10)	Exptls. (n = 10)	Controls (n = 10)	Exptls. (n = 7)	Controls (n = 9)
1. Unity:						
a. Internal	70%	8%	60%	5%	77%	5%
b. External	38%	2%	39%	1%	51%	6%
2. Transcendence of space/time	84%	6%	78%	7%	73%	9%
3. Positive affect	57%	23%	54%	23%	56%	21%
4. Sacredness	53%	28%	58%	25%	68%	29%
5. Noetic quality	63%	18%	71%	18%	82%	24%
6. Paradoxicality	61%	13%	34%	3%	48%	4%
7. Ineffability	66%	18%	77%	15%	71%	3%
8. Transience	79%	8%	76%	9%	75%	9%

Note. Our table has been constructed to allow direct comparison between Doblin's percentages and Pahnke's. Terms have been altered to correspond more closely to M Scale terminology where relevant. Pahnke's criteria were not employed by Stace (e.g., transience), and some of Stace's criteria were not employed by Pahnke (e.g., inner subjectivity). Paradoxicality is not assessed by the M Scale. Smith (2000, pp. 99–105) has revealed that in the original study, one experimental subject had a disruptive psychological experience that had to be handled by administration of thorazine—a fact unfortunately not reported in the original description of the study. Exptls., experimental participants.

ylphenidate was chosen as an active placebo control, because it and psilocybin have similar time course effects on blood pressure. An additional 6 randomly assigned volunteers received methylphenidate on the first two sessions and unblinded psilocybin on the third session. The purpose of this condition was to obscure the study design to both participants and guides. This was successful. Despite the use of an experienced entheogenic guide (who was drug-free when guiding) and additional knowledgeable monitors, almost one-quarter of sessions were misclassified, with methylphenidate identified as psilocybin or psilocybin identified as some other drug. Thus, unlike Pahnke's original study, this study was successful in its double-blinding.

The 36 participants (20 females) were volunteers with some religious and/or spiritual interests. They were all medically and psychologically healthy, without histories of prior entheogen use. Ages ranged from 24 to 64 (mean age was 46). Most were college graduates, and half had postgraduate degrees. Thirty participants were told that they would receive psilocybin and also that various other drugs might be administered (double-blind conditions), while six participants who received methylphenidate in the first two sessions were told that in the third session they would receive psilocybin. All participants met with the primary monitor over four sessions (for 8 hours total) and on four occasions (for 4 hours total) after each session. The primary purpose was to develop rapport and trust and to minimize any negative reactions.

This study was and is a longitudinal study, in that participants will be followed up and assessed on a wide variety of measures at various intervals. For our present purposes, we focus only upon the assessment of mysticism in this study. The assessment occurred in several ways. Before and 2 months after the study, participants took the M Scale. Seven hours after drug ingestion, participants took a modified version of Pahnke's questionnaire to assess mysticism. Thus both measures of mystical experience were directly related to Stace's phenomenologically identified "common core" (see below).

Results of the study indicated that 7 hours after drug ingestion, participants in the experimental group had significantly higher scores on the modified Pahnke questionnaire than the methylphenidate controls had. Likewise, 2 months after the experiment, psilocybin participants had higher scores on the Hood M Scale than the methylphenidate controls had. Scores on the Hood M Scale *after* psilocybin predicted the spiritual significance of the experience ($r = .77$) in a 12- to 14-month follow-up (Griffiths, Richards, Johnson, McCann, & Jesse, 2008). Scores on all three factors of the M Scale (Interpretation, Introvertive Mysticism, and Extrovertive Mysticism; see below) were significantly greater than the initial screening scores at both the 2-month and 12- to 14-month follow-ups for those receiving psilocybin. The majority of psilocybin participants rated their experience in the study as one of the five most spiritually significant in their lives at both follow-ups.

Pahnke's (1966) original study, Doblin's (1991) long-term follow-up, and the studies by Griffiths et al. (2006, 2008) are important in demonstrating the effect of set and setting on drug-facilitated mystical experiences, using Stace's explicit criteria. The general discussion of entheogens and religious/spiritual experience in Chapter 10 obviously applies to this experiment. Yet in terms of this chapter, Pahnke was the first investigator to attempt explicitly to operationalize Stace's criteria of mysticism. His original questionnaire has been variously modified through the years, with many additional, nonmystical items added. However, basic items relating to Stace's core criteria of mystical experience have remained virtually unchanged and allows direct comparisons between Pahnke original data, Doblin's follow-up study, and the studies by Griffiths and his colleagues. The most recent, expanded versions of

Pahnke's questionnaire include items relevant to peak experiences. It is clear that the concept of "peak experience" has been broadened to include a wide variety of experiences, only some of which are mystical in Stace's sense of the term. Fortunately, the studies by Griffiths and his colleagues employed the M Scale. The M Scale is explicitly designed to measure Stace's criteria of mysticism—distinct from a wide range of other experiences, including peak experiences. Thus this research can be seen as facilitating mystical experiences in solitary settings as verified by a widely used measure of mysticism. It also provides support for the common-core thesis (discussed below)—something the experienced guide in these studies strongly supports, based upon his own extensive experience with entheogens (Richards, 2008).

COMMON-CORE THEORISTS VERSUS DIVERSITY THEORISTS

Given that the M Scale is based upon Stace's demarcation of the phenomenological properties of mysticism, it is also of necessity driven by some of Stace's theoretical concerns. Most central is the fact that Stace has become the central figure in the debate between what we call the "common-core theorists" and the "diversity theorists." Common-core theorists assume that people can differentiate experience from interpretation, such that different interpretations may be applied to otherwise identical experiences. This theory is often characterized by its opponents as if it claims that there is an absolute, unmediated experience. In fact, Stace (1960) and other common-core theorists simply distinguish between degrees of interpretation, arguing that at some level different descriptions can mask quite similar if not identical experiences.

Diversity theorists—led by Katz (1977), who edited an entire volume in response to Stace's work—argue that no unmediated experience is possible, and that in the extreme, language is not simply used to interpret experience but in fact constitutes experience. Proudfoot (1985) is among the contemporary theorists (heavily influenced by psychology) who argue for the role of language in the constitution of, and not simply in the interpretation of, experience.

Just as Katz marshaled a series of scholars in opposition to Stace's common-core thesis, Forman has marshaled others in opposition to the diversity position of Katz. In two edited works (Forman, 1990b, 1998), scholars associated with Forman argue that at least with respect to introvertive mysticism, the diversity thesis fails. The basic argument is that since introvertive mysticism is an experience devoid of content, it cannot be qualified by various descriptors; nor can language play a role in its construction. Hence introvertive experience (identified as "pure conscious experience" by Forman, 1990a) may be variously interpreted after the fact, but as experience it lacks content. It thus is legitimately as Stace conceptualized it—a common core to mysticism independent of both culture and person—and has become the basis for constructing what Forman (1998) refers to as a "perennial psychology." Recently, Parsons (1999) has also championed this phrase.

Studies in the Good Friday tradition clearly establish that when entheogens are ingested under appropriate set and setting conditions, they can facilitate mystical experiences, in both group (Pahnke) and individual (Griffiths et al.) sessions. The consistent use of measures derived from Stace's common core indicates that these facilitated experiences are indistinguishable from mystical experiences that occur "spontaneously" or by other facilitated means, such as prayer or meditation (Nichols & Chemel, 2006). Thus psilocybin and even methylphenidate (Ditman et al., 1969) can serve as psychoactive sacramental substances. The Griffiths et al. research indicates that psilocybin is a more effective facilitator than methylphenidate. Stud-

ies in the Good Friday tradition can be interpreted to support the common-core thesis, in that both “spontaneous” and facilitated mystical experiences are indistinguishable as measured by Hood’s M Scale.

Although we cannot further engage this rich conceptual literature here, we should emphasize that three fundamental assumptions implicit in Stace’s work and in that of the common-core or perennialist psychologists. First, the mystical experience is itself a universal experience that is essentially identical in phenomenological terms, despite wide variations in ideological interpretation of the experience (the common-core assumption). Second, the core categories of mystical experience are not all definitionally essential to any particular mystical experience, since there are always borderline cases, based upon fulfillment of only some of the criteria. Third, the introvertive and extrovertive forms of mysticism are most conceptually distinct: The former is an experience of unity devoid of content (pure consciousness), and the latter is an experience of unity in diversity, one with content. The psychometric properties of the M Scale should reflect these assumptions, and insofar as they do, they are adequate operationalizations of Stace’s criteria. The question for now is this: Does empirical research support a common-core/perennialist conceptualization of mysticism and its interpretation?

FACTOR-ANALYTIC TESTS OF THE COMMON-CORE/PERENNIALIST CLAIM

The M Scale consists of 32 items (16 positively worded and 16 negatively worded items), covering all but one (paradoxicality) of the original common-core criteria of mysticism proposed by Stace. Independent investigators (Caird, 1988; Reinert & Stiffler, 1993) have supported Hood’s original work indicating that the M Scale contains two factors. For our purposes, it is important to note that Factor I consists of items assessing an experience of unity (introvertive or extrovertive), while Factor II consists of items referring both to religious and knowledge claims. This is compatible with Stace’s claim that a common experience (mystical experience of unity) may be variously interpreted. The factor analysis by Caird (1988) supported the original two-factor solution to the M Scale. Reinert and Stiffler (1993) also supported a two-factor solution, but suggested the possibility that religious items and knowledge items might emerge as separate factors. This would split the interpretative factor into religious and other modes of interpretation, which would not be inconsistent with Stace’s theory. This would allow for an even greater range of interpretation of experience—a claim to knowledge that can be either religiously or nonreligiously based. This is consistent with the distinction between spirituality and religion, to be discussed later in this chapter. However, the factor-analytic studies cited above were from definitive; notably, they suffered from adequate subject-to-items ratios. Overall, however, they consistently demonstrated two stable factors— one an experience factor associated with minimal interpretation; the other an interpretative factor, probably heavily religiously influenced.

Hood, Morris, and Watson (1993) proposed a three-factor solution to the M Scale, based upon a more adequate sample size. This three-factor solution fitted Stace’s phenomenology of mysticism quite nicely, in that both introvertive and extrovertive mysticism emerged as separate factors, along with a third interpretative factor. Hood and his colleagues then undertook to directly test Stace’s common-core theory of mysticism with both exploratory and confirmatory factor-analytic procedures.

A persistent problem with the M Scale is that it attempts to be neutral with respect to religious language. For instance, the scale refers to experience with ultimate reality, not to experience of union with God. However, the language of neutrality is perplexing, as empha-

sized by the diversity theorists: How do we know that union with God is the same experience as union with ultimate reality? Two issues are empirically relevant.

First, no language is neutral. Hence, to attempt to speak of union with “God” or “Christ” in language that references only “ultimate reality” suggests to some conservative religionists a “New Age” connotation. Likewise, to reference “God” or “Christ” is itself problematic for secularists. Although the distinction between experience and interpretation acknowledges that language is an important interpretative issue, it also forces us to focus upon the experiential basis from which genuine differences in interpretation can arise. Like texts, measurement scales use particular language and thus confound the distinction between interpretation and experience. However, empirical methods are available to suggest how this confound can be clarified. One method is to show similar factor structures despite different language.

Second, individuals demand that profound experiences be interpreted. In Barnard’s (1997) extended treatment of James’s theory of mysticism, a mystical experience is defined as one that is necessarily “transformative” with respect to contact with some transpersonal reality. Although we do not accept this definition of mysticism as properly Jamesian, it does indicate that intense transformative experiences will be acknowledged in some language that identifies, defines, and expresses what the experienced transpersonal reality is. In Jamesian terms, this language is less constructionist of the experience than descriptive of it. Therefore, those who have experienced “ultimate reality” may not wish to claim it as “God.” Even more, Christians may want that reality to be identified as “Christ”—something that non-Christian mystics may eschew. Thus the claim of what is experienced is important as part of the “social construction” of the expression of experience. However, differently expressed experiences may have similar structures if we can avoid confounds with language issues.

Hood and Williamson (2000) created two additional versions of the M Scale. Each paralleled the original M Scale, but, where appropriate, made references either to God or to Christ. Both the original M Scale and either the God-language version or the Christ-language version were given to relevant Christian-committed samples. The scales were then factor-analyzed to see whether similar structures would emerge. Basically, whether the M Scale items were phrased in terms of God, Christ, or more “neutral” words, the structures were identical. The structures for all three versions matched Stace’s phenomenologically derived model quite well. For all versions of the scale, clear introvertive, extrovertive, and interpretative factors emerged. The exception was that, as Hood and Williamson (2000) anticipated, ineffability emerged as part of the introvertive factor in all samples, and not as part of the interpretative factor (as suggested by Stace). However, as Hood and Williamson note, an experience devoid of content is inherently “ineffable,” as there is no content to describe.

In additional research, Hood et al. (2001) translated the M Scale into Persian and administered this scale to a sample of Iranian Muslims. The scale in its original English version was also administered to a U.S. sample. Confirmatory factor analysis was then used to directly compare Hood’s model of mysticism in both samples (with ineffability as part of introvertive mysticism) to other possible models, including Stace’s (where ineffability is part of the interpretative factor). The overall results showed that both Stace’s and Hood’s models were better than any other models, and that Hood’s model of mysticism was better than Stace’s. Thus, empirically, there is strong support to claim that as operationalized from Stace’s criteria, mystical experience is identical as measured across diverse samples, whether expressed in “neutral language” or with either “God” or “Christ” references. Both Stace’s and Hood’s versions of the basic structure of mysticism emerging from this research are presented in Table 11.8.

TABLE 11.8. Conceptual (Stace's) and Empirical (Hood's) Models of Mystical Experience: The Perennialist View

<u>The Stace model of mystical experience—phenomenologically derived</u>	
<i>Introvertive Mysticism</i>	<i>Extrovertive Mysticism</i>
a. Contentless Unity	a. Unity in Diversity
b. Timeless/Spaceless	b. Inner Subjectivity
<i>Interpretation</i>	
a. Noetic	
b. Religious	
c. Positive Affect	
d. Paradoxicality (not measured in M Scale)	
e. Ineffability (alleged)	
<u>The Hood model of mystical experience—empirically derived</u>	
<i>Introvertive Mysticism (12 items)</i>	<i>Extrovertive Mysticism (8 items)</i>
a. Contentless Unity items	a. Unity in Diversity items
b. Time/Space items	b. Inner Subjectivity items
c. Ineffability items	
<i>Interpretation (12 items)</i>	
a. Noetic items	
b. Religious items	
c. Positive Affect items	

Three-factor solutions to the M Scale clearly provide the most adequate overall measures of mysticism in terms of compatibility with Stace's theory. Furthermore, Hood's three-factor solution with ineffability as part of introvertive mysticism is clearly the most psychometrically adequate. It is preferred for future research. However, for now it seems fair to conclude that the perennialist view has strong empirical support, insofar as regardless of the language used in the M Scale, the basic structure of the experience remains constant across diverse samples and cultures. This is a way of stating the perennialist thesis in measurement-based terms.

Correlational and Empirical Research with the M Scale and Other Measures

Most empirical research with the M Scale to date has used the two-factor solution initially reported by Hood (1975), in which introvertive and extrovertive mysticism are not independently measured, forming as they do part of the minimal phenomenological factor (Factor I). Thus the majority of studies of mysticism to date using two-factor solutions do not separately identify differential predictions for introvertive and extrovertive mysticism, but rather merge these two as a single factor expressing experiences of unity (see Hood, 2002b).

The initial publication of the M Scale related it to several other measures. The M Scale might be anticipated to correlate with the REEM, since the latter contains a mixture of items relating to numinous and mystical experiences. However, given the overall religious language (explicit or implicit) in the REEM, it was anticipated that the interpretative factor

would correlate more strongly with the REEM than the phenomenological factor would. This was the case in a sample of 52 students enrolled at a Protestant religious college in the South: Factor I correlated .34 with the REEM, while Factor II correlated .56 with the REEM (Hood, 1975). It was also found in another sample of 83 college students that Factor I of the M Scale correlated (-.75) more strongly with a measure of ego permissiveness (Taft, 1970) than did Factor II (-.43) (Hood, 1975). Insofar as Taft's ego permissiveness measure is related to openness to a wide range of anomalous experiences, including ecstatic emotions, intrinsic arousal, and peak experiences, it is not surprising that Factor I correlated more strongly with this measure than Factor II. The differential correlation of Factors I and II in the two studies is congruent with Stace's theory that experience can be separated from interpretation in varying degrees. Factor I correlates more strongly with measures of experience minimally interpreted, and Factor II with measures of experience more extensively interpreted in religious language.

In Hood's (1975) original report, the M Scale factors correlated with a measure of Intrinsic religion in roughly the same magnitude in a sample of 65 fundamentalist college students enrolled in a religious college in the South ($I = .68$, $II = .58$), supporting the research noted above linking the REEM and Intrinsic religion. Furthermore, if in light of the assumption that intrinsically religious persons are likely to be frequent church attendees, Hood's (1976b) finding that both frequent attendees and nonattendees had similar high scores on Factor I of the M Scale, but only frequent church attendees had high Factor II scores, makes sense in terms of Stace's distinction between experience and interpretation. Both frequent attendees and nonattendees reported mystical experiences in terms of their minimal phenomenological properties of an experience of union, but only frequent church attendees were likely to interpret these experiences in religious terms. The nonattendees did not use traditional religious language to describe their experiences.

Holm (1982) prepared a Swedish translation of the M Scale and administered it to a sample of 122 Swedish informants. Unlike the REEM, the M Scale could be meaningfully translated into Swedish and could be studied similarly to the way it was investigated in North America. Holm not only confirmed a two-factor solution closely paralleling Hood's initial mysticism and interpretation factors, but also found that in correlating the M Scale with ratings of a person's most significant personal experiences, Factor I correlated best with experiences reported by individuals without a Christian profile, while Factor II best related to more traditional Christian experiences. The revised Swedish version of the REEM, using Nordic accounts of intense experiences appropriate to Finnish-Swedish culture, also showed similar patterns to Hood's research with the REEM in North America. Holm (1982) stated:

We also discovered one factor which could be called a general mysticism factor and another where the experience was interpreted on a religious/Christian basis. The "religious interpretation factor" had strong correspondences with religious quality in the interviews and with the background variables of prayer frequency, Bible study, church attendance and attitude towards Christianity. This factor thus covered experiences with an expressly Christian profile. It showed high correlations with the intrinsic scale, with the expressively Christian narratives on the REEM and with the religious quality on the interviews. Thus, overall, in a Finnish-Swedish culture the M Scale and REEM functioned very closely to how they function in American culture. (p. 273)

Interestingly, Holm also noted that the distinction between a general mysticism factor (or impersonal mysticism) and a religious factor (or personal mysticism) has parallels with early research on mysticism in Sweden by Söderblom (1963), who identified these as “infinity mysticism” and “personality mysticism,” respectively (see Holm, 1982, pp. 275–276). Holm (2008) has recently summarized his research on mysticism by noting that mysticism can occur both within and outside religious traditions. The latter is simply a generalized mysticism without need of specific religious interpretation.

Although the relationship between the religious factor of the M Scale and the more explicitly religiously worded REEM items is reasonable, the question of more general personality factors related to mysticism is of interest. M Scale scores have been correlated with scores on standardized personality measures in two studies. In one, Hood (1975) found that most scales of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), a widely used measure to assess pathology, failed to correlate with the M Scale. Furthermore, differential patterns of significant correlations between Factors I and II were compatible with a nonpathological interpretation of mysticism. For instance, Factor II (but not Factor I) significantly correlated with the Lie (L) scale of the MMPI. This scale presumably measures the tendency to lie or present oneself in a favorable social light. However, insofar as Factor II represents a traditional religious stance, Hood suggested that high L scores for Factor II may represent the fact that traditionally religious individuals are less likely to engage in deviant social behaviors as measured by the L scale. Factor I did significantly correlate with two scales on the MMPI concerned with bodily processes (Hypochondriasis) and intense experiential states (Hysteria), which in nonpathological terms are likely to be compatible with mystical experience.

Possible relationships between absorption or hypnosis, discussed above in connection with the REEM as a measure of religious experience are consistent with the work of Spanos and Moretti (1988). They directly correlated the M Scale with the Tellegen and Atkinson (1974) Absorption scale and with three measures of hypnosis. Overall, the M Scale correlated positively with all these measures. When mysticism was used as the criterion variable, regression analyses using the four hypnosis measures, absorption, and two other variables (neuroticism and psychosomatic symptoms) indicated that absorption was the single best predictor, accounting for 29% of the variance; hypnotic depth was second best, adding a further 5%. None of the other hypnosis scales, or the neuroticism or psychosomatic symptom scales, added predictive power. Spanos and Moretti concluded that although mystical experience can occur among distraught and troubled individuals, it is as frequent among psychologically untroubled people.

A study of the M Scale along with other indices of mysticism is relevant to this issue. Hood and Morris (1981a) took virtually all items used in previous empirical assessments of mysticism and factor-analyzed them into scales, all with adequate reliability. These were then administered to a sample of respondents who rated the items for their applicability to defining mysticism as they understood it. Next, they rated each item as to whether or not they had ever had experienced it. The respondents did not differ in knowledge about mysticism, including whether or not they personally identified themselves as having had a mystical experience. However, persons denying having a mystical experience did not mark items they knew to define mysticism as experiences they had had, whereas those affirming mystical experience did. Thus persons who were equally knowledgeable about mystical experiences differed in whether or not they marked an item as being experienced as a function of hav-

ing a mystical experience. This suggests that persons can know what mysticism is and yet not have an experience of it. This further suggests, despite the possibility that both demand characteristics and the abstract nature of many items assessing mysticism may contribute to “false positives” in studies of mysticism (Wulff, 2000), that respondents can be knowledgeable about mysticism and still deny that they have had the experience. Perhaps Scharfstein (1973) is correct in warning that mysticism may be more common than social scientists have heretofore thought. Certainly his claim to an “everyday mysticism” is supported by survey research and by measurement-based studies. It may be that the true fulfillment of mysticism, like love, may be rare, but few also are those who have no experience of it at all.

Triggers of Mystical Experience

Accepting that mystical experience is normal has led some to search for personal and cultural factors that affect what might be appropriate triggers for mystical experiences. Survey research has long established that a variety of triggers can elicit mystical experiences. Although some triggers are consistently reported—prayer; church attendance; significant life events, such as births and deaths; and experiences associated with music, sex, and entheogens—one seeks in vain for a common characteristic shared by such diverse triggers. Empirically, it is more useful to focus upon what triggers function to elicit mystical experience in different persons. Research Box 11.3 presents the results of a study in which the evaluation of experience was shown to be a function (1) of the normative legitimacy of the trigger, (2) of the experience, and (3) of the alleged open-mindedness of respondents.

Sex and eroticism are often cited as triggers of mystical experience. Consistent with the vast conceptual literature relating mysticism and eroticism (Kripal, 2001), Hood and Hall (1980) hypothesized that individuals would use similar gender-based descriptions to describe both mystical and erotic experiences. Open-ended descriptions of mystical and erotic experiences by both males and females were coded for the use of active, agentive language or receptive language. As predicted, females used receptive terms to describe both their erotic and mystical experiences. However, while males used agentive language to describe their sexual experiences, they did not describe their mystical experiences in such terms. Rating their mystical and erotic experiences on words independently established to be either agentive or receptive also showed that females described both erotic and mystical experiences in receptive terms, but that males described only their sexual experiences in agentive terms. The researchers have suggested that the compatibility of erotic and mystical experiences for females is aided by the masculine imagery common in the Christian tradition, which facilitates congruent expression of eroticism and mysticism for females but inhibits it for males. Consistent with this claim is a study by Mercer and Durham (1999), who found scores on the M Scale to be significantly correlated with scores on a measure of gender orientation; specifically, persons with female and androgynous orientations had higher M Scale scores than persons with masculine orientations. Mercer and Durham suggest that persons scoring high on the M Scale are those who have developed a feminine self-schema (cognitive structure), through which they process data in a way that facilitates the unity of reality and facilitation of mystical experiences. Similar arguments have been made within the conceptual literature on mysticism (Kripal, 2001).

Rather than focusing upon particular concrete triggers, Hood has argued that more abstract conceptualization may permit a more empirically adequate investigation of con-

RESEARCH BOX 11.3. Differential Evaluation of Experiences and Triggers by High- and Low-Dogmatism Persons (Hood, 1980)

Hood was interested in how the evaluation of intense experiences would vary as a function of the identification of triggers among open- and closed-minded persons. From published sources, he selected one true report each of an aesthetic, a mystical, and a religious experience, independently operationalized for equal intensity. These unlabeled experiences were then presented in a booklet along with Rokeach's (1968) Dogmatism scale, claimed to be a measure of "open-mindedness." Three versions of the booklet were constructed, so that the experiences described could be described as a result of drugs, prayer, or unspecified factors. The experiences were rated on an evaluative semantic differential scale, with higher scores indicating a more positive evaluation. This part of the study clearly showed that the more normative the experience, the more positively it was viewed, so that religious experiences were evaluated more positively overall. Aesthetic and mystical experiences were evaluated less positively overall than religious ones, but did not differ from each other in valence of evaluation. In addition, as predicted, the more normative the trigger, the more positively it affected the evaluation of the experience. Experiences triggered by prayer were more positively evaluated than those with unspecified triggers. Drug triggers lowered the evaluation of all experiences. These effects were most pronounced for the high-dogmatism persons. The actual mean evaluations for each experience coded by trigger for high- and low-dogmatism groups were as follows. (This table is based upon 93 low- and 93 high-dogmatism subjects; 31 subjects in each group rated the three experiences as triggered by drugs, 31 as triggered by prayer, and 31 as triggered by unspecified factors [none].)

Subjects		Aesthetic experience triggered by			Religious experience triggered by			Mystical experience triggered by		
		Drugs	Prayer	None	Drugs	Prayer	None	Drugs	Prayer	None
High-dogmatism	Mean	53.16	62.65	59.94	55.97	66.68	60.03	47.87	59.87	54.00
	SD	9.4	4.1	8.3	9.6	8.9	9.3	12.3	9.5	10.7
Low-dogmatism	Mean	51.988	61.32	57.86	54.50	62.10	59.61	48.02	57.45	53.65
	SD	9.9	7.3	9.0	8.7	8.1	8.6	11.4	9.7	10.7

Note. Adapted from Hood (1980). Copyright 1980 by the Religious Research Association. Adapted by permission.

ditions and circumstances that trigger mystical experience. In particular, theological and philosophical interest in the concept of "limits" is useful (Grossman, 1975). At the conceptual level, the idea of limits entails transcendence; in fact, awareness of limits makes the experience of transcendence possible. Perhaps the sudden contrast that occurs when a limit is suddenly transcended yields a contrast effect similar to a figure-ground reversal, in which what was previously unnoticed is thrown into stark relief. Hood (1977) has noted that such sudden contrasts are common in nature settings, particularly those in which stress is involved. The fact that nature is a common trigger of mystical experiences is well documented in survey studies, and often such experiences are associated with stress, which is itself sometimes cited as a trigger. In one study described earlier, the set-setting incongruity hypothesis was sup-

ported when the REEM was used as a measure. It has also been supported in research using the M Scale.

Hood (1977) took advantage of a week-long outdoors program at a private all-male high school. In this week-long program, graduating seniors took a trip in which they engaged in a variety of outdoor activities varying in degree of stress. Three particularly stressful activities were examined: rock climbing and rappelling (for the first time, for many students); whitewater rafting (down a river rated as difficult); and the experience (described earlier in this chapter) of staying alone in the woods at night with minimal equipment). A nonstressful activity (canoeing a calm river) was selected as a control. Just prior to participating in each activity, participants were administered a measure of subjective, anticipatory stress for that activity. Immediately after each activity, the participants completed the M Scale to assess mystical experience. The comparisons between set and setting stress for each high-stress activity supported the hypothesis that the interaction between these two types of stress elicits reports of mystical experience. It is important to note that anticipatory stress varied across situations, such that whether or not a particular person anticipated a given situation as stressful was not simply a function of its independently assessed situation stress. Second, in stressful situations, those anticipating low stress scored higher on mysticism than those anticipating high stress. Thus set–setting stress incongruity elicited reports of mystical experience—not simply stress per se, either anticipatory or situational. Additional support for this hypothesis was found by using the canoe activity as a control; no student anticipated this activity to be stressful. Given the congruity between anticipated stress and setting stress (both low), low M Scale scores resulted, as predicted. However, in high-stress activities anticipated as high in stress, low M Scale scores were also hypothesized and obtained. Only the incongruity between setting and anticipatory stress produced high M Scale scores. Furthermore, with only one exception, these results held for both Factor I and Factor II scores; this suggested not only that the minimal phenomenological properties of mysticism were elicited, but also that they were seen as religiously relevant in the broad sense of this term. This replicates the findings discussed above with solo experiences in a nature setting when the REEM was used as a measure.

The fact that both nature and prayer settings reliably elicit reports of mystical experience in traditionally religious persons has led some to suggest that prayer should be correlated with the report of mystical experience, particularly if the prayer is contemplative in nature. Hood and his colleagues have documented such a correlation in two separate studies, using a modified form of the M Scale (Hood, Morris, & Watson, 1987, 1989). They found that among persons who prayed or meditated regularly, intrinsically religious persons had higher M Scale scores than extrinsically religious persons, in terms of both the minimal phenomenological properties of mysticism and its religious interpretation. This finding is consistent with survey research by Poloma and Gallup (1991), in which meditative prayer was related to experiences of closeness to God. Thus several studies suggest that meditative prayer, as opposed to petitionary or other forms of prayer, relates to both mystical (unity) and numinous (nearness) experiences of God. Finney and Malony (1985c) have developed a theoretical model in which contemplative prayer should be a useful adjunct in psychotherapy when spiritual development is a treatment goal, and therapeutic progress should be associated with greater mystical awareness. However, they failed to find empirical support for their theory when mysticism as measured by the M Scale did not increase during successful therapy aimed at spiritual development, even though time spent in contemplative prayer did increase (Finney & Malony, 1985b).

Mystical experiences are common in nature and meditative prayer, both often solitary conditions. Hence factors that meaningfully enhance solitude may facilitate the report of mystical experience. Experimentally, it is possible to enhance solitude through the use of an isolation tank. If a religious set is given in an isolation tank, would the combination of set and enhanced isolation facilitate the report of mystical experience? Research Box 11.4 reports a study in which Hood and his colleagues explored this question.

Overall, then, studies (mostly employing the M Scale) have been successful in correlating mysticism with predicted variables of theoretical significance. Quasi-experimental studies involving efforts to elicit mystical experience have also produced useful results. It is simply not true that mystical experiences cannot be elicited under experimental or quasi-experimental conditions. Of course, we make no claim that investigators have caused such experiences—only that they have produced conditions under which such experiences are likely to occur.

Additional Measures of Mysticism

Although Hood's M Scale has been most commonly used in studies of mysticism, additional measures are associated with the work of Leslie Francis and his colleagues, and of Michael Thalbourne and his colleagues.

THE FRANCIS–LOUDEN MYSTICAL ORIENTATION MEASURES

Similar to Hood's use of Stace's common core criteria to develop the M Scale, Francis and Loudon (2000a) drew upon Happold's (1991) seven criteria of mysticism to develop two useful measures of mysticism. As Hood and his colleagues have done, Francis and his colleagues use phenomenology and measurement to complement one another in the best spirit of the call for a new multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm. The Francis–Louden measures operationalized Happold's seven criteria of mysticism: ineffability, noesis, transiency, passivity, oneness, timelessness, and true ego. Factor analyses confirmed the psychometric validity of the classifications and produced a long and a short measure; there is both a 21-item Index of Mystical Orientation (Francis & Loudon, 2000a) and a 9-item Short Index of Mystical Orientation (Francis & Loudon, 2004). Given Francis's established interest in Eysenck's personality theory, he and his colleagues have used these measures to demonstrate that mysticism is related to extroversion, but unrelated to neuroticism and psychoticism, in a large sample of Roman Catholic priests (Francis & Loudon, 2000b). This replicates earlier research with a sample of over 200 male clergy that found the same results (Francis & Thomas, 1996), as well as research by Argyle and Hills (2000) using an independently constructed measure of mysticism. However, in a study relevant to our discussion in Chapter 10 of Eastern and Western forms of meditation, Kaldor and his colleagues found a difference between a sample of Eastern meditators and a sample of Christians who prayed: Christian prayer was associated with low psychoticism scores, but Eastern meditation was associated with high psychoticism scores, as measured by a Revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Kaldor, Francis, & Fisher, 2002).

In two earlier studies, Francis and his colleague attempted to test Ross's hypothesis that in terms of Jungian theory as operationalized in the Myers–Briggs scale, the perceiving function is crucial for individual differences in religious expression (Ross, Weiss, & Jackson,

RESEARCH BOX 11.4. The Differential Elicitation of Mystical Experience in an Isolation Tank
(Hood, Morris, & Watson, 1990)

Solitude is often cited as one trigger of religious and mystical experiences. Hood and his colleagues placed individuals in a sensory isolation tank to maximize solitude. The tank was approximately 7.5 feet in diameter and 4 feet high. It contained a hydrated magnesium sulfate solution with a density of 1.30 grams/cc, a constant temperature of 34.1°C, and a depth of 10 inches. The tank was totally enclosed, lightproof, and soundproof. It was equipped with an intercom system so that a participant could communicate with an experimenter in another room.

Each participant in the study was placed in the isolation tank after being told about the typical images likely to occur under these conditions. In addition, participants were given a specific religious set (in boldface) or nonreligious control set (*italics*) as follows:

I am now going to invite you to keep silent for a period of ten minutes. First you will try to attain silence, as total silence as possible of heart and mind. Having attained it, you will expose yourself to whatever (**religious revelation/insight**) it brings.^a

Participants had previously taken the Allport and Ross (1967) religious orientation scales and could be classified as intrinsic, extrinsic, and “indiscriminately pro” (IP) individuals. A modified version of the M Scale was used that allowed a simple “yes” or “no” response to each item, so that the participants could respond over the intercom while still in the isolation tank. Results were as predicted: Under the religious set, both intrinsic and IP participants reported more religious interpretation of their experiences (higher Factor II scores) than extrinsic participants. However, the IP participants reported less minimal phenomenological properties of mysticism (lower Factor I scores) than either the intrinsic or the extrinsic participants. This suggests that IP participants wished to “appear” religious by affirming religious experiences they did not actually have. Extrinsic participants had these experiences, as indicated by their Factor I scores, but did not describe them in religious language. Intrinsic participants both had the experiences and described them in religious language.

Further support for these views was evident in the control conditions. When participants were not presented with a religious set, none of the groups differed in the minimal phenomenological properties of mysticism (Factor I). However, intrinsic persons still interpreted their experiences in religious terms (Factor II), whereas neither extrinsic nor IP persons described their experiences in religious language in the control condition. Thus the isolation tank elicited similar experiences in subjects of all religious types. The difference in Factor II under set conditions for the types suggests that intrinsic persons consistently interpreted their tank experiences as religious; extrinsic persons consistently interpreted their tank experiences as less religious; and IP persons only interpreted their tank experiences as religious when given an explicit religious set.

^aThese instructions were adapted from those used by de Mello (1984) in his study of prayer.

1996). Using the Short Index of Mystical Orientation, both Francis (2002) and Francis and Loudon (2000b) failed to find support for Ross's hypothesis. However in a sample of over 300 individuals who stayed at a retreat house associated with Ampleforth Abbey, Francis, Village, Robbins, and Ineson (2007) found clear support for Ross's hypothesis, using the full 21-item Index of Mystical Orientation.

Edwards and Lowis (2008b) have proposed a measure of attitudes to mysticism as distinguished from reported mystical experience. This promising measure has been used in one study, suggesting that attitudes toward mysticism and mystical experience as measured by the long version of the Francis–Louden Index of Mystical Orientation may relate differently to personality traits such as psychoticism (Edwards & Lowis, 2008a). Research on attitudes toward mysticism and the three factors of Hood's M Scale is needed, especially since attitudes toward mysticism may be more influenced by interpretative factors than reports of mystical experience may be (Edwards & Lowis, 2008a, p. 156).

THALBOURNE'S MEASURE OF TRANSLIMINALITY

Hood (2008c) has argued that scholars have overemphasized James's commitment to a uniform treatment of mysticism. Barnard (1997, p. 63) has noted that ultimately James equates mystical experience with any submarginal or subliminal state, including a wide variety of experiences that defy easy classification. Among these submarginal experiences is James's "diabolical mysticism," a "sort of religious mysticism turned upside down" (James, 1902/1985, p. 337). In this sense, the measure of transliminality developed by Thalbourne (1998) is the most nearly Jamesian measure of mysticism we have. It is a single-factor scale measuring essentially subliminal states of consciousness. Thalbourne and Delin (1994, p. 25) have coined the term "transliminal" to refer to a common underlying factor that is largely an involuntary susceptibility to inwardly generated psychological phenomena of an ideational and affective kind. However, transliminality is also related to a hypersensitivity to external stimulation (Thalbourne, 1998, p. 403); as such, transliminality becomes a Jamesian measure of the submarginal region where, as noted above, "'seraph and snake' abide there side by side" (James, 1902/1985, p. 338).

Lange and Thalbourne (2007) have also developed a single-factor measure of mysticism that is more restricted than the transliminal domain, but is similar to James's treatment of mysticism in *The Varieties*, as it allows for interval scaling of intensity of experiences (as an empirical "mystical ladder" of sorts). However, at the empirical level, the single-factor measure of transliminality links such phenomena as schizotypy, magical ideation, creativity, and paranormal experiences as interrelated. This is different from Hood's conceptualization of mysticism based upon Stace's criteria, in which relationships between mystical experience and other states are treated as independent empirical hypotheses. For instance, using the earlier two-factor solution of Hood's M Scale, Byrom (2009) has noted that the experiential component has a stronger relationship with a measure of magical ideation than the interpretative component does. Thalbourne's measure of transliminality would suggest this, as both magical ideation and mysticism are components of the underlying single factor of transliminality. Masterful studies using mixed methods by Kohls and his colleagues (Kohls & Walach, 2006, 2007) are beginning to document the role of actual spiritual practices (as opposed to mere beliefs) in separating out positive experiences of ego loss (mysticism) from negative ones (psychoses). It appears that spiritual practices buffer otherwise negative effects that might occur due to transliminality (Kohls, Hack, & Walach, 2006; Kohls, Walach, & Wirtz, 2009).

MYSTICISM AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

In this chapter, we have presented considerable support for the commonality of reports of mystical experience among normal persons. However, despite the fact that such reports are firmly established as normal phenomena among healthy individuals, it remains true that there has been a considerable bias against mystical experience among many clinically oriented specialists. For instance, the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry (GAP) answered its own question, *Mysticism: Spiritual Quest or Psychic Disorder?*², in favor of the latter (GAP, 1976). This view is based largely upon well-established similarities between mysticism and madness at the purely experiential level (Boisen, 1936).

The most reasonable position is that both normal and psychotic individuals can have mystical experiences. Empirical support for this fact is provided by Stiffler, Greer, Sneek, and Dovenmuehle (1993), who administered Hood's M Scale along with other measures to three relevant samples ($n = 30$ each): psychiatric inpatients who met formal diagnostic criteria for psychotic disorders, and who also displayed "notable religiously oriented symptoms" (p. 368); senior members of various contemplative/mystical groups; and hospital staff members (as "normal" controls). Stiffler et al. found that the psychotic and contemplative groups could not be distinguished from one another on their mysticism scores, but that both differed from the hospital staff controls. Thus both psychotic and contemplative individuals report mystical experiences more often than controls. Although these data are correlational, it is reasonable to assume that mysticism neither causes nor is produced by psychoses. Rather, psychotic individuals, like contemplative persons, can have or report such experiences. What distinguished the psychotic from the normal mystics in Stiffler et al.'s study was not mystical experience, but rather dimensions of personality structure. The psychotic mystics exhibited resistance and rigidity, as opposed to the normal mystics, who exhibited openness and fluidity. Thus it is not simply mystical experience, but the reactions to the experience, that distinguish psychotic from normal mystics. This is supported by research using mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative). For instance, Kohls, Hack, and Walach (2008) have demonstrated that among persons who have mystical experiences, those who are adept at spiritual practices are more prone to experience these states as positive. Thus not simply belief, but actual spiritual practice, is a necessary component of a positive mystical experience. As we note elsewhere in this chapter, those who have meaningful religious frames to interpret their mystical experiences are unlikely to have psychotic reactions to them (Hood & Byrom, in press).

Consistent with research affirming that mysticism might be pathological is work on temporal lobe epilepsy, commonly assumed to be associated with reports of mystical and other religious experiences (see Chapter 3). For instance, Persinger (1987) has argued that what he terms the "God experience" is an artifact of changes in temporal lobe activity. He has been able to elicit a sensed presence of God in laboratory studies, using weak complex magnetic fields to stimulate the frontal lobes (Persinger, 2002; Hill & Persinger, 2003). However, Granqvist et al. (2005) have demonstrated that the sensed presence of God in temporal lobe stimulation studies is due to suggestibility and not to the application of complex magnetic fields. Likewise, in a study of 46 outpatients in the Maudsley Epilepsy Clinic, Sensky (1983) found that patients with this type of epilepsy did not have a higher rate of mystical experiences (or general religious experiences) than a control population. By contrast, a study by Persinger and Makarec (1987) found positive correlations between scores on their measure of complex epileptic signs and the report of paranormal and mystical experiences in a sample of 414 university students. Overall, temporal lobe studies suggest that even if mystical expe-

rience is commonly associated with temporal lobe activity, it is no more common in actual patients with such epilepsy than in control populations with normal temporal lobe activity. Hence there is no firm empirical basis from which to assume neurophysiological deficiencies in those reporting mystical experiences. On the contrary, as noted in Chapter 3, the biological basis of religious experience in general and mysticism in particular suggests that, if anything, such experiences are normal. They can occur in persons with neurophysiological or psychiatric disorders, but this does not make mystical experience itself psychopathological. Even if mysticism and madness are viewed as different aspects of the same experience (Heriott-Maitland, 2008), how one interprets or frames the experience is the crucial determinant of whether the experience is positive or negative (Granqvist & Larsson, 2006; Hood & Byrom, in press). It is also worth emphasizing that despite the identification of neurophysiological processes that facilitate mystical experiences, the neurophysiology does not rule out the possibility that such experiences have a basis in reality (Azari, 2006; d'Aquili & Newberg, 1993, 1999). As Deikman (1966) has said, the unity revealed in mysticism may be the unity of reality.

TOWARD A THEORY OF MYSTICISM: RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL

The rather substantial body of conceptual and empirical literature on mysticism has not yielded any coherent theory that has been accepted by more than a few investigators. Perhaps consistent with Chapter 3, as suggested just above, are neurophysiological theories of mysticism. As Wulff (2000) concludes, his own survey of research on mysticism suggests that some fundamental internal mechanism is operating. Yet Wulff also notes the methodological issue raised by the fact that it is not uncommon for investigators who were originally neutral about mysticism to become convinced of its reality as other than a merely subjective state, and to seek out explanations compatible with the ontological assertions of the experience. William James followed this path (Hood, 2000a, 2002b), and insofar as mystical experiences are noetic, perhaps so should we. Thus we end this chapter with a theory of mysticism that is not linked to proposed internal mechanisms, but to Deikman's (1966) claim noted above that the unity of the mystical experience may in fact be a unity that is objectively real. However, our theory, rooted in the pioneering but neglected work of Troeltsch's (1931) description of two types of mysticism, remains neutral with respect to theological or cosmological claims to the reality experienced as unity. Nevertheless, it is rooted in historical processes that facilitated the emergence of mystics as independent types, and is consistent with the empirical data on mysticism, religion, and spirituality.

Mysticism within and outside Religious Traditions: The Emergence of "Mystics"

Both Bouyer (1980) and Smith (1977) note that the word "mysticism" comes from the Greek and derives its meaning from the verb "to close." Applied initially to the very specific Greek mystery rites whose rituals were secret or "closed" to outsiders, the term gradually evolved to refer simply to any knowledge that is enigmatic (Bouyer, 1980, p. 44). The term has a distinct history within Christianity, emerging in three distinct transformative stages. Bouyer identifies these stages as "Biblical," "liturgical," and "spiritual."

Only later in its history has the term come to mean a particular experience—what Bouyer has described as an “ineffable mode of experimental knowledge of divine things” (1980, p. 51). It is important to note that “mystical experience” was formerly not thought to be psychologically illuminated by a mere subjectivity, but was viewed as an experience grounded in what is ontologically “real” in terms of the objective description of Biblical truth that also inspired all Christian liturgy. Smith (1977) suggests that the derivation from the pagan rites came to mean the closing of the mind to all external things (i.e., all things not of divine illumination). The crucial point for our empirical concerns is that whatever the focus upon mystical experience may have been, it was contextually dependent upon claims for it as the objective realization of a truth less ineffable than that contained in sacred texts and expressed in sacred liturgy. Thus, as Katz (1983) has argued, mysticism is often conservative—expressing itself within a tradition, not standing outside and opposed to it. Furthermore, empirical studies suggest that mystical experiences interpreted within a tradition have the most meaning and transformative power (Deikman, 1966; Hood, 2008b; Ruffing, 2001; Wittberg, 1996).

