Religion and Family Research in the Twenty-First Century

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In the first *Handbook of Marriage and the Family by Harold Christensen* (1964), "religion" or "religion and family" is indexed only six times, though admittedly, these were early days for the study of religion and family. Herberg's (1955) *Protestant, Catholic, and Jew* had been available for less than a decade and Lenski's (1961) *The Religious Factor* had only recently been published. Thomas Luckmann had not yet published *The Invisible Religion*: *The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (1967) and Berger had not published *The Sacred Canopy* (1967).

The first edition of this version of the *Handbook* (Sussman & Steinmetz, 1987) included a full chapter on family and religion (Marciano, 1987). Although little research was available at this time (see the exception, D'Antonio & Aldous, 1983), Marciano laid down the foundations, specifying issues that required the attention of religion and family scholars: secularization, individualism, and the transmission of religion across generations, women and the ministry, as well as sexuality. Two decades later, scholarly interest in religion and family linkages had grown; the chapter included in the second edition of the *Handbook* began with secularization and then explored the impact of religion on premarital sex and cohabitation, age at marriage, fertility and contraception, abortion, gender roles, childrearing, marital quality, and divorce (Wittberg, 1999). Even so, the field was still in its infancy (Heaton & Cornwall, 1989; Thomas, 1988; Thomas & Cornwall, 1990).

At the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century, however, the scholarship on religion and family is now well established. Since the new century began several handbooks have been published by sociology of religion scholars (Beckford & Demerath, 2007; Clarke, 2009; Dillon, 2003; Ebaugh, 2005; Fenn, 2001), each with a chapter on some aspect of family, such as (1) the paradox of gender relations among Pentecostals (Martin, 2001), (2) religious socialization (Bartkowski, 2007; Sherkat, 2003), (3) the interdependence of religion/family vitality (Wilcox, 2005), (4) life course, cohort, and generational change in American spirituality and religion (Dillon, 2007; Roof, 2009), or (5) the accommodation of congregations to new family forms (Edgell, 2003, 2009). The family and religion factor has also been explored in edited volumes and handbooks on marriage and the family with chapters on (1) religion and family change in diverse cultural contexts (Houseknecht & Pankhurst, 2000a), (2) Muslim families in the United States (Sherif-Trask, 2004), (3) religion and family practices in diverse communities (Dollahite, Marks, & Goodman, 2004), (4) religion, romantic love, and the family (Turner, 2007), family values in American life (Tipton & Witte, 2005), as well as (5) a summary of the current religion and family research (Chatters & Taylor, 2005). Among the many handbooks

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published in the last decade, only Demo, Allen, and Fine neglected religion in their *Handbook of Family Diversity* (2000). Spiritual development also has been added to the study of marriage and parenting (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005), to childhood and adolescent development (Boyatzis, 2005; Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006), and to the study of emerging adults (Dillon, 2007; Levenson, Aldwin, & D'Mello, 2005).

Attempting a summary of the full spectrum of studies of religion and family in the current literature is a herculean feat. The research covers a full range of analysis from *institutional changes* (e.g., linkages between the institutions of religion and family) to *organizational relations and effects* (e.g., denominational studies, congregations, and social movements) to *micro-level analyses* of religion's influence on family behavior (e.g., child and youth socialization, marriage, divorce, infidelity, fertility, and sexuality). In adopting a multi-level approach, what follows is not only an effort to describe the essentials of the current literature on religion and family. Instead, the purpose is also to highlight the need for a multi-level analysis of religion and family that takes into account institutional and organizational change and a more theoretically focused consideration of the associations involving religious affiliation, participation, and practice with family behaviors. The chapter concludes with a discussion of four nagging problems in the study of religion and family: (1) the adequacy of current methodologies used to assess religion and family practice (e.g., the continuing predominance of cross-sectional studies and global measures of religiosity), (2) attention to the size of statistical effects, (3) assertions of causality based on measures of association with little regard to the possibility of reverse causality or third variable effects, and (4) theorizing about causal mechanisms with little regard for the tendencies toward what Chaves has labeled "the religious congruency fallacy" (2010).

Religion and Family Linkages

In a recent summary of religion's influence on family life, Chatters and Taylor (2005) recount current thinking about the linkage between religion and family. Religion is a source of social control, proscribing unacceptable behaviors and promoting practices that are conducive to family solidarity and marital communication. Religion provides a framework of beliefs and practices that reinforce family life and family identities and a meaning system that sustains care work. Through religious commitment, a system of support via belief systems and religious associations provides a source of positive hope, optimism, and empowerment. Others note that both religion and family are important locations for acquiring values, maintaining companionship and support, and finding meaning. Religious rituals mark family events, create solidarity among family members, and establishes individual identities within religious traditions and families (Christiano, 2000). The intergenerational transmission of religious beliefs primarily occurs within families (Bartkowski, 2007; Sherkat, 2003) and marriages benefit from the resources and support of religious communities and their teachings (Dollahite et al., 2004). Moreover, the local congregation is an important source of understandings about "what is good, moral, and appropriate in family life" (Edgell, 2006). Much of this literature assumes that religion is a stable institutional force that provides individuals with useful social and psychological resources.

Identifying the mechanisms by which these social and psychological resources function, Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, and Swank (2001) suggested that religion's impact on family life operates via social and psychological processes that are either independent of religious content (*functional elements*) or embedded within religious content—beliefs and practices (*substantive elements*). But they also note that religion may be maladaptive because religiously prescribed beliefs, practices, and roles can be harmful. They call for a conceptual framework that understands religion as "a rich set of theologically grounded beliefs or practices that may help or harm family functioning in unique ways, and religion as a source of generic psychosocial functions that lead to positive or negative outcomes" (p. 586).

As a follow-up to Mahoney et al. (2001), studies now explore the effects of parental, marital, and

familial sanctification (Baker, Sanchez, Nock, & Wright, 2009; Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). In a series of small N studies, Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, and Murray-Swank (2003) conclude that many couples believe God is active in their lives and that the sanctification of parenting is associated with