As McGinn (1991) has noted, self-identified “mystics” are a more recent historical phenomenon. It thus behooves social scientists to develop a theory of how mysticism became divorced from specific faith traditions. The separation, while never complete, suggests a tension that mystics in the third (“spiritual”) sense of Bouyer’s classification have always faced within their traditions. It also serves as an umbrella that can meaningfully cover the contemporary debate over religion and spirituality.

The Religion–Spirituality Debate in Relation to Mysticism

Recently, as we have discussed in earlier chapters, this tension has been best captured in the social-scientific literature by the comparison and contrast between two terms—“religion” and “spirituality” (Pargament, 1999). For some, “religion” has become a term that identifies institutional aspects of a faith tradition. This includes beliefs and rituals adhered to and practiced, but seen by some people as devoid of an “inner, experiential dimension.” For these people, the preferred term is “spirituality.” Wulff (1997) claims that the “new spirituality” employs an emergent model of a journey or quest whose goal is the realization of some innate capacity, variously conceived. He rightly notes that this model has deep roots in historical faith traditions. He states with reference to the Christian tradition, “Indeed, the classic Christian mystics would find every element in the model familiar” (Wulff, 1997, p. 7). He further notes that the shift from “religious” to “spiritual” is simply the focus upon inner processes emphasized by the latter rather than the former term. He goes on to assert that what is “conspicuously new” in contemporary spirituality is the lack of an explicit transcendent object outside the self (Wulff, 1997, p. 7). Here, of course, are serious ontological issues not to be avoided (Deikman, 1966; Hood, 2002b; Parsons, 1999; Porpora, 2006). However, our focus here is upon a theory to account for the emergence of spirituality within the framework of a larger theory of mysticism. Pargament (1999, p. 7) has argued that discussions and studies of spirituality lack theoretical grounding—something that is desperately needed. Although there are some interesting efforts to develop theoretically grounded views of spirituality (e.g., Helminiak, 1998), our intent is to develop a theory that is grounded in historical facts and can frame the empirical data.

Troeltsch's Model: Church, Sect, and Two Types of Mysticism

Troeltsch's theory, as developed in *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (1931), has been explored in Chapter 9 in terms of the distinction between church and sect. However, Troeltsch was clearly using an expanded typology derived from Weber, in which besides church and sect as forms of religious organization, he identified a third type—mysticism. Ironically, Troeltsch was popularized among North American scholars by H. R. Niebuhr, especially in his *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (first published in 1929 and thus antedating the English translation of Troeltsch's text by 2 years). Niebuhr dropped Troeltsch's third type, mysticism, so that subsequent theorizing and empirical research on church–sect theory has largely ignored mysticism. The reasons for this are in dispute, but it is clear that neither Niebuhr nor Troeltsch thought highly of mysticism, and that neither saw it as characteristic of the North American religious landscape (Garrett, 1975; Steeman, 1975). Whatever the reason, as Garrett (1975, p. 205) has noted, mysticism has experienced “wholehearted neglect” at the hands of sociological investigators. Among psychologists, the wholehearted neglect is of a historically grounded theory. Thus, if sociologists have a relevant theory, psychologists have the relevant data (many of which have been presented above). In the remainder of this chapter, we develop a general theory of mysticism that incorporates two mysticisms—that of the church and of what Parsons (1999, p. 141) has called “unchurched mysticism.”

According to both Bouyer (1980) and Troeltsch (1931), one form of mysticism is an inherent tendency to seek personal piety and an emotional realization of a faith within the individual; it serves simply to intensify commitment to a tradition. Only when mysticism emerges as an independent religious principle—as a reaction to the church and the sect form—does it become a new social force and seek an independent philosophical (today, psychological!) justification. These two forms of mysticism must be clearly distinguished—something social scientists have failed to do even when acknowledging Troeltsch's mysticism. Garrett (1975, pp. 214–215) simply identifies these two forms as M_1 and M_2 .

In the widest sense, mysticism is simply a demand for an inward appropriation of a direct inward and present religious experience (Troeltsch, 1931, p. 730). It takes the objective characteristics of its tradition for granted, and either supplements them with a profound inwardness or reacts against them as it demands to bring them back “into the living process” (Troeltsch, 1931, p. 731). This is Garrett's M_1 or Troeltsch's “wider mysticism.” We identify this as “religious mysticism” for two reasons. It is a mysticism that, according to both Troeltsch (1931, p. 732) and Bouyer (1980, p. 51), is found within all religious systems as a universal phenomenon. Thus, as an empirical fact, it entered Christianity partly from *within* (insofar as Christianity entails the same logical form as all traditions relative to this type) and partly from *without* (from other sources that were “eagerly accepted” by Christianity) (Troeltsch, 1931). Concentrating among the purely interior and emotional side of religious experience, it creates a “spiritual” interpretation of every objective aspects of religion, so that mystics typically stay within their tradition (Katz, 1983).

However, Troeltsch also identifies a “narrower, technically concentrated sense” of mysticism (1931, p. 734). This is Garrett's M^2 . It is a mysticism that has become independent in principle from, and is contrasted with, religion. It gives rise to “spiritual religion.” It claims to be the true inner principle of all religious faith. This we refer to as “spiritual mysticism,” but the term “spiritual” is redundant. This type of mysticism breaks away from religion, which it disdains. It accepts no constraint or community other than ones that are self-selected and self-realized. It is a “spiritual religion,” with the term “religion” as redundant here as “spiri-

tual” is above (Hood, 2006). It is the basis of what Forman (1998) and Parsons (1999) identify as a “perennial psychology” rooted in mysticism, which now allows one to be identified as a mystic, rather than as a Buddhist, Catholic, or Jew. It is what many today profess to be “spirituality” as opposed to “religion.”

Research on Distinctions between Religiousness and Spirituality

Kenneth Pargament and his students have taken the lead in descriptive and correlational work identifying distinctions between religious and spiritual self-identification (Zinnbauer et al., 1997; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). One motivation for Zinnbauer et al.’s (1997) study, to borrow part of the title of the article in which these data are presented, was to “unfuzzy the fuzzy” (a phrase first coined by Spilka).

Data were solicited from 11 different small convenience samples, ranging from “conservative Christian college students” to “New Age groups.” Most of the 364 participants were either college students or members of some religious group. Exceptions included a small sample of residents of a nursing home ($n = 20$) and another one of mental health workers ($n = 27$). Overall, 78% of participants identified themselves as “religious,” while 93% identified themselves as “spiritual.” It is worth noting that in both Roof’s (1993, 1999) research on “baby boomers” (see Research Box 11.5, below) and the Zinnbauer et al. (1997) study, most religious persons considered themselves to be spiritual (74% in the latter study). Overall, few of Zinnbauer et al.’s participants thought religiousness and spirituality to be identical concepts (2.6%) or entirely nonoverlapping concepts (6.7%). Thus, for most, religiousness and spirituality were somehow and variously intertwined. Nearly identical percentages identified themselves as religious but not spiritual (4%) or as neither (3%); all we need to note is that very few people considered themselves religious but not spiritual. Hence, for most participants, religion was inherently involved with spirituality.

Content analysis of participants’ descriptions of religion and spirituality in the Zinnbauer et al. (1997) study revealed what sociological studies have also confirmed: The most common categories for spirituality were experiential, while those for religion were belief-based. This is consistent with Day’s (1994) distinction, found in his interview with “Sandy” and with other Sierra Project participants (see Research Box 11.6, below). Not surprisingly, the greatest differences between self-ratings were found among participants who were members of religious groups distant from traditional expressions of faith, such as “New Age groups” and Unitarians. Although members of more traditional faiths might differ in levels of self-rated religiousness and spirituality, within specific groups such as Roman Catholics there was no significant difference, whereas among “New Age groups” self-rated spirituality greatly exceeded self-rated religiousness. Furthermore, consistent with Roof’s (1993, 1999) perceptive observation, more conservative religious groups made less distinction between spirituality and religiousness (Zinnbauer et al., 1997).

These data are also congruent with previous empirical work. In particular, the finding that mental health workers are more “spiritual” than “religious” replicates previous work on mental health professionals. Shafranske (1996a) has reviewed the empirical research on the religious beliefs, associations, and practices of such professionals. Focusing primarily on samples of clinical and counseling psychologists who are members of the American Psychological Association, Shafranske notes that psychologists are less likely to believe in a personal God, or to affiliate with religious groups, than other professionals or the general population.

In addition, while the *majority* of psychologists report that spirituality is important to them, a *minority* report that religion is important to them (Shafranske, 1996a, p. 153). Shafranske summarizes his own data and the work of others to emphasize that psychologists are more like the general population than was previously assumed. However, Shafranske (1996a, p. 154) lumps together various indices as the “religious dimension,” and this is very misleading. In fact, psychologists neither believe, practice, nor associate with the institutional aspects of faith (“religion”) as much as they endorse what Shafranske properly notes are “noninstitutional forms of spirituality” (1996a, p. 154). One could predict that in forced-choice contexts they would be most likely to be “spiritual but not religious.” Empirically, three facts about religious and spiritual self-identification ought to be kept quite clear.

First, most persons identify themselves as *both* religious and spiritual. These are largely persons sampled from within faith traditions, for whom it is reasonable to assume that spirituality is at least one expression of and motivation for their religion (e.g., institutional participation). Hence many measures of spirituality simply operate like measures of religion (Gorsuch & Miller, 1999).

Second, a significant minority of individuals use spirituality as a means of at least partly refuting or even ridiculing religion. This is particularly obvious in qualitative studies, where individuals identify their spirituality in defiant opposition to religion. They actually oppose various aspects of institutional religion, such as its authority, its more specific (“closed”) articulation of beliefs (“dogma”), and its practices (“ritual”); they seek to move away from religion in order to become “more developed” spiritually. The move is from belief to experience, as Day (1994) perceptively notes. This is consistent with the research on deconversion discussed in Chapter 8.

Third, religiousness and spirituality overlap considerably, at least in North American populations. The majority of the U.S. population in particular is religious *and* spiritual, in terms of both self-identification and self-representations. Exceptions are easy to identify, but we ought not to lose sight of the fact that they are *exceptions*. Significantly, they include not only scientists in general, but psychologists in particular (Beit-Hallahmi, 1977, Shafranske, 1996a). Among these people, a hostility to religion as thwarting or even falsifying spirituality is evident. This hostility is readily revealed in qualitative studies in which there is some degree of rapport between interviewer and respondents. One sociological study—Roof’s research on baby boomers, which has already been discussed to some extent in Chapters 6 and 8—is presented in Research Box 11.5.

The emergence of the discussion of spirituality among psychologists of religion parallels sociological concern with a vocal minority of highly active seekers whose spirituality is most typically identified as mystical (Bellah, Marsden, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1996; Roof, 1993, 1999). It also characterizes much of the empirical literature on deconversion and spiritual transformation discussed in Chapter 8. A qualitative psychological study is presented in Research Box 11.6.

Empirical support for qualitative studies that have identified a minority of persons intensely opposed to religion while identifying themselves as spiritual is readily available. For instance, Zinnbauer et al. (1997, p. 553) used a modified form of Hood’s M Scale (unity items only) and found that in their overall sample, self-rated religiousness did not correlate with mystical experience ($r = -.04$), but self-rated spirituality did ($r = .27, p < .001$). Furthermore, there was a significant difference between the mean mysticism scores for the “equally spiritual and religious” group and the “spiritual but not religious” group, with the latter scoring significantly higher. The percentages of self-identification into groups (“neither

RESEARCH BOX 11.5. Qualitative Sociological Study of Religion versus Spirituality
(Roof, 1993, 1999)

Roof (1993) has characterized the 76 million U.S. adults born in the two decades after World War II as a “generation of seekers” who are either “loyalists” (those who have stayed with their religious tradition), “returnees” (those who experimented with options before returning to their religious tradition), or “dropouts” (those who have left their tradition). Roof (1993) noted that a distinguishing feature among the “highly active seekers” he interviewed was a preference to identify themselves as “spiritual” rather than “religious.” Twenty-four percent of these had no religious affiliation. Such highly active seekers were but a minority (9%) of all Roof’s participants, but they seem to have captured the interest of researchers in what we might identify as the “spiritual turn” in the scientific study of religion. Roof’s (1999) follow-up text reveals similar findings regarding self-identification. Asking, “Do you consider yourself religious?” and “Do you consider yourself spiritual?” in nonconsecutive places in open-ended interviews (but always in that order) revealed an overall weak association between the two identifications ($\gamma = .291$). However, the association was higher among “strong believers” ($\gamma = .439$) than among “highly active seekers” ($\gamma = .196$). Other data, including the question “Which is best: to follow the teachings of a church, synagogue or temple, or to think for oneself in matters of religion and trust more one’s own experience?” (Roof, 1999, pp. 320–321), suggested that those identified as seekers were least likely to rely upon institutional authority or to think that such authority should overrule their own conscience. An Asian American participant who was no longer active in the Methodist Church captured well what we are suggesting: “You can be spiritual without being religious. I think religious ... would be more specific. The faith is more specific, certain doctrines. Spiritual would be general, wider. I think that’s how you can be spiritual without being religious. Maybe even religious without being spiritual. Show up for church and go through the motions” (Roof, 1993, p. 78).

religious nor spiritual,” “religious but not spiritual,” “spiritual but not religious,” and “equally religious and spiritual”) in Hood’s data reasonably parallel Zinnbauer et al.’s (1997) data for mainstream college students. The scores on the M Scale, as well as the group comparisons, are also consistent with Zinnbauer et al.’s data. However, use of the complete M Scale provides further clarification. As in Zinnbauer et al.’s data, the means for the two experiential factors were greater for the “spiritual but not religious” group than for the “equally spiritual and religious” group. However, the difference was not significant for the Introvertive Mysticism factor (one that is quite compatible with classical Christianity), but it was significant for the Extrovertive Mysticism factor (an experience less traditional within Christianity) (see Hood, 1985). The truly significant difference lay between the “spiritual but not religious” and “equally spiritual and religious” groups on the one hand, and the “religious but not spiritual” and “neither” groups on the other. A crucial point, consistent with previous research, was that both “spiritual-only” and “equally religious and spiritual” persons reported mystical experience more often than “religious-only” or “nonreligious” persons. Also important was that on the Interpretation factor, the “equally religious and spiritual” group scored higher than the “spiritual but not religious” group; again, however, the real difference was between these two groups and the “religious but not spiritual” and the “neither” groups.

RESEARCH BOX 11.6. A Qualitative Psychological Study of Religion versus Spirituality
(Day, 1994)

The Sierra Project, which was specifically designed to increase knowledge about students' stages of moral development, began with the 1979 class at the University of California–Irvine. A crucial aspect of this study (and its continuation since 1987 by researchers associated with Boston University) is the use of both traditional empirical and narrative-based qualitative methodologies (see Day, 1991, 1994; Whiteley & Loxley, 1980). Day (1994) reported the results of in-depth interviews with three Sierra participants chosen by the Boston research team after listening to hundreds of hours of audiotaped interviews. Day wrote up the results of an interview with one participant, “Sandy,” in an idiographic presentation rare in psychology.

The interview probed Sandy's views on both religion and spirituality—a tactic based upon researchers' belated recognition that earlier Sierra participants might have purposefully avoided discussion of religion, especially religious beliefs (Day, 1994, p. 160). Thus questions on religion and spirituality were strategically placed within the schedule on subsequent interviews.

Sandy took great care to distinguish religion from spirituality. In her words, “Religion is organized, dogmatic, and social. Spiritual is individual, intimate, personal. Religion tells you what is good or true and tells you who is favored and who is not. It operates in fixed categories. Spirituality is developed. You have to work hard at it and to be conscious about it and take time for it. Sometimes, in order to grow spiritually, you have to go beyond or even against religious doctrine” (Day, 1994, p. 163). Sandy's concern with doctrine was important. Day noted that she would probably protest if identified as a “believer.” She neither identified herself nor wanted others to label her as “religious” (Day, 1994, p. 165).

Thus we can summarize these data by stating that mystical experience (“spirituality”) is commonly reported by individuals who identify themselves as spiritual rather than religious, and by those who identify themselves as equally religious and spiritual. In other words, there is a mysticism (“spirituality”) both within and outside of religious traditions. The mysticism outside religion is what Holm (2008) has referred to as “generalized mysticism.” This ought not to surprise us. As noted earlier, Katz (1983) reminds us that most mystics, even when struggling against their faith tradition, stay within it. Religious mysticism is inherently conservative in this limited sense. For most religious people, belief adequately expresses their mystical experiences, and their religious rituals facilitate them (Hood, 1995a). But for some “independent” mystics, spirituality is only constrained and choked by belief. These independent mystics are those who consider themselves spiritual but not religious.

Hood (2003b; 2005b; 2006) has reviewed several empirical studies using various indices of mysticism. Overall, a clear pattern emerges: Spirituality is more closely identified with mystical experience, whereas religion is more closely identified with a specific religious interpretation of this experience. Thus the current debate on religiousness and spirituality is really neither new nor theoretically unexpected. It has now been over four decades since Vernon (1968) noted that those who answered “none” to questions of religious preference were ignored in the scientific study of religion. He argued that perhaps a parallel could be

drawn to those in political surveys who identify themselves as “independents.” Such persons, he noted, are not without political convictions (1968, p. 223). “Spiritual but not religious” persons, or “nones,” are perhaps religious independents, paralleling political independents. In response to the question “Have you ever had a feeling that you were somehow in the presence of God?”, Vernon found that those who rejected membership in formal religious groups (the “nones”) answered either “I am sure” (5.9%) or “I think so” (20%). Thus 26% of the “nones” nevertheless thought or were sure they had had an experience of God. This percentage closely matches survey reports of mystical experience across a wide range of populations, religious and otherwise, as discussed above. They are also congruent with psychological research indicating that “nones” often score higher on measures of the minimal phenomenological properties of the experience than on the religious interpretation of the experience (Hood & Morris, 1981b). Vernon also noted the problem that his religious “nones” had with using religious language to describe mystical experiences. So there is not simply the finding of spirituality emerging in opposition to religion, but the persistent failure by social scientists of religion to study the experiences of those who do not primarily identify themselves as religious. If these people are more willing to identify themselves as “spiritual” than as “religious,” it has been a social-scientific oversight to think that they have nothing to do with “religion.”

OVERVIEW

Clearly, mystical experience remains a central concern for those who would link the conceptual and empirical literatures on religious/spiritual experience. The mystical and the numinous remain contenders for the unique in religion and spirituality. They also provide an experiential basis that may require serious attention to the ontological claims of those who have such experiences. McClenon (1990) has argued that the uniformity in the reporting of a wide range of anomalous experiences suggests that cultural determination of these interpretations may account for less variance than many suppose. We have discussed many examples of such experiences in Chapter 10. Similar arguments apply to numinous and mystical experiences. Although social scientists may not offer “proofs” for such claims, neither can they without hubris deny the possibility that religion contains truths. Indeed, such truths may be as necessary for the experience as the more restricted claim that the *belief* in such truths is necessary. Few persons have such experiences without believing in their possibility in advance or becoming converted to their truth after the fact.

Research on mystical experiences is best approached in terms of what each methodology can contribute. The descriptive material of open-ended and qualitative studies enhances the narrowness and precision of survey research. Yet both methods have revealed similar triggers and consequences of these experiences, and both methods have confirmed the normality of their occurrence. Survey research provides correlations and patterns suggestive for laboratory and quasi-experimental studies, which in turn have shown that mystical experience can be facilitated and follows patterns compatible with the results from open-ended and survey research. All these are then given various conceptual alternatives by the theological, philosophical, and historical literatures.

If there is any picture to be suggested at this point, it must be sketched in broad lines. Yet even this picture is helpful. Mysticism is a normal phenomenon, reported by

healthy and functioning persons who struggle to find a meaningful framework within which to live out this experience as foundational—as at least what is real for them, if not in some sense as the ultimate “Real.” Mysticism, real or Real, has proven itself susceptible to empirical investigation. As noted above, we now have several useful measures of mysticism. Clearly, much remains to be done. Future progress will surely be in the spirit of the call for a new interdisciplinary multilevel paradigm for the psychology of religion. Even if McGinn (1991, p. 343) is correct in his fear that an empirical reading of mystical texts from a psychological perspective has only an “ambiguous contribution” to make, he is correct in noting that psychological investigators and those involved in studying the history and theory of mysticism must cooperate in what to date is an “unrealized conversation.”

Religion, Morality, and Prejudice

[Religion] makes prejudice and it unmakes prejudice. . . . Some people say the only cure for prejudice is more religion; some say the only cure is to abolish religion.

NO to condom distribution in the schools, NO to taxpayer funding of abortion, NO to sex-education classes in the public schools that promote promiscuity, NO to homosexual adoptions and government-sanctioned gay marriages.

. . . being helpful is a scriptural criterion of true religion (James 1:27), and humans will ultimately be judged on their efforts on behalf of those in need of aid or comfort (Matthew 25:31–46).

Religious involvement is an especially strong predictor of volunteering and philanthropy.

. . . terrorism is religious because religion provides the moral justification for killing and the images of cosmic warfare that impact a heady illusion of power. . . . every major religious tradition has served as a resource for violent actors.¹

Religion has much to say about morality. Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus may not agree on the nature of God, or on religious rituals and teachings, but they do tend to agree about moral issues. In fact, when it comes to ethics, major world religions are amazingly consistent in their teachings about right and wrong, especially concerning murder, stealing, and adultery. In Christianity and Judaism, this distilled essence of morality is captured by the Ten Commandments. And all major world religions seem to teach some version of “Do unto others what you would have them do unto you.”

Persons with a proreligious orientation would be inclined to argue that religion has tremendous potential to improve our world by teaching an ethical system that would benefit all of us. In fact, the theologies of such diverse religious bodies as Buddhists, Christians,

¹These quotations come, respectively, from the following sources: Allport (1954, p. 444); a fund-raising letter distributed in March 1995 by the Christian Coalition, quoted in Birnbaum (1995, p. 22); Ritzema (1979, p. 105); Putnam (2000, p. 67); and Juergensmeyer (2000, p. xi).

and Jews have claimed that faith and morality are inseparable (Spilka, Hood, & Gorsuch, 1985). In contrast, some people are not convinced that religion holds the key to morality in the world, and they may argue that it can actually cause intolerance and suffering. Some of these individuals, such as Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, are becoming rather prominent in popular culture.

We can all think of examples in which religion has apparently resulted in tolerance, helpfulness, and personal and interpersonal integrity. Mother Teresa spent her life in appalling conditions in order to help the poor, the sick, and the downtrodden in the cause of Christian charity. Martin Luther King, Jr. faced considerable danger, and was eventually assassinated, in his religiously based fight for equal rights and self-respect for black Americans. Churches, mosques, and synagogues provide money, housing, and social support for homeless persons and for refugees from other lands. Soup kitchens and halfway houses are sponsored by religious organizations. The list could go on and on.

On the other hand, many examples can be cited where religion has seemed to have no impact at all in encouraging positive behavior, or where it may even have contributed to dishonesty, intolerance, physical violence, and prejudice. Anti-Semitism is still preached from some pulpits. The Christian-based Ku Klux Klan, still in existence in regions of the South, spreads hatred of blacks, Jews, and Catholics. Many wars and other violent conflicts in today's world are religiously based: Shiites and Sunnis battle in the Middle East; Catholics and Protestants still sporadically clash in Northern Ireland; Sikhs and Hindus die in violent conflicts in India; ethnic and religious "cleansing" occurred in Bosnia (of Muslims by Christians) and now in Sudan (of Christians by Muslims); the Taliban in Afghanistan has taken away women's rights and has also attacked Western aid workers for being open about their Christian beliefs; extremist Palestinian Muslim groups send suicide bombers to kill Israeli civilians; and Israeli Jews respond with military violence against Palestinians. The list could go on.

Religious faith is complex, and it would therefore be a mistake to oversimplify the relationship between religion and morality—especially in light of the many unique religious groups, orientations, and dimensions that may have different understandings of "right and wrong." Furthermore, we should not assume that religion has an impact on ethics through the process of "moral development" in childhood and adolescence. We have shown in Chapter 4 that Kohlberg and other researchers on moral development see religion as quite distinct from moral reasoning and the emergence of morality in general.

It has been pointed out that different religious groups may have different ways of thinking about moral issues, possibly because of religious teachings. Cohen and Rozin (2001) found that Protestants, partly because they were more likely to believe that mental states are controllable and likely to lead to action, rated a target person with "inappropriate mental states" (p. 697—e.g., not honoring one's parents, or thinking about having a sexual affair) more negatively than did Jews. As a result, Cohen and Hill (2007) have argued that Allport's conceptualization of Intrinsic and Extrinsic (abbreviated throughout this chapter as I and E) religious orientations—with an emphasis on beliefs and other cognitive activities for I, and an emphasis on personal and (particularly) social benefits for E—may have a Protestant bias. For example, from a Jewish perspective that places a much greater emphasis on community and ritual, the E items "One reason for my being a church member is that such membership helps to establish a person in the community" or "I pray chiefly because I have been taught to pray" may contain quite a different meaning from Allport's notion of E as flagrantly utilitarian. Indeed, Cohen and Hill (2007) found that Jews (in comparison to Protestants and Catholics) stress values of community and descent in their understanding of religion. Furthermore, important

life experiences were more likely to include a social component for Jews, as opposed to a more guided focus on God and personal beliefs among Protestants (Catholics were between the two). As a result, Jews were found to be the least I and the most E; Protestants were just the opposite by being the most I and the least E (again, Catholics were between the two on both measures). Thus defining “mature” religion as I and “immature” religion as E may, the authors have speculated, reflect a Protestant bias (Allport was an Episcopalian). To be sure, religious traditions to some extent lead people to think about moral issues differently, and also to judge others differently, depending on the others’ expressed thoughts about moral issues. However, evidence suggests that the ways in which people *reason* about religious and moral conflicts are quite similar (Cobb, Ong, & Tate, 2001).

Quite apart from formal moral development in Kohlbergian or other terms, and the ways in which people think about morality, it has been claimed that religiousness is associated with being a “better person” in numerous ways. In addition to broad moral imperatives such as “love thy neighbor,” many religions have specific things to say about various personal issues: honesty and cheating; substance use and abuse; sexual behavior; criminal behavior and delinquency; domestic abuse; helping others; and prejudice and discrimination. After a brief discussion of moral attitudes and religion, we explore each of these areas in turn, attempting to determine whether religion and morality are associated.

MORAL ATTITUDES

It is not surprising that religion is related to people’s attitudes on a host of morality-related issues. Typically, people who are religious (as measured in many different ways) are more “conservative” in their attitudes. In general, those who are more religious show more opposition to abortion (Bryan & Freed, 1993; Strickler & Danigelis, 2002), AIDS education (Ford, Zimmerman, Anderman, & Brown-Wright, 2001), divorce (Hayes & Hornsby-Smith, 1994), pornography (Lottes, Weinberg, & Weller, 1993), contraception (Krishnan, 1993), premarital sexuality (Bibby, 2001; Barkan, 2006), homosexuality (Rowatt, Tsang, et al., 2006), feminism (Wilcox & Jelen, 1991), nudity in advertising (Alexander & Judd, 1986), suicide (Domino & Miller, 1992), euthanasia (Shuman, Fournet, Zelhart, Roland, & Estes, 1992), amniocentesis (Seals, Ekwo, Williamson, & Hanson, 1985), heavy metal and rap music (Lynxwiler & Gay, 2000), and women going topless on beaches (Herold, Corbesi, & Collins, 1994). Highly religious individuals are also more likely to support marriage (Hayes & Hornsby-Smith, 1994), capital punishment (Bibby, 1987), vengeance (Cota-McKinley, Woody, & Bell, 2001), traditional sex roles (Larsen & Long, 1988), conservative political parties (Bibby, 1987), more severe criminal sentences (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992), and censorship of sex and violence in the mass media (Fisher, Cook, & Shirkey, 1994). These lists surely just scratch the surface of such relationships, but they should give the reader an idea of the many diverse links between religion and moral attitudes. However, it should also be noted that the relationship between religion and moral issues does not necessarily remain constant. For example, Strickler and Danigelis (2002) found that general religiosity had become less powerful as a predictor of abortion attitudes in 1996 than in 1977, though religious fundamentalism in particular had become a stronger predictor of opposition to abortion during the same time period.

Perhaps no morally related social topic has generated as much recent controversy as homosexuality, with religiousness as a primary factor. Not surprisingly, there appears to be a relationship between theologically conservative religion and negative attitudes toward

homosexuality (Herek, 1987, 1994; Rowatt, Tsang, et al., 2006; Wilkinson, 2004). Religion has been found to be one of the major predictors of opposing views on social and political issues related to sexual orientation. One study (Olson, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006), consisting of a nationally representative survey of over 1,600 respondents, found homosexuality to be the most prominent issue in current “moral values” discourse in American politics. Olson et al. also found that religion, more than any other demographic variable, predicted attitudes about same-sex unions, with conservatives (especially Protestant conservatives) more likely to oppose such unions. Of interest, however, was their finding that religiousness was less capable of predicting support for a constitutional amendment to prevent gay marriage than in predicting general attitudes about the topic. Sexual orientation issues (e.g., same-sex marriage and other civil rights for gays and lesbians) are increasingly raised for consideration by the U.S. Congress as well as by state legislative bodies. The very fact that these issues are being considered by legislators probably heightens the fervency of different views, especially among those holding traditional views, who often find the consideration of such issues threatening. One study (Oldmixon & Calfano, 2007) found that though decision making pertaining to gay issues was primarily a function of legislators’ partisanship and ideology (both of which correlate with religiosity), members of the U.S. Congress show a high degree of responsiveness to religious groups, especially conservative Protestants. We return to the topic of religion and views of homosexuality later in this chapter.

It is one thing to oppose, for example, premarital sex or alcohol use on the basis of religion, and quite another to act consistently with this attitude when the opportunity presents itself. Furthermore, it is possible that one’s personal position on ethical issues may differ from one’s public stance. For example, it has been found that people who personally oppose abortion on moral or religious grounds, may actually *favor* legal abortion (Scott, 1989). And 70% of a sample of Seventh-Day Adventist young people endorsed their church’s prohibition of premarital sex, but 54% of the sample reported that they had engaged in premarital sex (Ali & Naidoo, 1999). Thus, although associations between faith and moral attitudes are informative, they do not always accurately predict how religion will relate to moral *behavior*. So we now turn to a survey of several areas of behavior with strong ethical implications, in order to assess the role of religion in people’s actions. However, as we shall see, beliefs and behavior are often intertwined in the research literature; it is therefore sometimes necessary to focus on attitudes generally in order to gain insights into moral behavior, despite the problems in doing so.

MORAL BEHAVIOR

Honesty and Cheating

Research suggests that academic dishonesty in high school and university settings is quite common, even among religious college students. One investigation (Goldsen, Rosenberg, Williams, & Suchman, 1960) found that 92% of religious college students affirmed that it was morally wrong to cheat, but that 87% of them agreed with the statement “If everyone else cheats, why shouldn’t I?” Consistent with this, Spilka and Loffredo (1982) reported that 72% of a group of religious college students admitted that they had cheated on examinations. More generally, another study (Cochran, Chamlin, Wood, & Sellers, 1999) found that 83% of college students admitted to at least one act of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism on

an essay, cheating on an examination). Bruggeman and Hart (1996) noted that when given incentives to lie and cheat, their sample of both religious and secular high school students revealed “surprisingly high levels of dishonest behavior” (p. 340). Even among Mormons, a group known for a conservative and strict approach to moral issues, 70% of a sample of more than 2,000 adolescents admitted that they had cheated on tests at school (Chadwick & Top, 1993). Apparently cheating is quite widespread among high school and college students, even among students who consider themselves religious.

Does Religion Make Any Difference?

Does religion make any difference at all? Overall research results over several decades, though not entirely consistent from study to study, suggest not. Early studies (Hartshorne & May, 1928, 1929; Hartshorne, May, & Shuttlesworth, 1930; Hightower, 1930) investigated a possible link between religiousness and cheating in their massive studies involving some 11,000 school children in the 1920s. These researchers devised ingenious tests for cheating—for example, by measuring peeking during “eyes-closed” tests, and by checking whether students had changed their original answers when allowed to grade their own exams. In the end, they found essentially no relationship between religion and honesty or cheating. Later research, involving behavioral measures and diverse samples, has confirmed that religion does not decrease cheating behavior. Guttman (1984) investigated sixth graders from religious schools in Israel and discovered that religious children indicated some resistance to temptation on a paper-and-pencil test, but were actually more inclined to cheat on a behavioral measure. Smith, Wheeler, and Diener (1975) studied undergraduate college students, categorizing them as involved in the “Jesus movement” or as being otherwise religious, non-religious, or atheistic; no differences emerged with respect to their tendency to cheat on a class examination when the opportunity was available.

A more recent study (Perrin, 2000), using a behavioral measure, did find that religious college students cheated less. Because such behavioral investigations of cheating are rare, this study is highlighted in Research Box 12.1. Unfortunately, the cheating in this research was necessarily quite mild, involving 1 point on a single weekly quiz, and just four of seven measures of religion (all single-item measures) achieved statistical significance. In another behaviorally based study of cheating on a computerized version of the Graduate Record Examination, Williamson and Assadi (2005) found that religious orientation was unrelated to cheating. In their study, induced low self-esteem was the major predictor of cheating. Therefore, the results of these studies cannot be seen as representing a major shift in findings when behavioral measures are used. However, behavioral measures of cheating deserve further attention and follow-up research.

Those studies that have found a negative link between religiousness and cheating have usually involved self-reports rather than actual behavioral measures. Of course, self-reports are subject to bias, either intentionally or unintentionally. Grasmick and his colleagues (Grasmick, Bursik, & Cochran, 1991; Grasmick, Kinsey, & Cochran, 1991) have investigated the relationship between religion and self-reported admission of how likely respondents would be to cheat on their income taxes (and, in one study, to commit theft and to engage in littering) in the future. There was some tendency for more religious persons to indicate they were less likely to cheat on their taxes (and less likely to litter, but there was no significant relationship for theft). Similarly, a nationwide Dutch survey (ter Voert, Felling, & Peters, 1994)

RESEARCH BOX 12.1. Religiosity and Honesty (Perrin, 2000)

Perrin carried out this study in an attempt to address problems in the literature, including the paucity of studies on religion and honesty; measurement problems, such as the tendency for dependent measures to rely on self-reports rather than behavior; and inconsistencies in the results of relevant investigations.

Perrin's own study had two main components. First, students in a large lecture course at a university in the western United States completed a survey that included seven items on religiosity. These items were intended to tap frequency of church attendance, participation in religious activities (such as Bible study), frequency of prayer, belief in life after death, whether respondents considered themselves to be "born again" and to be "strong Christians," and the frequency with which they had had religious experiences (i.e., being "very close to a powerful, spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself" [p. 539]). We are not told what else was on the questionnaire, or what the reliability of the seven religiosity items might be.

Second, there was a simple but effective measure of honesty. In one of the weekly quizzes in this class, the teaching assistant intentionally graded them incorrectly, so that *everyone* received 1 additional point on that quiz. Students were then informed that an error might have been made in grading. They were to regrade their own quizzes and write, at the top of an unrelated assignment that they were handing in, one of three phrases: "I owe you a point," "Quiz graded correctly," or "You owe me a point."

Results indicated that, first, honesty was hard to come by in this investigation, as had been found in previous research. Of the 130 students included in the analyses, just 32% honestly admitted receiving an extra point on the quiz. Fifty-two percent said that the quiz was graded correctly, and 16% actually tried to get another point in addition to the point they received from the teaching assistant's "mistake." More important, however, were the comparisons of honesty across the religion item responses. For all seven items, the results were in the expected direction, such that more honesty was apparent for more religious responders. However, the results achieved significance for just four of the seven items (church attendance, frequency of other religious activities, belief in life after death, and born-again status). The most dramatic difference in scores seems to have been for church attendance: 45% of weekly (or more frequent) attenders, but just 13% of those who attended once a year or less, honestly reported the 1-point error on their quiz.

Finally, the results do confirm a stark reality for "religious people." Even among the most highly religious people in this study, as defined by seven quite different items, the majority of students apparently lied about the results of their quiz. It would seem that truly high percentages of honesty are difficult to find in groups of religious or nonreligious persons.

Unfortunately, this study had a relatively small sample about which we know little (e.g., age, percentage of men and women, race/ethnicity, religious affiliation, extent of personal religiosity), as well as only a brief measure of religiosity without established reliability and validity. Results are reported only in percentages of some rather unique combinations of response categories, and so on. For these reasons, it would be helpful to see the results replicated, with more standard measures and more information about samples and analyses. At the same time, this study is one of very few that has attempted to use a behavioral measure of honesty, and we hope that it will stimulate additional and much-needed investigations in this area.

found that “strong Christian believers” reported holding a stricter moral code with respect to “self-interest morality” (different forms of cheating). And Storch and Storch (2001) found that higher I religious scores were negatively related to reported rates of academic dishonesty.

These findings suggest that as researchers probe deeper into the religious variable and consider such things as degree of religious commitment or religious orientation, the “no relationship found” conclusion may be an oversimplification. Nonetheless, Francis and Johnson (1999) found no relationship between scores on a “lie scale” (whether intentional or unintentional) and either church attendance or personal prayer among primary school teachers (see also Francis & Katz, 1992; Gillings & Joseph, 1996; Lewis & Joseph, 1994). In other studies, religiosity has been linked with *higher* lie scale scores (e.g., Francis, Pearson, & Kay, 1983a; Lewis & Maltby, 1995), indicating a possible bias among religious respondents. We must therefore be careful with such self-report findings, regardless of what the results suggest; what people say they will do is not always consistent with their actual behavior.

Religion and Honesty: Summary

In the end, although more religious people apparently say that they are more honest than less religious persons, such findings seem to be contradicted by other research showing no relationship, or even a positive relationship, between lie scale scores and religiosity. More important, there is not much evidence from studies of actual behavior to support the position that religious people are somehow more honest, or less likely to lie or cheat, than are their less religious or nonreligious peers. In view of the clear teachings of most faiths on such issues, we are left to ponder why religion does not have a significant impact in reducing cheating *behavior*.

Substance Use and Abuse

Religious teachings across diverse groups typically oppose the abuse of such substances as alcohol and illicit drugs. One might expect, therefore, that faith would be associated with decreased substance use/abuse. And, in fact, the related literature generally does confirm this. Gorsuch and Butler (1976) noted this in their survey of studies prior to the mid-1970s, and more recent reviews (e.g., Benson, 1992b; Gorsuch, 1995) concluded that research from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s quite consistently confirmed the tendency for more religious persons (as defined in many different ways) to be less likely to use and abuse alcohol and drugs.

The range of studies in this area is impressive, focusing variously on alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs used for nonmedical purposes (e.g., cocaine, heroin, amphetamines, barbiturates, and psychedelic substances). Some studies focus on either alcohol *or* “drugs,” but many investigate the impact of religion on both. Here we consider the findings of the various studies together, because their results are so similar.

The Negative Relationship between Religion and Substance Use/Abuse

Research since the mid-1970s continues to show, as it has for decades, that religion is an important negative predictor of alcohol and substance use (Michalak, Trocki, & Bond, 2007). Religiousness—especially being actively involved in one’s religion (attending church, engaging in Bible study, etc.)—predicts lower levels of alcohol abuse among college students, even

after researchers control for such related variables as grade point average, ethnicity, and social support (Dulin, Hill, & Ellington, 2006). Religious participation seems to be a key in religiousness as a predictor. For example, in a Canadian inpatient population, those who participate in more frequent worship reported lower levels of current and past alcohol abuse (Baetz, Larson, Marcoux, Bowen, & Griffin, 2002). Similarly, Bazargan, Sherkat, and Bazargan (2004) found that religious participation had a significant negative relationship with alcohol use six hours prior to seeking emergency care. Dunn (2005) found that the importance of religion was a predictor of less initiation of alcohol use, less current alcohol use, and less likelihood of having tried binge drinking among high school seniors. Similar findings have been documented for tobacco use (Nonnemaker, McNeely, & Blum, 2006).

These studies document what many large-scale surveys (often involving samples of 5,000 people or more) have found—namely, that people who are religious are less likely to abuse alcohol and other drugs (Bahr, Maughan, Marcos, & Li, 1998; Benson, Wood, Johnson, Eklin, & Mills, 1983; Cook, Goddard, & Westall, 1997; Ford & Kadushin, 2002; Khavari & Harmon, 1982; Lee, Rice, & Gillespie, 1997; Park, Bauer, & Oescher, 2001; Perkins, 1994; Sutherland & Shepherd, 2001). Similarly, Brown and associates (T. N. Brown, Schulenberg, Bachman, O'Malley, & Johnston, 2001), in reviewing research conducted annually from 1976 to 1997, concluded that religiosity was consistently and negatively linked to various types of substance abuse among high school seniors.

Furthermore, these findings tend to hold regardless of age or gender and, with few exceptions, across cultures. Consistent findings have been obtained in diverse parts of the United States (Donahue, 1987), as well as in countries and regions as disparate as Central America (Kliwer & Murrelle, 2007), Canada (Hundleby, 1987), Nigeria (Adelekan, Abiodun, Imouokhome-Obayan, Oni, & Ogunremi, 1993), Scotland (Engs & Mullen, 1999), the Netherlands (Mullen & Francis, 1995), Sweden (Pettersson, 1991), Israel (Kandel & Sudit, 1982), Australia (Najman, Williams, Keeping, Morrison, & Anderson, 1988), Thailand (Assanangkornchai, Conigrave, & Saunders, 2002), Spain (Grana Gomes & Munoz-Rivas, 2000), Saudi Arabia (Qureshi & Al-Habeeb, 2000), and China (Wu, Detels, Zhang, & Duan, 1996). The relationship has been demonstrated among Filipino Americans (Gong, Takeuchi, Agbayani-Siewert, & Tacata, 2003) and Mexican American youths (Marsiglia, Kulis, Nieri, & Parsai, 2005), in addition to the U.S. ethnic groups usually studied (European Americans and African Americans). This effect has even been found among the children of individuals addicted to opium (Miller, Weissman, Gur, & Adams, 2001). *Parental* religiosity is also apparently linked with less substance abuse among children (Foshee & Hollinger, 1996; Merrill, Salazar, & Gardner, 2001).

THE MAGNITUDE AND GENERALITY OF THE RELATIONSHIP

The size of the relationships between religiosity and substance use noted above varies from study to study. Benson (1992b) concluded that on average, correlations with alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana use are roughly $-.20$, and that the corresponding relationships for other illicit drugs are lower. Although the obtained relationships are only weak to moderate, they often remain significant even after the effects of age, gender, race, region, education, income, and other variables are controlled for (see, e.g., Benson & Donahue, 1989; Cochran, Beeghley, & Bock, 1988). All indications from recent research are that if a similar analysis were done today, similar conclusions would probably be drawn.

However, we should not assume that other variables are inconsequential. Mason and Windle (2002), in a 1-year longitudinal study, found that religious attendance initially seemed to predict fewer subsequent alcohol problems. But when peer, family, and school influences were statistically controlled for, the relationship disappeared. A Finnish study of adolescents (Winter, Karvonen, & Rose, 2002) showed a negative correlation between religiousness and alcohol use only for a rural sample; there was no relationship for an urban sample. There are also suggestions that gender is important, with stronger relationships for women than for men (e.g., Templin & Martin, 1999). A study by Corwyn and Benda (2000) is highlighted in Research Box 12.2, to give the reader a better appreciation for the complexities of “controlling for other variables” and ways in which the relationship between religion and substance use can be further specified.

NEW RELIGIONS

The negative association between religion and substance use/abuse is not limited to traditional religious groups. Although there is evidence that individuals who become members

RESEARCH BOX 12.2. Religiosity and Church Attendance:

The Effects on Use of “Hard Drugs” after Sociodemographic and Theoretical Factors Were Controlled For (Corwyn & Benda, 2000)

This questionnaire study involved 532 students in grades 9–12 from three inner-city public high schools in a metropolitan area on the U.S. East Coast. The authors pointed out that “church attendance” has been a favorite measure of religion in studies of religion and substance use, but because this measure is confounded by other variables, they suspected that personal religiosity might be a more appropriate measure. The authors also wondered about the extent to which the relationship between religion and substance abuse might be mediated by other variables. That is, there has been some question about whether religion is related to substance abuse simply because of its relation to other relevant variables, or whether religion makes some unique contribution to the relationship that cannot be “explained” by resorting to those other variables. Also, relatively few studies have investigated the use of “hard drugs” (e.g., cocaine, heroin) in relation to religiosity.

The results of this study led the authors to conclude that “church attendance, like attendance in a college classroom, is at best a vicarious indicator of commitment and a poor measure of performance” (p. 253). Indeed, church attendance did not show a negative association with hard drug use, but personal religiosity (e.g., private prayer, Bible study) did show the expected negative association. Indeed, the results indicated that personal religiosity was negatively correlated with self-reported hard drug use even after other strong predictors found in the literature were statistically controlled for.

This investigation is of course limited by the nature of the sample (inner-city high school students) and the measures (relatively few single items were used to generate measures of church attendance and personal religiosity), as well as the use of self-reports for all dependent variable information. However, this investigation did consider a variety of other potentially influential variables, without assuming that the initial correlations themselves justified the conclusion that religion is negatively related to hard drug use.

of cults often have a history of greater drug and alcohol utilization before joining (Rochford, Purvis, & NeMar, 1989), research suggests that their subsequent use of these substances often declines, sometimes dramatically (Galanter & Buckley, 1978; Richardson, 1995). In fact, these sorts of findings led Latkin (1995) to suggest that “The study of new religions may provide insights into methods of improving drug treatment programs” (p. 179). On the other hand, new or alternative religions sometimes also encourage substance use. For example, some cults from the 1960s and 1970s openly advocated LSD use (Gorsuch, 1995).

WHY DOES THIS RELATIONSHIP EXIST?

It is one thing to find an association between variables, and quite another to explain *why* that relationship exists. There are probably many factors involved in the inverse correlation between religion and substance use/abuse, and various theories have been proposed to explain the association (see Cochran, 1992; Ford & Kadushin, 2002; Gorsuch, 1995). Benson’s (1992b) review of the related empirical literature led him to infer:

Nearly all of these efforts appeal to the social control function of religion, in which religious institutions and traditions maintain the social order by discouraging deviance, delinquency, and self-destructive behavior. Religion, then, prevents use through a system of norms and values that favor personal restraint. (p. 216)

Gorsuch (1995) has pointed out two mechanisms that may be operating here. First, as clearly noted in the quotation above, socialization processes may decrease substance use through the internalization of (religious) antiabuse norms. Drawing on a distinction made by the classical social theorist Emile Durkheim (1915), we call this the “normative” function of religion—the notion that religion provides a reference group that prescribes what one’s attitude and behavior toward alcohol and other substances should be. Thus affiliation with conservative reference groups (e.g., churches that teach against substance use) should negatively predict substance use. Second, Gorsuch maintained that religion may serve as an alternative (i.e., to drugs or alcohol) means of meeting basic needs, such as the need to relieve mental anguish or social anxiety, or as an alternative to a sense of meaninglessness and alienation. We refer to this second mechanism, again following Durkheim’s lead, as the “integrative” function of religion—the notion that the religious group provides an individual with a sense of acceptance, and that such social support lessens reliance on other anxiety-reducing mechanisms, such as the use of alcohol or drugs.

Consider, for example, research showing that the negative relationship between religion and substance use is stronger for white than for black adolescents in the United States (Amey, Albrecht, & Miller, 1996). Furthermore, different aspects of religiosity are better predictors for blacks than for whites. A study of adolescents (mostly 14- and 15-year-olds) in Ohio and Kentucky found that church attendance was a better negative predictor of alcohol use among blacks, but that fundamentalism was the better negative predictor for whites (T. L. Brown, Parks, Zimmerman, & Phillips, 2001). Though it is not precisely clear what these findings mean, Ford and Kadushin (2002) have offered an explanation along the lines of the distinction between the normative and integrative functions of religion. Their study of over 18,000 individuals found that though the normative dimension of religion was important for both races, it had much greater power in predicting alcohol use among whites. In contrast, the integrative dimension seemed to have greater predictive power among blacks. The

authors suggest that the influence of the organizational church, especially in the black community, should be understood in terms of not just its doctrinal teachings, but also its position as a provider of social support and its ability to meet basic psychological needs. In a similar vein, Wallace, Brown, Bachman, and Laviest (2003) found that religion operated as a protective factor for white youths at an individual level, whereas for black youths the influence of religion seemed greater at a group level.

Benson (1992b) has argued that in addition to social control mechanisms, religion decreases alcohol and drug use/abuse indirectly by “promoting environmental and psychological assets that constrain risk-taking” (p. 218). He is referring here to religion’s attempts to encourage positive behaviors through promoting family harmony and parental support, as well as through sponsoring prosocial values and social competence. Others have similarly concluded that religious young people are generally less likely to engage in health-compromising behaviors and more likely to engage in health-enhancing behaviors (Wallace & Forman, 1998). Research is needed to assess the extent to which such indirect mechanisms are effective deterrents to drug and alcohol use/abuse.

There are interesting variations in the relationship between religion and substance use/abuse across faith groups. Cochran (1993), for example, found that for alcohol consumption, this association was strongest for religious bodies that condemn alcohol, perhaps reflecting the normative function of religion. However, faiths that are silent regarding alcohol revealed little influence of religiousness. Similarly, recent research (Chawla, Neighbors, Lewis, Lee, & Larimer, 2007; Walker, Ainette, Wills, & Mendoza, 2007) has further documented that the negative religion-substance use linkage may reflect the perceived perception of others, such that less substance use is found among those who associate with less tolerant groups. Individuals apparently find that their ability to refuse drugs or alcohol is enhanced by both private and public religiosity, as one study among African American adolescents and young adults found (Nasim, Utsey, Corona, & Belgrave, 2006). Another study (Beeghley, Bock, & Cochran, 1990) showed that when people changed religions, the effects of faith on alcohol consumption were strongest when their new religious group banned the use of alcohol.

Of course, the association of religiousness and substance use may reflect other, more personal characteristics as well. Walker et al. (2007) found that the effect of religiousness on substance use was mediated through personal self-control and less personal tolerance for deviance. They also found that parental support and less parent-child conflict were associated with decreased substance use. Other research (Goggin, Murray, Malcarne, Brown, & Wallston, 2007) has identified the importance of belief in high God control (in addition to, not replacing, internal control) as a predictive factor in lower alcohol use.

The Role of Religion in Prevention and Treatment of Substance Abuse

Some of religion’s role in inhibiting substance abuse may derive from its role in preventing abuse before it begins. For example, Stewart (2001) found that religious beliefs seemed to act as a buffer for university students, deterring them from making an initial decision to use alcohol or drugs. In this sense, religion may play a role in prevention.

It is likely that some prevention, treatment, and support programs could benefit from the aspects of religion that combat substance abuse, though research is needed to clarify what those specific elements are. Gorsuch (1995) and Benson (1992b) suggested over a decade ago that religion may be especially effective for religious people who want their beliefs to be considered in a nurturing and supportive treatment context for substance abuse; this sug-

gestion has only recently been systematically investigated. However, the studies are now numerous, with the vast majority suggesting that spirituality or religiousness seems to be a facilitative factor in substance abuse recovery—often because those who report high religiousness or spirituality also show positive mental health characteristics, such as increased coping and optimism, greater perceived social support, and so on (Arnold, Avants, Margolin, & Marcotte, 2002; Collins, 2007; Pardini, Plante, Sherman, & Stump, 2000; Piedmont, 2004; Robinson, Cranford, & Webb, 2007; Shields, Broome, Delany, Fletcher, & Flynn, 2007; Sterling et al., 2006, 2007). Several of these studies include behavioral components. For example, those who report being more religious are abstinent from illicit drugs significantly longer during the first 6 months of a treatment program (Avants, Warburton, & Margolin, 2001) and are more successful in recovering from addiction (Jarusiewicz, 2000). One large-scale recent study (Shields et al., 2007), based on a national sample of over 10,000 individuals in 70 different drug treatment programs, concluded that a religious or spiritual emphasis in treatment programs was moderately positively related to treatment outcomes, though the researchers admitted difficulty in assessing the specific contribution of religion as compared to these treatment programs' other features. Sterling et al. (2006) also found that a spiritual treatment component was helpful, but only to clients who desired such a component. This team of researchers (Sterling et al., 2007) also found that patients report spiritual growth during substance abuse treatment that has a spiritual emphasis; such treatment provides a sense of meaning and hope, which in turn may have an impact on treatment outcome.

Probably the most well-known treatment approach that includes a religious element is that of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Though the organization has had some success in treating alcoholism over the years (Oakes, Allen, & Ciarrocchi, 2000), some authors would argue that AA's success, especially as portrayed in the mass media, is overrated (see, e.g., Bufo, 1991). AA is essentially a secular organization, but it has incorporated aspects of religious experience and practices into its treatment approach, especially a reliance on a higher power (God) as the source of rehabilitation (Morreim, 1991). Tonigan, Miller, and Schermer (2002) found that belief in God appears not to be necessary in deriving AA-related benefits; however, they discovered that relative to spiritual and religious clients, atheists and agnostics were less likely to initiate and sustain AA attendance. Also, in another study, theists were more likely to maintain sobriety longer than agnostics or atheists (Zemore & Kaskutas, 2004).

Caveats

One drawback of the many studies on religion and substance use/abuse is that they typically rely on self-reports—a recurring theme throughout this text. If, as Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis (1993) have suggested, religious persons (especially those with an I orientation) have an inclination toward socially desirable responses, it is possible that they are reporting a kind of ideal image of themselves, rather than an accurate assessment of actual substance use and abuse.

In addition, most of the studies in this area, particularly those conducted prior to the 1990s, have examined religiousness in a very general sense, relying on such measures as church attendance and affiliation. These measures are probably overly simplistic, and studies are needed that involve more sophisticated scales of personal religiosity and religious orientation—measures that have been better incorporated in more recent research. There is evidence that in some specific contexts, the usual negative relationship between religion and substance use/abuse may disappear, or may even be reversed. For example, some studies of

adolescents have revealed the usual negative relationship with substance use, but have also found a *positive* relationship between some aspects of religion (e.g., proscriptiveness) and binge or problem drinking (e.g., Kutter & McDermott, 1997), or between early (teen) religiosity and increased adult alcohol use (Galaif & Newcomb, 1999).

The results of relevant studies are correlational, leading to some difficulties in interpretation. The most obvious cause-and-effect interpretation seems to be that greater religiosity somehow protects individuals from substance use and abuse. However, it is conceivable that substance use decreases religiosity. For example, adolescents who experiment with alcohol or drugs may find less room for religion in their lives, and the “hassles” of religious proscriptions for substance use may make religious teachings seem less relevant to their lives and therefore less important. At the least, there may be a reciprocal causal relationship between religiosity and substance use (e.g., Benda, 1997; Benda & Corwyn, 2000; Corwyn, Benda, & Ballard, 1997). However, the development and increased use of more sophisticated statistical procedures are helpful, though not conclusive, in suggesting the more likely causal directions.

Furthermore, in spite of repeated findings of low negative correlations between religion and substance use/abuse, there are exceptions. Some “failures” to find the expected association may reflect unique cultural or religious situations. For example, studies carried out in Iran (Spencer & Agahi, 1982), in Colombia (Marin, 1976), and among Chinese students in Singapore (Isralowitz & Ong, 1990) have shown no link between religion and alcohol or drug use. Other “failures” may simply be related to the generally weak nature of the relationships; slightly weaker correlations in some samples, or small sample sizes, might also result in “no relationship” results. In addition, as noted above, there have been reports of a positive relationship between religion and *problem* drinking (e.g., Alem, Kebede, & Kullgren, 1999).

Finally, we must remember that the “substances” considered in this section sometimes play a part in religious ceremonies or rituals for specific faith groups, and that within this context their use may actually be increased by religious involvement. For example, religious ceremonial use was one justification for drinking alcohol in Nigerian (Oshodin, 1983) and in Mexican and Honduran (Natera, Renconco, Alemendares, Rosowsky, & Alemendares, 1983) samples. In the 1960s, as noted earlier, some new religious groups encouraged the use of LSD, and Clark (1969) and Siegel (1977) have argued that psychedelic drugs may contribute to religious experiences and behaviors. In a different vein, Westermeyer and Walzer (1975) have even suggested that drug use among young people may occur in part because it generates personal and social benefits that would formerly have been derived from religious practice. It has also been noted that traditional religious-based festivals may serve as a vehicle for binge drinking, as well as violence against women (Perez, 2000).

Religion and Substance Use/Abuse: Summary

The vast majority of studies in this area reveal a negative link between religion and substance use/abuse. The relationship is typically rather weak; there are also confounds to consider, as well as occasional failures to replicate the effect. But, all in all, it is impressive how general and consistent the association is across diverse samples and studies. Until recently, the overall literature on substance use/abuse made only token acknowledgment of religion as an important explanatory variable, and then only as one of many possible cultural influences (see, e.g., Gorsuch, 1995; Petraitis, Flay, & Miller, 1995). However, as more and more studies are being published, it is likely that religion will be increasingly recognized as an important predictor variable.

Sexual Behavior

Traditionally, religion has acknowledged the proper role of sexuality as being for procreative purposes within a marital relationship. Consequently, virtually any sort of sexual expression outside heterosexual marriage has been considered inappropriate and sinful. These norms have been both strong and stable across the centuries, but recent changes in these standards have occurred, particularly in Europe and North America. The population at large and some religious groups are currently showing an increased tolerance of masturbation, premarital sex, and even some extramarital sexual behavior. As Cochran and Beeghley (1991) have pointed out,

some churches have addressed the problem by adjusting and softening their stand, while others have steadfastly avoided such secularization. As a result, there are significant differences in the official stands taken toward nonmarital, particularly premarital sex, among mainstream religious bodies in America. (p. 46)

Apparently, it is conservative Protestant churches that have most resisted a softening of attitudes toward nonmarital sex. Petersen and Donnenwerth (1997) examined more than 14,000 cases from longitudinal data obtained from 1972 to 1993. Their results showed that, across the years, mainline Protestants and Catholics revealed less support for traditional beliefs in sex before marriage; however, conservative Protestants showed no such decline.

Religion and Nonmarital Sex

In spite of these denominational differences, research has generally found that stronger religious beliefs and involvement are associated with self-reported decreased nonmarital sexual activity, especially premarital sex, in a broad sense. A considerable research literature supports this conclusion. For example, a longitudinal New Zealand investigation revealed that for both men and women, being involved in religious activities (as measured at both age 11 and age 21) predicted abstinence from sexual intercourse until at least age 21 (Paul, Fitzjohn, Eberhart-Phillips, Herbison, & Dickson, 2000). Atkins, Baucom, and Jacobson (2001) found that frequent churchgoers reported less extramarital sexual activity than did nonattenders. However, this difference was moderated by marital satisfaction; that is, the difference between church attenders and nonattenders was largest among those who were in “very happy” marriages. In marriages described as “pretty happy” or “not too happy,” not only was more extramarital sexual activity reported, but the differences based on church attendance were eliminated, suggesting that marital discontent may be a stronger predictor of extramarital sexual activity than religiosity may be.

Other studies have also shown that various measures of religiosity are related to decreased premarital sexual activity (e.g., Grey & Swain, 1996; Holder et al., 2000; Lammers, Ireland, Resnick, & Blum, 2000; Woody, Russel, D’Souza, & Woody, 2000; Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000), though at least one recent study suggests only a weak relationship (Cochran, Chamlin, Beeghley, & Fenwick, 2004). Most of this research involves adolescents. Barkan (2006) has found that the general pattern of results discovered with adolescents applies to adults as well: The number of premarital sexual partners is fewer among the religious, partly because of moral disapproval of premarital sex; the relationship of religiousness with premarital sexual activity is about the same for men as it is for women; the association of religiousness and premarital sexuality is stronger for European Americans than for African Americans. One

study of Australian adults suggests that the frequency of attendance at religious services may be a key; infrequent attenders held relatively liberal sexual attitudes and behavior patterns, more similar to those of nonreligious peers than to those of regular attenders (de Visser, Smith, Richters, & Rissel, 2007; see also Haerich, 1992).

As is the case with research on religion and substance use/abuse, the research here is almost entirely correlational, so we must resist the temptation to draw causal inferences prematurely. The bulk of the literature appears to assume that the causal direction is from religion to sexuality; given religious teachings about sexual morality, this assumption is not so much unreasonable as it is perhaps premature. We should entertain the possibility that sexual beliefs and practices may influence religious commitment, or since many decisions about both religion and sexuality often occur at about the same time, that some third variable is influencing both religious and sexual decisions.

The negative relationship between self-reported religiosity and nonmarital sexual activity is now well established, and researchers are directing their attention to explaining this relationship. Cochran and Beeghley (1991) examined cumulative data from the National Opinion Research Center's General Social Survey series conducted in the United States between 1972 and 1989, involving almost 15,000 people. They did find an overall tendency for religious persons to disapprove more strongly of premarital sexuality, extramarital sexuality, and homosexuality than the less religious respondents did. However, there were notable variations across different religious groups (see Table 12.1), apparently indicative of the official doctrines of U.S. churches. The more strongly one's (religious) reference group condemns and prohibits various sexual acts, the more likely one is to agree. "That is, as religious proscriptiveness increases, the effect of religiosity on nonmarital sexual permissiveness increases" (Cochran & Beeghley, 1991, p. 46). This view is further supported by empirical data (Cochran et al., 2004) suggesting the importance of religion's normative dimension (as discussed in the section on substance use/abuse). However, as in the case of substance abuse,

TABLE 12.1. Attitudes toward Nonmarital Sexuality: Percentages Saying Specific Behaviors Are "Almost Always Wrong" or "Always Wrong" among Different Religious Groups

Religious group	Attitude toward:		
	Premarital sexuality	Extramarital sexuality	Homosexuality
Nonaffiliated	10	66	49
Jewish	18	75	43
Catholic	36	87	77
Episcopalian	25	85	66
Presbyterian	36	89	76
Lutheran	40	90	81
Methodist	43	91	84
Baptist	49	90	89
Other Protestant	55	93	86
Total sample	40	88	79

Note. Adapted from Cochran and Beeghley (1991, pp. 54–55). Copyright 1991 by the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Adapted by permission.

the normative dimension seems to hold less sway for African Americans than for European Americans (Barkan, 2006).

QUALIFICATIONS

The vast majority of research studies on sex outside marriage has focused on *premarital* sexual activity among adolescents and young adults. More investigations are needed on older populations, as is research focusing on other aspects of nonmarital sexual behavior (such as extramarital sex and noncoital activity).

It is unfortunate that there has not been more research interest in the relationship of specific religious *orientations* to nonmarital sexual attitudes and behavior. Haerich (1992) investigated the role of the I and E religious orientations in the sexual attitudes of about 200 undergraduate psychology students. Consistent with other research, Haerich found that lower church attendance and religiousness were (by self-report) weakly but significantly associated with more permissive attitudes toward nonmarital sexuality, as measured by a sexual permissiveness scale. Furthermore, permissive attitudes were negatively linked to I scale scores and positively associated with E scale scores, usually in the moderate .20 to .30 range. This is consistent with Woodroof's (1985) finding that extrinsically religious persons were more likely to be nonvirgins and to have had more sexual experience than intrinsically religious persons. Haerich interpreted these findings as indicating that greater commitment to religious institutions (I scores) is associated with decreasing permissiveness, whereas people with a religious orientation that focuses on personal comfort and security (E scores) will, in a similar manner, use sexual intimacy to contribute to their personal comfort and security. However, this interpretation must be considered speculative, pending further research. One study, for example, found that *both* I and E scores were linked with decreased sexual activity (Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000).

More religious young people tend to be less knowledgeable about sexual issues. For example, adolescents reporting no religious affiliation were found to have the fewest misconceptions about condom use (Crosby & Yarber, 2001). We need more research on how such misconceptions and/or lack of knowledge about sexuality may affect premarital sexual activity and the likelihood of premarital pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases. Some authors (Zaleski & Schiaffino, 2000) have speculated that although religion helps to protect adolescents from initiating sexual activity, it does not seem to have a protective effect against practicing unsafe sex, at least among students who are already sexually active. Possibly this failure of religion to protect against unsafe sex is related to a fear among conservatives that education about safe sex implicitly communicates an endorsement of sexual activity outside the marriage relationship, thus resulting in a greater lack of knowledge or misconceptions among more religious adolescents.

The many studies that simply look for relationships between general measures of religiousness and sexual attitudes and behaviors neglect potentially important factors. For example, Reynolds (1994) has pointed out that research investigating premarital sexual experience typically assumes that early sexual activity is consensual, when in many cases it is not, especially for females. Cases of nonconsensual sex should not be included in studies of the influence of religion on sexuality, she argues, since this could distort the nature and strength of the overall relationship. Furthermore, gender differences are sometimes found with respect to the relationship between religion and sexuality. For example, research at a large public "Bible belt" university revealed that strength of religious beliefs was significantly

negatively linked with engaging in risky sexual behavior for women only (Poulson, Eppler, Satterwhite, Wuensch, & Bass, 1998). Similarly, a Scottish study found that religiosity had greater influence on women's judgments about sexual standards than on men's judgments (Sheeran, Spears, Abraham, & Abrams, 1996). Clearly, gender issues are potentially important in this area.

Finally, Hammond, Cole, and Beck (1993) have noted yet another complicating factor in the relationship between religion and nonmarital sexuality. Their investigation indicated that at least among white Americans, young people from fundamentalist and sect-like religions are more likely to marry before the age of 20 than are mainline Protestants, even when various other factors are controlled for. They argue that this tendency may result from generally stronger pressures to avoid premarital sexual intercourse. In one sense, this is important because it emphasizes another way in which a person's religious background may influence an aspect of the transition to adulthood—namely, marriage. In another sense, this tendency could also unfairly contribute to the “religion deters premarital sexual activity” finding in many studies, because early marriages among fundamentalist groups will reduce the opportunity for premarital sexual interaction between highly religious young people. By definition, one cannot engage in *premarital sex after* marriage, regardless of age.

RELIGION AND NONMARITAL SEX: SUMMARY

There is little dispute about the typically weak but consistent tendency for religion to be negatively related to nonmarital sexual attitudes and behaviors. However, it is also evident that the relationship is not as simple as was once thought, and future research needs to consider various issues: denominational differences in sexual standards and behavior; religious orientation; knowledge and misconceptions about sexuality; and gender.

Clergy Sexual Abuse

Many books and articles on clergy sexual abuse have appeared over the years, but often these have focused on theological or church-related issues, have offered armchair analyses of such abuse, or have been concerned with pastoral care and counseling issues. It is only relatively recently that empirical attempts to analyze and understand clergy abuse have begun to proliferate. In keeping with the theme of this book, we refer primarily to empirical work here. In light of the recent intense media coverage of the sexual abuse of children by priests, one might suspect that there is an abusing priest lurking in every parish. However, Sipe (1990, 1995) has estimated that just 2% of priests are pedophiles, and possibly 4% would be classified as “ephebophiles” (those who reveal sexual attraction and behavior toward adolescents). Also, as these figures suggest, postpubescent adolescents are more likely to be abused than are prepubescent children (see Plante, 1999). Of course, even these small percentages translate into substantial numbers of abusing priests in the United States.

RESEARCH ON CLERGY ABUSE

Clergy sexual abuse, especially in the Roman Catholic Church, has been a problem for centuries (Isley, 1997). In some cases it may reflect mental disturbance. Others see abusive clergy as egocentric, immature, and narcissistic individuals, who want gratification of their desires as rapidly as possible without concern for the needs and feelings of others. It may therefore

be argued that this condition, though it is indeed deviant, is not usually considered a form of mental disorder. Unfortunately, more time and energy has been spent in documenting the prevalence of clergy sexual abuse than in conducting research to help us understand those who have engaged in abusive behavior.

The situation is too complicated to be explained by simple reference to a pattern of personality traits. For example, it has been pointed out that the clerical profession exposes clergy to sexual temptation—women or men who “fall in love” with their pastors, or parishioners who bare their most intimate problems to ministers, rabbis, or priests. Such actions make both the clergy and those who seek their help vulnerable to exploitation. Given such encounters, it may not come as a surprise that one study of 1,500 Catholic priests over a 25-year period indicated that about half had violated their celibacy vows (Schaffer, 1990). Other work reports that between 42% and 77% of women clergy claim that they have been sexually harassed or abused (see Culver, 1994; Fortune & Poling, 1994; Simpkinson, 1996). Though some estimates suggest that up to one-third of U.S. ministers admit to having engaged in sexual misconduct (Fortune & Poling, 1994), most work indicates that about 25% of pastors have had some kind of sexual involvement with a parishioner (Culver, 1994; Lebacqz & Barton, 1991). Actual intercourse rates between 10% and 15% have been reported (Culver, 1994). In the 1983–1993 decade, one concerned organization documented over 1,150 such incidents (Fortune & Poling, 1994).

It should be noted, however, that the considerable amount of unflattering attention in recent years given to the sexual misconduct of Roman Catholic clergy has led many to overestimate the pervasiveness of the problem. For example, the John Jay Report (John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2004) has estimated that 4% of priests have sexually abused minors (usually fondling of males) and that this percentage is approximately the same as that found among clergy of other religious traditions and among others with unsupervised positions with children (e.g., coaches, scout leaders, teachers, etc.). This percentage is also slightly lower than that found among the general male population in the United States as a whole (Plante & Aldridge, 2004).

Despite these numbers, efforts at psychologically characterizing clergy who perpetrate abuse have met with limited success, in part because of the variety of such abuse. These episodes can involve heterosexual or homosexual behavior and the mistreatment of children or adults. Among other possibilities, one scheme identifies what might be termed “passive/neurotic” perpetrators and “angry/impulsive” perpetrators (Camargo & Loftus, 1993). Another framework distinguishes six different types (Hands, 1992). Another attempt was based on the statistical technique of cluster analysis, and focused on Roman Catholic priests and brothers who had been identified as child sexual offenders (Falkenheim, Duckro, Hughes, Rosetti, & Gfeller, 1999). This investigation identified four clusters of abusers, which were labeled as follows by the authors: Sexually and Emotionally Underdeveloped; Significantly Psychiatrically Disturbed; Undefended Characterological; and Defended Characterological. Unfortunately, we still do not know how to recognize any of these types of clerics before they do damage.

The application of psychological and psychiatric labels to clergy sexual abuse has not proven particularly useful, for although such behavior is unacceptable, individual cases often involve many unique, sometimes tragic circumstances that would also influence average people. Furthermore, especially in cases involving abuse of children, many years may pass before complaints are lodged or legal action is taken. In such cases, issues of memory accuracy and the legitimacy of so-called “repressed memory” become important (see, e.g., Loftus & Guyer, 2002; Qin, Goodman, Bottoms, & Shaver, 1998).

CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE: SUMMARY

In any profession, perfection is an unrealizable ideal. However, people frequently look to the clergy as ideal role models, forgetting that they are subject to the same stresses, problems, motives, and shortcomings as are parishioners and congregants themselves. Clergy, especially when celibacy is expected as part of their role, may experience considerable conflict over personal sexuality (Fones, Levine, Althof, & Risen, 1999). Perhaps better procedures are needed to select those who enter the religious professions; however, screening processes will undoubtedly contain a fair amount of error for some time to come. Psychological and character disorders will therefore persist in religious institutions. Little, however, can be done about such difficulties until they become evident, and the tragedy is that when they do come to light, there will be victims—clerics and laypersons alike.

Criminal Behavior and Delinquency

The literature on religion and crime rates is ambiguous and even somewhat contradictory; this is hardly surprising, once we consider a few points of clarification. Besides the complex issue of how religiousness or spirituality is defined and operationalized, there are equal ambiguities in defining and measuring criminal behavior. “The term criminal and delinquent behavior” covers considerable territory, some of which is discussed elsewhere in this chapter (such as clergy sexual abuse, serious cases of cheating/dishonesty, or illicit drug use). Also, there is sometimes confusion regarding where to draw a line between mental disorder and criminal behavior. Furthermore, crime statistics themselves may be unreliable. Definitions of crimes may vary from one jurisdiction to the next; some governments and police agencies may be more zealous in enforcing laws; and much crime surely goes unreported. Also, the methodological and statistical challenges in teasing out religion–delinquency relationships are considerable. In light of such problems, conflicting findings should be taken in stride.

Common-sense reasoning suggests that religious ties should be linked to decreased crime rates. Theoretical underpinnings of this expected inverse relationship can be traced back to Durkheim’s (1915) emphasis on the social roots of religion, and particularly his social integration theory of religion’s place in society. Durkheim felt that religion is integrally tied to the social order, playing an important role in legitimizing and reinforcing society’s values and norms. Deviance may then stem from a breakdown in the church’s role in this regard. Although the preponderance of studies do show a negative relationship, it tends to be weak to moderate and inconsistent. A review and meta-analysis of 60 investigations published from 1967 to 1998 led to the conclusion that in general, religious beliefs and behaviors were moderately negatively related to individuals’ criminal behavior (Baier & Wright, 2001). However, it was noted that results varied, depending on the conceptual and methodological approaches in individual studies. This is an important point; operational definitions of crime and religion vary substantially across studies, as do samples, data collection techniques, statistical analyses, and controls for potentially confounding factors. It is not surprising that studies in this area generate conflicting results, given the tendency for “apples and oranges” to be thrown into the same bowl as if they are identical (see also Benda & Corwyn, 1997).

Furthermore, like the research on other moral issues discussed in this chapter, virtually all of the published studies on crime and religion are correlational, though it appears that many researchers assume (sometimes even slipping into causal language) that religion

somehow prevents or reduces crime. However, it might also be true that those predisposed toward criminal behavior may be less inclined to attend church or see religion as important. Furthermore, much of this association may be attributable to social environment factors rather than to religion itself. For example, Benson, Donahue, and Erickson (1989), when surveying the literature on adolescent delinquency and religion, concluded: "After accounting for whether they have friends who engage in deviant behaviors, the adolescents' closeness to their parents, and how important it is for them to do what their parents say, religion contributes little independent constraining effect" (p. 172).

In general, the negative relationship seems most likely to appear for "victimless activities" (e.g., the use/abuse of alcohol and drugs, consensual premarital sexual activity), rather than other delinquent behavior (Chadwick & Top, 1993). It is important to go beyond simple correlational relationships, as indicated in research carried out by Peek, Curry, and Chalfant (1985). They found evidence that over time, higher delinquency rates appeared among students who declined in religiousness, compared to those who were low in religiousness throughout the same period. Such longitudinal trends may provide the basis for future investigations of adolescent delinquency.

We focus in the next section on one particular type of criminal behavior: domestic abuse.

Domestic Abuse

There has been increasing concern with the issue of domestic violence toward both spouses/partners and children. Some studies have focused on partner or child abuse that is apparently related to religious beliefs. Similar violence related to religion has been documented across cultures and through time, so we are not witnessing a phenomenon indigenous to our own time and social order (Girard, 1977). In the past, like clergy abuse, domestic abuse was often "hushed up"; people seemed to prefer to believe that it did not exist. Even today, because virtually all of the research is based on self-report that is subject to bias for many reasons (e.g., reluctance to admit to abuse, having heard overly positive or negative stories about one's childhood from parents or others, the power of suggestion), we cannot be sure how widespread the phenomenon is. Furthermore, exploratory research has even indicated that the *belief* that one was abused may be more important than *actual* abuse history in predicting some effects of abuse (Webb & Otto Whitmer, 2001).

Religious "Justification" for Abuse

Apparently religion may be seen by some people as "justifying" child or partner abuse, in the sense that it may encourage physical punishment of children or violence against one's partner (Capps, 1992, 1995; de Jonge, 1995; Greven, 1991; Kroeger & Beck, 1996; Volcano Press, 1995). These authors point to numerous Biblical passages, as well as books and articles written by religious authors, that may be interpreted as encouraging the use of physical force, especially in disciplining children. It is argued that this could serve as a justification for various forms of abuse (e.g., "It is for the child's own good," "The man is the head of the household"). Furthermore, Bottoms et al. (1995) suggested that religious beliefs can threaten the welfare of children in various ways, including the withholding of medical care and attempts to rid children of evil, as well as direct physical and psychological abuse that adults see as religiously justified. At the same time, religious institutions have usually taken strong posi-

tions against domestic abuse (Volcano Press, 1995), and current research suggests that religion is overall more of a protective factor against marital violence and child physical abuse than a factor facilitating such violence/abuse (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005).

Research on Religion and Domestic Abuse

Research in this area has generated unclear results because of such influencing factors as education, denial that abuse has taken place, reluctance to admit to having endured or perpetrated abuse, and differing definitions of abuse. For example, we might be tempted to conceive of domestic violence as only physical or sexual. But the Volcano Press (1995), for instance, has listed 98 forms of domestic abuse, including 29 that are considered physical, 16 sexual, 17 financial, 16 verbal, and 20 emotional. The research that has been carried out on this topic, however, has generally been confined to more straightforward operational definitions of "domestic abuse."

One summary of this literature indicated that those who attended church frequently were half as likely as infrequent attenders to experience physical violence themselves, or to use physical aggression against their partners (Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001). Similarly, Ellison and Anderson (2001) recently found a negative relationship between church attendance and domestic violence (see also Ellison, Bartkowski, & Anderson, 1999; Fergusson, Horwood, Kershaw, & Shannon, 1986), and Lown and Vega (2001) reported that regular church attendance was associated with decreased physical abuse by a partner for Mexican American women. Brown, Cohen, Johnson, and Salzinger (1998), in a 17-year longitudinal study, found that children of regular church attenders were less than half as likely to suffer from physical abuse as were children of parents who rarely or never attended church. In a somewhat different vein, Makepeace (1987) found religion to be negatively associated with courtship violence among college students. A Canadian investigation of more than 1,000 adults reported that more frequent church attenders were the least violent (Brinkerhoff, Grandin, & Lupri, 1992). Initially, then, the research evidence seems to show a link between higher religiosity (generally speaking) and reduced domestic abuse or child physical abuse.

There have been suggestions that family abuse, generally speaking, has roots in the strong patriarchal family structure espoused by some conservative religions (Brinkerhoff et al., 1992). This patriarchal system is sometimes interpreted as justifying the subordination of women, particularly in terms of their subjection to powerful male authority (Clarke, 1986; Pagelow & Johnson, 1988), though some women may turn to religion as a source of personal empowerment in other ways (Ozorak, 1996). The problem may be confounded by some clergy, who counsel women to remain with abusive husbands because it is their religious duty and responsibility to stay with and obey their spouses (Alsdurf & Alsdurf, 1988); indeed, there is evidence that religious beliefs among evangelical Christian women may make them more reluctant to leave a physically abusive husband (Nason-Clark, 1997). Also, women from such patriarchal environments whose intimate partners have sexually abused their children may experience intense value conflict over the need to preserve the family, as well as their loyalty to both their abusive partners and their victimized children (Alaggia, 2001). This patriarchal issue may cross cultural boundaries. Higher levels of religiosity among Arab women in Israel were associated with the attitude that abused women should assume more personal responsibility for their husbands' violent behavior (Haj-Yahia, 2002).

Brinkerhoff et al. (1992) found that their hypothesis that more fundamentalist, conservative Protestants would be more abusive "because of the stereotypes surrounding their value

of patriarchy” (p. 28) received mixed support. Conservative Protestant women, but not men, reported the highest rates of violence (37.8%), compared to mainline Protestants (28.1%), Catholics (23.9%), and nonaffiliated respondents (30.8%). It may be that a greater differential understanding or definition of abuse between the genders exists among conservative Protestants. Of course such research is also subject to the biases already mentioned that are associated with self-reports. For example, gender differences might represent a self-serving bias or a reluctance to admit to abuse.

Consequences for the Victims of Abuse

Studies have shown that child sexual abuse has both religious and nonreligious consequences for those who are abused. Doxey, Jensen, and Jensen (1997) investigated more than 5,000 women, including more than 600 who reported being sexually abused when they were growing up. Those reporting abuse also reported higher rates of emotional and psychological problems (e.g., depression, lower self-esteem), as well as lower levels of religiousness. Bottons, Nilesen, Murray, and Filipas (2003) found that although religion-related physical abuse is similar to non-religion-related physical abuse, abuse in the name of religion has significantly more negative implications for long-term psychological well-being. Pritt (1998) looked at the effects of sexual abuse on Mormon women and noted that it was spiritually disruptive. Among other things, such abuse created alienation from self and God, resulting in a sense of powerlessness and meaninglessness in a woman’s life. The effects of domestic violence on children and women, especially when religiously justified, are profound and long-lasting (Volcano Press, 1995). A study of 1,207 male veterans reported that those who had a history of sexual abuse did report greater spiritual injury, but abuse was not related to an overall measure of current religious behavior (Lawson, Drebing, Berg, Vincellette, & Penk, 1998).

However, there are also indications that religion can help people to deal with the effects of domestic abuse, possibly through a mechanism such as social support (Coker et al., 2002). Elliott (1994) investigated child sexual abuse among almost 3,000 professional women. She could find no evidence that its prevalence was related to family religious affiliation, but there was a tendency for adult religious practices to mediate the severity of symptoms for those victimized as children. Similarly, Reinert and Smith (1997) found that their sample of women who had been sexually abused as children often looked to faith for support. Another investigation compared about 1,000 female teenagers who had been sexually abused to a sample of 1,000 female teenagers who had not been abused (Chandy, Blum, & Resnick, 1996). Results indicated that greater religiosity seemed to act as a protective factor against a variety of adverse outcomes. And Giesbrecht and Sevcik (2000) found that abused women from a conservative evangelical background could allow their faith either to engender shame and guilt or to provide a vehicle for hope and change. Studies such as this underline the potential of religion to help some adult survivors to cope with their earlier abuse.

Perceptions of Abuse

One’s religious orientation is apparently linked to how one views partner abuse in others. Burris and Jackson (1999) experimentally varied scenarios depicting a woman who was abused by her boyfriend. They found that their undergraduate students’ ratings of the abused woman and her abuser changed, depending on whether the woman was depicted as upholding or as violating religious values (see Research Box 12.3).

RESEARCH BOX 12.3. Hate the Sin/Love the Sinner, or Love the Hater?: Intrinsic Religion and Responses to Partner Abuse (Burris & Jackson, 1999)

The authors of this study began by noting inconsistencies in the little research that exists on the relationship between religion and partner abuse. Past research, they pointed out, was limited by a possible social desirability bias (intrinsically religious people may be more prone to this bias and attempt to present themselves in a more positive light), crude measures of religiosity, and a failure to take contextual influences into account. They attempted to deal with all of these problems in their investigation of how an I religious orientation would be associated with reactions to the perpetrator and the victim of abuse, under different conditions.

Ninety undergraduate volunteers responded to the Allport–Ross I and E religious orientation scales, and were then randomly assigned to one of three conditions in which they read a vignette about a woman who was abused by her partner. The vignettes were mostly the same for all conditions, describing a situation where, after dating for 9 months, Rob asked Cheryl to marry him. She asked for a week to think about his proposal, after which they had dinner together at a restaurant. The vignettes diverged at this point. In one condition (“value-affirming”), Cheryl told Rob that their religious differences were too great; she “would not feel right about marrying outside of my faith” (p. 165), and therefore regretfully said no to his marriage proposal. In a second (“value-neutral”) condition, Cheryl admitted that she did not think that she was in love with Rob, and therefore could not accept his proposal. In the final condition (“value-violating”), Cheryl said that the reason she could not marry Rob was that she needed time to resolve issues about her sexual orientation, especially her concern that she might be a lesbian. All vignettes ended with Rob throwing a glass of ice water in Cheryl’s face and storming out of the restaurant, leaving Cheryl alone and crying.

Participants indicated their liking for both Cheryl and Rob on a 9-point response format, from “not at all” (1) to “very much” (9). A check indicated that after reading the vignette, all respondents did remember Cheryl’s reason for turning down Rob’s marriage proposal.

As expected, people with higher I scale scores tended to like the victim more when she based her decision to decline the marriage proposal on her religious values. However, when the victim (Cheryl) based her decision on value-violating concerns (that she might be a lesbian), those with higher I scores actually liked the abuse perpetrator (Rob) more. These relationships are especially interesting, because the perpetrator’s behavior was identical in all conditions; the victim suffered precisely the same abuse in all conditions; and these two correlations were not found for any of the other conditions.

The authors reasoned that Cheryl’s rationale for saying no to the marriage proposal gave more intrinsically religious persons a sort of contextual justification to express what otherwise would probably have been socially undesirable responses, in actually expressing liking for an abusive person. This rather subtle shift from loving the person who was abused to expressing more positive attitudes toward the abuser is disturbing, since it seems to fly in the face of intrinsically oriented individuals’ “claim to endorse positive attitudes toward women and to reject many patriarchal beliefs. . . . The present research suggests that the commitment underlying their profession may be tenuous and undercut by other value commitments (e.g., ‘family values’), however” (p. 171). The findings of this study are especially relevant to our discussion of partner abuse, because they might help to explain why victims of abuse do not always receive the expected love and sympathy from their religious group, and why sympathy for the perpetrator can sometimes override concern for the victim among religious persons.

Religion and Domestic Abuse: Summary

This is another area where it is difficult to come to firm conclusions, based on the relevant research. It is challenging to carry out research on domestic abuse for many reasons, such as potentially biased self-reports from respondents, difficulties in operationalizing concepts, lack of agreement regarding measures to be used, differential value systems in defining abuse, and so on. In spite of these problems, the most common finding has been a negative relationship between measures of religion and domestic violence. There is also some support for the claim that some domestic violence may seem to be justified by the patriarchal family structure found most often in fundamentalist or conservative religious groups. Also, victims of abuse can potentially suffer serious adverse effects for many years. Often victims become less religious, but there is evidence that religion can serve as a positive resource as well in their coping with abuse. Finally, some perpetrators of abuse may be viewed sympathetically, especially if “value violation” might have contributed to the abuse. In spite of these findings, this area of study is still in its infancy, with many research contradictions and anomalies to be resolved.

HELPING BEHAVIOR

“Help those in need.” “Love one another.” “Treat others as you would have them treat you.” These are simple yet powerful imperatives, and similar themes are espoused by all of the world’s major religions (Coward, 1986). Religion has been identified with humanity and community through such terms as “love,” “justice,” “compassion,” “mercy,” “grace,” and “charity.” The scriptural writings of most religions provide many examples of religious persons’ being kind to and helping others in need. And even in contemporary society, religious organizations and individuals sometimes stand out in their efforts to assist others. Churches become involved in relief efforts to ease the effects of famines, earthquakes, wars, and other disasters. Religious groups organize and fund soup kitchens in cities large and small; they help refugees to escape from unbelievable horrors and to become established in a new land; they become actively involved as peacemakers in the world’s “hot spots.” Interviews with hundreds of people who rescued Jews in Nazi Europe revealed some who attributed their behavior to their religious values (Oliner & Oliner, 1988). The list of such religiously sponsored helping efforts is a long one.

Yet for many, “religion” apparently has little or nothing to do with their good will; present-day society offers unlimited opportunities to aid others in a secular context, and many people accept this challenge. Of course, this is why anecdotes are of little use in clarifying our understanding of the relationship between religion and helping behavior. Examples can be marshaled to show that both religious and nonreligious individuals and organizations assist others, and that they can also act with callous neglect when people cry out for assistance. Our challenge is to move beyond rhetoric and anecdotal material—to examine more general links between religion and helping, as revealed in the empirical literature.

A growing body of research suggests *some* connection between religion and helping behavior. However, the relationship is complex and involves many qualifications. The assumption of many that the more religious a person is, the more helpful he or she is toward others is only partially and indirectly supported—to the extent that, some would argue, the assumption itself is of little utility and should be disregarded.

Research Findings

By now, as readers might guess, psychometric, methodological, and definitional issues are important in the study of helping behavior, just as they are in most areas of psychology. Norms for helping can differ across cultural or religious groups (e.g., Kanekar & Merchant, 2001). Also, in keeping with many psychological studies of religion generally, much research in this area relies on questionnaires, asking for self-reports of religiousness and helping behavior. This raises concerns about “self-presentation” issues. For example, religious persons may be concerned that they should appear to be good representatives of their faith, and therefore may be inclined to exaggerate the extent to which they help others. Fortunately, there are also some studies in this area that utilize behavioral measures, and these serve as an important counterbalance to the many questionnaire studies on helping.

Early Studies

Early survey studies in this area tended to rely on measures of frequency of church attendance as the primary measure of religiousness, with occasional forays into measures of such factors as belief in God, affiliation, or religious involvement. Assessment of “helping” typically involved self-reports (and occasionally others’ reports) of one’s inclination to assist others. These studies were fairly “primitive,” in the sense that the measures of both religion and helping were quite simple and basic, and investigators merely looked for correlations between such general measures. These studies typically reported low to moderate positive correlations between religiousness and helping (Hunsberger & Platonow, 1986; Langford & Langford, 1974; Nelson & Dynes, 1976; Rokeach, 1969), though one study (Nelson & Dynes, 1976) found that the greater likelihood of helping among those more religious was limited to religion-related contexts. However, more recent investigations concluded that conservative Christians were more likely to report volunteering and giving in both religious and secular realms (Lam, 2002; Regnerus, Smith, & Sikkink, 1998; Uslander, 2002).

In contrast, among early studies that incorporated actual behavioral measures there is limited evidence that religious people are necessarily more helpful than less religious or nonreligious people. In fact, Batson et al.’s (1993) review of six early studies employing behavioral measures (i.e., creatively putting people in a behavioral situation, not just asking them how they would hypothetically behave; examples included taking lost addressed letters to a mailbox, calling a garage for a stranded woman motorist without any money, and making a financial contribution to help a needy family) showed that five of the six found no evidence that more religious individuals were more helpful. Only one study showed any inclination for more religious individuals to be more likely to help than their less religious counterparts, and even this finding held only when the request came from a religious person. After reviewing these six studies, Batson et al. (1993) concluded that “this evidence strongly suggests that the more religious show no more active concern for others in need than do the less religious. The more religious only present themselves as more concerned” (p. 342).

Recent Research

Recent research seems to confirm many of the early research findings, but also provides some new insights. Much of the new research has looked at the broader construct of “prosocial character,” which involves far more than just helping behavior; it has found clear associations

between self-reported measures of religiousness and such prosocial characteristics as forgiveness (McCullough, Bono, & Root, 2005; Worthington, 2005), benevolence (Saroglou, Delpierré, & Dernelle, 2004), and agreeableness (Saroglou, 2002b). A meta-analysis (Saroglou et al., 2004) found that though the relationship between religiousness and prosocial personality traits and values is somewhat modest, it seems to exist across religions and cultures.

Once again, however, the vast majority of these studies rely on self-reports that may be biased. However, one recent set of studies (Saroglou, Pichon, Trompette, Verschueren, & Dernelle, 2005) utilizing behavioral measures found that religiousness is indeed associated with prosociality, but with certain qualifications. These researchers conducted four studies and found that religiousness was accompanied by prosocial tendencies, including not engaging in indirect aggression in response to hypothetical daily hassles (Study 1) and being willing to help people who are known and close to them (Study 2). Studies 3 and 4 suggest that any self-reported altruistic behavior and empathy were not delusional, since peers also validated those self-reports. These results were found after the researchers controlled for such other possibilities that might explain the relationship, such as gender, honesty, social desirability bias, and attachment security; hence the relationship between religion and prosociality does not reflect these variables. However, the researchers point out that perhaps there are limits to the amount of prosociality (i.e., low-cost actions) related to religiousness, and that such tendencies are not necessarily extended to all people (especially if the people are not personally known).

Furthermore, other research (de Dreu, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1995) suggests that we perceive religious people to be more prosocial. In a “prisoner’s dilemma” game, participants were more cooperative with and expected their hypothetical partner in the game to be more cooperative, honest, and moral when that partner was described as a religion (vs. business) major.

Dimensions of Religion and Helping

Most of the research discussed above did not take into account possible differences in helping tendencies associated with varying religious *orientations*. The reader is again reminded of Gordon Allport’s two dimensions and accompanying measures of I and E religious orientations, introduced in Chapter 2. Briefly, the I orientation is intended to reflect what Allport (1950) called a mature religious sentiment—a motivation that arises from the goals set forth by the religious tradition itself. Religion is thus regarded as a *master motive* that overrides other needs, as compelling as they may be. In contrast, the E religious orientation is characterized by a utilitarian approach to religion—where religious beliefs, attitudes, and actions are endorsed to the extent that they aid in achieving other, less ultimate goals (both personal and social). One would expect that persons with an I orientation should be more helpful, since they tend to “live” their religion, and that persons with an E orientation should be less helpful, because their religion derives from self-interest. And, indeed, many investigations involving self-reports have revealed positive correlations between I scores and either helping others or professing values consistent with helping others (Benson et al., 1980; Bernt, 1989; Chau, Johnson, Bowers, Darvill, & Danko, 1990; Johnson et al., 1989; Tate & Miller, 1971; Watson, Hood, Morris, & Hall, 1984; Watson, Hood, & Morris, 1985). Likewise, most of these studies found either negative or no correlations between E scores and helping-related values.

The evidence presented above suggests that more religious persons, especially more intrinsically religious individuals, tend to help others through their religious organizations

in a variety of ways. Also, it would appear that I religiosity is positively but weakly related to an inclination to say that one helps others, and possibly the tendency actually to volunteer in a charitable context. There is some evidence that social desirability does not explain this relationship, though the relevant studies have relied to a large extent on self-reports. The situation is certainly not clear-cut, since the associations that have appeared tend to be weak, and they are not entirely consistent from one study to the next.

Quest as an Alternative Orientation

Batson and his colleagues have suggested that I religiousness relates positively only to the *appearance* of being more helpful (Batson, 1976, 1990; Batson, Floyd, Meyer, & Winner, 1999; Batson, Schoenrade, & Pych, 1985; Batson et al., 1993; Batson, Eidelman, Higley, & Russell, 2001), since that is what virtually all religious traditions teaches. They proposed that a measure of the Quest (Q) dimension—a flexible, questioning approach to religion—might be the most direct predictor of actual helping behavior. Defined as “the degree to which an individual’s religion involves an open-ended, responsive dialogue with existential question raised by the contradictions and tragedies of life” (Batson et al., 1993, p. 169), Batson developed the notion of Q from those neglected elements of Allport’s (1950) original conceptualization of the mature religious sentiment. It frequently happens, when a researcher is attempting to construct a measure of a complex concept, that certain dimensions or elements of the concept are lost. This, Batson and colleagues argued, is precisely what happened when religious maturity became operationalized for measurement purposes into the I scale. The neglected elements included the recognition, and even appreciation, of the complexity of issues involved; openness to the possibility of change in religious beliefs; and ascription of a positive role to doubt.

As we know from Chapter 2, for the Q dimension to be scientifically studied, it was necessary to develop a reliable and valid measure. An early version of a Q Scale was criticized on psychometric grounds (see, e.g., Altemeyer, 1996). Batson and Schoenrade (1991a, 1991b) subsequently developed a 12-item revised Q Scale that addressed the earlier problems, and that generated Cronbach’s alphas of .81 and .75 (reasonably acceptable internal consistency scores indicating adequate reliability of the measure) in two samples. Other Q measures have also been developed (e.g., Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; $\alpha = .88$). We must be careful, however, in comparing such measures; there is little item overlap, and it is not clear to what extent different scales might tap different conceptualizations of Q. Batson’s 12-item revised Q Scale has become the instrument of choice in much related research.

We spend some time here looking at Batson’s research program, which stresses behavioral measures of helping rather than self-report measures. However, it should be noted that questions about the conceptual and methodological underpinnings of Q have been raised (e.g., Donahue, 1985), and that some of Batson’s interpretations of results of the relationship of religious orientations to helping behavior and to prejudice (which we review later in this chapter) have been challenged.

Altruism or Egoism?

An early behavioral study in this area attempted to place the parable of the good Samaritan in an experimental context (Darley & Batson, 1973; see Research Box 12.4). Essentially, this experiment revealed no tendency for scores on religion as *means* (similar to E), religion as *end*

RESEARCH BOX 12.4. Situational and Dispositional Variables in Helping Behavior
(Darley & Batson, 1973)

In the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus described a man who was robbed, beaten, and left for dead at the side of the road. Two “religious” individuals, a priest and a Levite, passed by but did not stop to help. However, a Samaritan (a religious outcast), at some cost to himself, gave the robbery victim the help he needed. Jesus apparently wanted to make the point that people should model their behavior after the Samaritan, not after “religious” people who may be so caught up in their thoughts that they do not see the needs of people around them.

Would the results differ if this situation were to occur in contemporary society? Darley and Batson attempted to construct a similar “help-needed” situation at Princeton University. Sixty-seven seminary students first completed questionnaires to assess their religious orientation, among other things. Then, one at a time, 40 of them showed up for a follow-up experimental session. They were asked to prepare a short talk based on either (1) the parable of the good Samaritan, or (2) jobs that seminary students might pursue. After having a few minutes to prepare for their forthcoming talk, participants were given a map to show them how to get to a room in another building where they would give their talk. Half of the participants were told that they would need to hurry, since they were late for their appointment.

As these students passed down an alley, they met a man who clearly seemed to be in need of help. A confederate of the experimenters was slumped in a doorway, head down, eyes closed, not moving. As each seminarian passed, the victim coughed and groaned; given the geographical setting, it was virtually impossible to miss him. The key dependent measure in this study was whether or not the students stopped to offer any kind of help. In fact, just 16 of the 40 seminarians (40%) offered assistance. And religious orientation scores—Means (similar to E), End (similar to I), or Q—did not predict who would stop to offer aid.

However, among those who did stop, an interesting finding emerged. When a seminarian offered help, the victim indicated that he had just taken his medication, he would be fine if he just rested a few minutes, and he would like to be left alone. Some of the “good Samaritans” were quite insistent, however. In spite of the victim’s objections, some participants insisted on taking him into a nearby building and pouring some coffee and/or religion into him. Among only those who did stop to help, scores on the I measure correlated positively with this “I know what is best for you” helping style ($r = .43$), but scores on the Q measure were negatively associated with such insistent aid ($r = -.54$). Darley and Batson concluded that the more I-oriented seminarians seemed to be guided by a “preprogrammed” helping response, which was not affected by the expressed needs of the victim. It was almost as if the “super helpers” were satisfying their own internal need to help, rather than meeting the needs of the victim. However, those with a Q orientation had a more tentative helping style, sensitive to the person needing help, since they tended to accept the victim’s statement that he really just wanted to be left alone and everything would be fine.

Before we leave our consideration of this study, there are some loose ends to tie up. Contrary to expectations, it did not make any difference whether the participant was preparing to give a speech on the parable of the good Samaritan or on jobs for seminary graduates. Apparently, thinking about helping in a Biblical context did not make participants more likely to offer aid in a similar situation. Finally, those participants in the “hurry up, you’re late” condition were significantly less likely to stop and offer any kind of help than were those with no “hurry up” instructions. Apparently, the most powerful variable in determining helping behavior overall in this study was a nonreligious one—whether or not the participant was in a hurry.

(similar to I), or Q to be related to helping behavior. Darley and Batson (1973) concluded that among those who did not offer to help, the more orthodox intrinsic persons might be helping for their own reasons, instead of being sensitive to those needing aid. Additional studies conducted by Batson and his colleagues (Batson et al., 1989; Batson & Gray, 1981; Batson & Flory, 1990) have pursued the “altruism versus egoism” issue concerning underlying motivation for helping by people with different religious orientations. The findings of these studies provide further support that for those who score high on Q, providing assistance is generated a concern for the victim’s welfare. Those with an I orientation seem motivated primarily by a personal need to appear helpful.

This interpretation has been challenged (Gorsuch, 1988; Watson, 1993; Watson et al., 1985). Possibly those with higher Q scores helped “tentatively” because they really weren’t very committed to helping in the first place, and the more assertive assistance of those with higher I scores reflected more genuine caring and concern on their part. Furthermore, we may wonder about the generalizability of findings from the relatively homogeneous and religious sample of seminary students.

Intrinsic and Quest Religion as a Source of Universal Compassion?

Batson et al. (1999, 2001) carried out two studies to investigate more thoroughly the role of the I and Q religious orientations in helping behavior—specifically, when a target person’s behavior violated or threatened one’s values (e.g., the person was a homosexual). These studies suggested that a high Q orientation—but not a high I orientation—was associated with broadly based compassion. Their investigations overlap two foci of this chapter (helping and prejudice) and are included here because they speak directly to the underlying motivation of religious people’s helping behavior. Specifically, the authors investigated people’s inclination to help, depending on the extent to which helping might violate their values. An I orientation was found to be associated with *less* help being offered for people who violated values. That is, intrinsically religious people’s antipathy was not limited to value violators’ (sinful) behavior, but was apparently directed at the value-violating person as well (i.e., the sinner). High Q scores, on the other hand, were associated with less help being offered to aid value-violating behavior, but there was not greater antipathy toward the value-violating person (the sinner).

Findings from a recent study (Mak & Tsang, 2008) are inconsistent with those found by Batson and his colleagues. They found in a behavioral study (i.e., not relying exclusively on self-reports) of 100 females at a religiously based university that those with high I scores were just as likely to help a self-disclosed gay person as much as they would help a straight person. However, regardless of the target person’s sexual orientation (gay or straight), the high-I participants were less likely to help if the person was sexually promiscuous (a value-violating behavior). The authors concluded that “High intrinsic scores seemed to be related to antipathy toward the value-violation, but not toward the gay person as an individual” (p. 379). We return to this issue later in this chapter.

Furthermore, Goldfried and Miner (2002) attempted to replicate and extend Batson et al.’s (2001) work, but were led to a rather different conclusion. The “target” for helping/prejudice in Goldfried and Miner’s study was a “religious fundamentalist” rather than the “gay person” targeted by Batson et al. (2001). Goldfried and Miner concluded that the Q orientation is not indicative of a universally compassionate religious style. Rather, even those with a Q orientation demonstrated discrimination against (i.e., a lesser tendency to help) someone with a different value system (here, a “religious fundamentalist”). Of particular interest is the

fact that the questers' self-reports did not reflect negative opinions of the fundamentalists. Hence, even questers may demonstrate the desire to *appear* to adhere to their set of values (e.g., "open-minded") more than they actually do, similar to what Batson and his colleagues documented among intrinsically religious persons.

However, Batson, Denton, and Vollmecke (2008) replicated the Goldfried and Miner study with some important methodological differences: They restricted their study to U.S. Christians with at least a moderate interest in religion (Goldfried and Miner studied Australian students and did not limit their sample by religion or interest level) and used what they argued to be a better Q measure. They found that those Christians scoring high on Q helped someone who endorsed fundamentalist beliefs (again the "target" person was a religious fundamentalist) as much as a nonfundamentalist, unless such help would promote closed-minded fundamentalist religion. Thus the researchers concluded that questers do extend compassion to those who violate their own values of religious open-mindedness, but not to the point that it might help promote a violation of dearly held values.

Jackson and Esses (1997) also investigated the extent to which religious orientation was related to helping behavior under different value-threatening circumstances, but focused on religious fundamentalism (abbreviated from here on in this chapter as RF)—defined as an inflexible belief that one's religious beliefs represent absolute truth that must be followed—rather than the I, E, and Q religious orientations. They found that when someone needed help and that person was a "moral violator" (e.g., a homosexual), religious fundamentalists advocated personal change rather than other forms of helping. When the person seeking help did not violate their value system (e.g., Native Canadians, single mothers, students), the high-RF respondents were just likely to give direct help or to do what they could to empower the individual to help him- or herself as to provide advice. Whether this tendency is unique to fundamentalists awaits additional research.

Religion and Helping Behavior: Summary

The study of religion and helping behavior is especially interesting because of the availability of both self-report questionnaires and investigations of actual and anticipated behavior. Furthermore, few areas have seen extensive use of theory accompanied by a systematic research program, such as that provided by Batson and his coworkers. Not all research supports Batson et al.'s conclusions that I religion is related to the *appearance* of helping, and that the assistance provided by such individuals is likely to be a preprogrammed, self-serving type of aid (Mak & Tsang, 2008; Saroglou et al., 2005). Nor is there complete support of the finding that the Q orientation is a good predictor of *actual* (behavioral) helping, and that Q-based assistance is motivated by the needs of others—a source of universal compassion (Goldfried & Miner, 2002; see also Gorsuch, 1988; Watson et al., 1984)—though Batson et al. (2008) have recently responded. Also, Jackson and Esses (1997) have given us much to think about in their unique investigations of religion and helping. Apparently RF scores predict a tendency to attribute personal causes for need, at least to value-threatening groups. Perhaps all people, whether their orientation is I, E, Q, RF, or nonreligious, are subject to biases as defined by their own value system—a general human tendency well documented by social psychologists.

We might also wonder whether their religious values could be used in a more positive way. Values not only serve as a potential source of threat; they may also provide a means of increasing helping behavior for religious persons. Could a direct appeal to religious values

increase helping behavior—for example, by increasing perceived personal moral obligation to help among religious persons? Recent research suggests that such an approach might be productive, at least in the context of blood donations as helping behavior (Ortberg, Gorsuch, & Kim, 2001).

PREJUDICE, DISCRIMINATION, AND STEREOTYPING

Since most world religions espouse a common theme of “love one another,” it might be expected that this teaching would have a powerful effect in reducing prejudice among the members of these religions. But research has not supported this generalization. In fact, research shows that as a broad generalization, the more religious an individual is, the more prejudiced that person is (Batson et al., 1993; Dittes, 1969; Gorsuch & Aleshire, 1974; Meadow & Kahoe, 1984; Myers & Spencer, 2001; Paloutzian, 1996; Spilka, Hood, & Gorsuch, 1985). However, the generalization that religion is positively correlated with prejudice is more complex than it might first appear. In fact, there are important qualifiers that must be considered—such that any broad conclusive statement about the relationship between religion and prejudice is an oversimplification, and therefore not particularly helpful.

The religion–prejudice link has a long history. It dates at least to the late 1940s, when Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford’s (1950) famous studies of the authoritarian personality disclosed a positive association between religion and prejudice. Batson et al. (1993) reviewed much work on religion and prejudice, and found that for investigations published in 1960 or earlier, 19 of 23 findings confirmed the positive relationship between religion and prejudice; there was no clear relationship in 3 studies; and just 1 revealed a negative relationship. Similarly, of 24 additional studies published between 1960 and 1990, 18 showed that religion was positively related to prejudice, and just 1 investigation revealed a negative association.

In reviewing the work on religion and prejudice, we do not offer an exhaustive review of the literature that has accumulated in the area (see Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005). Rather, we attempt to summarize different stages in the development of our understanding of the religion–prejudice relationship. We ultimately focus on promising developments that have occurred in the past decade or so, involving the RF and Q orientations, right-wing authoritarianism (hereafter abbreviated as RWA), and intergroup conflict perspectives.

Does Religious Orientation Make a Difference?

Much of the research, especially the early research on religion and prejudice, did not take religious *orientation* into account. Some of the initial work was conducted before the conceptualization and measurement of various personal religious orientations began in the mid-1960s and later. Allport and Ross (1967) addressed this issue head-on when they published their famous article outlining the formulation of the I and E religious orientations, as well as the scales developed to measure the concepts, since this work was done in the context of their study of prejudice. Ultimately, Allport and Ross concluded that persons with an I orientation were, as expected, less prejudiced than those with an E orientation, who in turn were less prejudiced than those with an “indiscriminately pro” (IP) orientation (i.e., those who scored high on both the I and E scales). This finding concerning prejudice levels (i.e., $I < E < IP$) has become firmly embedded in the literature (see, e.g., Gorsuch, 1988). However, as several

authors (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996; Donahue, 1985; Hunsberger, 1995; Kirkpatrick, 1989; Kirkpatrick & Hood, 1990; Laythe, Finkel, & Kirkpatrick, 2001) have pointed out, there were numerous problems with the original I and E concepts and scales as presented by Allport and Ross (1967).

Furthermore, just as we have discussed in the section on helping behavior, high-I persons may only *appear* to be less prejudiced. Batson et al. (1993) suggested that a measure of social desirability and the I orientation were positively correlated, making it difficult to assess the real relationship between intrinsic religiosity and prejudice. Batson, Naifeh, and Pate (1978) reported a link in one study between I scores and social desirability (.36), whereas other authors have been unable to find a significant relationship in this regard (e.g., Hunsberger & Platonow, 1986; Spilka, Kojetin, & McIntosh, 1985) or have reported a significant but very low correlation (.12; Duck & Hunsberger, 1999). Batson, Flink, Schoenrade, Fultz, and Pych (1986) and Batson et al. (1978) reported that I scores were negatively correlated with overt prejudice, but this relationship was not apparent when the effects of social desirability were controlled for in the first study, or when a covert behavioral measure of prejudice was used in the second study. E scores were unrelated to all measures of prejudice.

However, two other studies (Duck & Hunsberger, 1999; Morris, Hood, & Watson, 1989) found that controlling for social desirability did not change prejudice–religion relationships. Furthermore, it has been argued (Watson, Morris, Foster, & Hood, 1986) that weak positive correlations between I scores (or scores on a similar religiousness dimension) and social desirability are unique to the Crowne–Marlowe Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964—the measure used by Batson et al., 1978, and Duck & Hunsberger, 1999). That is, such correlations are not a result of social desirability, but appear because the Crowne–Marlowe Social Desirability Scale “has a substantial number of items confounded by a religious relevance dimension” (Watson et al., 1986, p. 230). However, Leak and Fish (1989) have challenged Watson et al.’s conclusions in this regard. The reader will understand why these discrepancies make it difficult to come to firm conclusions regarding the role of social desirability in the relationship between I religiousness and prejudice.

Measures of Q have been found to correlate significantly with measures of prejudice. Batson et al. (1993) cited five studies that revealed significant negative relationships between Q scores and prejudice (Batson et al., 1978, 1986; McFarland, 1989, 1990; Snook & Gorsuch, 1985). Two other studies (Griffin, Gorsuch, & Davis, 1987; Ponton & Gorsuch, 1988) did not replicate this negative association. However, all of these studies apparently used the earlier, psychometrically weaker version of Batson’s Q Scale (Batson & Ventis, 1982).

Subsequent research using Batson and Schoenrade’s (1991a, 1991b) revised Q Scale have sometimes replicated the significant negative associations between Q and intolerance (Duck & Hunsberger, 1999), as did research by Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) with their own Q measure. Similarly, the research on helping (Batson et al., 1999, 2001) discussed earlier in this chapter seems to support the link between Q and tolerance. However, still other investigations (often with different Q measures) have obtained rather mixed results (Fisher, Derison, Polley, Cadman, & Johnston, 1994; Fulton, Gorsuch, & Maynard, 1999; Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999; Kirkpatrick, 1993).

The relationship between prejudice and the I-E dichotomy as well as Q is at best tenuous and difficult to interpret. At times it seems that the I-E distinction, which was intended to help us understand Allport’s paradoxical assertion that religion both makes (the E religious orientation) and unmakes (the I religious orientation) prejudice, has instead led us into a psychometric and empirical morass of confusion. Certainly, not all authors agree with this

rather bleak assessment of the research on I-E religiosity and prejudice, and some see more potential for these concepts in the future. Studies focusing on the I-E orientations continue to appear regularly in the literature, and many other I-E scales have been developed that are improvements on the original Allport and Ross (1967) scales (see Hill & Hood, 1999a). However, other approaches to religious orientation may offer more promise in explaining the religion–prejudice connection.

Proscribed and Nonproscribed Prejudice: Attitudes toward Homosexuality

It seems logical that for religious people, the stand of their church on issues of prejudice would have some effect on their own attitudes and behavior. However, it has been noted that the existing research on religion and prejudice rarely considers the potential impact of the formal or informal stance of one's religious group on such issues (Batson & Burris, 1994; Hood, Hill, & Williamson, 2005; Rosik, 2007a, 2007b; Watson, 1993). There may be situations in which a religious group does not attempt to negate prejudice, and in fact may even formally or informally support values that to some may seem to be an attempt to justify a specific prejudice ("nonproscribed prejudice"). In such cases, the same religious (e.g., high-I) persons will be likely to admit to their prejudice because it is sanctioned by their church. To discuss the distinction between "proscribed" (forbidden) and "nonproscribed" (not forbidden) prejudice further, we focus on the topic of attitudes toward homosexuality.

Numerous authors have suggested that racial prejudice is now generally proscribed by mainline North American Christian churches, but that prejudice against homosexuals (at least among religious conservatives) is not proscribed. Certainly the link between religion and negative attitudes toward homosexuality is well established (e.g., Finlay & Walther, 2003; Fisher, Derison, et al., 1994; Gentry, 1987; Herek, 1988; Kunkel & Temple, 1992; Margislio, 1993; VanderStoep & Green, 1988). Unfortunately, until recently, few studies on religion and homosexuality have attempted to assess the proscribed–nonproscribed distinction. Duck and Hunsberger (1999) examined this issue by asking undergraduate students directly about church teachings related to prejudice. Their results indicated that, as predicted by Batson and his colleagues, racial prejudice was typically proscribed by students' religious groups, but intolerance toward gay men and lesbians was generally not proscribed. Furthermore, they found that I scores were negatively related to proscribed prejudice (racism), but positively associated with nonproscribed prejudice (negative attitudes toward homosexuals) in two separate studies. Also, as predicted, Q scores were negatively correlated with both proscribed and nonproscribed prejudice (although one of the four correlations was not statistically significant).

Other studies (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Fisher, Derison, et al., 1994) have documented that more frequent church attenders, as well as those who belong to more conservative denominations, are more likely to report prejudice against homosexual individuals. Within a pluralistic society, fundamentalists maintain their sectarian nature by deliberately utilizing both religious and sectarian means to maintain the boundaries of their beliefs that are functional for their way of life (Hood et al., 2005). For instance, several studies have shown that fundamentalists vote as a meaningful bloc only when candidates take significantly different stands on issues crucial to fundamentalists' beliefs. In these instances, fundamentalists vote in a manner congruent with what has been called "boundary maintenance" (Hood, Morris, & Watson, 1985, 1986). Thus fundamentalists within Protestantism attempt to maintain a tradition in the face of broader cultural changes that threaten their beliefs. In this sense, pro-

scribed beliefs are integral to maintaining the boundaries of the faith. Proscribed behaviors and boundary maintenance among fundamentalists are widely recognized in other traditions, including Islam, despite their originally being described as North American phenomena (Marty & Appleby, 1991).

Further support for the connection between religion and “nonproscribed” sexual prejudice, especially among people with an I religious orientation, is found in recent research on sexual prejudice as an implicit attitude. As a reminder from material covered in Chapter 2, implicit attitudes are automatic, unconscious evaluations that have influence on thoughts, feeling, and behaviors (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). Tsang and Rowatt (2007; see also Rowatt, Tsang, et al., 2006), using the most common measure of implicit attitudes, the Implicit Association Test (IAT), as a measure of sexual prejudice, found that an I (but not E or Q) religious orientation among college students at a religious university was positively associated with implicit sexual prejudice, even when RWA was controlled. In contrast, another study of students at the same university (again using the IAT) found that Christian orthodoxy was negatively related to implicit racism (Rowatt & Franklin, 2004). However, religious orientation (I, E, Q) was not related to implicit racism. Also, Rowatt, Franklin, and Cotton (2005) found that Christian orthodoxy and self-reported positive attitudes toward Christianity, but not religious orientation (I, E, Q) or other personality variables such as RF or RWA, predicted implicit preference for Christians over Muslims. This line of research suggests that a nonproscribed attitude, such as that toward homosexuality, is an internalized implicit component in I religion—something not found in proscribed attitudes, even when measured implicitly, such as racism or religious identity.

Ideological Surround

In a series of empirical studies, Watson and his colleagues have utilized methodological innovations that directly compare the structures of meaning operating within the psychology of religion (Watson, 1993). The underlying assumption of these procedures is that dimensions of social life have meanings that necessarily depend to some important degree upon the “ideological surround” in which they are placed. The ideological surround model contends that all research is conducted within a context of ideological influence, and that such influence may be particularly prominent when the subject matter involves religion. Sensitivity to specific ideological surrounds of targeted populations (e.g., people with a conservative religious orientation) may require, according to Watson’s model, corrections or adjustments of ideological content underlying certain empirical measures. Such an approach is consistent with the position that both ideological and methodological pluralism characterize postmodern culture (Rosenau, 1992; Roth, 1987). Two of these procedures—empirical translation schemes and direct rational analysis—are directly relevant to studies of religion and prejudice.

“Empirical translation schemes” pursue the goals of dialogue by determining whether the language of a social-scientific ideology can be translated into the language of a religious community (or vice versa). Prominent psychotherapeutic and Christian theorists, for instance, sometimes argue that the humanistic promotion of self-actualization is incompatible with Christian normative beliefs. With the empirical translation scheme procedure, statements from a humanistic self-actualization scale are expressed in a number of seemingly compatible Christian articulations of the same basic ideas (Watson, Milliron, Morris, & Hood, 1995). Both sets of statements are then administered to Christian samples, and a positive correlation between a humanistic and Christian expression of self-actualization identifies a successful

translation. A humanistic statement of self-actualization says, for example, "I can like people without having to approve of them." A positively correlating Christian translation says, instead, "Christ's love for sinners has taught me to love people regardless of their background and lifestyle." Christian translations of self-actualization in fact correlate with greater Christian commitment and are superior to the "untranslated" secular self-actualization scale in predicting Christian psychological adjustment. Hence Christian communities have linguistic resources for expressing self-actualization in their own terms (Watson, 2008).

"Direct rational analysis" procedures help determine whether one ideological community might socially construct a biased empirical description of another ideological community (Watson, Hood, & Morris, 1988). For example, let us assume that a psychological scale records existential ideological assumptions about unhealthy tendencies to avoid disturbing realities of life, such as suffering, death, and meaninglessness. Christian commitments are in fact associated with higher scores on this measure, suggesting that Christians fail to face the harsh realities of life. When rationally analyzed, however, this existential scale includes items that appear to be clearly anti-Christian in their implications. Claims that "God exists" and that "It is quite certain what happens after death" supposedly reflect a mentally disturbed avoidance of existential confrontation. Through rational analysis, the overall measure can therefore be subdivided into apparently anti-Christian and Christian-neutral subscales, and these subscales can then be correlated with other variables. Such procedures demonstrate that Christian commitments are connected only with the anti-Christian items and that only the Christian-neutral items predict psychological maladjustment. A correlation between the full scale and Christian commitments, therefore, merely means that Christian ideological assumptions predict Christian ideological assumptions. A failure to rationally analyze the scale could result in the ideological ambush of one (religious) community by another (social-scientific) community.

Applying Watson's direct rational analysis procedure (Watson, 1993; Watson et al., 2003) and the concept of ideological surround, Rosik and his colleagues have explored the relationship between conservative religion and homophobia as defined by Herek's (1998) Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale—Revised (ATLG-R) (Rosik, 2007a, 2007b; Rosik, Griffith, & Cruz, 2007; see also Bassett et al., 2004). Rosik (2007a) found that among a sample of students from a small conservative Christian liberal arts college, 4 items of the ATLG-R were ideologically balanced (e.g., "Female homosexuality is a threat to many of our basic social institutions"), 4 items were viewed as proreligious (e.g., "A woman's homosexuality should not be a cause for job discrimination in any situation"), and 12 items were viewed as antireligious (e.g., "Sex between two men is just plain wrong"). Of particular interest is the fact that of the 12 items judged to be antireligious by the Rosik sample, all but one of the items entirely constitute what has repeatedly been found in a number of studies as the single dominant factor (called Condemnation–Tolerance) of Herek's conceptualization of homophobia—what Rosik has identified as the "moral" factor. Only one perceived antireligious items was found among the other three factors (Social Cohesion, Social Concern, and Right to Privacy). Further research by Rosik (2007b) found that the relationship between religiousness and negative attitudes toward homosexuality was entirely a function of the single moral Condemnation–Tolerance factor and its perceived antireligious items, forcing Rosik to conclude:

Thus, homophobia as defined by the ATLG-R appeared largely explicable in terms of traditional religious moral sentiment rather than pathological adjustment that inevitably leads to negative affects toward or the suppression of certain basic civil rights for

gay men and lesbians. To the extent that other scales of homophobia have similar factor structures and ideological surrounds fundamentally experienced by religious conservatives as antireligious, they may share in the need for interpretive sensitivity. (p. 151)

It is clear from much research that religious conservatives, including those with an I religious orientation, hold more negative attitudes toward homosexuality. However, to simply and pejoratively label such attitudes as sexual prejudice or homophobia may overlook the “undisclosed but inherent ideological collision among competing visions of sexual morality” (Rosik, 2007a, p. 141). The bottom line, Rosik maintains, is that some measures of homophobia, such as Herek’s ATLG-R measure, fail to consider the normative beliefs of a religiously oriented value framework. He further suggests that successful efforts in educating and reducing homophobia in the conservative religious community will require sensitivity to their belief systems. One such normative belief, supported in yet another study (Rosik et al., 2007), is the distinction between homosexual behavior and homosexual persons—or, in the words of those with a religious perspective, the distinction between the “sin” and the “sinner.”

Distinguishing between Sin and Sinner

Rosik’s conclusion that the negative sentiment toward homosexuality among religious conservatives stems from Biblically based moral judgments (e.g., Leviticus 18:22) has been supported in other research (Bassett et al., 2000, 2002, 2005; Fulton et al., 1999; Gorsuch, 1993). The implication seems to be that Christians high in RF and/or I would distinguish between the perceived sin (i.e., homosexual behavior) and the perceived sinner (i.e., the gay person), so that they would “hate the sin, but love the sinner.” In fact, on the basis of the ideological surround model just discussed, it can be argued that to refer to such a distinction as “non-proscribed prejudice” (as is common in the psychology-of-religion literature and hence used here), which implies that it is nevertheless still prejudice (and perhaps, by further implication, that religious traditions bear some responsibility for not having forbidden the prejudice), fails to do justice to the sin–sinner distinction.

Fulton et al. (1999) reported some support for the distinction between sin and sinner from an investigation of students at a conservative Christian college with a Seventh-Day Adventist affiliation. The researchers attempted to categorize negative attitudes toward gays and lesbians into morally rationalized (sin) and nonmorally rationalized (sinner) groups. Examples of items representing these two categories are “Homosexuality is a perversion,” and “A person’s homosexuality should not be a cause for job discrimination,” respectively (Fulton et al., 1999, p. 17). The authors found that the I orientation in particular was correlated with morally rationalized but not nonmorally rationalized antipathy: The researchers concluded that “Intrinsics appear to be relatively accepting of homosexual people, but not of homosexual behavior” (p. 19). It should be noted that this study was limited by the unique (e.g., relatively high-RF) and homogeneous nature of the sample, and the use of an unpublished RF measure (we do not know how it compares to other measures of this concept).

Other studies that speak to this issue have provided mixed results. Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1993) pointed out that RF was associated with condemnation of both sin and sinner on an item-by-item basis in their study of attitudes toward gay persons. Research by Batson et al. (1999, 2001), discussed earlier in this chapter in the “Helping Behavior” sec-

tion, led to the conclusion that high-I individuals do *not* distinguish between sin and sinner. Batson et al. (1999) conducted a behavioral study and found that religiously devout university students (high I faith) were less willing to offer a monetary prize to a homosexual person (relative to a heterosexual person), regardless of how the prize money would be used (to visit grandparents or to attend a gay pride rally). The researchers concluded that those with an I religious orientation have a general antipathy toward gays and lesbians, regardless of behavior.

However, to date, more studies appear to support the conclusion drawn by Fulton et al. (1999). Burris and Jackson (1999) interpreted their findings in a study of attributions regarding partner abuse as inconsistent with the sin–sinner interpretation. Bassett et al. (2000, 2002) have provided evidence from samples of Christian college students that the distinction between homosexual persons and behavior is made by high-I individuals. The 2002 study is particularly noteworthy, in that it was a conceptual (and with some exceptions, a methodological) replication of the Batson et al. (1999) study. This team of researchers found that high-I individuals (defined by using the same cutoff on the I scale as that used by Batson et al.) made a value distinction between behavior and persons. In a later study (Bassett et al., 2005), Christian college students who were either uniformly accepting or rejecting of both homosexual persons and homosexual behavior were exposed to psychological and spiritual interventions that purposed to help students more clearly value homosexual persons. The researchers found that the intervention improved attitudes toward homosexual persons and, for the uniformly negative students (i.e., those with negative attitudes toward both the gay person and gay behavior), to homosexual behavior as well. Ironically, the intervention diminished the acceptance of homosexual behavior among those students who were initially accepting. The fact that the Bassett et al. studies involved rather homogeneous samples of Christian college students (though, again, in the one replication study, they used the same cutoff values on their measure of religious orientations as did the Batson et al. study being replicated) may have influenced the results.

Finally, the reader is reminded of the Mak and Tsang (2008) study reviewed earlier (see the “Helping behavior” section), which showed that high-I participants would help a self-disclosed gay person as much as a straight person, but not when the targeted person (whether gay or straight) revealed that she was also sexually promiscuous. Again, this suggests that intrinsically religious persons make the distinction between value-violating behavior and the person who engages in that behavior. Studies are just beginning to unpack the sin–sinner issue, and we hope to see further research on this important topic.

Religious Fundamentalism and Prejudice

Recent evidence suggests that there may be other ways of assessing religious orientation that are more productive in explaining religion’s link with prejudice than the traditional I-E distinction. Of particular interest is the concept of RF. Not surprisingly, a positive relationship between RF and prejudice has been documented in a number of studies (e.g., Altemeyer, 2003; Fulton et al., 1999; Hunsberger, 1996; Hunsberger, Owusu, & Duck, 1999; Jackson & Esses, 1997; Kirkpatrick, 1993; Laythe et al., 2001; McFarland, 1989; Wylie & Forest, 1992). Much of this research has utilized a scale developed by Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992; see Research Box 12.5, below). To unpack this relationship further, we must consider how RF is conceptualized.

Defining Fundamentalism

RIGID DOGMATISM

Early in the 20th century, William James (1902/1985) anticipated the importance of going beyond the content or orthodoxy of a person's beliefs. He argued that a rigid, dogmatic style of religious belief might be associated with bigotry and prejudice. Over the years, some investigators have used the term "religious fundamentalism" (RF) to capture this rigid, dogmatic way of being religious. However, the definition of this term was quite variable, and often did not correspond to *religious* use of the word. In fact, early researchers often used the term interchangeably with "orthodoxy of belief," "intense interest in religion," or "considerable religious involvement."

Consider, for example, the following definition of RF offered by Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992):

the belief that there is one set of religious teachings that clearly contains the fundamental, basic, intrinsic, essential, inerrant truth about humanity and deity; that this essential truth is fundamentally opposed by forces of evil which must be vigorously fought; that this truth must be followed today according to the fundamental, unchangeable practices of the past; and that those who believe and follow these fundamental teachings have a special relationship with the deity. (p. 118)

This definition is a valiant attempt to offer a conceptualization of RF that is theoretically distinct from other aspects of religion, such as orthodoxy, interest in religion, or high religious involvement. It also may apply to most world religions, in that it makes no mention of any specific religion. To this extent, it is indeed a significant improvement over other attempts to conceptualize RF. However, there is still considerable overlap with orthodoxy (particularly Christian orthodoxy), especially if major religious sources (e.g., sacred writings) teach that there is but one set of truths about humanity and deity. Thus, when it comes to measuring RF, a person who holds to orthodox views can easily be (mis)identified as a fundamentalist. To say, therefore, that this conceptualization is free of doctrinal content, as Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992, 2005) have done, is perhaps not entirely warranted.

To support this contention, Watson et al. (2003), noting that both RF and RWA are correlated positively with I religiousness (e.g., Altemeyer, 1988; Genia, 1996), utilized the ideological surround concept to examine through a sample of over 400 introductory psychology students at a state university whether ideology influenced research results that involve the RF and RWA constructs. The research team translated each original RF scale item (many of which contained negative terms) into a new item that had more positive implications compatible with a Biblical framework, thus creating a new scale called the Biblical Foundationalism Scale (BFS). For example, the RF scale item "God will punish most severely those who abandon his true religion" was translated to "God has created a universe in which punishment is the unavoidable consequence of failing to follow the love and sacrifice modeled by Christ." The two scales correlated strongly (.73) with each other, suggesting a successful translation; that is, those who scored high on the RF measure also tended to score high on the BFS. After RF scores were partialled out, BFS scores were correlated positively with the Allport and Ross (1967) measure of I religion and with the Gibson and Francis (1996) Christian Fundamentalist Beliefs Scale—a measure of orthodoxy more than RF—but not with a measure of intolerance of ambiguity (unlike the RF measure). The researchers maintained that these

partial correlations revealed that the original RF scale failed to identify the more positive aspects of what they called a “Biblical intrinsicness.” They concluded that “Ideological factors, therefore, did seem to underlie empirical suggestions that traditional Christian commitments necessarily reflect a narrow-minded authoritarian fundamentalism” (p. 315), as rooted in the Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) conceptualization of RF.

Nevertheless, the Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) definition is consistent with other theoretical work on RF (e.g., Kirkpatrick, Hood, & Hartz, 1991) and is potentially applicable to most major world religions—unlike much previous work on RF. Also, the reader will recognize that we might expect this conceptualization to be negatively related to Batson et al.’s (1993) Q orientation, which involves a questioning approach to religion; openness and flexibility; and a resistance to clear-cut, pat answers. Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) developed a 20-item RF Scale to measure their conceptualization and later (2004) developed a shortened 12-item version. Both RF Scales are balanced against response sets and generated Cronbach’s alphas of .91 to .95 in different studies.

AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW: INTRATEXTUALITY

Hood et al. (2005) offer an alternative perspective on RF. Though they agree that some fundamentalists are characterized by the rigid dogmatism described above, they suggest that to fully understand why fundamentalists so strongly adhere to their belief system, one must approach the subject matter on fundamentalists’ terms (a “hermeneutical” approach, as described in Chapter 2). Much in line with the theoretical framework introduced in Chapter 1, they contend that religion provides a convincing system of meaning to fundamentalists by keeping its sacred text (which is usually written, but may be an oral text as well) as the sole source of meaning. This is not to imply that nonfundamentalists who are highly religious fail to recognize and appreciate the value of sacred writings such as the Bible. The difference is that the fundamentalist sees the sacred text as the single authoritative base to which all other elements of human experience are subordinated; such subordination to a supreme authoritative text is, according to these authors, the hallmark of RF. No sources outside the text are necessary for an understanding of absolute truth. This principle of “intratextuality” is tautologically reinforced, in that it specifies not only what truths are absolute, but also what text is sacred. Though the text requires an interpretive process, the absolute truths are not relative to human understanding and impose themselves on the reader. Furthermore, the absolute truths of the sacred text inform and regulate all peripheral belief systems (i.e., beliefs that are not specifically and directly addressed by the text itself). So, for example, fundamentalists’ approach to the value of the field of psychology will be determined by their understanding of what the sacred text reveals about it. Furthermore, the text is protected from outside influences; if it questions the content of the authoritative text, it is rejected.

In contrast, the religious *non*fundamentalist utilizes the principle of “intertextuality,” whereby no single text speaks authoritatively in isolation from other texts. It is the interrelationship between texts that is consulted in the process of deriving truth; this process is much more in accordance with modernistic thinking. Thus, there may be, for example, knowledge from science that may help interpret and even alter one’s understanding of the text (e.g., scientific findings that might influence one’s perspective on the Biblical creation account). Furthermore, peripheral beliefs may also exert influence on the interpretive process.

The Hood et al. (2005) alternative has yet to be empirically tested. This team of researchers is currently developing a measure of RF based on the principle of intratextuality to test

the model's utility. Until a reliable and valid measure is developed and used in research, it is difficult to assess the theory's value.

The Link with Right-Wing Authoritarianism

Over 50 years ago, it was noted by Adorno et al. (1950) that religiousness was related to RWA, as measured by the California F scale. For example, it was rare for religious people also to score low on RWA. However, Adorno et al.'s work has received considerable criticism on methodological and conceptual grounds (see, e.g., Altemeyer, 1981), and these authors used rather unsophisticated operationalizations of religion (e.g., frequency of attendance, importance of religion). Work by Altemeyer (1981, 1988, 1996) has confirmed that RWA may help us to understand the relatively high levels of prejudice found among religious persons scoring high on RF and low on Q. Altemeyer's reconceptualization of RWA focuses on three attitudinal clusters: authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism.

ADDING FUNDAMENTALISM AND QUEST TO THE EQUATION

Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) conducted a study to assess the links among RF, Q, prejudice, and RWA (see Research Box 12.5). They found that people who scored high on the RWA scale tended also to score high on RF ($r = .68$), as well as to be prejudiced in a variety of ways (r 's = .33 to .64). This is not to imply that all high-RWA individuals are high on RF, or the reverse. However, "off-quadrant" cases (i.e., those high on RWA and low on RF, or vice versa) were quite rare, and Altemeyer (1988) concluded that RF and RWA do seem to "feed" each other. That is, they both encourage obedience to authority, conventionalism, self-righteousness, and feelings of superiority. Unfortunately, one of the problems with the RWA scale is that it includes a number of religious items, which may help contribute to the high correlation between the RF and the RWA measures. Altemeyer and Hunsberger (2005) have contended that this is not a problem, since the nonreligious items on the RWA measure tend to correlate just as strongly as the religious items with the RF scores. However, even many of the items judged to be nonreligious (e.g., questions about the morality of homosexuality and the role of women) may be viewed as part of the religious meaning system by the fundamentalist (see Hood et al., 2005).

DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES

The findings described above have not gone without comment in the psychology-of-religion literature; for example, Gorsuch (1993) questioned several aspects of the Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) study, as noted earlier. Leak and Randall (1995) have suggested that RWA's positive association with religion is limited to measures of "less mature faith development" (p. 245). They found that such measures of "less mature" religion (e.g., a scale assessing Christian orthodoxy, measures of Fowler's second and third stages of faith development [see Chapter 4], and church attendance) were positively related to RWA scores, but that measures of "more mature" religion (e.g., Batson's Q scale, measures of Fowler's fourth and fifth faith stages, and a Global Faith Development Scale) were negatively correlated with RWA scores.

The real issue here may be semantics. Just what *is* "mature faith"? Leak and Randall have chosen to regard a Q sort of orientation as "mature" (see also Kristensen, Pedersen, &

RESEARCH BOX 12.5. Authoritarianism, Religious Fundamentalism, Quest, and Prejudice
(Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992)

Based on their conceptualization of RF (see the text), the authors developed a 20-item RF Scale, including items such as “God will punish most severely those who abandon his true religion.” They developed this measure, as well as a 16-item Q measure, in several studies of university students in Manitoba and Ontario. Satisfied that their new measures were reliable and interrelated as expected among students, the authors then carried out an investigation of 491 Canadian parents of university students.

In addition to the RF and Q instruments, these adults completed a 12-item Attitudes Toward Homosexuals scale (e.g., “In many ways, the AIDS disease currently killing homosexuals is just what they deserve”); a 20-item Prejudice scale (e.g., “It is a waste of time to train certain races for good jobs; they simply don’t have the drive and determination it takes to learn a complicated skill”); the RWA measure; and two additional measures of prejudice—a Posse–Radicals survey (in which participants indicated the extent to which they would pursue radicals outlawed by the government), and a Trials measure (in which respondents “passed sentence” in three court cases involving a dope pusher, a pornographer, and someone who spit on a Canadian provincial premier). The resulting web of relatively strong and significant correlations led these authors to conclude the following about the answer to the question “Are religious persons usually good persons?”:

[It] appears to be “no,” if one means by “religious” a fundamentalist, nonquesting religious orientation, and by “good” the kind of nonprejudiced, compassionate, accepting attitudes espoused in the Gospels and other writings. But the answer is “yes” if one means by “religious” the nonfundamentalist, questing orientation found most often in persons belonging to no religion. Which irony gives one pause. (pp. 125–126)

The authors cautioned against overgeneralizing these findings, since there were inevitably exceptions to the rule—people scoring high on RF and low on Q who showed nonprejudiced, accepting attitudes; or people scoring low on RF and high on Q who were bigoted. But the correlations that emerged were quite strong and clear-cut. Apparently individuals who scored high on RF and low on Q, as defined here, tended to be prejudiced in a variety of ways. The authors speculated that fundamentalist beliefs can be linked to some of the psychological sources of authoritarian aggression (e.g., fear of a dangerous world and self-righteousness), as well as the tendency for high-RWA individuals to reduce guilt over their own misdeeds through their religion.

Williams, 2001). Their Global Faith Development Scale included items such as “It is very important for me to critically examine my religious beliefs and values” (p. 248), and in this respect it bears some resemblance to Q measures. It is not surprising that such measures have a negative association with RWA, as previously reported by Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992). However, it seems a moot point to define, for example, global faith development and a Q orientation as “mature,” and religious orthodoxy and RF as “less mature.” Religiously orthodox persons and those with an RF orientation may feel that *their* religion is the mature one, and that Q is immature. Of course, Gordon Allport considered an I orientation to be mature and an E orientation to be immature (Allport, 1954; Allport & Ross, 1967). In any

case, we would suggest that Leak and Randall's findings, aside from the maturity issue, are consistent with earlier findings of relationships among RF, Q, RWA, and prejudice.

What about Non-Christian Religions and Samples outside North America?

Finally, it is worth noting that the relationships described here are not unique to the specific measures and North American samples reported above. Research from Europe, using very different measures of religiousness, RWA, and prejudice, have found links among these measures that are quite consistent with the findings reported above (e.g., Billiet, 1995; Eisinga, Konig, & Scheepers, 1995). Apparently the findings on religion, prejudice, and RWA cut across differing variables and cultural contexts, at least within Christianity.

Hunsberger (1996) assessed RF–RWA–prejudice relationships in small samples of people from non-Christian religions in Canada. The strength of these relationships is similar to those found in samples of mostly Christian adults and university students in Canada (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992) and college students in the United States (Laythe et al., 2001). These associations have also been essentially replicated with Muslim and Christian university students in Ghana (Hunsberger et al., 1999). These results seem to confirm the links among RF, RWA, and prejudice across various religious groups in North America and elsewhere. However, further research is needed to assess the relationships in larger samples, and particularly for non-Christian groups outside North America.

A series of investigations has been carried out in Belgium and the Netherlands by a group of European researchers, focusing on religious beliefs, RWA, and prejudice (Billiet, 1995; Duriez & Hutsebaut, 2000; Eisinga, Billiet, & Felling, 1999; Eisinga et al., 1990; Konig, Eisinga, & Scheepers, 2000), although they did not include the same religious orientation measures described in this chapter (e.g., I, E, Q, or RF). These investigations have typically revealed little or no relationship between ethnic prejudice and measures of Christian belief or attendance, although there are occasional exceptions of positive (e.g., Duriez & Hutsebaut, 2000) or negative (e.g., Billiet, 1995) relationships.

Outside Europe and North America, several relevant investigations have been reported. Griffin et al. (1987) found that on the Caribbean island of St. Croix, members' commitment to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and their I orientation were positively correlated with prejudice (e.g., withholding human rights from Rastafarians). However, the authors pointed out that church members perceived the church itself to be relatively prejudiced in this regard; therefore, this could be an instance of a positive link between an I orientation and prejudice when such prejudice is nonproscribed by one's church. In Venezuela, Ponton and Gorsuch (1988) reported a negative link between I religiosity and (ethnic) prejudice, as well as a positive association for E religiosity. The Q orientation was uncorrelated with prejudice. Of course, the proscription of specific prejudice may be specific to cultural, religious, and temporal context. For example, Lafferty (1990) argued that in South Africa racial prejudice was (until the abolition of apartheid) religiously nonproscribed, but others have pointed out that it is proscribed in North America (e.g., Batson et al., 1993; Duck & Hunsberger, 1999).

A study at a university in northern India showed a "reverse prejudice" (Murphy-Berman, Berman, Pachauri, & Kumar, 1985, p. 33), in that Hindu students allocated more money to Muslim (than to Hindu) targets in a hypothetical situation. The authors speculated that a social desirability effect might have influenced the results. Hassan and Khalique (1987) reported a tendency for Muslim college students to be more prejudiced than Hindus. In

Bangladesh, Hewstone, Islam, and Judd (1993) had Muslims (the majority group) and Hindus (the minority group) evaluate targets of different religion (Muslim or Hindu) and nationality (Bangladeshi or Indian). They concluded that religion and nationality were both important predictors of outgroup discrimination.

Such studies are important in broadening the investigation of religion and prejudice to different cultural and religious groups in the world. However, these studies often do not include comparison groups; their measures and samples vary considerably; results are sometimes seemingly contradictory; and it is therefore very difficult to compare their results and make sense of them in a systematic way. Comprehensive cross-cultural research is needed—especially investigations that compare the same measures and similar samples across cultures and religious groups, while controlling for other important variables such as proscription status, demographic aspects of the sample, and the cultural context of the research (e.g., majority vs. minority status of participants).

The Target of Prejudice

Earlier in this chapter, we have concluded that the position of one's church on specific prejudices (i.e., proscribed vs. nonproscribed) may have important implications for self-reported personal prejudice. Possibly related to the proscribed–nonproscribed distinction, the target of prejudice seems to be important. In particular, some authors have noted different religion–prejudice relationships when the target of prejudice involves racial groups compared to groups based on sexual orientation (e.g., Herek, 1987; Laythe et al., 2001).

Hunsberger and Jackson (2005) constructed a table to show relationships between four religious orientations (I, E, Q, and RF) and measures of prejudice directed toward specific targets (racial/ethnic groups, gay or lesbian persons, women, Communists, and religious outgroups), as well as the RWA measure (as a measure often associated with prejudice). They included only studies published from 1990 to the time their paper was written in 2003, and only investigations that used the well-accepted I, E, Q, and RF measures. They included 16 different papers² that reported studies of 25 distinct samples involving more than 5,800 adults and undergraduate students. The results of their survey are shown in Table 12.2.

If one were simply to examine the total scores in the bottom row of this table, one would conclude that I, E, and RF were all associated with intolerance. The reader will recall that the literature typically portrays the I orientation as linked to tolerance rather than intolerance, however. Furthermore, Table 12.2 shows that Q was usually associated with increased tolerance in these studies, as expected. However, the relationships sometimes changed markedly for different targets of prejudice. If we consider only ethnic and racial targets, the historical expectation of a negative correlation with I scores was evident in 4 of 4 studies. But in 7 of 9 samples, I scores were *positively* related to intolerance directed toward gay men and lesbians. This difference apparently supports the proscribed–nonproscribed distinction (e.g., Batson & Burris, 1994) when the I religious orientation and prejudice were considered.

²Altemeyer (2003); Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992); Batson et al. (1999); Duck and Hunsberger (1999); Fisher, Derison, et al. (1994); Fulton et al. (1999); Griffiths, Dixon, Stanley, and Weiland (2001); Hunsberger (1996); Hunsberger et al. (1999); Jackson and Esses (1997); Jackson and Hunsberger (1999); Kirkpatrick (1993); Laythe et al. (2001); Laythe, Finkel, Bringle, and Kirkpatrick (2002); Leak and Randall (1995); and Wylie and Forest (1992).

TABLE 12.2. Relationships between Four Religious Orientations and Measures of Intolerance: A Survey of Studies from 1990 to 2003

Type of intolerance	Religious orientation measure											
	I			E			Q			RF		
	+	0	–	+	0	–	+	0	–	+	0	–
Racial/ethnic groups	0	0	4	3	1	0	0	3	2	5	6	0
Gay/lesbian persons	7	1	1	4	2	2	0	2	7	17	0	0
Women	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	3	0	0
Communists	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	3	0	0
Religious outgroups	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	0
RWA	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	4	13	0	0
Total	11	2	5	8	5	4	0	8	13	44	6	0

Note. Sixteen studies, some with multiple samples and/or multiple measures, are included. “+,” significant positive relationship between religious orientation and intolerance; “0,” no relationship; “–,” significant negative relationship. Adapted from Hunsberger and Jackson (2005). Copyright 2005 by Blackwell Publishing, Ltd. Adapted by permission.

Studies involving the E and Q measures were more mixed, but there was some tendency for E to be positively related to both racial/ethnic prejudice (3 of 4 studies) and gay/lesbian prejudice (4 of 8 investigations), and also for Q to be linked to more tolerant attitudes toward racial/ethnic groups (2/5, but no correlations were negative) and gay/lesbian persons (7/9). The most consistent predictor of prejudice, regardless of target, was the RF Scale, which in every case was linked to negative attitudes toward gay/lesbian persons, women, Communists, and religious outgroups, as well as to RWA (39/39 findings in total). Only the relationship between RF and racial/ethnic prejudice was less clear (5 positive relationships, 6 nonsignificant findings).

Unfortunately, there have been few studies involving prejudice toward such target groups as women, Communists (or other political or ideological groups), or religious outgroups—including prejudice both toward nonreligious individuals (Hunter, 2001; Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999) and toward more general “religious ethnocentrism” (Altemeyer, 2003). Work is needed to assess links between such specific types of prejudice and religious orientation measures, and also to assess the extent to which antipathy toward such targets is religiously proscribed.

Relatedly, the specific measure of prejudice can also be important. Many different pencil-and-paper instruments have been used to measure prejudice; unfortunately, some self-report scales suffer from such problems as weak or unreported psychometric properties, the fact that they are obviously tapping prejudice, social desirability effects, and so on. Although more subtle and more valid pencil-and-paper indices of prejudice have been proposed (e.g., McConahay, 1986; Rudman, Greenwald, Mellott, & Schwartz, 1999), such measures have seldom been used in religion–prejudice investigations. More subtle measures may be necessary to identify prejudice against targets that tend to be protected by religious or other societal standards. For example, studies have found that more subtle (implicit) measures draw out evidence of greater anti-Semitism in both the United States (Rudman et al., 1999) and Italy (Franco & Maass, 1999) than do more explicit measures.

Is Cognitive Style Relevant?

Since religions offer people a particular view of the world, potentially giving meaning to their existence and offering answers to questions about the universe and the world around them, one might wonder whether religions influence people to think in similar ways (see Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005). Some evidence does point in this direction. For example, RF is apparently related to complexity of thought about existential issues (e.g., Hunsberger, Alisat, Pancer, & Pratt, 1996; Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 1994). “High and low fundamentalists may actually perceive and deal with their own (and others’) religious experiences in different ways” (Hunsberger et al., 1996, p. 218); that is, high-RF persons may tend to incorporate new information into an existing religious schema, whereas low-RF persons may be more likely to adapt their religious beliefs to accommodate religious doubts or new information. Also, the Q orientation has been associated with increased complexity of thought (Batson & Raynor-Prince, 1983) and openness to different perspectives (McFarland & Warren, 1992).

It has been suggested that such unique cognitive styles, associated with religious orientation, might help us to understand the religion–prejudice connection (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005). Specifically, those high in RF may tend to cling to existing stereotypes, rather than changing their views in light of new information. Conversely, those with a Q orientation may be inclined to think more complexly about both religion and, for example, cultural diversity, contributing to greater tolerance of such diversity. Similarly, these individuals’ tendency toward greater cognitive complexity may incline them to be less influenced by group or social norms that tolerate prejudice. However, these possibilities remain speculations, awaiting empirical test.

Beyond Personal Religion to Group Effects

Several researchers have argued that research on religion and prejudice needs to expand to focus more on intergroup issues (Altemeyer, 2003; Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005; Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999). Historically, research on religion and prejudice has been dominated by work involving an individual-difference perspective (especially that of religious orientation), as reflected in much of our discussion so far in this chapter. However, it has been argued that a group perspective could help us to understand religion–prejudice relationships.

Some theories of intergroup relations suggest that group members are susceptible to prejudice against outgroup members. For example, social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986) posits that personal self-esteem may be bolstered when group members compare themselves with other groups. In terms of religious groups, if individuals believe that their religion is the source of absolute truth, this could enhance their self-esteem (and ingroup attachment); it could also serve as a source of prejudice against members of other religions, who are seen as belonging to inferior groups. In general, it could seemingly justify intolerance of people who do not adhere to divinely revealed morality (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005).

Similarly, realistic group conflict theory (e.g., Sherif, 1966) argues that the perception of being in competition with other groups for valued resources can exacerbate intergroup tension and prejudice. Perceived threat to values can apparently engender greater discrimination against disadvantaged groups by some religious people (Jackson & Esses, 1997). So, for example, the perception that immigrants compete for jobs with established members of a society can foster prejudice against those immigrants’ religion in particular (Jackson, 2001), even if the original perceptions of job competition are incorrect. In a similar vein, Struch and

Schwartz (1989) reported that perceived conflict of interest among different Jewish groups in Israel was associated with intergroup negativity and endorsement of antagonistic behaviors toward outgroups. In this context, it has been argued that stronger religious group identification is characteristic of especially devout persons—for example, those who score high on I, orthodoxy, or RF measures (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005). Indeed, I scores have been found to be strongly correlated (+.70) with religious group identification (Burris & Jackson, 2000), as have RF scores (+.46) and scores on a measure of Christian orthodoxy (+.51) (Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999).

Jackson and Hunsberger (1999) reported two studies that investigated these intergroup conflict proposals in a religious context. Both studies reported by these authors involved Christian and religiously nonaffiliated undergraduate students who were asked to complete measures of their religious orientation, as well as their attitudes toward various religious outgroups. Using an “evaluation thermometer” with labels describing every 10-degree change, participants indicated their evaluation of various groups: 0 degrees indicated “extremely unfavorable,” 50 degrees was “neither favorable nor unfavorable,” and 100 degrees was “extremely favorable.” This measure has been used successfully in other research on intergroup attitudes and relations (see Haddock, Zanna, & Esses, 1993). Results suggested that measures of RF, orthodoxy, I, E, and Q were *all* associated with more favorable attitudes toward ingroup members (Christians, “believers”) and greater intolerance of religious outgroups (atheists, “nonbelievers”). It is particularly interesting that all religious orientation measures were associated with negativity toward outgroups, when it has been argued in the past that the I and particularly Q orientations should be associated with tolerance of others (see the discussion earlier in this chapter). The authors concluded that “prejudice against religious outgroups is pervasive . . . religious intergroup relations are no different from any other form of intergroup relation, and . . . for a variety of reasons, group identifications can generate intergroup antagonism” (p. 521). Interestingly, people who identified themselves as atheists or nonbelievers did not show the same degree or pervasiveness of outgroup negativity toward religious groups (i.e., believers and Christians—“religious outgroups,” from their perspective).

Similarly, Altemeyer (2003) found that both RF and emphasis on religious identity in childhood were associated with a “religious exclusiveness,” a kind of religious ethnocentrism involving a tendency to reject atheists as well as persons of other faiths (including faiths with rather similar beliefs to their own). These studies provide evidence that religious group membership per se can contribute to intergroup prejudice, especially intolerance of religious outgroup members.

Religion and Prejudice: Summary

Clearly, the religion–prejudice link is more complicated than the initial suggestion of a linear relationship between church attendance and prejudiced attitudes indicated. We are not as convinced as some authors that the I-E dichotomy has been very helpful in understanding the relationship between religion and prejudice. Furthermore, we now know that it was premature to conclude that Gorsuch and Aleshire’s (1974) review of the prejudice–religion literature “marked the end of an era, [since] by the early 1970s, mainstream American culture no longer countenanced blatant prejudice. The casual church attender thus stopped admitting to bigoted outlooks, and results became nonreplicable” (Spilka, Hood, & Gorsuch,

1985, p. 274). Developments in the last three decades have shown that we still have much to learn about this area. Some research suggests that high RF and low Q scores are apparently linked to prejudice and discrimination; there is also some evidence that it is not RF per se that causes prejudice, but rather the tendency for those high in RF to be high in RWA as well. These conclusions, however, are not airtight and should command further investigation, given some recent contradictory empirical findings as well as theoretical and methodological challenges. Nevertheless, work from the past three decades has provided valuable insight into the religion–prejudice relationship.

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND RELIGION

To some, religion seems only to emphasize the darker side of human nature. To such individuals the beginning chapters of Genesis, for example, is less a story about creation than it is about the fall of humanity. The story of Adam and Eve stresses condemnation for eating a forbidden fruit—and, more importantly, for the human frailty of giving in to temptation even when one knows that it is wrong. Similarly, Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* contain a lucid account of his own spiritual struggles with lust, and Saint Thomas Aquinas’s writing in *Summa Theologiae* systematically identified and discussed the seven deadly sins. Lamenting that contemporary psychological discourse has thoroughly disregarded the wisdom of the past and is therefore “seriously deficient in addressing problems associated with impulse control, selfishness, existential meaning, moral conflict, and ethical values that were so prominent in earlier psychological reflection” (p. 5), Schimmel (1997) argued that psychology, particularly psychotherapy, should incorporate ethical and spiritual values if it is to effectively address contemporary emotional and social issues.

It is therefore perhaps not surprising that research in the psychology of religion has tended to emphasize ethical and moral guidelines as proscriptions that prohibit certain behaviors or even thoughts, as indicated by the topics thus far discussed in this chapter (with the exception of helping behavior). In the religious literature, probably the foremost examples are the Ten Commandments found in the Old Testament. Most (but not all) of these commandments warn us about our human tendency to succumb to that which is not good for us—whether it be worshipping false gods, committing adultery, or coveting another person’s possessions. Sometimes, however, these guidelines are in the form of prescriptions that tell us about our potential as human beings to cultivate those characteristics deemed good.

Students of psychology may notice that one of the more substantial changes in psychology over the past decade is the development of a new focus area called simply “positive psychology.” Psychologists everywhere, so it appears, seem eager to accept the challenge of former American Psychological Association President Martin Seligman (1999; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) to take seriously a view of human nature that considers such strengths and virtues as compassion, empathy, persistence, gratitude, and honesty as authentic rather than derivative human experiences. Positive psychology’s mission is the scientific study of the “good life”³—that is, what is right about human nature, what works, what is improving, what its capacities are, what makes people authentically happy. If psychology can begin to answer

³The popular use of the term “good life” may conjure a materialistic vision consisting of possessions and pleasure. Here the term is used in a more philosophical sense of what values constitute a life worth living.

these questions, then our ability to handle the big questions often facing the ordinary person, such as “What makes life worth living?” or “How can life can be more fulfilling?”, will be enhanced. In short, according to Sheldon and King (2001), positive psychology is “nothing more than the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues” (p. 216). An obvious question for our consideration here is the extent to which religion and spirituality help foster those human strengths and virtues that lie at the heart of what makes a life well-lived. Conversely, are there religious elements that serve as impediments to the good life?

Dimensions of Positive Psychology

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) proposed that one way to think about positive psychology is to consider it at three levels: the *subjective level* (subjective states, such as positive emotions and thoughts); the *individual level* (individual traits, such as courage, or behavior patterns, such as helping those in need); and the *societal or group level* (social institutions, such as positive civic and church communities, as well as positive work and home environments). The study of religion and spirituality, of course, cuts across all three levels, though we focus primarily on the second and (to a lesser extent) the first levels, since many religious teachings tend to focus on individual development. We should also note that though these three levels are a useful way of categorizing human experience, in reality the distinctions among the three levels become blurred. Many subjective states at the first level blend together into individual traits at the second level. Without a Level 2 trait, some Level 1 subjective experiences may less frequently occur. Also, throughout this book, we have maintained that individuals are not isolated from a Level 3 social context; they are surrounded, or surround themselves, with people and programs that help reinforce a value system (Hood et al., 2005; Watson, 1993). Hence the levels often interact with each other and sometimes the unique interactions are what interest psychologists of religion the most.

Core Virtues

A useful framework for our discussion is Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) characterological approach to positive psychology. They have identified six core virtues or character strengths, each of which is briefly discussed here. This is not to suggest that we promote some sense of global judgment that one person is virtuous while another is not. Rather, we should think in terms of virtues (plural) as “discrete, coordinated systems of thought, reason, emotion, motivation, and action” (McCullough & Snyder, 2000, p. 3). There are thus many virtues that fall within the six core broad categories discussed below.

There is a growing empirical literature surrounding each virtue, though the important connection with religion is still in its conceptual infancy. As a result, many ideas have yet to be empirically tested. What we can say, though, is that religion speaks considerably to what is right about people—specifically to the development of strengths of character, such as wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. As Exline (2002) has pointed out, if the psychological study of religion is to advance, we need to look “underneath the broad category of religious involvement to consider the effects of specific religious beliefs or doctrines. Even if psychological studies of religion cannot address ‘ultimate matters,’ they can address people’s beliefs about such matters” (p. 246). Our discussion of positive psychology takes Exline’s advice to heart.

Wisdom

Wisdom is defined as “cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 29); such strengths are “knowledge hard fought for, and then used for good” (p. 39). Wisdom is, in the words of Sternberg (2007), “in large part a decision to use one’s intelligence, creativity, and knowledge for a common good” (p. 38). The presence of such “noble intelligence” makes no one resentful and everyone appreciative. Specific strengths of wisdom include creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, and seeing things in broad perspective (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Wisdom is a common theme in many religious traditions. Dahlsgaard, Peterson, and Seligman’s (2005) study of the major writings of eight world philosophies (Confucianism and Taoism in China; Buddhism and Hinduism in South Asia; and Athenian philosophy, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the West) found that wisdom is explicitly named as a virtue in all but Buddhism (where it is thematically implied). For example, the authors point out that wisdom as a form of higher knowledge, including that gained through education and experience, was clearly taught as a specific virtue (*zhi*) by Confucius and is listed by Aquinas in his classic Christian enumeration of human strengths as the most important of the cardinal virtues. In contrast, Hindus and Buddhists view wisdom as an ideal attainment of transcendental knowledge of the self.

Wisdom is a broad construct, and therefore one that is difficult to test empirically. Research (e.g., Ardelt, 1997; Staudinger & Baltes, 1996; Wink & Helson, 1997) on wisdom has suggested that it is characterized by a highly developed form of thinking that involves dialectical reasoning, a recognition of limitations, and an openness both to difficult questions about the conduct and meaning of life (to which life goals and strategies may be mapped) and to different modes of experience (for reviews, see Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Kramer, 2000). Though a minimal level of intelligence is a necessary condition for wisdom, it appears to be less of a predictor of wisdom-related performance than other components, such as life experience, chronological age, and certain personality characteristics (e.g., openness to experience, desire for personal growth) (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Staudinger & Leipold, 2003). Most of the research conducted to date has focused on the specific strengths of wisdom listed above, and a discussion of this research is beyond our scope here. What is clear, however, is that religion, depending on its type, can both foster and inhibit wisdom. For example, to the extent that an I or E orientation keeps one from facing complex and difficult issues, then one’s religiousness may be a barrier to wisdom. On the other hand, if an I orientation reflects an integrated crystallization of one’s efforts to face the complexities of life, religiousness may be a hallmark of wisdom. At this point, little or no research has investigated religious orientation (or any other approach to the study of religiousness) with validated measures of wisdom.

Courage

Defined by Peterson and Seligman (2004) as “emotional strengths that involve the exercise of the will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal” (p. 36), courage includes such specific strengths as bravery, persistence, integrity, and vitality. Courage is likely to be a broader construct than what immediately comes to mind. Surely it includes courage in confronting physical danger, but it also includes moral courage, such as the expression of personal values in the face of rejection and even derision—the courage to stand up

for one's beliefs. It also includes vital courage, such as the desire to live in the face of chronic illness.

Religious traditions too speak of courage, though it appears to be more representative theme in Western than in Eastern religious traditions. For example, Dahlsgaard et al.'s (2005) analysis found that courage was explicitly mentioned in all of the major Western traditions (Athenian philosophy, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism), but only in Hinduism among the major Eastern religions. The emphasis on courage in Hinduism may be due to the fact that the notions of caste in a stratified society are mingled with the sacred text *The Bhagavad Gita*. The character strengths of courage are prescribed for the soldier caste, the second highest of four caste levels. In Athenian philosophy, Aristotle saw virtue as a social practice lying between two extremes; in this case, courage is the mean between rashness and cowardliness.

To date, there has been no direct empirical research testing the notion of courage, including its related character strengths, in relation to religiousness. Of course, there are historical examples of religious courage—martyrs who gave their lives because of religious conviction, or people like Mother Teresa who faced tremendous odds in carrying out their missional objectives. Perhaps, the most indirect empirical indication of the religion–courage connection is the rather substantial literature investigating how religion is a source of courage in coping with difficult life circumstances. We explore that topic in Chapter 13.

Humanity

Defined by Peterson and Seligman (2004) as “interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others” (p. 29), the virtue of humanity “relies on doing more than what is only fair—showing generosity when an equitable exchange would suffice, kindness even if it cannot (or will not) be returned, and understanding even when punishment is due” (p. 37). The character strengths of this virtue include love, kindness, and social intelligence.

Humanity was found by Dahlsgaard et al. (2005) to be among the most common in all of the eight religious traditions and philosophies they studied. Many Christians identify love as the hallmark virtue, primarily on the basis of the three theological virtues proposed by Saint Paul: faith, hope, and love, with love being held as the greatest. It is also stressed in the other Western religions; many Proverbs (Judaism) stress graciousness and kindness, and the importance of friendship and generosity is discussed in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Though humanity is not seemingly as heavily stressed in Eastern religious thought, Dahlsgaard et al. point out that this virtue is emphasized in all four of the major Western religions reviewed.

The well-established empirical tradition in the psychology of religion on helping behavior has already been discussed in this chapter. This is not to suggest that the virtue of humanity has been exhaustively covered by psychologists of religion, for helping behavior is but a small slice of the humanity “pie.” Furthermore, as the reader may recall, there is little consensus from the empirical findings on the precise connection between religion and helping behavior. As a result, there should be no shortage of ideas for the psychologist of religion who wishes to investigate this virtue further.

Justice

Defined by Peterson and Seligman (2004) as “civic strengths that underlie healthy community life” (p. 30), justice implies the “shared notion that some standard should be in practice

to protect intuitive notions of what is fair” (p. 37). The character strengths of justice include citizenship, fairness, and leadership. The principle of justice as a virtue is stressed by all of the eight traditions reviewed by Dahlsgaard et al. (2005), suggesting that it is perhaps a ubiquitous theme. However, Maltby and Hill (2008) maintain that justice as a virtue is especially applicable to Judaism:

For the Jew, citizenship necessarily involves concerns for justice. Suggesting that a just God is indeed an imitable God, since humans were created in God’s image (*imago dei*), Jewish law is structured to foster a sense of loyalty and social responsibility with a primary concern for justice. Indeed, following God’s law prevents injustice gaps; it is the violation of such laws that leads to the need to respond to injustice, and to do so properly is yet another indication of citizenship as a developed character strength. (p. 128)

There is a considerable empirical research tradition centering around the theme of justice. For example, one of the more notable theories in social psychology, “equity” theory (Adams, 1965), proposes that although people desire to maximize self-interests in social relationships, they are happiest when there is an equitable distribution of benefits relative to the amount of effort put into the relationship. Research on organizational justice (Folger, 1977; Greenberg & Folger, 1983) has documented the importance in the procedural sense of justice of “voice” (Thibaut & Walker, 1975)—the opportunity to be heard, even if it has little desired influence on the outcome (Lind, Kanfer, & Earley, 1990). When these norms of justice are violated, an “injustice gap” (Worthington, 2006) occurs; the size and importance of this gap are determined by a number of factors, such as the intention behind the injustice and the injustice’s severity (Hill, Exline, & Cohen, 2005). The degree to which these notions of justice are applicable to one’s religious identity has yet to be empirically determined.

Transcendence

Defined by Peterson and Seligman (2004) as “strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning” (p. 30), the virtue of transcendence includes appreciation of beauty and awe, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality. Perhaps surprisingly to some, transcendence—the notion that there is some greater meaning or purpose to life—is not as widespread among world traditions as might be expected. Dahlsgaard et al. (2005) claim that of the six core virtues discussed here, it may only exceed courage as a ubiquitous theme. Their review found transcendence to be explicitly named in five of the eight great traditions they reviewed, but with it at least thematically implied in the other three (Confucianism, Taoism, and Athenian philosophy).

In Chapter 1, we have suggested that religion is uniquely capable of providing meaning and purpose. Indeed, it is around this theme that we have structured much of this book, so we do not review it further here. Maltby and Hill (2008), however, maintain that certain elements of transcendence are especially prominent in the theologies of Christianity and Islam. For example, they suggest that hope (along with optimism, future-mindedness, and future orientation), as one of the manifestations of transcendence, is a core personal characteristic strongly emphasized in Christianity. Such a sense of hope and significance may be one of the cohesive elements that helps make religion a unique meaning system (Silberman, 2005b). Emmons (2005) reminds us that for Christians, hope is one of the “Big Three” theological virtues, along with faith and love. Snyder, Sigmon, and Feldman’s (2002) review of the litera-

ture shows that hope has many positive effects on mental and even physical health. If hope is conceptualized—as it has been by Snyder and his colleagues (Snyder, 1994; Feldman & Snyder, 2005)—in terms of the ability to think of goals, to believe that one is capable of achieving those goals, and to perceive and apply pathways that lead to those goals, then religion is capable of fostering hope (Snyder et al., 2002). Indeed, Sethi and Seligman (1993) found that more conservative religious groups (whether Muslim, Jewish, or Christian) tended to be more hopeful and optimistic, perhaps because of specific religious teachings that, if taken literally, meet the conceptual criteria of hope stressed by Snyder and his colleagues.

Temperance (and Self-Control)

Defined by Peterson and Seligman (2004) as “strengths that protect against excess” (p. 30), temperance includes such character strengths as forgiveness and mercy, humility and modesty, prudence and self-regulation. Temperance is explicitly identified in all of the eight great religious and philosophical traditions reviewed by Dahlsgaard et al. (2005) except for Confucianism, where it is thematically implied.

Consider, for example, Buddhism’s four Noble Truths. The first Noble Truth is that there is suffering (*dukkha*), which reflects the impermanence and imperfection of human existence. The second Noble Truth is that the cause of such suffering is the craving for pleasure or desire, which is inherent in the impermanence of our human condition. Thus what all humans should strive for is the cessation of desire, which results in the cessation of suffering, or *nirvana* (the third Noble truth). The fourth Noble Truth is that a path leading to the cessation of desire can be achieved through the blueprint of the “eightfold path”: right views and right intent (which together constitute wisdom); right speech, right conduct, and right livelihood (which collectively make up morality); and right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration (which together constitute mental discipline). This example shows not only that religion usually specifies a virtue (e.g., an end to the desire of impermanent things), but that it often prescribes a means by which that virtue can be obtained (e.g., the eightfold path).

One interesting approach to an understanding of positive psychology, much in line with the virtue of temperance, is that taken by Baumeister and Exline (1999). They argue that a core psychological function underlying many virtues is self-control as an internal restraining mechanism. A life of virtue, they maintain, frequently necessitates putting the collective interests of society and community above pure self-interest. In their estimation, the natural proclivity toward self-interest and personal gratification (the very definition in some religions of sin or personal evil), often at the expense of others, requires the necessity of self-regulation for the good of society; this makes self-control in some sense a master virtue—what they refer to as personality’s “moral muscle.” In fact, Baumeister and Exline claim that “virtues seem based on the positive exercise of self-control, whereas sin and vice often revolve around failures of self-control” (1999, p. 1175). They make a convincing argument by analyzing the seven deadly sins in terms of the absence of self-regulation (failing to overcome excessive desire, or striving toward inappropriate goals), gluttony, sloth (one needs self-control to initiate activity when tempted to do nothing), greed, lust, envy, anger, and pride.

Consider, for example, the case of pride. There is considerable evidence in psychology that people want to think well of themselves, and indeed Western culture places a great value on self-esteem (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). As such, people often overestimate the importance of their own contributions as a form of self-enhancement. Although a positive self-concept in and of itself is not necessarily bad, an unbridled motivation to

achieve a high level of self-esteem surely often has unexamined by-products, both for the individual and for society (Crocker & Park, 2004; Robins & Beer, 2001); these include costs to autonomy, relationships, learning, and competence, among others (see Crocker & Park, 2004, for a review). The point at which a healthy self-esteem becomes an unhealthy narcissism may be for many people undetectable, and surely what such people themselves believe to be high self-esteem may be seen as pride or arrogance by others. At what point, for example, does a high level of self-esteem actually hinder relationships within a group? As Baumeister and Exline (1999) have pointed out,

... prideful people may be so self-focused that they are less prone to contribute to the group's welfare or to be willing to make sacrifices for others. In particular, group harmony may depend on maintaining a broad sense of fairness and equity, but such calculations are distorted by pride, insofar as proud people overestimate the value of their own contributions and believe they deserve large rewards. (p. 1173)

As a contrast, Baumeister and Exline (1999) also highlight the role of self-control in discussing the development of positive virtues, such as the four cardinal virtues identified by Aquinas: prudence (the practice of delayed gratification in the service of long-range considerations), justice (overriding what one wants to do with what one should do), temperance (restraining one's passions and desires), and fortitude (remaining firm and resolute). At the heart of the "self-control as a master virtue" argument is a view that human nature's tendency is one toward self-interest, and that the development of virtue must counteract this tendency. But this will require work. If indeed self-control is like a muscle (a term purposely used by these authors), we should see evidence of both fatigue and eventual strengthening after continued use. Baumeister and Exline have reviewed a number of studies documenting both tendencies.

Religion and Positive Psychology: Summary

The study of positive psychology is a relatively new development that has generated much enthusiasm among researchers. Though it has strong and obvious implications for the psychology of religion, there has not yet been much direct empirical research looking specifically at the association of religion and ordinary human strengths and virtues. What positive psychology does provide is a refreshingly new approach to understanding the role of religion in ordinary living—the extent to which it encourages and fosters the development of a virtuous character, as well as the possibility that it discourages or hinders such development. We have reviewed what positive researchers have identified as six core virtues, each of which includes more specific character strengths. These virtues and strengths may provide a useful categorical approach for researchers to investigate religious experience in light of research and thinking in positive psychology.

OVERVIEW

We have had something of a roller-coaster ride in this chapter. Religion does indeed seem to be related to some aspects of moral attitudes and behaviors, although there are almost always studies with contradictory findings. We have seen that in the areas of substance use/abuse, nonmarital sexual behavior, and (to a lesser extent) crime and delinquency,

more religious persons generally report that they have stricter moral attitudes and are less likely to engage in behaviors that contravene societal (and especially religious) norms. The relationships are not always strong, but they do seem to be reasonably consistent, albeit qualified by various relevant factors as research progresses. However, faith is surprisingly unrelated to some other behaviors, such as cheating/dishonesty. There are indications that religious people *say* they are more honest, but the data do not always bear this out for actual behavior in a secular setting.

We have also found that the relationship of religiousness to helping behavior and prejudice is complex. Again, there are indications that religious people *say* they are more helpful, but the findings do not bear this out for actual behavior in a nonreligious setting. Within a religious context, the more faithful do indeed help more by giving money, time, and talent to religiously based causes. However, outside such a context, it becomes very difficult to distinguish helpers from nonhelpers on the basis of their religion. Batson and his coresearchers have tried to build a case that I religiousness is only related to the *appearance* of helpfulness, not to actual behavior; however, some studies have failed to find any association between I scores and self-reported helping. The Q religious orientation is usually, but not always, positively associated with behavioral measures of giving assistance to others. The question of whether some religious orientations are more universally compassionate than others cannot be answered completely clearly. Though Batson's research suggests that questers are more likely to demonstrate universal compassion, there is evidence that they too may be more likely to demonstrate compassion to those with whom they agree than to others, especially if their compassionate acts are somehow likely to promote a view that violates their values.

The evidence indicates that religion is, in general, negatively associated with prejudice. However, those high in religiousness may hold negative attitudes toward proscribed behaviors, such as homosexuality. Whether individuals separate the behavior from the person performing the behavior (the "sin-sinner" issue) has yet to be fully resolved, and this question will undoubtedly generate new research in the years to come. At present, it seems that it is not religion per se that is linked to prejudice, but the ways in which one holds one's faith, the importance of one's religious *group* affiliation, and so on.

Finally, we have explored a promising new avenue for the psychology of religion—positive psychology. Though the implications are obvious, the research in this area to date is rather scarce.

In the end, we are left to puzzle over many things. Why do obtained relationships vary so much for different moral behaviors? Why doesn't religion have a stronger impact in *all* of these areas? How do we explain the "no relationship" findings? Can religion really be a source of criminal behavior, such as child sexual abuse or domestic violence? If so, can religion "right itself" and find within itself the cure for such problems? Does religion promote virtuous character development? These questions are difficult to answer, but they may serve as stimuli for future research efforts.

Religion, Health, Psychopathology, and Coping

Religion is comparable to a childhood neurosis.

There is a madness which is the special gift of heaven.

Religious anxiety is rarely, if ever, a cause of insanity. The sublime faith of Christianity is rather a safeguard against it.

When misery is the greatest, God is the closest.

A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing;
Our helper He amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.

A little girl repeating the Twenty-Third Psalm said it this way: "The Lord is my shepherd, that's all I want."¹

Religion and issues of mental health, particularly psychopathology, have had a long and sometimes troubled relationship, often resulting in a tug-of-war over whose word was final. In the West until the last four to five centuries, power was vested in the church, and the medical profession took its orders from ecclesiastical authorities, which throughout history has combined kindness and compassion with cruelty and punishment (McNeill, 1951; Zilboorg & Henry, 1941). Established religion reluctantly ceded power to medicine and psychiatry, and, with similar reluctance, medicine has slowly yielded some control to psychology and social work. However, the notion that sin and wrongdoing are the causes of mental problems remains in the popular mind, and such themes even persist among the helping professions (Kirk & Kutchins, 1992; Nunnally, 1961). Though the cruder versions of these ideas seem to be fading, some still prevail in certain religiously conservative quarters, particularly in rela-

¹These quotations come, respectively, from the following sources: Freud (1927/1961b, p. 53); Jowett (1907, p. 549); Caplan (1969, p. 132); Gross (1982, p. 242); ; Martin Luther, quoted in Bartlett (1955, p. 86); Mead (1965, p. 166).

tively isolated groups. In contrast, however, we find conservative mainstream religious bodies such as the American Baptist Churches (1992) formally adopting sophisticated approaches to mental illness.

Similarly, suspicion of and concern about religion within the psychological/psychiatric community are abating. Historically, psychoanalysis and positivistic behaviorism either were openly antithetic toward religion or simply had no place for it in their views of mental life (Burnham, 1985; Farberow, 1963; Wulff, 1997). However, classic behaviorism has faded into psychological history, and psychoanalytic ideas (often in new garb) have become integral to the psychological study of religion and often the work of the clergy (Beit-Hallahmi, 1995; McDargh, 1983; Smith & Handelman, 1990). A new and growing level of cooperation now characterizes religion–psychology relationships. For example, in contrast to earlier editions, the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV; American Psychiatric Association, 1994) and its text revision (DSM-IV-TR; American Psychiatric Association, 2000) recognize “religious and spiritual difficulties as a distinct mental disorder deserving treatment” (Sleek, 1994, p. 8). As part of this new awareness, religion and spirituality can be considered psychotherapeutic tools. Antireligious statements, such as Albert Ellis’s (1980) view that “the less religious [patients] are, the more emotionally healthy they will tend to be” (p. 637), are becoming passé. Ellis (2000) later came to feel that “religious beliefs which [he] once saw as irrational, are potentially helpful to some clients. Religious believers embrace some rational, self-helping beliefs as well” (p. 277).

For the last several decades, therefore, psychologists and religionists have been replacing previous doubts and antagonisms with a new spirit of mutual concern and support. We have come full circle, to the realization that cooperation between religion and the behavioral sciences is essential to human betterment. Still, however, challenges remain. Probably the most notable challenge is each field’s lack of education and sophisticated knowledge about the other field. Many religious professionals, for example, may not be knowledgeable about psychology, particularly when it comes to distinguishing those psychological claims of a popular variety from those with scientific support. Similarly, many researchers, particularly those who are interested in the religion–health linkage, may be well trained in the field of health and health care, but may have a naïve understanding of religion and spirituality. For example, many studies (particularly those conducted prior to the 1980s) designated their respondents simply as “Catholic,” “Protestant,” “Jewish,” and “other,” or used such simplistic measures as church attendance to indicate the degree of religious commitment or salience. By now, we hope our readers can see that such measures are not likely to move our understanding of religious/spiritual experience, including its relationship with mental and physical health, very far forward.

In Chapter 2, we have discussed the complexity of the religious domain, suggesting that categories such as the Intrinsic and Extrinsic or Committed and Consensual dimensions and measures (among other possibilities) may be useful. We have seen in other chapters how important it is to understand not just what a person believes or practices, but also how those beliefs are held and practiced. Simplistic indicators of religion often mask researchers’ poor understanding of this highly complex realm. Still, consistency over multiple studies suggests reliable findings, and even where respondents have been poorly classified, clues may be present that will stimulate better research. Unfortunately, this is a costly and a time- and energy-consuming path to follow. A much more efficient approach entails the development of adequate theory to guide such studies; more exacting definitions on both sides of the religion–health linkage are essential prerequisites in such work.

THE RELIGION–HEALTH CONNECTION

Religion did not begin drawing sustained systematic attention from scientific researchers as a health-related factor until the 1980s (Oman & Thoresen, 2005). Since then, however, there has been an explosion of research—to the point that there have now been a number of reviews, the vast majority of which link religion and spirituality positively to physical health (e.g., Ellison & Levin, 1998; Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Larson, Swyers, & McCullough, 1998; McCullough, Hoyt, Larson, Koenig, & Thoresen, 2000; Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Powell, Shahabi, & Thoresen, 2003) and to mental health (e.g., Koenig, 1998; Larson et al., 1998; Miller & Kelley, 2005). There have also been reviews of the reviews (e.g., Sloan & Bagiella, 2002; Sloan, Bagiella, & Powell, 1999), questioning, on the basis of methodological concerns, the strength of the alleged religion–health linkages. For example, using strict scientific criteria in their review of the literature for the year 2000, Sloan and Bagiella (2002) found that only 17% of 266 articles showed a significant relationship between religion and cardiovascular disease. Criticizing the methodology of much of this research, these researchers believe that the claims of religion's beneficial effects are greatly exaggerated. Obviously more meta-analytic studies (in which analyses are conducted on combined data from many studies) need to be undertaken in this area, and over a broader range of illness.

One methodological concern stressed throughout this book, but particularly in Chapter 12, is the reliance in the psychology of religion on self-report measures. This same issue plagues those who are exploring the relationship of religion and health. Though some measures of health do not rely on self-report, still most studies to date have used only self-reported measures of religion or spirituality.

Religion and Physical Health

The relationship between physical health and religion is not simple, for even though some research finds “direct” connections between physical well-being and religion, these may work indirectly by fostering other benefits (e.g., good health habits). In what is perhaps the most definitive and scientifically rigorous review to date that investigates the linkage between religion and physical health, Powell et al. (2003) conclude that the relationship does exist, though it “may be more limited and more complex than has been suggested by others” (p. 50). These reviewers acknowledge the “file drawer effect”—the unknown impact of unpublished results that may weaken the relationship (since “no effect” findings are less likely to get published), but also the fact that the strength of the relationship may be *underestimated* due to imprecise measurement of religion or spirituality (see Hill & Pargament, 2003).

Why might there be a connection between religious or spiritual involvement and physical (as well as emotional) health? Oman and Thoresen (2005; see also Thoresen, 2007) suggest four broad mechanisms that may operate independently or in combination, all of which have received at least some empirical support (see Koenig et al., 2001, for a more extensive discussion of each mechanism and the empirical research):

- *Health behaviors.* Religion in general or specific religious groups may encourage healthy practices, such as exercise (Oman & Reed, 1998), use of seat belts (Oman & Thoresen, 2006), or dietary restrictions (King, 1990); religious involvement may also discourage unhealthy practices, such as smoking, drinking, drug use, or risky sexual behavior (King, 1990; Levin & Schiller, 1987; Sarafino, 1990; see also Chapter 12 for a more complete dis-

cussion). A comparison of highly religious mothers with their less committed counterparts revealed that the former were significantly more likely to engage in active illness prevention behaviors than the latter group (Ameika, Eck, Ivers, Clifford, & Malcarne, 1994). Still, the more religious mothers felt that they had less control over illness. Since a major prevention category was to “go to the doctor,” this finding may suggest an inclination for religion to promote deference both to God and to medical authorities. This possibility merits further assessment, as it may also imply a more general obeisance to authority.

- *Psychological states.* Involvement in religion may foster more positive psychological states, such as joy or hope, which are perhaps useful in buffering stress (Cole & Pargament, 1999); it may also protect against negative psychological states, such as fear, sadness, or anger. Reviewing over 100 studies that examined religiousness and well-being, Koenig (1998) found a statistically significant positive correlation between the two constructs in almost 80% of the studies, including 8 of the 10 studies that tracked respondents over time. A number of more recent studies further document religion as a major predictor of well-being (Cohen, 2002; Ferriss, 2002; Francis & Kaldor, 2002; Fry, 2001; Laurencelle, Abell, & Schwartz, 2002), though some studies have found no relationship (Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 2001b) or a weak relationship (Diener & Clifton, 2002; Tsuang, Williams, Simpson, & Lyons, 2002).

- *Coping.* Religious and spiritual involvement may provide additional ways of dealing with life's stressors by complementing nonreligious coping. Like other effective coping, religious coping can lead to stress-related personal growth (Park, 2005) and may be a unique source of meaning and purpose to life (Oman & Thoresen, 2003; Paloutzian & Park, 2005). Religion seems to enhance one's sense of control, and this appears to be associated with better health (Loewenthal & Cornwall, 1993; McIntosh, Kojetin, & Spilka, 1985; McIntosh & Spilka, 1990). In a large-scale community investigation, these results were supported, but it was noted that religion was of particular benefit when people were dealing with either chronic illness or the death of loved ones (Mattlin, Wethington, & Kessler, 1990). In another study, resorting to one's faith was found to be the most useful coping device in dealing with such issues (McCrae & Costa, 1986). We explore religious/spiritual coping in much greater depth later in this chapter.

- *Social support.* Involvement in religious groups may provide a greater social support network (Oman & Reed, 1998). In general, positive social support has been shown to help create greater meaning in life (Krause, 2003, 2007). Koenig et al. (2001) report that 19 of 20 studies they examined found at least one statistically significant relationship between religious involvement and social support. Religious support has been associated with more positive affect or life satisfaction and with lower levels of depression (Fiala, Bjorck, & Gorsuch, 2002; Krause, Ellison, & Wulff, 1998); it has also been predictive of less emotional distress among people coping with stress from the early 1990s Gulf War (Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000). Furthermore, social support from religious sources is a significant predictor of psychological adjustment, even after the effects of general social support are controlled for (VandeCreek, Pargament, Belavich, Cowell, & Friedel, 1999).

These are general categories of some, but probably not all, mediators between religion and both physical and mental health. Today, most researchers seem convinced that there is *some* relationship between religion and health. Now the questions facing researchers center on more specific issues about that relationship (e.g., whether religion has the same relationship with cardiovascular health as with cancer; whether it has the same relationship with dif-

ferent types of cancer; whether it matters what religion one adheres to or what one's religious beliefs are; etc.) and about the mediating mechanisms that help explain the relationship. Though the research to this point has been substantial, we have a long way to go before we can draw definitive conclusions that will help explain the religion–health connection.

Religion, Stress, and the Immune System

Health is intimately connected to the defenses mobilized by the body when illness and infection are encountered. These stressors activate the body's immune system. One response is the release of a steroid hormone, cortisol. Secreted by the adrenal glands, cortisol has been called the “stress hormone.” Too much or too little cortisol can be harmful to a broad spectrum of physiological activities. The negative effects of most interest here are elevated blood pressure, increased heart rate, indirect release of glucose for energy into the bloodstream, and possible problems with emotional control (Purves, Orians, & Heller, 1995; Stoppler, n.d.; Weber, n.d.). Especially in relation to the psychological effects, high levels of cortisol are considered undesirable.

Koenig et al. (2001) have reviewed an immense medical literature in their *Handbook of Religion and Health*. For example, one study indicated that persons engaging in Buddhist meditation showed significant reductions in cortisol levels. In other work, female patients who resorted to prayer and religion while awaiting breast biopsies for possible cancer revealed less cortisol production than those not employing these methods. A study of women with metastatic breast cancer who evidenced religious activity and who considered faith important also showed lowered evening cortisol levels, but not reduced overall levels. In a number of other studies, the contributors to the *Handbook* found religion to be beneficial to the immune system with regard to other physiological indicators, such as interleukin. Apparently, therefore, religious and spiritual coping can reduce bodily expressions of stress.

Seeman, Dubin, and Seeman (2003) have provided a critical review of the evidence for biological pathways that may help us better understand the relationship of religion and spirituality with health. Most of the research they reviewed (see Table 1 on p. 55 of their review for a list of the actual empirical studies reviewed) investigated either Judeo-Christian practices or Zen, yoga, and other meditation/relaxation practices. Among Judeo-Christian practices, they found “reasonable” evidence for the association of religion/spirituality with lower blood pressure and less hypertension and with better immune functioning. They found only limited evidence supporting a link between Judeo-Christian practices and better lipid profiles. For Zen, yoga, and other meditation/relaxation practices, they found extensive evidence that such practices were associated with lower blood pressure and with better health outcomes in clinical patient populations; “reasonable” evidence that these practices were associated with lower cholesterol, lower stress hormone levels, and differential patterns of brain activity; but only limited evidence that such practices were associated with less oxidative stress, less blood pressure activity under challenge, and less stress hormone reactivity under challenge.

Though it is clearly safe to say that religiousness/spirituality and physiology are connected, it is far more difficult to put the particular pieces together to make much sense of this connection. For a society that places great emphasis on physical health and longevity, the implications of this research are significant. We suspect, therefore, that this will remain an important topic of research for years to come.

Religion and Longevity

One may argue that the final test of the relationship between religion and health may be found in longevity. Do religious people live longer than their less religious counterparts? A surprisingly large number of studies have addressed this issue. Even though most of this work indicates that religious involvement is associated with low mortality, the problem has proven to be far more complex than it appears on the surface. Because many variables confound the religion–longevity relationship, much research that has dealt either directly or indirectly with this issue has not produced clear or consistent results, as we have noted in the discussion of religion and mortality in Chapter 7. For example, as described there, the link between gender and faith shows that correlations between mortality and religion are stronger for women than for men. We cannot take this finding at face value, however, because women tend to outlive men. In addition, they use health facilities more often than men, ensuring faster treatment for problems (Taylor, 1991). Clearly, researchers need to correct for gender.

The subtle influence of socioeconomic status may also complicate the religion–longevity issue. Higher status is associated with joining more organizations, and churches may be included in this picture (Chalfant, Beckley, & Palmer, 1981). Higher socioeconomic status also means more knowledge about health, greater use of medical services, and better-quality health care. These factors will have an obvious impact on longevity. Similarly, indices of public religious involvement such as church attendance have been found to relate positively to longevity, but this may be due to the likelihood that nonattenders have poorer health, which prevents them from going to church. As indicated in Chapter 7, these are only a few of many possible confounds; thus it is understandable that the more such variables are controlled for, the weaker the association between faith and longevity becomes. Readers are referred to the “Religion and Mortality” section of Chapter 7 for a description of other research in this area, particularly the meta-analysis of data on this issue by McCullough, Hoyt, et al. (2000). McCullough (2001) offers a number of possibilities to account for the meta-analytic findings, opening the door to further research.

Religion and Emotional Health

Many of the same mechanisms that underlie the connection between religion and physical health are at work in religion’s association with mental health as well. Lifestyle issues, social networks, psychological states, religious coping, and religion’s general promotion of well-being are all important mediators between religion and mental or emotional health. We focus here primarily on the relationship between religion and positive emotions. This is not to say that religion causes people, for example, to be happy; most of the work is correlational in nature. Nor does it mean that there is only a rosy side to religious experience; we discuss some emotions that are not positive in nature. Finally, it also does not mean that religion is somehow synonymous with mental health. Later in this chapter, we explore religion’s connection with psychopathology as well.

Before we explore specific emotions, it should be noted that until recently, psychologists of religion have neglected the affective basis of religion. This is somewhat surprising, given that (1) so many people find religious and spiritual experiences to have a strong emotional component; (2) emotions have long been recognized by theologians (e.g., Jonathan Edwards, Rudolph Otto, Friedrich Schleiermacher) to be prominent in religious experience; and (3)

early psychologists of religion, particularly William James (1902/1985), placed emotion at the center of conscious religious experience. Some of this neglect is probably due to the fact that research on emotion has, as a whole, lagged behind other psychological domains, no doubt in part due to the difficulty of the subject matter. But there have been recent theoretical and methodological advances in the study of emotions, and psychologists of religion have been challenged to begin to apply these new understandings to their subject matter (Emmons, 2005; Hill, 1995, 2002).

Silberman (2003) proposes three ways in which religion can have an impact on emotional experience. First, religion helps define what is appropriate and inappropriate emotional expression, including its appropriate intensity. Second, the *content* of religious belief (e.g., the belief that God is loving vs. vengeful) will help determine the type of emotion experienced (e.g., security, gratitude, reciprocal love vs. fear). Third, religion allows one to experience powerful emotions, such as closeness to the sacred (see also Hill & Pargament, 2003). To say that religion and emotion are intimately connected is hardly an overstatement.

Meaning, Purpose, and Self-Esteem

In Chapter 1, we have said that religion is in a unique position to provide what Park (2005) refers to as “global meaning”—a general sense of meaning to life that involves beliefs, goals, and subjective feelings. This may be the case because religion alone, so it seems to many, (1) is comprehensive, and therefore is capable of subsuming other sources of meaning, such as family, work, personal relationships, and enduring values; (2) is accessible to human understanding, often through a system of taught values compatible with a religious system; (3) is transcendent, in that it points “beyond me” to some greater being or ultimate authority; and (4) makes direct claims as a meaning provider through its sacred character. To this end, religion is unusually existentially satisfactory to many (Emmons, 1999; Park, 2005).

Empirical research supports the notion that religion is associated with a sense of meaning in life, though the association itself appears to be stronger among elderly persons (Ardelt, 2003; Hughes & Peake, 2002; Krause, 2003) and among ethnic minorities (Mattis, 2002; Moadel et al., 1999). It may serve as a form of “meaning making” (Park, 2005) because religion can offer the elderly a sense of hope and optimism (Krause, 2003), even if they may otherwise cycle downward in a sense of Eriksonian “despair” (Erikson, 1963). Those senior citizens especially prone to despair due to poverty, crime, and other losses disproportionately experienced by ethnic minorities may find religion as the sole source of life meaning and purpose. Mattis (2002) conducted in-depth interviews with 23 African American women and found that religion/spirituality was the primary means by which they constructed meaning, especially in the face of adversity. She found eight faith-based meaning-making themes: Religion/spirituality helped these women to accept reality, to gain courage and insight, to confront and overcome limitations, to identify and grapple with existential questions, to recognize purpose and destiny, to define character and meaningful moral principles, to achieve growth, and to trust in transcendent sources of knowledge and communication.

The ability of religion and spirituality to define meaning and purpose in life even extends to adolescents; this is not necessarily surprising, given that the search for personal identity (Erikson, 1963) often involves existential issues. MacDonald and Holland (2002) used a five-dimensional measure of spirituality (the Expressions of Spirituality Inventory) to investigate the relationship between spirituality and boredom proneness among 296 undergraduates

(several other studies have shown boredom to be negatively related to meaning and purpose in life). They found that spirituality significantly predicted lower boredom proneness, but only as a function of existential well-being (comfort with one's self, confidence in one's ability to handle basic existential issues) and, for women only, cognitive orientation (belief in the existence of spirituality, perception of spirituality as having relevance to identity and daily functioning). The scale's other dimensions (religiousness, spiritual experience, and spirituality) did not predict boredom. Francis (2000) found that among a sample of almost 26,000 teenagers in England and Wales, Bible reading had a small but clearly detectable effect on adolescents' sense of purpose, even after gender, age, personality, church attendance, and belief in God were accounted for.

High scores on the measure of Intrinsic religion (but not on the Quest or Extrinsic religion measures) have been found to be linked solidly with high scores on a measure of global self-esteem (Laurencelle et al., 2002; Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993). A study of almost 1,000 people in Australia found that belief in God, attending church, and praying were correlated positively with self-esteem and well-being (Francis & Kaldor, 2002).

A religious person's level of self-esteem, however, may be influenced by other related factors. For example, Benson and Spilka (1973) showed that a positive outlook toward oneself corresponds to a similar perception of God. It is, however, well established that God concepts are multidimensional (Gorsuch, 1968; Spilka, Armatas, & Nussbaum, 1964). One long-standing dichotomy that is basic to Western religion is the one between notions of a loving God and a controlling God (Benson & Spilka, 1973; Spilka, Addison, & Rosensohn, 1975). Examining this dichotomy, Culbertson (1996) expected these images to relate to one's sense of personal shame. A controlling God concept was found to be positively affiliated with shame, but a loving God concept was independent of shame. Pargament et al. (1990) have observed that viewing God in a positive and benevolent light can buttress meaning, self-esteem, and one's sense of control in life.

Foster and Keating (1990) conducted a rather ingenious investigation into the relationships between male and female God images for men and women. They observed greater self-esteem when women interacted with a female God, while males viewed themselves more favorably when their God was masculine.

Optimism and Hope

Koenig et al. (2001) found that of 15 studies prior to 2000 investigating the relationship of religion to optimism and hope, only 4 found no relationship. All of the other studies found positive relationships between religion and greater hope or optimism. More recent studies have generally confirmed this finding. Markstrom's (1999) survey of 125 high school juniors in West Virginia (half of the sample was African American and half was European American) found that greater religious involvement was associated with such ego strengths as hope, will, purpose, love, care, and fidelity. Unlike most studies comparing European Americans with other racial groups, this study found the religious associations to be stronger among the European American students. Krause (2002) discovered from his sample of 1,500 senior citizens that perceived closeness to God was a significant predictor of optimism, especially among African Americans. Religious belief, but not religious behavior, was found to be the best predictor of hope in a study of 271 clinically depressed patients (Murphy et al., 2000).

Some research suggests that optimism is associated with religious conservatism (Sethi

& Seligman, 1993, 1994). This suggestion runs contrary to the common hypothesis that religious conservatism or fundamentalism should be associated with a negative self-concept and low self-esteem, because of an emphasis on personal sin and guilt (Hood, 1992c). Sethi and Seligman (1993) compared members of three different religious groups (liberal, moderate, and “fundamentalist”—though their measure of fundamentalism would be better described as one of religious conservatism or orthodoxy) on a variety of measures from which they derived indices of optimism and pessimism. Optimism was greatest among the members of the fundamentalist group, followed by those from the moderate group. The members of the liberal group evidenced the least optimism. Religious leaders were interviewed with regard to distinguishing the prayers and hymns typically used by the different faiths. A content analysis of these materials showed that theory paralleled the level of group optimism. In other words, the fundamentalist group was exposed to the most optimistic religious content, and the liberal group to the least. In related work, it was concluded that fundamentalism stresses the most hopefulness, the least hopelessness, and the least self-blame for negative happenings (Sethi & Seligman, 1994). There is a need to repeat this work with different procedures, however, since Kroll (1994) has raised questions about the validity of the optimism–pessimism measures used.

Snyder, Sigmon, and Feldman (2002) suggest that religion is uniquely capable of providing hope because it provides adherents with explicit goals, promotes pathways (including pathway thoughts) to achieve those goals, and supplies incentives for motivation to reach those goals. Emmons (2005) states: “In its religious context, hope provides respite during trials, brings perseverance during challenges, and provides assurance of eternal joy” (p. 242).

“Sacred” Emotions

Emmons (2005) suggests that the characteristics of certain emotions allow us to consider them as “sacred” emotions. These emotions, such as gratitude, hope, humility, awe, and reverence, are more likely to occur in religious or spiritual *settings*, to be elicited by religious or spiritual *practices*, to be experienced by people who *self-identify* as religious or spiritual, to be cultivated in adherents by religious and spiritual *systems*, and to be experienced when apparent secular aspects of lives are imbued with spiritual *significance*. If, in fact, the search for the sacred is a defining feature of religion and spirituality, as suggested by many (Hill et al., 2000; Pargament, 1997, 1999; Zinnbauer et al., 1997), then we might expect such sacred emotions to be generated when the sacred is encountered.

GRATITUDE

Understood as an emotional response to a gift (Emmons, 2005), gratitude has been shown to have a significant impact on emotional well-being (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003). Emmons and McCullough (2003) found that an intervention of a daily and weekly practice of gratitude caused increases in a general sense of subjective well-being and hope. Based on their findings, Watkins et al. (2003) maintained that people who are grateful have a general sense of abundance, appreciate the simple everyday pleasures of life, and appreciate the contribution of others to their well-being. Watkins (2004) proposed that the relationship between gratitude and subjective well-being may very well reflect a “cycle of virtue,” whereby gratitude enhances happiness, which in turn promotes

further gratitude; this is similar to what Fredrickson (2001) has called the “upward spiral” of positive affect. Watkins et al. (2003) found religiousness to be positively correlated with gratitude, and those who scored high in religiousness also acknowledged the contribution of the divine to their sense of well-being. Similarly, McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002) found that gratitude, as part of daily mood, was positively associated with various measures of religiousness, including scores on Intrinsic (but not Extrinsic or Quest) religious orientation, interest level in religion, and general religiousness.

HUMILITY

Many people think of humility as a “religious-type” trait (Exline & Geyer, 2004). Given such dictionary definitions as “lowliness,” self-abasement,” and “submission,” it is not surprising that humility is not a valued trait in Western society. As C. S. Lewis (1942/2000, p. 153) once said, “Thousands of humans have been brought to think that humility means pretty people trying to believe they are ugly and clever men trying to believe they are fools.” However, the psychological literature provides a different picture. For example, Furey (1986) defined “humility” as

the acceptance of our imperfection. It does not prohibit self-expression. Nor does it rule out pride in one’s accomplishments. Humility in no way limits human potential. Rather humility allows us to accept the limitations of our potential. Psychologically, humility implies the acceptance of ourselves. (p. 7)

Best understood as simply “a nondefensive willingness to see the self accurately” (Exline & Rose, 2005, p. 320; see also Exline et al., 2004, and Tangney, 2000, for reviews), a feeling of humility is often promoted when one contemplates the mysteries of the universe.

Ashton and Lee (2005; see also Lee & Ashton, 2004, 2005) have argued that personality researchers have neglected personality traits related to an honesty–humility dimension. In fact, these researchers have suggested that if honesty–humility is added as a sixth dimension of personality to the already well-established (but slightly realigned) five-factor model of personality (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism; McCrae & Costa, 1997), then more personality variables—especially those related to deceit without hostility, such as self-monitoring or social adroitness—are better accounted for. They provide convincing empirical evidence supporting this position, suggesting that honesty–humility is an important personality factor.

Research on humility is rather sparse, in part because it is so difficult to measure (Exline et al., 2004). However, a few studies are beginning to appear. Exline and Geyer (2004) found that undergraduate students, regardless of how religious they were, consistently saw humility as a positive characteristic, associated humility with good psychological adjustment, reported that humble people were more likely to be religious or spiritual, and reported experiences of personal success associated with positive emotion when recalling situations where they felt humbled. However, religiousness was positively associated with each of these findings (i.e., each association was stronger among those who scored higher in religiousness). High religiousness was also positively associated with the desire to become more humble.

But are religious people actually more humble, as the common perceptions from Exline and Geyer’s (2004) sample would suggest? We would predict this to be the case, given that humility is a virtue espoused by many religious traditions, including Christianity. Indeed,

some evidence in the Exline and Geyer study suggests that more religious people *desire* humility. Rowatt, Ottenbreit, Nesselroade, and Cunningham (2002), however, found evidence of a religious pride—a “holier-than-thou” attitude—in their student samples at a medium-sized church-affiliated university. This religious pride was greatest among those with high Intrinsic scores and least among those with high Quest scores. Attitudes and behavior, as social psychologists frequently remind us, are not always consistent.

RELIGION AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

As indicated thus far in this chapter, religion is usually associated with good health, both psychologically and physically. But there also may be many ways in which faith and psychological problems may be related. Bergin's (1983) meta-analysis of studies relating indices of religion and psychopathology up to that time found that 14 studies showed a favorable relationship between religion and mental health; 9 evidenced no association; and 7 indicated religion to be positively associated with pathology. It is an overgeneralization to say that religion is necessarily good or bad for one's health.

How might faith be associated with psychological problems? We consider five possible relationships:

1. Religion may be an expression of mental disorder.
2. Institutionalized faith can be a socializing and suppressing force, aiding people to cope with their life stresses and mental aberrations.
3. Religion can serve as a haven—a protective agency for some mentally disturbed people.
4. Spiritual commitment and involvement may perform therapeutic roles in alleviating mental distress.
5. Religion can be a stressor, a source of problems; in a sense, it can be “a hazard to one's mental health.”²

Religion as an Expression of Mental Disorder

Many years ago, when one of us (Bernard Spilka) was an undergraduate, he and his fellow students were regularly harassed and challenged by two street corner evangelists. Actually, only one was capable of presenting his Biblically based arguments; the other stood to the side, reading from a large open Bible in an unintelligible mumble. The students never saw him do anything else. It was evident that his contact with reality was extremely poor, and he illustrates what books on psychopathology frequently suggest—namely, that any aspect of religious belief, experience, or behavior can be meaningful to a seriously disturbed mind.

Disturbed Religious Beliefs, Thoughts, and Behavior

It is not uncommon that a person suffering from major mental illness who is delusional and possibly hallucinating feels chosen by God to do certain things. Delusions may be manifested

²With the exception of the last role for religion, we are deeply indebted to James E. Dittes for this framework, which was first used in Spilka and Werme (1971).

in the belief that one is an angel of God—or, on the other side of the coin, that one is cursed by God. An excellent example is the famous study by Milton Rokeach (1964), in which he studied three men who variously identified themselves as Jesus Christ and God. Though none felt victimized by God, all illustrated how religion might be a part of severe mental disorder.

One form of mental pathology that is manifested in religious thinking and behavior has been termed “scrupulosity” (Mora, 1969). Askin, Paultre, White, and Van Ornum (1993, p. 3) call it “the religious manifestation of Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder,” which is defined in DSM-IV and DSM-IV-TR as an anxiety disorder. They specifically define scrupulosity as “a condition involving continuous worry about religious issues or compulsions to perform religious rituals” (Askin et al., 1993, pp. 3–4). Askin and her colleagues have developed a short objective measure of scrupulosity that correlates very strongly with indices of obsessions–compulsions. Similar behavior has been reported for a group of disturbed Catholic children (Weisner & Riffel, 1960).

Primary among the expressions associated with scrupulosity are a fear of sin and compulsive doubt (Nolan, 1990; Overholser, 1963). Those suffering from this disorder continually seek assurances from religious authorities and tend to reject psychotherapy. It is possible, however, for an involved cleric to work with a therapist to help alleviate the problem (Nolan, 1990). In addition, scrupulous persons engage in rigid ritualistic observances and practices in order to gain some sense of purification—something they can never accept. They can never feel clean and accepted by God, because they make attributions to themselves as bad and sinful, and to the deity as unforgiving and tolerating no deviation from extreme religious strictures. Freudian theory suggests that scrupulosity relates to sexual impulse control; in support of this theory, there is evidence that its peak period of occurrence in life is adolescence (Nolan, 1990; Wulff, 1997). It is not restricted to the teenage years, however.

Religious and Mystical Experience

The often extremely unusual and graphic nature of religious or mystical experiences can easily lead one to conclude that they are signs of mental disturbance. Greeley (1974) suggested that mysticism reflected a badly disoriented personality, and a committee of the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry (GAP) (1976) indicated that it was unable “to make a firm distinction between a mystical state and a psychopathological state” (p. 815). The association of religious and mystical episodes with the use of drugs has been widely noted (Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993; Bridges, 1970; see also the discussion of entheogens in Chapters 10 and 11). Insofar as drug use may reflect abnormality, psychedelic experiences with a religious flavor can be regarded as expressing deviance in personality. Hood (1995a), however, details a wide variety of avenues to religious experience, further suggesting that such experience is not a common result of psychopathology.

Before we too readily label these experiences as indicating mental deviance, let us recall from Chapters 10 and 11 that considerable percentages of the U.S. and British populations report such encounters (Greeley, 1974; Hardy, 1979; Hay & Morisy, 1978; Thomas & Cooper, 1978). If one selects religiously active people, the rate is usually in the 70–80% range (Spilka, Ladd, McIntosh, Milmoie, & Bickel, 1996). In a highly significant theoretical and research paper, Rodney Stark (1965) offered a breakdown of religious and mystical experiences ranging from the normal to the possibly pathological. For example, his “salvational” type is said to be motivated by a sense of “sin and guilt” (p. 102). Of a more extreme nature, with much

potential for illustrating mental disturbance, is Stark's "revelational" experience. It is the rarest and most deviant form he discusses, and is expressed in visual and auditory hallucinations that the individual regards as messages from the divine, angels, or Satan. It has also received some confirmation from work showing that personality and adjustment problems may be associated with religious experiences involving extreme physical–emotional reactions and/or hallucinations (Jackson & Spilka, 1980). Similar connections have been offered by other scholars (Boisen, 1936; Spilka, Brown, & Cassidy, 1993).

Summarizing the research literature, Lukoff, Lu, and Turner (1992) noted that those reporting mystical experiences score more favorably on measures of abnormality and psychological well-being than members of control groups do. There is no doubt that religious and mystical encounters may reflect mental disturbance; however, the weight of the evidence suggests that most such experiences are not pathological, and that many even have beneficial effects (Clark, Malony, Daane, & Tippet, 1973; McCallister, 1995). Furthermore, Kohls and his colleagues have demonstrated that among persons who have mystical experiences, those who are adept at spiritual practices are more prone to experience these states as positive (Kohls & Walach, 2007; Kohls, Hack, & Walach, 2008; Kohls, Walach, & Wirtz, 2009).

Glossolalia

Glossolalia, or "speaking in tongues" (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 10), can be quite impressive in its effects, and may be expressive of mental disorder. Glossolalia is a worldwide phenomenon (Bourguignon, 1992; Greenberg & Witztum, 1992). One estimate suggests that at least 2 million persons in the United States engage in glossolalia (Greenberg & Witztum, 1992). Psychiatry and psychology are slowly accepting the idea that it is not pathological behavior. There is currently little doubt that it is learned behavior, which is reinforced in certain group settings into which glossolalic individuals are socialized (Goodman, 1972; Samarin, 1959). It continues to play a role in Pentecostalism. Schumaker (1995) speaks of the dissociation of learned associations, but then identifies dissociation with a broad range of mental problems. At worst, glossolalia might be termed a "mild psychopathological disorder" (Greenberg & Witztum, 1992, p. 306), but this may be more the exception than the rule. A representative example of research in this area is presented in Research Box 13.1.

Conversion

Conversion, particularly of the sudden and traumatic type (see Chapter 8), has often been the object of clinical and psychiatric concern—especially when a person affiliates with a religiously deviant group usually described as a "cult" (see Chapter 9). Without question, most conversions are not symptomatic of mental disturbance (Bainbridge, 1992; Rambo, 1992, 1993). Relative to our religion-as-meaning framework presented in Chapter 1, Ullman (1982) initially theorized that a need for meaning might stimulate conversion, but found that emotional and relational difficulties (often involving childhood distress) provided the motivation. The issue may not have been a lack of meaning, but a deficiency in control plus difficulties in social relationships.

Personal problems may set the stage for conversion, and it can be a constructive solution to those difficulties. In a classic study of over 2,000 people, E. T. Clark (1929) reported three kinds of "religious awakening." Two of these, the "definite crisis awakening" and the "emotional stimulus awakening," were judged to have the highest potential for expressing psycho-

RESEARCH BOX 13.1. The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues (Kildahl, 1972)

In this study, two groups—one of 20 persons who spoke in tongues, the other of 20 people who did not—were interviewed in depth about their lives and tongue-speaking experiences. The groups were equated for religiosity, which was evidently high. Three projective tests (the Rorschach inkblot, the Thematic Apperception Test, and the Draw-a-Person) and one objective test (the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory) were administered to the participants.

It was observed that the nonglossolalic individuals tended to be more independent and autonomous, but also more depressed, than their glossolalic peers. Speaking in tongues was associated with strong trust in a religious group leader. Though no real differences existed between the two groups in well-being, the glossolalic participants were characterized as being more dependent on the guidance of a valued religious authority. They were inclined to relinquish personal independence and control to this leader, and usually ceased engaging in glossolalia when they lost faith in their spiritual guide.

Kildahl cited one researcher who asserted that “more than 85 percent of tongue-speakers had experienced a clearly defined anxiety crisis preceding their speaking in tongues” (p. 57). In this study, the glossolalia seemed to be constructive and anxiety-reducing.

logical problems. They were generally accompanied by feelings of sin, guilt, and depression, and were frequently affiliated with sexual problems. Clark’s “gradual awakening” type was a more positive form of conversion, a normal process that slowly occurred over a long period of time. In three separate samples, Clark classified 53–77% of the converts in this “gradual” category. A number of later studies have suggested that rapid conversions follow major personal and social upheavals (Rambo, 1992).

Other work revealed that persons suffering from affective disorders (the earlier name for DSM-IV[-TR] mood disorders, such as depressive and bipolar disorders) showed an increased likelihood of having conversion and salvational experiences (Gallemore, Wilson, & Rhoads, 1969). This was explained by noting the heightened emotional responsiveness of such individuals. The outcomes of such religious manifestations spanned the range from pain and depression to increased maturation.

Clark’s (1929) research raises the question of sudden versus gradual conversion, discussed in Chapter 8. The literature usually indicts the former as an expression of underlying pathology, while suggesting that the latter form implies mental health and well-being. The general position has been that, on average, those who convert suddenly tend to be emotionally unstable and are likely to relapse; indeed, research has fairly consistently shown that rapid conversion is associated with higher anxiety and poorer chronic adjustment than the gradual form (Kildahl, 1965; Roberts, 1965; Spellman, Baskett, & Byrne, 1971).

We may say that conversion, though often impressive, is infrequently a manifestation of psychological disturbance. The rapid acquisition of a new religious faith is more likely than its gradual counterpart to reflect problems in coping with one’s impulses and relations with others and the world. However, most large-scale studies demonstrate that conversions are constructive events (Srole, Langner, Michael, Opler, & Rennie, 1962; Taves, 1999).

Religion as a Socializing and Suppressing Agent

The Control Functions of the Religious Community

Marty (1975) details how “religious America has been and is conducive to the building of human community” (p. 35). Churches and congregations thus strive to create and strengthen a natural human desire to belong; this is sociality par excellence. To maintain and reinforce the group’s bonds, a religious community actively functions to socialize, suppress, and inhibit what the community considers deviant and unacceptable behavior—whether these functions emanate from scriptural guidance, clerical pressure, or the social reinforcement of congregants (Koenig et al., 2001).

Churchgoers overwhelmingly represent the more conservative and conforming members of the North American social order (Glock & Stark, 1965; Herberg, 1960; McGuire, 1992; Stark & Glock, 1968). Stark and Glock (1968) refer to “churches as moral communities” (p. 163); as such, mental deviance is often redefined as a moral problem, since it threatens social cohesion. Whether a religious institution is liberal or conservative, it attempts to suppress conflict among its adherents, even if this increases dissension in the larger community (McGuire, 1992). This suppression can extend into all aspects of an individual’s life—not the least of which are child-rearing practices that attempt to control displeasing and socially inappropriate behaviors, such as aggression (Bateman & Jensen, 1958).

These socializing forces will be effective to the degree that mentally disturbed persons attend religious services, have contact with others in this setting, and are exposed to their traditional outlooks. The research supports such an inference: Improvements in mental health go along with church or temple attendance (Strawbridge, Shema, Cohen, & Kaplan, 2001). Specifically, most studies show that those who attend church, especially elderly individuals, reveal fewer depressive symptoms than nonattenders do (Levin & Chatters, 1998; Plante & Sharma, 2001). In addition, such associations apparently strengthen impulse controls and counter a variety of deviant tendencies (Rohrbaugh & Jessor, 1975). This is evidently true even for Hare Krishna members, whose overall adjustment improves with the length of time that they are affiliated with this group. The social controls exercised by this cult constitute a learning environment for its adherents (Ross, 1983).

Stark (1971) has shown that mentally disturbed persons who live outside a hospital setting assign less personal importance to religion and are less religiously active than nondisturbed citizens are. He has theorized that “psychopathology seems to *impede* the manifestation of conventional religious beliefs and activities” (p. 175; emphasis in original). This notable study is detailed in Research Box 13.2. It confirms other findings indicating that the faith of mentally disordered individuals is itself disturbed and deviant (Hardt, 1963; Lowe, 1955; Lowe & Braaten, 1966; Reifsnyder & Campbell, 1960). There are also indications that the more severe an individual’s psychopathology is, the less the individual is involved in both personal and organized religious activity (MacDonald & Luckett, 1983).

The Control Functions of Religious Ideas and Institutions

In the preceding section, we have looked at the control functions of religion that emanate from church affiliation. The implication is that mental disturbance may be socially shaped and focused by religious ideas and the ways churches, synagogues, or mosques present them. Institutionalized faith lives by both formal and informal rules and referents—the Ten Com-

RESEARCH BOX 13.2. Psychopathology and Religious Commitment (Stark, 1971)

Theorizing that conventional religious involvement would be incompatible with deviant thinking and behavior, Rodney Stark hypothesized a negative relationship between these two variables. In his study, 100 mentally disturbed persons were carefully matched with 100 nondisturbed individuals and compared on a variety of religious items. The basic findings were as follows.

Percentage claiming:	Mentally disturbed	Nondisturbed
No religious affiliation	16	13
Religion not important at all	16	14
Not belonging to any church	54	40
Never attending church	21	15

Note. Adapted from Stark (1971). Copyright 1971 by the Religious Research Association. Adapted by permission.

The hypothesis was clearly confirmed, as the mentally disturbed persons demonstrated less conventional religious involvement than the nondisturbed sample. In another part of this study, Protestants and Catholics from a national sample who scored low on indices of psychic difficulties were more likely to be religiously orthodox and to attend church frequently than those revealing such problems. Again, the hypothesis was supported.

mandments, the Golden Rule, the Bible, Papal statements, interpretations and decisions of denominational conclaves, and so forth. Scripture is replete with statements that associate religious devotion with bodily and mental health (Koenig et al., 2001). The ecclesiastical climate also sponsors notions of how a “good Jew” or a “good Christian” thinks and acts. These notions are supported by images of God’s love, mercy, or vengeance—which are not taken lightly by faithful people, whether they be nondisturbed or disturbed individuals. When adopted as guides for personal action, these rules and referents may be very effective forces for the suppression and socialization of abnormal impulses.

Even if psychopathology comes to the surface, the argument has often been made that the use of religion may prevent worse things from happening. One paper suggests that “occasionally religiosity in paranoid schizophrenia might itself be a mechanism to control underlying hostility and aggressive behavior” (MacDonald & Luckett, 1983, p. 33). In a case study, two psychiatrists claimed that a patient’s “religious conversion enabled him to find a new and potentially viable self-definition” (Levin & Zegans, 1974, p. 80). It apparently functioned as a substitute for the “overwhelming panic of his acute psychosis” (p. 79). Similarly, Allison (1968) referred to intense religious experiences and conversion as “adaptive regression” that may “help reorganize a weakened ego” (p. 459).

There is no need to document the very negative attitude of Western religious institutions toward suicide. Dublin (1963) has emphasized that “suicide . . . is infrequent where the guidance and authority of religion are accepted without question, where the church forms the background of communal life, where duties are rigidly prescribed” (p. 74). This relationship

is most evident in such bodies as Roman Catholicism, Greek Orthodoxy, and Orthodox Judaism. Countries in which these faiths predominate report the lowest suicide rates. The greater emphasis of Protestantism on individualism and personal freedom may work to set a troubled person adrift in an anomic world; hence suicide rates for Protestants are two to three times higher than for Jews and Catholics (Argyle, 1959).³

Despite these historical and sociological considerations, mostly small-sample studies have not consistently found negative relationships between religious variables and suicide attempts (Koenig et al., 2001). There is a clear need for meta-analytic studies tying religion to suicide attitudes, ideation, and attempts.

In summary, Mowrer (1958) quoted Feifel on the socializing function of religious doctrine: "Religion . . . tries to school us in those wise restraints—self-discipline, the capacity for sacrifice and service to others—that make the repressive control of impulses unnecessary" (p. 579). This is an ideal that many disturbed people attempt to realize.

Religious Role Models

Both children and adults often learn how to behave by modeling themselves after people whom they admire or who purvey ideas and ideals relevant to success in attaining desired goals (Bandura, 1977, 1986). In other words, they learn by observing others and emulating their thoughts and behavior. These others may be people with whom they interact or about whom they read, hear, or are informed. Social learning theory suggests that "the power of a moral model . . . can be an important component in the development of self-control" (Casey & Burton, 1986, p. 82). Within limits, people can learn to be what is generally defined as "normal" or "abnormal" by emulating others.

Ministers, priests, rabbis, Biblical heroes, Jesus and his apostles, saints, significant others from churches (e.g., youth group leaders), and even family members may stand as spiritual exemplars to be imitated (see Oman & Thoresen, 2003). Explicitly and implicitly, these figures enact roles that may significantly influence the behavior and thinking of religious people along approved lines. In local settings, clergy may stand as greatly admired models. In one study of over 3,000 children and adolescents, clerics were rated as more supportive than parents, suggesting the potential of priests and ministers as positive role models (Nelsen, Potvin, & Shields, 1976). In all likelihood, these images can be meaningful referents for some mentally disturbed individuals. As Bandura (1977) has affirmed, "modeling influences can strengthen or weaken inhibitions over behavior" (p. 49).

Such a behavioral role model approach has been formalized by the Swedish scholar Hjalmar Sundén. As noted in earlier chapters, his role theory appears applicable to religious behavior in general, since it stresses experience, perception, motivation, and learning. Holm (1987a) notes that "when an individual in a certain religious tradition absorbs descriptions from sacred history, he learns models for his attitudes toward the supernatural" (p. 41); he adds that "this description will function as a structuring role pattern" (p. 41). Here is a theoretical framework that usefully connotes religious role models with the socialized control of thinking and behavior on the part of mentally distressed persons.

³There is, of course, this confounding factor: A religious setting that condemns suicide is not likely to produce medical and civil authorities who are willing to define a death as suicide, except where the evidence is irrefutable and/or has become public knowledge (Gibbs, 1966).

Religion and the Disturbed Self

Another approach to understanding abnormality relates to the way people view themselves. Since deviant behavior may both result from and contribute to the social ostracism of disturbed persons, it is to be expected that such people possess negative views of themselves. We also know that unfavorable self-attributions parallel similar outlooks toward the deity and religion (Benson & Spilka, 1973). In some instances, this pattern may prevent these individuals' getting help either from their personal faith or from association with others in religious institutions. Jensen and Erickson (1979) suggest that strict religious group attitudes, along with the positive role models provided by clergy and coreligionists, may jointly act to socialize and restrain deviant thinking and behavior.

It is evident that religious systems and their supporters can suppress abnormal thinking and behavior, and can help mentally disordered people become part of the larger community. Such social and ideological sustenance may also contribute to ego strength and integration. Stated differently, adherence to a faith that is in line with cultural norms can constructively influence psychopathology.

Religion as a Haven

Religion can offer mentally distressed individuals refuge from the stresses of daily life—a safe harbor from the turmoil and turbulence of living. This can take place in three ways: (1) Everyday existence may be circumscribed and controlled by rules that leave little doubt about how to behave; (2) being part of a religious organization may alleviate fears of social isolation and rejection; and (3) strong identification with a religious body can provide the perceived security of divine protection. These processes can also take place within three different types of religious organizations: (1) groups or movements that are out of the religious mainstream (so-called “sects” or “cults”); (2) encapsulated religious communities, such as the Amish and the Hutterites; and (3) separate communities within mainline religions, such as sisterhoods of nuns.

Groups or Movements That Are Out of the Mainstream

Though many reasons exist for the formation of new religious bodies, particularly sects and cults, such movements can attract mentally disturbed individuals. As noted earlier, if such persons are not socialized by mainline churches, they may become estranged from traditional religion. This is a two-way street: The average churchgoer is probably sympathetic to the plight of mentally disordered individuals, but may still prefer not to be associated with such people. The inability of mentally disturbed persons to fit in may cause them to respond in a reciprocal manner and to reject conventional beliefs and believers. They may, however, find a home in religious or spiritual subcultures that are out of the mainstream (i.e., sects or cults). Since members of these bodies often feel that they are ostracized by society (and in many instances they actually are), they may find common cause with others who are similarly rejecting or rejected for reasons of individual mental deviance.

It is important to recognize that the majority of members of what are socially regarded as deviant religious groups are quite “normal” and mentally healthy (Richardson, 1995). Some disturbed individuals may, of course, find a haven that functions as a source of meaning and a framework of needed control in these religious groups, but they probably constitute the exception and not the rule (Ross, 1983).

Alienated individuals may be attracted by a wide variety of religious and ecclesiastical elements. Unquestioning attachment to a spiritual leader may reflect emotional immaturity and strong dependency needs. The charismatic quality of some of the founders of these groups can also entice persons whose reality contacts are weak. One study of the Unification Church (pejoratively called “the Moonies”) revealed that over 40% admitted having had mental difficulties prior to joining the church; many of these had sought professional help, and a few had been hospitalized (Galanter, Rabkin, Rabkin, & Deutsch, 1979). The researchers concluded that the outcome of affiliation with the Unification Church was psychologically beneficial.

Another example of the way in which sects or cults may serve a temporary haven function is implied by work showing that some young people, but by no means all, who affiliate with these bodies come from troubled homes and families (Schwartz & Kaslow, 1979). Such a religious group can act as a substitute family until a person is able to cope with a North American milieu that highly values personal autonomy; the group can offer needed social and psychological backing, with positive acceptance and support. We see this in Kildahl’s (1972) description of the fellowship among glossolalic individuals. He described them as exhibiting “a tremendous openness, concern, and care for one another . . . they bore each other’s burdens . . . were with each other in spirit and in physical presence” (p. 299).

Finding a spiritual haven is not easy. Particularly among the cults and sects, troubled people move rather easily from one such group to another. The unstable membership of these bodies is well documented (McLoughlin, 1978; Sasaki, 1979; Wood, 1965), possibly as seekers continue their search for meaning and control. Although we have focused upon the more negative mental health aspects of some of those attracted to cults, the more psychologically healthy aspects of those attracted to cults and sects must not be forgotten, as discussed in Chapter 9.

Encapsulated Religious Communities: The Amish and the Hutterites

Though they are usually considered sects, their long histories of relative isolation and yet reasonable acceptance by the general society make groups like the Amish and the Hutterites of special interest to mental health researchers. The quality of their separation allows social scientists to regard them as “laboratory-like” sociocultural cases, worthy of much study. Neither group has attempted to bring in new members by proselytizing. People are born into these groups; rarely do they seek to join from the outside. Because of these bodies’ isolation and the formal and informal controls they exercise over their adherents, they manifest the haven functions of religion well. They also provide information on some causes of various mental disorders.

Among the Amish, the doctrine of separation is evident in the proscription against marrying outsiders or even entering business partnerships with non-Amish persons. Basically, this view holds for any deep or long-lasting social involvement or contact with any outsider (Hostetler, 1968). Such self-segregation, when combined with very strict internal controls on behavior, creates great stress for many Amish. The expectations these rules engender have been cited as a cause of anxiety, and may in part account for a rate of suicidal tendencies above the national average among Amish hospitalized for mental problems. Unfortunately, there is not enough information available to indicate whether the Amish rates of neurotic or psychotic disorders are unusual. The community acts as a haven, preferring to care for its own whenever possible.

The Hutterites are a different matter; good observational data have been collected from them. Eaton and Weil (1955) carried out a highly regarded study on religion and mental disorder with this group many years ago. Like the Amish, the Hutterites are a separatist Anabaptist sect; they live in relatively isolated communities in southern Canada and along the northwest tier of the United States from the Dakotas westward. Because the group is a close-knit and highly supportive communal organization, the authors expected low rates of mental disturbance. Where such disturbance does occur, as with the Amish, a loving community with its own constructive therapeutic views is present to aid the distressed individual.

Eaton and Weil (1955) found that the frequency of the less severe neurotic states tended to be low, particularly those in which aggressive or antisocial expressions predominated. In lieu of these symptoms, guilt and depression were commonly found; these seemed to be products of both the highly controlling social milieu and failure to live up to the strict expectations of the community. Moreover, the low neurotic rates were countered by a high rate of severe psychotic disorders. Four centuries of relative isolation may have concentrated the genetic and constitutional potential for such illnesses; these propensities could also have been activated by the often inflexible demands of daily life. Furthermore, Eaton and Weil (1955) had reason to believe that the Hutterite communities they studied might operate much better as refuges for the less disturbed group members than for their more seriously affected counterparts.

Separate Communities within Mainline Religious Groups

Some mentally disturbed persons may believe that they are “called” to a religious vocation, and subsequently may find a haven in a religious community that separates them from the world. This view has been confirmed by Kelley (1958), who studied nuns. Finding a variety of disordered states among Catholic sisters, she concluded that these states were a function of preexisting difficulties rather than of the religious life. Reference has also been made to a high frequency of hypochondriacal complaints (Sister Margaret Louise, 1961). Similar findings have been reported in other studies of nuns (Jahreiss, 1942; Kurth, 1961). A few studies suggest that elderly Catholic nuns may score low on emotional maturity, but still reveal good affective adaptation and a positive outlook (Huck & Armer, 1995). In a study involving Tibetan nuns who had been tortured in Tibet, the negative effects of torture and status as refugees were mitigated by Buddhist spirituality (Holtz, 1998). It is abundantly clear that the few existing studies of this topic are not enough to establish the significance of the haven function of religion. There is a need for an organized research program in this area.

In some instances, the requirement of chastity and celibacy is too much of a psychological burden for Catholic priests and nuns to bear, and abnormal expressions of anxiety and other undesirable behaviors may result (Gratton, 1959, cited in Menges & Dittes, 1965; Sipe, 1990; Slawson, 1973). The widely publicized recent reports of molestations by priests, discussed in Chapter 12, speak to these pressures. Their problems may involve mental health considerations, but our culture views their actions primarily through a moral lens.

Religion as Therapy

For the last half century, the role of faith as therapeutic has been increasingly recognized on a number of levels. Not only do religious and spiritual practices exercise such a role, but clergy themselves are now explicitly undertaking psychological training as therapists. As

part of what has become known as “clinical pastoral education,” churches have been able to avail themselves of theologically sophisticated counselors and therapists who can utilize the doctrines of their faith when working with parishioners. We describe this and similar developments in greater detail later in the chapter (see “Religion and Psychotherapy,” below).

We have seen that the suppression/socialization functions of religion may work to inhibit deviant mental expression, if not to improve disordered mental states. However, moving beyond the suppression/socialization functions of religion can be actively therapeutic. Some of the activities and phenomena that we have discussed as possible expressions of mental disorders, such as religious experience, glossolalia, and conversion, may also perform remedial roles. Sometimes these work directly; at other times, they work indirectly by involving friends and congregants as socializers and suppressors. We have already reviewed an extensive literature, for example, showing that some religious and spiritual experiences have been associated with such positive emotions as optimism and hope. Furthermore, one must consider the social context of the experience. Prince (1992) notes that religious experiences may be defined as pathological or therapeutic, depending on culture and group values. In situations where such experiences are valued, he claims that some “may be channeled into socially valuable roles” (p. 289). This is true among Pentecostal sects that encourage religious mysticism. Hine (1969) suggests that these experiences aid adjustment and integrate people into their groups, which also provide quite supportive environments.

Conversion

The beneficial and therapeutic effects of conversion have been celebrated for millennia. We hear about being “born again,” “twice born,” “finding God,” “coming home,” and so forth. Over a century ago, Starbuck (1899) claimed that for converts “the joy, the relief, and the acceptance are qualities of feeling, perhaps, which give the truest picture of what is going on in conversion—the free exercise of new powers, and escape from something, and the birth into Larger Life” (p. 122). Though clinicians might employ different language, these are unquestionably therapeutic goals. Hill (2002) points out how spiritual transformation can create changes in meaning systems that yield a positive affective state through a new or renewed sense of purpose, value, efficacy, and self-worth. Though there may be many reasons for conversion, clinicians are becoming increasingly sensitive to the potential benefits of conversion experiences (Bergman, 1953; Levin & Zegans, 1974).

Ritual

Perhaps nowhere are the therapeutic aspects of religion better realized than through ritual. The role of ritual in ceremony and prayer cannot be minimized, for it is considered a means of contacting the supernatural and concurrently oneself and others. It is often a call for vicarious control by a deity when a supplicant is unable to exercise mastery (Brown, 1994). Prayer is probably the most common ritual and is discussed later in this chapter as a form of religious coping. Even though the following comments present ritual in the broadest perspective, let us keep in mind that these remarks are fully appropriate to religion. Though some aspects of ritual may involve mental disturbance, the use of religious rituals per se is not necessarily abnormal or unhealthy.

Since the evidence overwhelmingly confirms that the roots of ritual run deep in both biology and the evolutionary process, it is easy to believe that it must perform some impor-

tant function (Huxley, 1966, 1968). This inference is further supported by the apparent fact that there are no known cultures without ritual (Helman, 1994). Wulff (1997) cites Lorenz to the effect that ritualization is involved in “communicating, restricting aggression, and increasing pair and group cohesion” (p. 155). All of these may involve facets of mental disturbance. Rituals are also said to manage life’s uncertainties (Horner & Dobb, 1997). They counter ambiguity, increase control over oneself and the environment, enhance meaning, reduce stress, decrease anxiety, and curb impulsivity (Erikson, 1966). Social bonding is also facilitated. Several noted clinical scholars add that rituals channel destructive and extreme emotions into controllable forms (Benson & Stark, 1996; Pargament, 1997; Pruyser, 1968). Kiev (1966) has pointed out that ritual explicitly promotes “therapeutic emotional reactions” via the opportunity to “express in socially approved ways ordinarily inhibited impulses and desires” (p. 170). Pruyser (1968) has suggested that ritual is adaptive when it creates a “structure for emotional expression” or performs “dynamically as a defense against the intensity of any emotion or the unpleasantness of some” (p. 143). Through its emotion-regulating and control functions, ritual (and specifically religious ritual) works to increase self-control and to counter disordered thinking and behavior.

The ubiquitous nature of religious ritual is well demonstrated by Moberg (1971), who covers the range from the individual level through family, churches, and synagogues to literally nationwide forms that utilize the mass media. Given such possibilities, the healing and therapeutic possibilities inherent in rites and ceremonies appear quite impressive.

There can be little doubt about the importance of ritual. The observations of astute anthropologists and clinicians concerning its effects are quite striking; however, objective empirical work in this realm is lacking. It is a topic worthy of rigorous research by psychologists.

Religion as a Hazard to Mental Health

As we have already commented, the dominant traditional view of faith in psychology has been to associate it with psychopathology. We have shown that the opposite is often true; however, religious institutions and doctrines can create stress and cause psychological problems. Indeed, there is truth in the title of one book, *Religion May Be Hazardous to Your Health* (Chesen, 1972). Similarly, the noted psychologist Paul W. Pruyser (1977) referred in an article title to “The Seamy Side of Current Religious Beliefs.” Albert Ellis (1988) indicated 11 ways in which religion seems to create and support mental disorder, although he later modified his position, as noted earlier in this chapter. The problem has been considered of such magnitude that Koenig et al. (2001), in their definitive *Handbook of Religion and Health*, devote a chapter to “Religion’s Negative Effects.” The message is simply this: Religion does contain elements that can adversely affect the mental well-being of its adherents.

Religion as a Source of Abnormal Mental Content

The doctrines and sources of institutional faith sometimes contain the seeds of psychopathology. Though most individuals who accept religious mandates live happy and fruitful lives, there are those who misinterpret and misapply the core elements of their faith. Others are, in a sense, victimized by parents, clergy, or influential others who misuse religion to gain power and personal gratification. This can happen when people treat religious precepts in a rigid and inflexible manner (Stifoss-Hanssen, 1994). One study dealing with some mental disorder

correlates of “rigid religiosity” is detailed in Research Box 13.3. In essence, clinicians believe that a strict religious upbringing contributes to the development of emotional disorders, depression, suicidal potential, and a generally fearful response to life (Culver, 1988).

The inability to adapt church tenets and scripture to modern life is an accusation usually directed at fundamentalist groups and conservative religious bodies, often in an unbalanced manner. In fact, research, particularly on fundamentalism, suffers from a wide variety of biases. At the same time, some individuals are attracted to these bodies because of what Ostow (1990) has called an “illusory defense against reality” (p. 122). The great reliance of orthodox groups on a literalist interpretation of scripture may be one of those defenses. For example, such an interpretation has been used to justify the abuse of women and children (see Chapter 12), and support for such behavior has sometimes come from church officials (Alsdurf & Alsdurf, 1988; Pagelow & Johnson, 1988). Spousal and child abuse has been associated with much conflict about sexual issues and with the blaming of victims. These tendencies have been invoked to explain the claim that high rates of multiple personality disorder are found in families with fundamentalist religious backgrounds (Higdon, 1986).

Fundamentalist religion is often quite authoritarian in its structure, endowing its leaders with the image of having a special relationship with the deity. Control and the suppression of dissent are seen as the natural prerogatives of those holding high church positions. These factors have been used to explain the anxiety, “guilt, low self-esteem, sexual inhibitions, and vivid fears of divine punishment” noted among individuals who leave these groups (Hartz & Everett, 1989, p. 209). The argument is made that the absolutist structure and dictates of these institutions produce a “fundamentalist mindset” that creates adjustment problems for their members (Kirkpatrick, Hood, & Hartz, 1991). This mindset has been further described as involving extreme dogmatism and a need for simplistic “quick fixes for problems involving marriage, children, sexuality, or society” (Hartz & Everett, 1989, p. 208).

Despite all of these unpleasant inferences, research supporting such ideas is rather sparse. In fact, as noted earlier, fundamentalism is positively associated with an optimistic outlook on life (Sethi & Seligman, 1993). Other research has failed to find evidence for any adverse effects on the ego development or the adaptive capacity of fundamentalists (Weaver, Berry, & Pittel, 1994). When such contradictions exist, the only answer is to call for more research; however, we must keep in mind that this is a troubling and controversial area, and objectivity is imperative.

RESEARCH BOX 13.3. Rigid Religiosity and Mental Health: An Empirical Study
(Stifoss-Hanssen, 1994)

Religious bodies possess rules and regulations that people can often interpret in ways ranging from an easy flexibility to a rigid absolutism. The latter has been defined in one major study as a “law-orientation” (Strommen, Brekke, Underwager, & Johnson, 1972). In the present study, a scale assessing rigid–flexible religiosity was developed and administered to 56 volunteer hospitalized patients with neuroses and a control group of 70 nonpatients. The patients scored significantly higher than the controls on this scale, demonstrating that rigid religiosity is a correlate of severely neurotic thinking and behavior. The author also suggested a positive relationship between mental disturbance and an extrinsic religious orientation.

Religious doctrines are rich sources of ideas for use by mentally disturbed persons. Southard (1956) showed how identification with higher powers may help such individuals to deny reality and counter therapy; he described one patient who used hymn singing to frustrate psychotherapy. The presentation of miracles and other unusual occurrences found in religious writings can stimulate magical thinking of a pathological nature.

Commonly, religious groups and doctrines offer their members meanings that make life bearable, but at a cost—namely, a “sacrifice of intellect” (Pruyser, 1977, p. 332). Complex matters are often simplified into a dichotomy of good versus evil. Difficult and intricate issues are denied attempts at understanding by reference to such clichés as “God works in mysterious ways.” At times, however, objective need and cognitive dissonance may cause individuals to challenge polarized beliefs and “stop thinking” phrases. The outcome can be a serious crisis of faith, extreme personal stress, depression, and the potential for suicide (Pruyser, 1977).

Religion as a Source of Abnormal Mental Motives

Just as religion can strengthen moral commitments, enhance optimism, and stimulate ego development, it may also activate disordered thinking and behavior (Andreason, 1972; Bock & Warren, 1972). We see this in religion’s concern with sin. A book chapter by O’Connell (1961) asked, “Is Mental Illness a Result of Sin?” and the well-known psychologist O. H. Mowrer (1961) attempted to bring the sin concept into psychotherapy. It has thus been examined both positively and negatively—as a constructive control on behavior, and as an arouser of guilt, depression, and distress. Obsession with sin and guilt seems to be a correlate of religious frameworks that stress moral perfection (Miller, 1973). Such an emphasis can incite feelings of low self-esteem and worthlessness, which have the potential of contributing to mental disorders. We also find the presence of sin and associated guilt in the motivation for mysticism, conversion, prayer, scrupulosity, confession, bizarre rituals, self-denial, and self-mutilation (Clark, 1929; Cutten, 1908; James, 1902/1985).

The need to expunge sin and reduce guilt is a powerful motive, and one may eventuate in serious mental pathology. McGinley’s (1969) fascinating presentation of the behavior of saints abounds in examples of grotesque, brutal, and painful masochistic behavior, which today we would regard as indicative of profound psychopathology.

Religious institutions and leaders that demand absolute subservience and unquestioning obedience from followers frequently use punitive threats and devices to eliminate individuality. Pruyser (1977) has pointed out that those subject to such control must suspend any semblance of critical reasoning and substitute “unbridled and untutored fantasy” (p. 333). Blind faith of this sort requires an immature, if not extremely childish, denial of reality for its maintenance. The pathetic extremes to which such belief may drive people have been evidenced many times in recent years. One need only consider such tragedies as the mass suicides and deaths in the People’s Temple in Guyana, the Branch Davidians in Texas, the Solar Temple group in Europe and Canada, and the Heaven’s Gate group in California.

We conclude this discussion with a markedly different example—namely, the situation with Christian Science and other groups that reject modern medicine. No matter how dedicated to their faith and sincere these groups are, the vast majority of people in contemporary life seek medical aid when they are ill. Not to do so suggests a deviant point of view. With the medical knowledge currently available, the idea that religious beliefs and prayer are all that are necessary to effect a cure—regardless of a person’s condition—is an outlook that may

well indicate some difficulty in handling reality. Probably reflecting this situation, research on large samples shows that Christian Scientists evidence higher death rates than the overall population. For example, the death rate from cancer for Christian Scientists is double the national average (Koenig et al., 2001). Unfortunately, no similar mental health data seem to have been reported, but we advance the hypothesis that similar results should be observed for such conditions and outcomes as depression and suicide.

Religion and Psychotherapy

No treatment of the domain of religion and mental disorder would be complete without recognizing the increasing role of religious ideas and practitioners in treating psychological problems. Some years ago, Bergin (1980) poignantly observed the need for clinical psychology to broaden its perspective, as the religious outlooks of clients and therapists are often markedly discrepant in regard to religion.

The educational curricula of mental health professionals now include training to increase awareness of clients' and patients' religious and spiritual concerns. This is matched in the seminary training of clergy-to-be and in programs for those already working in religious institutions; both groups are now becoming extensively familiar with the psychological complexities they must confront when dealing with congregants' mental problems (Koenig et al., 2001; Richards & Bergin, 1997).

The result of these developments has been an alliance between psychiatry and psychology on the one hand, and religion on the other (Academy of Religion and Mental Health, 1959; GAP, 1960; Klausner, 1964). This alliance has resulted in serious efforts to integrate the basic principles underlying these disciplines, such as Stern and Marino's (1970) book *Psychotheology*. Those working in this interdisciplinary realm have proposed a variety of approaches to enhancing people's well-being and adaptive thinking/behavior. Some themes and approaches intended particularly for clerical counselors and therapists include "pastoral counseling" (Hiltner, 1949; Wicks, Parsons, & Capps, 1985), "clinical pastoral education" (Thornton, 1970), "spiritual psychotherapy" (Karasu, 1999), "reframing in pastoral care" (Capps, 1990), "Christotherapy" (Tyrrell, 1985), and "ethical therapy" (Andrews, 1987). Psychotherapists' appreciation of the need for spiritual perspectives and understanding in their work has also been greatly enhanced (Miller, 1999; Richards & Bergin, 2000). Mutuality and coordination to realize common goals are increasingly sought as the barriers separating religious from psychological and psychiatric professionals are reduced.

RELIGION AND COPING

"Nine-eleven." Just two numbers—but two numbers that powerfully communicate so much. The events of September 11, 2001, posed a huge and unexpected problem with which U.S. residents had to cope. To cope effectively with such problems, we often must marshal all available personal resources. In this section, we examine religion as one of those resources.

In the week following the September 11 tragedy, U.S. national polling organizations reported anywhere from a 6% to a 24% increase in church attendance (Walsh, 2002). This trend continued through October into November. Members of many religious bodies sensed a revival of faith. People were turning to their deity for support and comfort. Was this indeed a new revival of faith? Apparently not, as 3 months later, the influx of churchgoers had receded

to pre-September 11 levels. However, religious resources were available and were immediately utilized to help people cope with a national tragedy of monumental proportions.

Following September 11, Presbyterian clergy reported that they intentionally increased their sense of reliance upon God for strength, support, and guidance to help cope (Meisenhelder & Marcum, 2004). A study by Ai and her associates (Ai, Tice, Peterson, & Huang, 2005) of 453 students 3 months following the September 11 attacks, found that many resorted to prayer as a primary coping mechanism—particularly those with an initially high negative emotional reaction. The researchers found that the use of prayer for coping was related to less subsequent distress, largely through the sense of spiritual support and positive attitudes that the praying seemed to provide. In a different line of research, prayer was also found to be a frequent means of coping with trauma among Muslim refugees from Kosovo and Bosnia (Ai, Tice, Huang, & Ishisaka, 2005; see also Ai, Peterson, & Huang, 2003). Eighty-six percent of the sample reported praying, with 77% of the total sample using prayer so that their enemies “would pay for what they have done” (p. 291). As suggested by this latter finding, religious coping can take many forms.

The Process of Coping

Coping is at the heart of life. From its biological and evolutionary roots to complex human social behavior, it is the essence of living. In individualistically oriented Western society in particular, people are usually judged on their ability to cope with what is demanded of them. In many cases, personal trials prompt people to turn to their faith for help. Religion may be an especially important resource when individuals must deal with those “times that try men’s souls”—when crisis strikes and options are limited.

“Coping” means resolving the difficulties that confront us as human beings. This can be done in any of three ways: changing the environment, changing ourselves, or changing both to some degree. “Adaptation” involves the second or third possibility; “adjustment” more strictly implies self-modification to meet situation requirements.

In order to understand how people handle life’s problems, some researchers have emphasized coping *styles* or *traits*—relatively long-lasting, if not permanent, characteristics of individuals. Others have looked to the *process* of coping, and to change in the way difficulties are handled (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Though it may be argued that personal religiosity is commonly treated as if it were an aspect of personality, those who have studied the role of religion in coping are mostly concerned with it as a process variable, asking what it does for the person and how it functions when problems arise.

How Religion Enters into the Coping Process

People do not face stressful situations without resources. They rely on a system of beliefs, practices, and relationships which affects how they deal with difficult situations. In the coping process, this orienting system is translated into concrete situation-specific appraisals, activities, and goals. Religion is part of this general orienting system. A person with a strong religious faith who suffers a disabling injury, must find a way to move from the generalities of belief to the specifics of dealing with the injury. (Silverman & Pargament, 1990, p. 2)

For over two decades, Kenneth Pargament has been meticulously defining and assessing the contributions of religion to the various facets of the coping process. Building upon the work

of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), Pargament (1997) identifies the initial step in the coping process as “appraisal.” First, when an event takes place, the person implicitly asks, “What does this mean to me?” In other words, is it irrelevant, positive, or negative? If the answer is that it is negative and stressful, the next question becomes “What can I do about it?” This brings to the fore additional judgments of “harm/loss,” “threat,” or “challenge.” In the case of harm/loss, the individual has already suffered some adverse effects, such as illness or injury. Threat focuses on anticipated difficulties, whereas in challenge the person sees the likelihood of future growth and development. This form of appraisal has also been termed “primary appraisal.” Pargament notes the differential role of religion in such appraisal, as a person can view what is happening as an intentional action of God to teach a lesson, or possibly to reward or punish via everyday success or failure.

Dealing with the problem is the next step in the coping process, and the act of deciding how to do this has been labeled “secondary appraisal.” In secondary appraisal, an assessment of personal resources for dealing with the difficulty occurs. A religious person may do a number of things, one of which is praying—an active, cognitive coping strategy (Holahan & Moos, 1987) that we explore in more detail shortly. When people assess ways of dealing with various difficulties, they face two obstacles: the problem itself, and the emotions that the problem arouses. Chances are that both will be dealt with, but to different degrees. Attention is initially directed more toward one of these concerns than the other, suggesting that an individual’s style of coping may be primarily “problem-focused” or “emotion-focused” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Evidence suggests that people are likely to use problem-focused cognitions and behaviors when a situation is considered changeable. If circumstances can’t be modified, the tendency is to resort to emotion-focused coping. Those who turn to prayer and religious methods frequently consider the problems toward which these means are directed as changeable. At the same time, particularly among younger people, religion may counter undesirable emotions (disgust and anger) while enhancing pleasure and happiness (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). In other words, turning to one’s faith in times of difficulty is helpful and constructive in dealing with both problems and emotions.

Pargament (1997) caps his theory of coping with the notion that people engaged in coping are gaining or searching for a “sense of significance” (p. 92). This is especially cogent for a theory that emphasizes religious coping, since religion is an exclusively human venture. “Significance” is really a complex composite of values, beliefs, feelings, and conceptual schemas that defines the phenomenological essence of a person. Significance is thus a unified, holistic pattern of orientations toward oneself, others, and the world. Pargament (1997) also speaks of an “orienting system, a frame of reference, a blueprint of oneself and the world that is used to anticipate and come to terms with life’s events” (p. 100). It therefore contributes to and is part of the search for significance. Needless to say, religion, for many if not most people, is an important part of this orienting system. Given the detailed nature of his perspective, it is understandable how Pargament has been able to carry on an extensive research program on religion and coping.

The Coping Functions of Religion

In our view, stress, whether it involves harm/loss, threat, or challenge, reflects a situation in which meaning and control are in jeopardy. We may have difficulty making sense out of a situation, or be unable to master it. Religion is one way these needs are met, and the world-

wide prevalence of religion may testify in part to the success of faith in attaining these goals. In Chapter 1, we have offered a framework for conceptualizing the psychology of religion in terms of meaning and control. We now further enlarge the scope of this framework, in order to understand the functions of religion for coping with life.

The Need for Meaning

Simply put, being able to comprehend tragedy—to make it meaningful—probably constitutes the core of successful coping and adjustment. For most people, religion performs this role quite well, especially in times of personal crisis. Fichter (1981) asserts that “religious reality is the only way to make sense out of pain and suffering” (p. 20). That this struggle to understand tragedy via religion may last for a long time is evidenced by one extensive study (Echterling, 1993). Interviews with flood disaster survivors over a 7-year period led the researcher to infer that “they became theologians by asking how God could have allowed such tragedies to occur to them and their loved ones. They became philosophers by asking the meaning of life when they knew how frail and ephemeral life could be” (Echterling, 1993, p. 5). In other words, they searched for meaning in their moment of trial.

Faith habitually conveys the meaning that life’s difficulties can be overcome. Whether or not people control objective conditions may be less important than their belief that even insurmountable obstacles can be mastered. As noted in earlier chapters, in much of life the sense of control is really an illusion; yet it is one that can be a powerful force supporting constructive coping behavior (Lefcourt, 1973).

The Importance of Control

When we apply our framework to religious coping, we find that the concept of “control” takes on new dimensions. These, of course, enrich our theory’s structure: They make it more applicable to religion, and they enhance our understanding of the importance of control in human life.

Pargament (1997) has posited three approaches to the issue of control in religious coping. A “deferring” mode of relationship—for example, praying in order to put the problem totally in the hands of God—does not appear to be as helpful as when a “collaborative” mode of relationship is manifested, in which God and the supplicant work together. Here prayer may keep the individual working on the problem while seeking the support of the deity. In a “self-directive” approach, God is acknowledged, but the problem is regarded as requiring personal rather than divine solution. Gorsuch and his colleagues have proposed a fourth style, which they term “surrender” (Maynard, Gorsuch, Bjorck, 2001; Wong-McDonald & Gorsuch, 1997). This is similar to the deferring approach, but the deferring mode is akin to assigning *all* control to the external power of God, whereas the surrender style occupies a middle ground (some or most personal control is “surrendered” to God). In both self-direction and collaboration, by contrast, internal control is present. Petitioning for aid from God (i.e., the collaborative approach) is best for the individual who feels that personal responsibility cannot be deferred or surrendered. The collaborative and self-directive modes involve more of an internal locus of control, which research has shown to be generally beneficial (Phares, 1976); these modes have been found to relate to more positive coping outcomes than does the deferring approach, which employs a more external locus of control (Harris, Spilka, & Emrick, 1990; McIntosh & Spilka, 1990; Pargament et al., 1988).

As noted in Chapter 6, Jacobson, Luckhaupt, Delaney, and Tsevat (2006) conducted a qualitative study of how patients with HIV/AIDS interpreted their religious and spiritual experiences to their sense of self and adaptation while facing an HIV diagnosis. That is, how did religion and spirituality serve as a meaning-making framework for their current predicament? In-depth interviews with 19 patients resulted in four distinct patterns of religious/spiritual coping, three of which neatly corresponded with Pargament et al.'s (1988) religious coping styles: (1) "deferring believers," who believed that God had a reason for their illness; (2) "collaborative believers," who found a working relationship with God as a means for new global meaning; (3) "spiritual/religious seekers," who were spiritually oriented but adrift or unfulfilled, and thus in a stage of struggle; and (4) "self-directed believers," who stressed very subjective and individualized spiritual experiences not grounded in traditional religion.

COPING AND FORMS OF CONTROL

The idea of control is complex—so complex that Skinner (1996) was able to identify 88 control constructs. There is great overlap among these concepts, but one elemental scheme that is pertinent to our concern speaks of two basic forms: (1) "primary control," or "being in charge" (i.e., having the ability to change the situation); and (2) "secondary control," or being able to effect change in oneself. The famous writer Nikos Kazantzakis (1961) noted this latter potential when he quoted a mystic's prescription: "Since we cannot change reality, let us change the eyes which see reality" (p. 45). Faith may play an important role in stimulating both primary and secondary forms of control, and the two forms are probably not independent of each other. In psychological circles, however, religion is largely regarded as functioning as a form of secondary control.

MEANING AS CONTROL

In most cases, information gives people the feeling that they can do something about whatever is troubling them. As Sir Francis Bacon put it, "knowledge is power" (quoted in Bartlett, 1955, p. 118). Baumeister (1991) adds that "meaning is used to predict and control the environment" (p. 183), and religious meaning can help people regulate their emotions. In other words, simply having information may reduce stress (Andrew, 1970). A wonderful anecdotal example of how religion can realize this role was provided by a patient with breast cancer, who stated, "I had no idea that God could answer so many of my questions" (Johnson & Spilka, 1988, p. 12). Though we may call this "informational" control, it is intimately tied to three forms of secondary control that have been theorized by Rothbaum, Weisz, and Snyder (1982). These are termed "interpretive," "predictive," and "vicarious" control, and are especially significant for understanding how religion helps people deal with the problems they confront both in everyday living and in troubled times.

Interpretive Control. When people are in great difficulty, it is natural for them to feel that there is no way out of their predicament. In seeking to understand such an event and to achieve some degree of control over what seems hopeless, people often reinterpret what is taking place. They exercise interpretive control and construe a distressing situation in less troubling or even positive terms. They may claim that "things could be worse" or that "I have it better than a lot of other people." For example, in one study a patient with cancer concluded, "I looked upon cancer as a detour in the road, but not a roadblock" (Johnson &

Spilka, 1988, p. 13). Through such interpretations, people gain control over their emotions and may thus become better able to handle their difficulties in a constructive way. In other words, they may become increasingly problem-focused.

Predictive Control. The perpetual human dream is to foretell the future. The idea of precognition fascinates people. If they could predict what would happen on future rolls of dice, who would win horse races, what the stock market might do, or whether their efforts in general would result in success or failure, they would expect to become the beneficiaries of unlimited wealth and happiness. The Bible has said that “The Lord himself shall give you a sign” (Isaiah 7:14).

Predictive control, as a form of secondary control, assures a person that things will turn out all right in the end. For example, another patient with cancer stated, “Because of my relationship with God, I had faith that this cancer was not going to take my life” (Johnson & Spilka, 1988, p. 12). There is a poignant example of predictive control in Eliach’s (1982) *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust*. Eliach tells the story of a devout Jew who during World War II was brought by the Nazis into the death camp at Auschwitz. The number 145053 was tattooed on his arm. He looked at it and suddenly concluded that he would live. He reached this conclusion by adding the digits together and finding that they totaled 18; 18 is a number that within Judaism means life, and thus he felt assured of survival. It was as if God had offered an omen signifying a secure future. Such predictive control gives the person confidence that the morrow will be good. We must keep in mind, however, that the critical element here is *perception* of the future; what actually occurs is independent of this aspiration.

Vicarious Control. When people feel that they may not be able to cope with their troubles—particularly in cases of serious illness, where death is a possibility—they often turn to their God, and vicariously, the deity becomes a support or substitute for their own efforts. The essence of such vicarious control was stated by one woman with cancer, who declared, “I could talk to my God and ask for his help in healing” (Johnson & Spilka, 1988, p. 12). Identifying with her God gave her the strength to face potential death through her perceived divine connection. She thus attained a measure of vicarious control over her circumstances.

What Factors Prompt People to Turn to Religion?

The “availability” hypothesis or heuristic raises the question of why, in specific circumstances, certain things have a higher likelihood than others of coming to people’s minds (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Among the many factors that might stimulate the selection of religion as a means of coping, the fact that mainstream North American culture and child-rearing practices inculcate a readiness to turn to religion or exercise spirituality in times of distress is undoubtedly the most important. A less obvious point is that religious cues in the immediate situation are apt to be significant. For example, one often sees people (especially in the United States) wearing religious medals, crucifixes, Stars of David, and the like. St. Christopher medals frequently hang from rearview mirrors in cars. Catholics may carry rosary beads with them. Small Bibles are not uncommon. The meaning of such symbols has been nicely demonstrated in one investigation (Antkowiak & Ozorak, 2000). These researchers studied the use of sacred “objects as means of comfort” (p. 1), and confirmed Lamothe’s (1998) view that these objects “not only provide comfort and solace but a sense of identity

and cohesion” (quoted in Antkowiak & Ozorak, 2000, p. 7). Such referents may go far toward arousing religious and spiritual thoughts and feelings that calm, refresh, and strengthen distressed individuals.

People also turn to religion because it works for them. Levin and Schiller (1987) raise the interesting possibility that “perhaps the nervous system represents the locus of a mechanism by which religious faith or religious beliefs . . . promote well-being” (p. 24). The mechanism may well be the sense of control that is often promoted by religion (McIntosh et al., 1985). Specifically, the perceptions that one is personally in control of life situations and that God is in overall control (i.e., Pargament’s “collaborative” mode) relate to good health (Loewenthal & Cornwall, 1993; McIntosh & Spilka, 1990). Another possibility has been advanced by Benson (1975)—namely, that certain religious rituals (prayer, meditation, etc.) may stimulate a “relaxation response” that is broadly healthful (Goleman, 1984). In other words, not only may religion promote an increased sense of control; its rituals themselves may reduce stress and tension.

Finally, Bjorck and Cohen (1993) claim that the greater the stress, the more religious coping takes place. Further threats (defined as the anticipation of more damage) elicit greater use of religion than actual harm/losses, which require acceptance. Since events that challenge people call upon personal effort and resources, they are seen as most controllable. Resort to faith as a coping aid is thus least often employed in these situations (Bjorck & Cohen, 1993).

Varieties of Religious Coping

Religion provides many possible ways of coping with the stresses of life. Table 13.1 mainly includes the work of Pargament, Poloma, and Tarakeshwar (2001), yet permits a consideration of various religious devices and roles. Pargament et al.’s (2001) approach is one way in which the various coping functions may be described. Others may see many of these devices as aspects of prayer, such as confession, thanksgiving, pleading, meditation, or self-improvement (David, Ladd, & Spilka, 1992; see also the discussion of prayer below). An excellent example of coping research in this tradition is presented in Research Box 13.4.

Prayer as a Coping Method

Among the many ways religion can be used in coping, two merit special recognition—namely, prayer, because it occupies such a central and significant role in the lives of most people; and forgiveness, which has only very recently been recognized as an important coping mechanism. Interest and research in both realms have been increasing rapidly and cannot be overlooked. Because of space limitations, we focus here on prayer.

For many, prayer is at the core of faith (Brown, 1994; Buttrick, 1942; Heiler, 1932). It is easy to perform, is intensely personal, can be kept private, and is widely employed. Approximately 90% of U.S. residents indicate that they pray, and 76% regard it as very important in everyday life (McCullough & Larson, 1999; Poloma & Gallup, 1991). As Trier and Shupe (1991) have observed, “prayer [is] the most often practiced form of religiosity” (p. 354). One reason why it may be so popular is that it helps people cope with their problems.

Religious activities, especially prayer, are usually regarded as positive coping devices directed toward both solving problems and facilitating personal growth (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, De Longis, & Gruen, 1986). Some psychologists, however, see religious ritual, including prayer, as a means of controlling one’s emotions (Koenig, George, & Siegler,

TABLE 13.1. Various Means of Using Religion for Coping with the Stresses of Life

Variety of coping	Typical statement
Self-directive coping	"It's my problem to solve, not God's."
Collaborative coping	"God helps those who help themselves."
Deferring coping	"It's in God's hands."
Pleading religious coping	"Please, God, help me through this terrible time."
Benevolent religious reappraisal	"God gives me these trials to test me."
Punishing God reappraisal	"I have sinned and deserve to suffer."
Demonic reappraisal	"It is the work of the Devil."
Reappraisal of God's powers	"Nothing is too small for God not to notice and help."
Seeking spiritual support	"I know I can rely on God's love."
Spiritual discontent	"How could God do this to me?"
Seeking congregational support	"I know I can depend on my minister and other church members for help."
Interpersonal religious discontent	"I feel as if the church has deserted me."
Religious forgiving	"Father, help me be a better person; let me not be angry and afraid."
Rites of passage	"Now I am a man."
Religious conversion	"I have seen the light; I have found the way; I am born again."

Note. Adapted from Pargament, Poloma, and Tarakeshwar (2001, Table 13.1), Copyright 2001 by Oxford University Press. Adapted by permission.

1988). Others see it as an effective problem-focused mechanism, in that praying may be the only practical way of dealing with many tragedies, such as the death of a loved one (Bjorck & Cohen, 1993). Apparently, it can perform both problem- and emotion-focused functions (Carver, Scheier, & Pozo, 1992).

Forms of Prayer

This simple concept and word, "prayer," covers many possibilities. Foster (1992) conceptually identified 21 different forms of prayer. A survey of seven empirical efforts resulted in from four to nine kinds of prayer (Ladd & Spilka, 2002). The most stable types identified have been "petitionary," "ritualistic," "meditational," "confessional," "thanksgiving," "intercessory," "self-improvement," and "habitual." All have been confirmed and measured by separate, reliable scales (David et al., 1992). One U.S. national study discussed "contemplative," "conversational," "colloquial," "ritual," "petitionary," and "meditative" prayers (Poloma & Gallup, 1991). There is considerable overlap among the various proposed schemes—a condition that has not been helped by the lack of a coordinating theory. If any generalities may be inferred from the data on prayer, it would appear that the more people pray, the more forms of prayer they utilize (David et al., 1992). In addition, frequency of prayer goes with praying for more things—health, interpersonal concerns, and financial matters (Trier & Shupe, 1991).

RESEARCH BOX 13.4. God Help Me: I. Coping Efforts as Predictors of the Outcomes to Significant Negative Life Events (Pargament et al., 1990)

In this landmark research, a very basic question was addressed: “What kinds of religious coping are helpful, harmful, or irrelevant to people dealing with significant negative events?” (p. 798). The authors also attempted to find out whether measures of religious coping techniques would predict outcomes of coping better than measures of nonreligious coping techniques.

A sample of 586 Christian church members responded to questionnaires assessing religious and nonreligious coping activities and outcomes in regard to negative events that they had experienced during the preceding year. Six kinds of religious coping and four kinds of nonreligious coping were identified. Three outcome measures were assessed: mental health status, general outcome of the negative event, and its religious outcome. The religious variables, to varying degrees, predicted all three of the outcomes. This was most evident for spiritually based activities and for faith and trust in God. Religious discontent and concern with punishment from God hindered coping and adjustment. Positive effects were predictable from perceptions of a just, loving, and supportive deity; involvement in religious rituals, such as attendance at services; prayer; Bible reading; focusing on the afterlife, living a good life; and having support from clergy and church members. It was also observed that an extrinsic, utilitarian faith was helpful. The authors concluded that at least among church members, religious coping is an important and beneficial part of the overall process of coping with stress.

In order to provide some theoretical footing for conceptualizing prayer, Ladd and Spilka (2002) surveyed the literature and attempted to create a categorizing structure for the forms of prayer that have been empirically identified. Their model conceptualizes prayer as consisting of three directions of cognitive connections: inward (self-connection), outward (human–human connection), and upward (human–divine connection). Subsequent work (Ladd & Spilka, 2006) has resulted in a measurement scale that meets scientific criteria and supports this model.

Usage and Efficacy of Different Forms of Prayer

People are selective in their praying, and the different forms of prayer they use may be employed in different circumstances. For example, patients who have survived more than 5 years since an initial diagnosis of breast cancer are likely to stress prayers of thanksgiving (Ladd, Milmoie, & Spilka, 1994). Petitionary prayers, which are said to be the oldest and most common prayers, are employed to counter frustration and threat, whereas contemplative prayers (attempts to relate deeply to one’s God) seem to aid internal integration of the self (Janssen, de Hart, & den Draak, 1990; Poloma & Gallup, 1991). Meditational prayers (which are concerned with one’s relationship to God) seem to reduce anger, to lessen anxiety, and to aid relaxation (Carlson, Bacaseta, & Simanton, 1988). Contemplative prayers have also been shown to aid psychotherapy by lessening distress and specific kinds of complaints (Finney & Malony, 1985a). By contrast, there is some suggestion that mechanical, ritualized prayers may relate negatively to well-being (McCullough & Larson, 1999).

Little coping research has been done on most forms of prayer; however, a few, such as intercessory and petitionary prayer, are deserving of further exploration.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

Intercessory prayer is a particularly controversial issue. The idea that prayers in behalf of another person can influence the health of that other person has a long history. Research has generally not supported this notion. No differences were found between “treatment” groups (those who were prayed for by others) and control groups in studies of deteriorating rheumatic and psychological illness (Joyce & Weldon, 1965) and of alcohol consumption by individuals with alcohol abuse or dependence (Walker, Tonigan, Miller, Comer, & Kahlich, 1997). Small differences were found in studies of children’s leukemia (Colipp, 1969) and adult coronary disease (Byrd, 1988). More recently, a meta-analysis of 14 studies by Masters, Spielmans, and Goodson (2006) concluded that no scientifically discernible effect of distant intercessory prayer was found. We must conclude that at this stage of research on intercessory prayer, its power and significance have yet to be demonstrated. Frequently throughout this book, we have encouraged that further research on a topic be conducted. Here, however, we concur with the contention of Masters (2005) that scientific experimental methodology is not well suited to study divine intervention; as a result, such studies are probably draining resources from other important research on the religion–health connection.

PETITIONARY PRAYER

As noted above, petitionary prayer is the most common kind of prayer offered, and though it is treated negatively by some religionists, others have repeatedly averred that “petition is the heart of prayer” (Capps, 1982, p. 130). Capps (1982) further terms it “the crux of the psychology of religion” (p. 131). Simply said, prayers of petition ask for something. One content analysis of 227 petitionary prayers (Brown, 1994) showed that most requested something for family members (37%); next came prayers for alleviation of illness (21%). (The latter, though petitionary, were also intercessory when the illness was that of someone else, not the person doing the praying.) In third place were petitionary prayers for persons who had died (Brown, 1994). Obviously, people can plead for anything—one reason for the popularity of petitionary prayers. Earlier work by Brown (1966) with children and adolescents led to the conclusion that on the average, the more serious a situation is, the more strongly young people feel petitionary prayer is appropriate. An egocentric belief in the direct efficacy of petitionary prayer decreases with increasing age. There is reason to believe that as the belief in the material effectiveness of these prayers lessens, it is replaced by a belief in nonspecific effects, such as “granting courage, improving morale or producing other psychological changes” (Brown, 1968, p. 77).

Contextual Coping Concerns

The concept of coping seems to have no limits. The content of this field varies from dealing with one’s own outlook on life, to handling relations with others at home, work, school, and play, to dealing with the most tragic crisis situations that may be encountered. One person’s petty annoyances can be another’s sources of deep distress and depression. There-

fore, it is necessary to consider contextual issues (both external and internal) that affect coping.

Faith and Coping with Daily Hassles

Coping begins with the needs of daily living, and is not restricted to handling crises. Some researchers have thus asked whether faith might play a role in adapting to the “hassles” of everyday life (Belavich, 1995). Noting that a number of adaptive coping strategies might be utilized, Belavich administered a carefully selected battery of tests to over 200 college students, and controlled for a variety of demographic variables. Sophisticated data analyses revealed that “religion plays a significant role in a person’s experience with minor stressors on a day-to-day basis” (p. 24). Specifically, faith aids coping by diverting individuals from stress, and by enabling them to call upon the social support provided by other religious people and figures. Some aspects of religious coping were, however, related to poorer adjustment. The latter indicators—pleading and spiritual coping—implied a negative function. Conceptual efforts to explain these adverse findings call for further research.

Religious/Spiritual Struggles

Most people report that religion and spirituality are powerful resources for joy, purpose, and meaning—themes that we have used as an important framework throughout this book. But religious and spiritual experiences can also be sources of difficulty, tension, and struggle. Exline and Rose (2005) discuss four types of religious/spiritual struggles: suffering, virtuous striving, perception of supernatural attack, and social strain.

SUFFERING

As Exline and Rose (2005) point out, when a person is faced with suffering the natural response is to engage in an attributional search similar to what we have described in Chapter 1. To the degree that God is held responsible for the suffering, anger and mistrust may occur (Exline, Yali, & Lobel, 1999), though some may view such anger as morally wrong. Research has also shown that a small percentage of those who do blame God for negative events often find that their basic beliefs about God’s existence are shaken (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1997; Exline & Martin, 2005). However, some may see the suffering as a lesson from God that is ultimately good (Exline & Rose, 2005).

VIRTUOUS STRIVING

The conflictual nature of wanting to do right, but struggling with other natural inclinations that may be interpreted by a religious person as sin, is often a recipe for perceived failure. To the extent that such failure leads to a sense of shame or low self-esteem, it can have a negative impact on one’s sense of spiritual self-efficacy (Hill, 2002). For some people, this requires greater self-discipline, the practice of which may lead to a strengthened “moral muscle” (Baumeister & Exline, 1999). For others, it may mean focusing and relying on God’s power for transformation (something akin to the Christian theological doctrine of grace); this may result in humbly accepting God’s love and forgiveness—a process that has been empiri-

cally demonstrated to be associated with self-forgiveness (Carfaro & Exline, cited in Exline & Rose, 2005). For yet others, it may mean the act of surrender or submission to the authority of some higher power—a potentially adaptive coping style under some circumstances (Wong-McDonald & Gorsuch, 2000, 2004). In any case, the fact remains that most religious and spiritual traditions, even if individually determined rather than imposed by some external system of beliefs, prescribe moral guidelines that are often difficult to live up to. Such guidelines can thus constitute a source of struggle.

SUPERNATURAL ATTACK

Spiritual experience is by and large a positive experience (Hardy, 1979; Exline, Yali, & Sanderson, 2000), though many people of religious conviction perceive oppression and attack as part of the spiritual realm. Attributions to Satan are rare, but when they do occur, they are most often in response to negative life-altering events (Lupfer, Tolliver, & Jackson, 1996) and are often indices of spiritual distress (Exline et al., 2000).

SOCIAL STRAIN

The hassles of daily living may sometimes be implicit in one's life circumstances. We should therefore be sensitive to the social context of faith. Rosenberg (1962) studied consonance and dissonance between people's religious identification and the religious identifications of others in their surroundings. For example, a dissonant context would exist if a person was Jewish but his or her neighborhood was predominantly Christian. Consonance would, of course, mean that all neighborhood residents shared the same faith. Studying Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, Rosenberg observed that in a dissonant religious context, a person usually felt isolated from coreligionists and therefore lacked their support. Discrimination was also apt to occur. The long-range effects of contextual dissonance were likely to include low self-esteem, depressive feelings, and psychosomatic symptoms. A variation on this theme that merits study is dissonance in degree of religious commitment (i.e., the situation that exists when one's residence area is uniform in religious orientation, but the person is either more or less religiously involved than others).

Spirituality and Coping

Some valuable insights may be derived from the work of Socha (1999) on spirituality and coping. Emphasizing the "human existential situation," Socha goes beyond religion to a broader spiritual scheme. (See the discussions of "religion" vs. "spirituality" in several previous chapters.) He offers a holistic, growth-oriented view, in which a person recognizes the transitory nature of situations and acknowledges his or her own coping limits. Such awareness implies knowing when to define circumstances in terms of "sacredness"—a religious or secular notion of placing things in broader perspective. Belavich's (1995) work indicates what is done on a day-to-day basis; Socha's outlook suggests why, and introduces a different theoretical frame—a phenomenological approach that emphasizes how the individual perceives and explains the situation. This takes us back to the question of the meanings that precede the actions people take (another direction for research on coping and religion).

In other work relating to spirituality, Kennedy, Rosati, Spann, Neelon, and Rosati (n.d.), like Socha (1999), broaden the notion of coping from a focused pattern of responses to a

broader approach based on making lifestyle changes. Working within a medically based program, these workers felt that their therapeutic procedures would constructively affect well-being and spirituality. Though they did not distinguish between religion-based and non-religion-based spiritualities, half of the participants in their program evidenced an increase in spirituality, and close to 100% reported an increase in their subjective sense of well-being. Positive and significant correlations were obtained among spirituality, well-being, and meaning. Distinguishing between faith-oriented and non-faith-oriented spiritualities should provide a substantive direction for further research, and may enable participants to utilize such avenues more effectively to make the desired lifestyle changes.

Religion and Positive–Negative Life Orientation

Another factor that contributes to effective coping behavior is whether a person takes a generally positive or generally negative perspective on life and its problems. This dimension is often treated as a general characteristic that includes attitudes toward both oneself and the world (Myers, 1992). Primarily viewed as trait-dependent, it is largely conceptualized in terms of optimism–pessimism. Its significance is well illustrated by a longitudinal study in which a pessimistic explanatory style manifested in early life predicted poor health in middle and old age (Peterson, Seligman, & Vaillant, 1988). Faith has been shown to be a significant component of optimism.

The association of religion with personal happiness is apparently a major function of faith in general (Ellison, 1991). Extensive surveys of thousands of people in 14 countries have also shown a positive association between religiousness and feelings of well-being (Myers, 1992). Utilizing a variety of religious measures in national samples in the United States, Pollner (1989) concluded that “relations with a divine other are a significant correlate of well-being” (p. 100). In his system, religion’s effectiveness results from the following: (1) It brings a sense of order and coherence to stressful situations; (2) it has been found to counter feelings of shame or anger that are aroused by stress; (3) it also creates positive feelings about oneself, simply as a result of having a perceived relationship with the deity; lastly, (4) religion fosters a general tendency to see the self and the world in positive terms. In addition, there is strong evidence that religion, in offering a sense of meaning, control, and esteem, does support an optimistic outlook. This in turn helps people deal constructively with life, and seems to have long-range beneficial effects.

RELIGION, SELF-ESTEEM, AND LIFE’S MEANINGS

We have discussed the related work on self-esteem and similar concepts (Francis & Kaldor, 2002; Laurencelle et al., 2002; Ryan et al., 1993) earlier in this chapter, in connection with religion and emotional health. Other fairly large-sample research (Delbridge, Headey, & Wearing, 1994) examined whether religious practice is directly associated with a favorable outlook on life, or whether there is an intervening factor. Specifically, does one’s faith endow a person with a sense of purpose or meaning for life? This study points out that many different social and cultural referents offer meaning to people. For those who are religious, one’s faith performs this role directly, and it may also do this indirectly in various ways. For instance, in addition to religious/spiritual resources, churchgoing provides social support—which, through its community integrative function, contributes to the feeling that life has a purpose.

RELIGIOUS COPING, SELF-ESTEEM, AND WELL-BEING: ARE THEY STATE- OR TRAIT-RELATED?

Competence and success are the normal precursors to well-being, satisfaction with life, happiness, optimism, and self-esteem. This notion raises the question of whether competence and success in coping are functions of situations or more basic aspects of personality. In other words, are they state- or situation-dependent, or are they trait-dependent (Spielberger, 1966)? We may further ask whether the same is true of well-being and optimism. It appears that religion can be a part of this picture. For example, using religion to cope successfully with life should relate positively to one's subjective sense of well-being, and, as implied above, the research literature overwhelmingly supports this hypothesis. According to Maynard et al. (2001), both state and trait considerations are pertinent when religious coping occurs.

Jones (1993) further notes that "extensive studies have found the presence of religious beliefs and attitudes to be the best predictors of life satisfaction and a sense of well-being" (p. 2). This is also the essence of the message that Pargament (1997) provides in his definitive volume on religion and coping.

Religion and Coping with Major Stress

We have pictured living as a process of continual coping. Clearly, religion can play a constructive role in handling the problems of daily life, but the real test of faith comes when common hassles are supplemented by the major trials of human existence—aging, catastrophic illness, or disability; family, social, and economic difficulties; the loss of loved ones; and, of course, confronting our own death. We have looked at some of these issues in prior chapters. In this section, we look at some of the religious coping research surrounding three major sets of stressors: aging, serious illness, and the loss of a child.

Religion and Coping with Age-Related Stressors

The many types of stressors that elderly individuals must confront—social, economic, emotional, and health-related—have been described in Chapter 7. As that chapter notes, research has consistently revealed that religious coping mechanisms, especially prayer, are most frequently employed when senior citizens are dealing with health-related stress (Conway, 1985–1986; Manfredi & Pickett, 1987). Turning to a deity for support appears to be the most effective strategy available to elderly persons with health problems. This holds true across different ethnic groups, socioeconomic statuses, and levels of education (Koenig, George, & Siegler, 1988; Krause & Van Tran, 1989).

Furthermore, whether the religious variables examined are attendance at services, beliefs, prayer, or church social support, all are correlated negatively with depression and loneliness among elderly persons (Johnson & Mullins, 1989; Koenig, Kvale, & Ferrel, 1988; Pressman, Lyons, Larson, & Strain, 1990). Faith not only fosters long-range hope, but also creates optimism for the short-term future (Myers, 1992). Among senior citizens, religious involvement is a solid correlate of happiness (Myers, 1992).

One study of religiosity and time perspective found that religious people are more willing to look into the distant future and confront their eventual death than their nonreligious peers are (Hooper & Spilka, 1970). One's own impending demise is obviously a threat, and thinking about personal death is positively correlated with participation in religious activi-

ties by elderly persons (Fry, 1990). In addition, the salience of an individual's religion to self-image increases with age (Moberg, 1965).

To sum up, the findings are clear: Religion is a powerful buffer against stress among elderly people. As Myers (1992) has stated, "the happiest of senior citizens are those who are actively religious" (p. 75).

Religion and Coping with Serious Illness

Hayden (1991) researched the utility of religion in helping patients with arthritis cope with pain—an important feature of this illness. He noted tendencies for a conservative religiousness and a sense of meaning in life to counter pain perceptions. These worked best with individuals who were not very depressed to begin with, and who believed that their faith could address their pain effectively. That there is a significant psychological component in the perception of pain goes without saying. Physical and psychological pain often go together, and a strong faith combined with being religiously active seems to counter pain-related distress, depression, and anxiety (Ross, 1990).

When serious, potentially fatal illness strikes, one can expect religion to be invoked rapidly and with telling effect. This is especially true when the problem is cancer. There is apparently a pervasive tendency to avoid blaming God for the bad things that happen to people, and to credit God for positive possibilities and outcomes (Johnson & Spilka, 1991; Spilka & Schmidt, 1983b). To the degree that patients with cancer view God as being in control of things, their sense of threat to life lessens, and their self-esteem improves (Jenkins & Pargament, 1988). An intrinsic religious orientation also counteracts feelings of anger, hostility, and social isolation (Acklin, Brown, & Mauger, 1983). In addition, patients may receive much social support from their coreligionists.

The literature on the role of faith as a coping mechanism in serious illness covers a broad range of maladies. In order to gain some perspective, we confine ourselves to the literature on religious coping with cancer and HIV/AIDS.

RELIGIOUS COPING WITH CANCER

In their systematic review of the literature linking physical health with religion, Powell et al. (2003) concluded that there is insufficient evidence to suggest that religion protects against either contracting cancer or slows the progression of cancer, other than in certain groups (e.g., Mormons) that place restrictions on such behaviors as smoking, alcohol, and sexual practices. However, the issue of using one's faith to cope with cancer appears to be another story.

A number of interview-based studies (e.g., Feher & Maly, 1999; Gall, de Renart, & Boonstra, 2000; Strang & Strang, 2001) have shown the importance, often by spontaneous reporting, of religion and spirituality in coping with cancer. Other studies (e.g., Brady, Peterman, Fitchett, Mo, & Cella, 1999; Cotton, Levine, Fitzpatrick, Dold, & Targ, 1999; Tate & Forchheimer, 2002) have used a quantitative approach and have concluded that faith is an important predictor to the quality of life among patients with cancer.

Why might religion be such a successful coping mechanism? If a child contracts cancer, for instance, how do the child, siblings, parents, and other family members react? The child victim is likely to experience hospitalizations involving separations from others, as well as to experience much pain (both from the illness and from efforts to counter it). The effects

of possible surgical procedures and chemotherapy can be particularly devastating. The predominant child responses are depression and anxiety (Spilka, Zwartjes, & Zwartjes, 1991). Though the age of the child is a factor, fear of death and a wide variety of other anxieties indicate extreme stress. The basic problems have been pictured as those of meaning and mastery (Hart & Schneider, 1997; Spinetta, 1977), and religion appears to meet these needs rather well (Spilka et al., 1991). Psychiatrist Robert Coles (1990) has written of the efficacy of prayer, religious ritual, and Biblical readings in helping children with cancer cope with their trials. Pargament (1997) points out how religion may also constructively deal with the mechanism of denial—a common factor in these circumstances.

Religion plays a role in helping parents and siblings cope as well. With regard to parents, the list of reactions to children's cancer is extensive, ranging from anxiety and fear to extreme marital distress and breakup (Enskar, Carlsson, Golsater, Hamrim, & Kreuger, 1997; Groothuis & Last, 1997; Leyn, 1976). Church social support and religion's potential for meaning and control can provide strong backing to parents in dealing with their children's illness and their own reactions (Zwartjes, Spilka, Zwartjes, Heideman, & Cilli, 1979).

RELIGIOUS COPING WITH HIV/AIDS

Several recent studies on religious coping have involved patients with HIV/AIDS. Earlier in this chapter, we reviewed a qualitative study (Jacobson et al., 2006) that found three of the religious coping strategies outlined by Pargament et al. (1988) to be commonly used by people diagnosed with HIV. A number of other studies document the frequency with which religion is turned to as a coping resource. Cotton et al. (2006) found that the use of religion and spirituality was common in their sample of 450 patients with HIV/AIDS: Almost one-fourth of their sample attended weekly religious services, and one-third prayed or meditated daily. Positive coping strategies (e.g., "sought God's love and care") were significantly more common than negative strategies (e.g., "wondered whether God has abandoned me"), and spirituality levels remained stable over a period of 12–18 months. Ironson, Stuetzle, and Fletcher (2006) found a self-reported increase in spirituality and religiousness over a 4-year time period in 45% of their sample after HIV diagnosis (vs. 13% who reported a decrease in spirituality/religiousness). This research team further discovered that those who reported an increase in religiousness or spirituality also showed slower disease progression, even after such other potential mediating factors as church attendance, initial disease status, age, gender, health behaviors (e.g., risky sex, use of cocaine), social support, and other factors were controlled for. These two studies are but a small representation of a suddenly vast research literature suggesting that when faced with such dire circumstances as an HIV diagnosis, many people turn to religion or spirituality.

Religion and Coping with the Death of a Child

We expect the old to die; we painfully acknowledge that younger people do die, mostly by accident; but the death of youngsters is something we want to deny. Still, it occurs, and the death of infants who have not yet had a chance to enjoy life is particularly upsetting. With all the publicity that sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) has received in recent years, new parents often worry about such a possibility. (Fortunately, however, the death rate from SIDS declined from 1.5 per 1,000 in 1980 to .55 per 1,000 infants in 2004; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007.)

McIntosh, Silver, and Wortman (1993) have examined the role of faith following the death of an infant from SIDS (see Research Box 13.5). They found that religious participation elicited social support, and that religion helped bereaved parents for whom it was important to derive meaning from this calamity. In other words, parental faith supported the parents' efforts at cognitively processing the death of their child.

The McIntosh et al. (1993) study suggests that religion as a coping device may be especially important when a devastating, uncontrollable event such as the death of a child occurs. Naturalistic explanations of a child's death are unsatisfactory for most people, because they imply no future, no hope—simply complete and total termination. In contrast, religious interpretations offer not only the potential of future life and other-worldly gratification for the deceased, but this-worldly answers that offer a measure of contentment for survivors. McIntosh et al.'s (1993) study indicates this for parents who suddenly lose an infant to SIDS, and it has also been demonstrated for those who anticipate the death of a child from illness (Friedman, Chodoff, Mason, & Hamburg, 1963). Similar findings hold when parents have to deal with the deaths of premature and newborn infants (Palmer & Noble, 1986).

Three different "theodicies" (attempts to defend God's goodness in the face of tragedy) have been observed among bereaved parents: "1) reunion with the deceased in an afterlife; 2) death as a purposive event; and 3) death as punishment for wrong-doing on the part of survivors" (Cook & Wimberly, 1983, p. 237). These are regarded as attempts to make the death meaningful, and even to experience guilt feelings. Attributions to a purposeful God are also invoked when a friend dies, but people with an Intrinsic religious orientation may undergo much cognitive restructuring in order to understand what has occurred, possibly because of their positive image of the deity. There is also the possibility that it is cognitively easier to deal with one's own death than that of another valued person (Park & Cohen, 1993; Schoenrade, Ludwig, Atkinson, & Shane, 1990).

RESEARCH BOX 13.5. Religion's Role in Adjustment to a Negative Life Event:
Coping with the Death of a Child (McIntosh, Silver, & Wortman, 1993)

This significant study examined how religion helped parents who lost an infant to SIDS adjust to this tragedy. A sample of 124 parents was studied; each set of parents was interviewed within 15–30 days after their child's death, and reinterviewed 18 months later. Adjustment and coping were related to four factors: religion, social support, cognitive processing, and meaning. The researchers hypothesized that religious participation would promote perceptions of social support and adjustment. They also expected that when religion per se was important to the parents, it would help them find meaning in the loss and aid cognitive processing of the event, and would enhance adjustment through these avenues. These hypotheses were supported. In addition, religious participation helped the parents derive meaning from their loss.

This study revealed that religion may not affect adjustment and distress directly; rather, it may work indirectly by bolstering perceptions of social support, aiding cognitive processing, and increasing the meaningfulness of an infant's death, probably by putting it in the context of a positive religious framework. Research such as this indicates the complexity of the role of religion in the coping process, and clarifies some of the mechanisms that are operative when a person's faith is tested by crisis and tragedy.

OVERVIEW

As we have seen, the issue of religion and health is an extremely complex topic on many levels, from cause to expression. The amount of research on religion and health has grown significantly over the past two decades, and only a small representation could be covered in this chapter. We have, however, attempted to provide what we believe to be a fair representation.

Serious defects that often stemmed from antireligious perspectives exist in many early studies of relationships between religion and psychopathology. The more modern view is that religion functions largely as a means of countering rather than contributing to psychopathology, though severe forms of unhealthy religion will probably have serious psychological and perhaps even physical consequences. In most instances, faith buttresses people's sense of control and self-esteem, offers meanings that oppose anxiety, provides hope, sanctions socially facilitating behavior, enhances personal well-being, and promotes social integration. Probably the most hopeful sign is the increasing recognition by both clinicians and religionists of the potential benefits each group has to contribute. Awareness of the need for a spiritual perspective has opened new and more constructive possibilities for working with mentally disturbed individuals and resolving adaptive issues.

A central theme throughout this book is that religion "works" because it offers people meaning and control, and brings them together with like-thinking others who provide social support. This theme is probably nowhere better represented than in the section of this chapter on how people use religious and spiritual resources to cope. Religious beliefs, experiences, and practices appear to constitute a system of meanings that can be applied to virtually every situation a person may encounter. People are loath to rely on chance. Fate and luck are poor referents for understanding, but religion in all its possible manifestations can fill the void of meaninglessness admirably. There is always a place for one's God—simply watching, guiding, supporting, or actively solving a problem. In other words, when people need to gain a greater measure of control over life events, the deity is there to provide the help they require.

Epilogue

One of the most devastating examples of the danger of religion, is of course, September 11, 2001.

Dear God, save us from the people who believe in you.

For those who regard a transcendental explanation as inadequate, or feel that an appeal to supernatural explanations involves a sacrifice of intellectual integrity, the phenomena of religious observance must be aligned with what is known of other aspects of human psychological functioning.

Some significant portion of traditional supernatural belief is associated with accurate observations interpreted rationally.

We have yet to fully understand the profound and mysterious religious experiences of human everywhere, experiences that shape attitudes toward life and arouse hopes for transcendence and personal immortality.¹

At the end of our review of the ever-increasing literature on the psychology of religion, it is fitting to take stock of the field—both as it is now and as it is likely to develop in the immediate future. There is a heavy dose of evaluation in the former effort, and a bit of prophecy in the latter. Yet, as in our epilogue to the third edition, we wish at least to go on record so that our prophecies can be judged empirically.

The problems and possibilities of the psychology of religion continue to be functions of the notable personalities involved in the field. To this we now add the considerable influence in shaping the field by funding linked to the interests of the late Sir John Templeton, a pioneer in the mutual fund industry who used a portion of his considerable wealth to establish the John Templeton Foundation. The rise of positive psychology, as well as studies reflecting his interests in unlimited love, forgiveness, and spiritual transformation—all these efforts are guided by the monies his foundation provided. As has often been true in the history of this field, single individuals can be immensely important in determining not simply whether

¹These quotations come, respectively, from the following sources: Albacete (2002, p. 166); Dowd (2002); Hinde (1999, p. 233); Hufford (1982, p. xviii); and Wiebe (1997, p. 222).

religion will be studied, but, if so, what aspects will be examined (Hood, 2000a). Even more than the third edition of this work, this fourth edition reveals that the differences in emphasis and orientation among us authors reflect the diversity characterizing contemporary psychology in general and the current psychology of religion in particular. This diversity may well be restrained as major funding from individuals or foundations influences the field. The future psychology of religion may largely be one of funded research projects (Coon, 1992; Hood, 2000a). The certainty that many of these will surely be projects funded by the Templeton Foundation concerns some (Wulff, 2003). However, researchers are free to explore any aspects of religion, not simply those that are heavily funded by Templeton interests.

RESEARCH IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Our immediate focus has been upon the empirical psychology of religion, because it most adequately characterizes the academic study of religion in North American psychology departments. As we have seen, the empirical psychology of religion is as old as scientific psychology itself. Yet, from its inception, scientific psychology has often been more of an ideal than a fact. The term “empirical” has undergone a curious change over time, so that entire orientations historically identified as empirical are not granted that description today by mainstream psychologists (Belzen & Hood, 2006). For many psychologists, classical psychoanalytic, object relations, Jungian, and phenomenological psychologies are not empirical. “Empirical” has come to mean reliance upon the triad of observation, experimentation, and measurement. This is the paradigm that, according to Gorsuch (1988), identifies the psychology of religion. Now Hill and Pargament (2003) have claimed the same for the psychology of religion and spirituality. These investigators place the study of both religion and spirituality within a natural-scientific framework. In the past, this has not always been the case (Hamlyn, 1967; Hearnshaw, 1987). Porpora (2006) has noted how the explicit stance of methodological atheism actually empirically limits the study of religion. Likewise, we welcome the call for a new interdisciplinary paradigm that is both multilevel and nonreductive (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). This new paradigm is evident in many places in this fourth edition, and it is likely to guide future research on the psychology of religion.

A Historical Reminder

The Two Stances of Wilhelm Wundt

Authorities such as Robinson (1981) remind us that psychology as a natural science emerged in the 19th century, and that its success was largely a North American phenomenon associated with the professionalization of the field (Coon, 1992; Hood, 2000a; Taves, 1999). Its roots, however, had been laid down by philosophical developments utilizing natural-scientific assumptions to describe phenomena in the light of principles based upon observation, measurement, and experimentation. Textbooks commonly cite Wilhelm Wundt’s establishment of his psychological laboratory at Leipzig in 1879 as the beginning of scientific psychology. This event indicated that psychology was moving from speculative philosophy to natural science. The bridge was experimentation, which involved measurement, manipulation, and observation. Yet Wundt (1901) actually fostered two psychologies—limiting the applicability

of natural-scientific assumptions to some phenomena, but applying different assumptions and methods to other, more social, “folk” expressions (Wundt, 1916).

From the beginning, psychology and social psychology never quite met in terms of natural-scientific assumptions. Even less could psychology maintain its grasp on the entire range and scope of religion with natural-scientific hands—aspects of religion, maybe, but not religion itself. The reduction of religion to categories of science, a persistent goal of early Enlightenment philosophers, can be judged to have failed (Bowker, 1973; Porpora, 2006; Preus, 1987). The split between psychology as a natural science and social psychology is today as firmly debated as in Wundt’s time (Parker, 1989). From the efforts to reconstruct social psychology proposed by Armstead (1974) to the efforts to deconstruct social psychology advanced by Parker and Shotter (1987), the identity of social psychology as a natural science has always been and remains problematic. This is important, insofar as the major source of our contemporary measurement-based psychology of religion and spirituality is social psychology. Thus the need is for even more interdisciplinary research, as well as acceptance of the widest variety of methodological options for increasing our scientific understanding of religion (Hood & Belzen, 2005; Belzen & Hood, 2006).

The Two Stances of William James

William James, a contemporary of Wundt and a founder of North American psychology, also failed to apply laboratory measurement-based methodologies to the study of religion. Twice president of the American Psychological Association, James also helped establish the American Society of Psychical Research. The two organizations made strange bedfellows. Coon (1992) reminds us that psychology gained its professional roots in North America within a population that equated psychology (“psychical”) with things spiritual. The study of things psychical was a bridging concept that allowed psychologists to gain popular support for their science, while aiming to use natural-scientific methods to debunk the claims of spiritualists.

James, as in so many other instances, was an exception. His most consistently psychological work, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890/1950), took a rigorous stance that psychology was to be a natural science. However, as Hood (2000a) has emphasized, James took this stance provisionally, seeking to expose its limits. These limits were both revealed and transcended in James’s confrontation with religion. Religious experience was the subject matter of his Gifford Lectures and the basis for James’s other undisputed classic text in the psychology of religion.

James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902/1985) explored the range and depth of religious experience, using personal documents placed within the context of their development so that their fruits could be assessed. The stress upon measurement and the use of questionnaires, already established by such notables as Hall (1900) and Starbuck (1899), were ignored by James in favor of the existential thrust of experience, defined and interpreted within a more historical, narrative context. In modern terms, James’s research was qualitative, not quantitative. His psychological treatment of religion specifically expanded the boundaries of the natural-science-based psychology articulated in *The Principles* (Hood, 1995c). *The Varieties* still remains the most frequently assigned text in the psychology of religion (Vande Kemp, 1976). This should not convey the idea that the contemporary empirical psychology of religion has been heavily influenced by James; however, William James remains the most significant figure in identifying the tensions between a psychology of reli-

gion and the tendency to move toward a religious psychology (Hood, 2008). Measurement has often been the fence that most separates these two fields.

Despite the fact that empirical psychologists of religion tend to be primarily social psychologists, they come from the *psychological* tradition of social psychology, not the *sociological* tradition. Ironically, as Schellenberg (1990) has noted, the latter has been influenced more strongly by James than the former has been. The natural-scientific assumptions of psychology remain firm for most of the psychologically oriented social psychologists who do empirical research. Those who confine themselves to natural-scientific assumptions tend to produce what Beit-Hallahmi (1991) identifies as a “psychology of religion” rather than a “religious psychology” per se. A psychology of religion places psychological categories at the forefront, and would have psychology explain religion only insofar as its phenomena can be captured within natural-scientific constructs from mainstream psychology. On the other hand, religious psychology gives supremacy to religious constructs, and expects psychology to follow from and to be constrained within the conceptual limits of a natural science whose explanatory power is superseded by religion. There is an uneasy tension between psychologists of religion and religious psychologists, which promises to persist in the foreseeable future. It is further complicated as the psychology of religion becomes entangled in efforts to tease out differences and similarities between religion and spirituality at both conceptual and measurement levels (Hill et al., 2000; Moberg, 2002).

As we have noted in this text, not simply measurement, but the ontological status assigned to what is measured, is crucial in developing theory within the psychology of religion (Porpora, 2006). Psychologists of religion must begin with a rich and accurate description of religion and spirituality from the believers’ perspectives (Vergote, 1997). To do this, psychologists of religion will need to participate more in the actual religious and spiritual practices of their subjects (Belzen, 2009). Examples of this more culturally sensitive means of gathering relevant data can be found in Belzen’s (1999; Belzen & Hood, 2006, pp. 23–24) study of conversion among the “*bevindelijken*” in the Netherlands, and Poloma’s (2003) study of a Pentecostal group known as the Toronto Blessing and Reviving. Furthermore, such culturally sensitive participatory studies do not negate the ability to gather measurement data as well—as illustrated by Hood and Williamson’s (2008a, 2008b) study of the Christian serpent handlers of Appalachia, and Poloma and Hood’s (2008) study of a Pentecostal emerging church in Atlanta, Georgia. Although scientific explanations of aspects of religion and spirituality have been explored in this text, we are not so brash as to think that we have exhaustively “explained” religion or spirituality. These remain their own valid ways of knowing, similar in many ways to scientific knowing (Miles, 2007).

The Measurement Paradigm in the Psychology of Religion

Hood (1994) has argued for a compromise position—neither a psychology of religion and spirituality nor a religious and spiritual psychology, but rather psychology *and* religion *and* spirituality in interactive dialogues. This is also what we take to be the spirit of the new paradigm for the psychology of religion, to which we have referred throughout this text. This stance admits the validity of concepts from all three domains and encourages their interaction. At odds is the extent to which a genuine interaction can occur, given the limited empirical characteristics of many religious and spiritual constructs. Still, one can identify the empirical consequences of many such constructs. The psychology of religion is both broadened and challenged by newer orientations such as transpersonal psychology and the human

sciences—both of which accept a broader definition of “empirical,” much of it compatible with religious and spiritual traditions.

The *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* has established itself as a major journal representing spiritual phenomena studied by means of admittedly sympathetic psychological methods. Such studies and methods contrast with those of more objective measurement-based journals, such as the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, whose focus has been on mainstream social-scientific methods applied to religious (and, to a lesser extent, spiritual) phenomena. The *Review of Religious Research* stresses theory and empirical research with some relevance or application to religious institutions. The boundaries among these journals promise to become more permeable as social scientists sympathetic to both religious and spiritual phenomena begin to develop scientific theories compatible with concepts central to religion and spirituality. Likewise, as proponents of more traditionally measurement-based psychology broaden their theoretical horizons, new measurement techniques are likely to be developed to permit a more adequate assessment of variables of religious and spiritual relevance. Moreover, some of the newer journals—such as the *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion and Mental Health, Religion, and Culture*—emphasize by their titles alone that the psychology of religion and spirituality can no longer be simply North American. Also encouraging are the reconstitution of the International Association for the Psychology of Religion and the reappearance of the oldest yearbook in the psychology of religion, the *Archiv für Religionspsychologie* (founded in 1914) (Belzen, 2002). Likewise, as additional journals are founded, it is likely that they will either ignore religion in favor of spirituality (such as *Spirituality and Health International*) or explicitly link religion and spirituality (as in the recently established official journal of the American Psychological Association’s Division of the Psychology of Religion, *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*).

The classical non-measurement-based theories of religion, many derived from psychoanalysis or its analytical and object relations offshoots, continue to spawn an immense literature (Hood, 1995b; Corveleyn & Luyten, 2005). Largely interpretative of religion (as in the case of psychoanalysis), or interpretative of spirituality (as in the case of Jungian or object relations theory), this literature promises to influence measurement-based psychology in two ways. First, it provides hypotheses that can be subjected to measurement-based tests; many of these tests are controversial, but these complex theories require equally complex qualitative and quantitative methods (Corveleyn & Luyten, 2005). Psychodynamic psychologies of religion must be included in the new paradigm. Second, as competing qualitative methodologies, approaches such as these gain credibility as other narrative and interpretative psychologies emerge and influence mainstream social psychology (Belzen, 1997, 2001). In addition, the long tradition of qualitative sociological social psychology, such as symbolic interactionism, is beginning to influence more measurement-based psychological social psychology. Measurement is thus on the defensive as an all-inclusive methodological claim. As Roth (1987) has noted, methodological pluralism is the emerging norm in the social sciences. The psychology of religion and spirituality promises to benefit from interchange between theories and methods that were previously perceived as mutually exclusive. As Wulff (2000) has noted, the study of a phenomenon such as mysticism, if done openly, fundamentally challenges the methods and assumptions of empirical psychology.

Measurement-based psychology is likely to rise to the challenge by articulating more meaningful and inclusive theory that is nevertheless susceptible to empirical test (Hill, 2005; Hill & Gibson, 2008). Works such as that of Spilka and McIntosh (1997), which respond to the critical demand for theoretical advancement in the empirical psychology of religion, are

welcome harbingers. One major challenge to a measurement-oriented psychology of religion is simply put—interest. It is not clear that the massive literature generated in psychology in general has yielded results appropriate to the effort. When one considers the explosion of literature in mainstream psychology, it is obvious that no psychologist can master even a small portion of it. It has been over 20 years since Hearnshaw (1987) noted that writing in psychology since 1950 exceeded the total output of works on the subject produced since the time of the Greeks. The literature since 1987 has continued to increase exponentially, yet has produced no agreed-upon theoretical integration. Despite the vast amount of research produced in the North American resurgence of interest in the psychology of religion since 1950, much of it is, in Dittes's (1971a) view, a "promiscuous empiricism" (p. 393). The rigors of measurement and the cleverness of experimental designs fail if at the end the findings are trivial or uninformative. The psychology of religion and spirituality is likely to become more like a quilt, in which measurement will at best sew together patches derived from diverse theoretical perspectives. This is in the best spirit of the call for a new paradigm: interdisciplinary, nonreductive, and multilevel.

THE NEED FOR THEORY IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

Within the psychology of religion, the cry for good theory remains at the level of cacophony. Our guess continues to be that the older generation of researchers will want to make their theoretical contributions in light of the plea for such guidance across the disciplines concerned with the study of religion and spirituality. Likewise, a younger generation of researchers will be trained to demand good theory as a prerequisite to the collection of meaningful empirical data. The field should profit from the emerging consensus that theory congruent with the passion and interest elicited by religion is needed. Theory and measurement need not be incompatible endeavors, but the latter alone will not rise to the level of adequate theory.

There is no all-encompassing theory in general psychology, much less in the psychology of religion and spirituality. Calls for an evolutionary psychology as a grand narrative to integrate all of psychology echo a trend that has occurred in almost every generation of researchers, perhaps most significantly with psychoanalytic pioneers (Badcock, 1980). Throughout this text, we have noted how evolutionary psychology has been used in support of religious and spiritual views and as a not-so-humble claim to have reductively explained religion. Even the most vocal defenders of evolutionary psychology note that it is not a monolithic enterprise; nor, in what can be seen as amounting to a concession to postmodernism, is it a single enterprise (Kirkpatrick, 2006a, p. 78). Critics have argued that it is not clear that evolutionary theory is a genuine empirical theory, failing as it does to permit falsification and, in the words of Watts (2006, p. 63), "not being really testable." No doubt much empirical work will be done under the umbrella of some form of evolutionary theory, but it will probably be done in the tradition of hypothesis testing, assuring that hypotheses derived from evolutionary theory will be "verified." However, verification has long been abandoned as a defensible philosophy of science (Belzen & Hood, 2006). Evolutionary theories thus have their place in the psychology of religion, but must be cautiously evaluated as grand narratives. Evolution does not demand a denial either of God or of some *teleos* or directionality inherent in the process (Watts, 2002, pp. 17–31). Evolutionary psychology's success in providing a fuller understand-

ing of religion and spirituality as part of the new paradigm will depend upon its openness to a truly interdisciplinary effort, including a willingness to give theology its due.

Consistent with theory development in the psychology of religion is similar growth in general psychology as it is forced to confront religious issues. Religion is no longer a marginal concern of psychology; whether in the challenges of therapy or in the collective confrontation with cults, it occupies much of the center stage of general culture. Mainstream psychology will begin to confront religion in terms of its theories, if for no other reason than to show the meaningful relevance of psychology to the interests of a culture that supports and in the process seeks guidance from this science, natural or otherwise. In many cases, the vacuum left by some religions will be filled by psychology. Vitz (1977) has made the case that for some people, psychology has become a religion. Some areas, such as transpersonal psychology, blur the boundaries between psychology as science and as a spiritual discipline. In the future, religionists will probably need to be more psychologically skilled, and psychologists will need to be more religiously and spiritually sophisticated, if there are to remain identifiable but permeable boundaries between psychology on the one hand and spirituality/religion on the other.

In a similar vein, journals devoted to a faith commitment—either by constraining their psychology within the more narrow confines of a particular faith (e.g., the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, the *Journal of Psychology and Judaism*), or by interrelating or integrating psychology and religion (e.g., the *Journal of Psychology and Theology*)—will assure that psychology itself appropriately reflects on its own limits. Religion and psychology may confront similar questions, but how they are asked defines what constitutes an appropriate answer. Precisely what it is within religion or spirituality that admits of an empirical answer must be more clearly theoretically determined. So, too, the limits of empiricism must be acknowledged theoretically as new empirical methods are created.

The continual debate between nomothetic and idiothetic methodologies within mainstream psychology has strong parallels in the history of religion (Gorsuch, 2008). Idiothetic methods have been one of the strengths of psychodynamic psychologies (Corveleyn & Luyten, 2005). General covering laws have long been empirical psychology's goal, but are no longer thought to exclude the individual case. Idiothetic studies are of immense value both as unique narratives in their own right, and as instances of a general law concretely particularized. Tageson's (1982) "objective phenomenology" is not an oxymoron. Radically subjective occurrences can enter a rigorous psychology of religion. Hufford's (1982) warning that psychologists need a parallel to ethnography—a "phenomenography"—can no longer be ignored. Pike (1992, pp. 166–168) also argues for phenomenography in his study of mysticism, precisely because his is a focus on phenomena as they are reported, and hence he sees his work as also hermeneutical. Likewise, Steinbock (2007, p. 3) would not oppose his work on phenomenology and mysticism as "hermeneutic phenomenology." Finally, Hood and Williamson (2008b, pp. 247–256) have explicitly applied a specific hermeneutical and phenomenological method in their study of the contemporary Christian serpent handlers of Appalachia. Empirically oriented psychologists would do well to follow suit, insofar as they can ill afford to ignore such methods, even as guides in measurement-based research (Belzen & Hood, 2006). They have yet to provide the most basic description of the experience central to the study of religion and spirituality. The discussion of mysticism in Chapter 11 also indicates the interface between phenomenological and measurement psychology, in which the results of phenomenological analysis can be operationalized and fulfill the requirements of a measurement paradigm. This is the possibility of "the empirical validation of phenomenolog-

ically derived classifications” argued by Seigfried (1990, p. 12) in her study of William James. Once again, the issue is not only that multiple methods can be of value in the psychology of religion and spirituality, but that measurement can be based upon a variety of theoretical and even alternative methodological perspectives. The time is long past when the psychological illumination of religious issues can be assumed to deny the validity of the religious nature that is illuminated psychologically (Vergote, 1997, p. 208). Boundaries must be identified theoretically even if they are to be crossed.

If there is a change in the psychology of religion, it is likely to be most evident in the North American dominance of the field. The success of psychology in the United States and Canada has always been associated with its development as a profession. Contemporary psychology has witnessed a split in allegiances between the American Psychological Association, long the dominant organization for psychologists (whether teachers, researchers, or practitioners), and the more recently formed American Psychological Society (which focuses more upon research and teaching than upon practice). This apparent dichotomy suggests that even within North American psychology, tensions between research and practice, and between knowledge and application, are considerable. The tension is reflected in religion as a specialty in the American Psychological Society and religion as a division within the American Psychological Association. Practitioners are more likely to foster a religious psychology than researchers are. It is unlikely that this emphasis will gain as strong an academic foothold in North American universities as a research-based empirical psychology of religion has.

Compared with North American psychologists of religion, Europeans are less measurement-oriented and more receptive to phenomenological, psychodynamic, hermeneutical, and cultural studies. These cultures are also less overtly committed to institutional religion. Thus the European psychology of religion promises to challenge the supremacy of the North American psychology of religion, both because of European psychology’s greater breadth and scope, and because of North American psychology’s tendency to take apologetic religious-psychological stances. Although much of the European psychology of religion and spirituality follows a more restricted empirical model common to American psychology, globalization promises to become a two-way street, with American psychology of religion in the spirit of the new paradigm seeking insights from the more qualitative European psychologies noted above. In addition, Asian studies in the psychology of religion are emerging—with much less distinct lines among psychology, religion/spirituality, and science. To date, mainly transpersonal psychologists have examined these traditions, but their influence will undoubtedly affect measurement-based psychology. Again, the challenge to a psychology of religion premised upon measurement and experimentation is for theoretical meaningfulness as well as greater breadth and scope. We prophesied in the second edition of this book that another *Annual Review of Psychology* would be unlikely to “include a review of psychology of religion in which the data base consists exclusively of convenience samples of Protestant Christians selected primarily from North American universities” (Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 1996, p. 448). Unfortunately, this optimistic prophecy has not been borne out. Another such review of the field has appeared more recently (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003), but its data base is very much like that of Gorsuch’s (1988) earlier review. Advancements in statistical methods have not paralleled advances in theory, despite the call for a new paradigm. For many reasons, this situation is even less acceptable now than we found it to be in our third edition.

However, this fourth edition does suggest movement toward a more reflective and humble psychology of religion—one that accepts spirituality as an integral aspect of our dis-

cipline, insofar as individuals define themselves as spiritual beings (Belzen, in press). The future looks promising as psychologists of religion seek greater conceptual depth, more comprehensive models, and more inclusive approaches (Reich & Hill, 2008).

EXTREMISM, CONFLICT, AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

The urgency of the need to consider the global dimensions of psychology and religion has been highlighted by recent world events. After September 11, 2001, few would disagree that we live in seriously troubled times. Perhaps for some there is a renewed call to faith, but for others it appears that religion itself may be the problem. The great faith traditions of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism find themselves in both direct and indirect conflict. Whether it be the imagery of “Onward Christian Soldiers” or the cries of “*Jihad!*,” a sense of being wronged is succeeded by hate, usually legitimated by carefully selected scriptural prescriptions.

The problem extends well beyond armed violence. There is a psychology of religious extremism that has not yet been empirically understood. It appears to be associated with a sense of righteousness and the need to demonize other points of view. Virtually all of the current “anti-” trends in religion—those targeting abortion, evolution, women, homosexuality, science, medicine, and progress in general—are clothed in anti-Satan beliefs and rhetoric. In North American Christianity, this tradition began with the Salem witch trials in 17th-century colonial Massachusetts, which reflected medieval religious views of women. The title of Karlsen’s (1989) history, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, places the trials in a religious framework. Others have focused upon extreme aspects of Islam (Kressel, 2007), but we must be careful not to link religious extremism with any one faith tradition, much less to use it as a necessary defining criterion of religious fundamentalism (Hood, Hill, & Williamson, 2005).

Extremists may take refuge in ethnocentrism, creating ingroup–outgroup distinctions and reinforcing these with alienating rhetoric. Abortion is likely to be countered with sexism; prayer in the schools may take on an anti-Semitic tint; and brotherhood can be restricted to one’s fellow believers. “True believing” knows few bounds, especially when religion is an organizing force. Believers in “conspiracy” ask who is behind pornography, evolutionary theory, secular humanism, women’s rights, or opposition to prayer in the schools—and the approved answers too often excite bigotry.

This is not to say that there may not be extremists on both sides of all these issues. Those who consider themselves “warriors in God’s name” find their counterparts in atheistic networks. The advocates of science in *The Skeptical Inquirer* commonly take on conservative religionists. The editors, publisher, and writers in *Science and Spirit* make a commendable effort to struggle for a middle ground by titling their magazine as “connecting science, religion, and life.” Of course, their stance may itself be regarded as extreme by those who polarize these issues.

One does not have to look far to find religious roots for the events of September 11, 2001. These illustrate the extremes to which religious traditions are able to motivate true believers (Nielsen, 2001). Unhappily, the actions of extremist Muslims on that tragic September day have created much distress among moderate Muslims in the United States. Equally extremist Christians have directed indiscriminate hate speech against Islam and its representatives (Sachs, 2002b). The Palestinian–Israeli conflict, when seized upon by extremists on either side, has often been reduced to a conflict between Islam and Judaism, but this tendency has

intensified since the September 11 events (Karsh, 2002; Sachs, 2002a). Extremism blunts perception and cognition, so that unreasonable and false generalizations simplify and polarize thinking.

Perceptions of science as the enemy, particularly where the theory of evolution is concerned, seem as strong today as they were during the Scopes trial in Tennessee over 80 years ago. State school boards in Ohio, Kansas, and Georgia, among others, have generally given up on replacing Darwinian theory with creationism, and now argue for equal time in the classroom. Whereas creationism was relatively easily rejected as religion rather than science, new arguments from “intelligent design” have been introduced into this classic fray (Clines, 2002; Holt, 2002). The backers of this more sophisticated position are often highly trained scientists themselves (Nelson, 2002).

It is not difficult to give many more examples of extreme behaviors connected to religion. However, the extremism–religion association is not well understood and merits both the development of theory and the undertaking of research. It will require a global approach—one not restricted to sampling North American university undergraduates. We need to know a great deal more than is currently understood about the cognitive and motivational aspects of the kind of religious commitment that supports extreme behavior, so that we can empirically engage Dionne’s (2001) question: “Is religion the cause or the solution?” (p. B11).

FINAL THOUGHTS: NEEDS FOR TODAY AND THE FUTURE

Once again, what appears the clearest need in social-scientific work that will assure the vigor, relevance, and compatibility of the psychology of religion with mainstream psychology is theory. Our prophecy in the third edition that the psychology of religion will no longer be atheoretical, piecemeal, and lacking in sustained development has not yet been proven false. Mainstream psychology has proposed a variety of theories that integrate and guide meaningful empirical research, and many of them are beginning to influence the study of religion. Likewise, more restricted theories are being developed within our field that can sustain significant research (Hill & Gibson, 2008). In any case, whether broad or narrow, the demand for theory will guide the future psychology of religion. We suspect that theory will be revitalized precisely to the extent that it is genuinely interdisciplinary and nonreductive. To cite an example discussed in Chapter 8, attachment theory and psychoanalysis (especially object relations theory) can no longer stand in isolation from one another. They are best viewed as complementary theories that are not incompatible (Fonagy, 2001).

Closely related to the issue of theory is the need for more sophisticated theological literacy among researchers in the psychology of religion (Hunter, 1989). For instance, Gorsuch (1994) has emphasized that if intrinsic religion is treated as a motivational construct, then assessing it independently of belief content is essential. Low correlations between measures of general intrinsic religiousness (such as the Allport–Ross Intrinsic scale) and other variables may be due to the fact that only when specific beliefs are taken into account can more powerful predictions be made. That is, whether one is intrinsically motivated may be a less powerful predictor than one’s intrinsic motivation within a particular belief context. In a similar vein, Hood (1992c) has argued that empirically identified psychological processes are of little use in making predictions unless the content of specific faith traditions is taken into account. The psychology of religion and spirituality, even when it is not a “religious psychol-

ogy” in Beit-Hallahmi’s (1991) sense, needs to be religiously and spiritually informed in order to make meaningful empirical predictions (Gorsuch, 2008; Porpora, 2006).

Finally, concern for theory is not unrelated to training in the professional practice of psychology. The need for clinicians and counselors to be sensitive to cultural, gender, and religious differences makes the understanding of religion and spirituality necessary. Jones (1994) has made a case for the inclusion of religious values and perspectives within modern clinical psychology. At a minimum, sensitivity to clients’ values, including religious ones, is an ethical imperative for clinicians and other social science providers.

In many cases, psychotherapy takes place within a religious framework. Clinical and counseling psychologists have begun to explore the integration of religion and spirituality in psychotherapy. Titles such as *A Spiritual Strategy for Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Richards & Bergin, 1997), *Incorporating Spirituality in Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Miller, 2003), and *Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy* (Pargament, 2007) attest to the fact that the new paradigm seeks genuine integration, and that theology and religion must be in dialogue (Watts, 2002). Even if much of the funding for research in the psychology of religion and spirituality is funded by what some see as the conservative vision of Sir John Templeton (Wulff, 2003), it remains true that this vision can generate empirically testable hypotheses. Those with other visions can do the same. The standards by which research is evaluated need not be hampered by the source of funding. That conservative religion seeks to defend itself in the face of more liberal opposition is part of the dynamic that social psychologists of religion have long studied, as we have noted in Chapter 9. The tension between transformation and tradition is likely to characterize the study of religion and spirituality in the foreseeable future.

The American Psychological Association discovered a great demand for Shafranske’s (1996b) significant edited volume on religion and the practice of clinical psychology. His work has been followed by several additional books published by the American Psychological Association that focus upon the global dimension of religion and spirituality, including texts on religious diversity (Richards & Bergin, 2000). An awareness of religious motivations, schemas, and attributions is particularly necessary for effective intervention in cases where law enforcement deals with religiously based deviance, as in confrontations with religious sects and cults over the last few decades.

It has long been established that things believed and acted upon as true have real consequences, whether they are true or not in some ultimate sense. Understanding religious perspectives, however different from our own, is another tool for effectively interacting with those whose religiously based views provide them with meaning, security, and mastery. Theory, empirically supported, ought properly to dominate the future of the psychology of religion and spirituality. Psychology is itself a product of culture, and as we remember the events of September 11, 2001, we remain keenly aware that we are North American psychologists who desire greater illumination of religious and spiritual phenomena—phenomena that with our current knowledge can be seen only “through a glass darkly.”

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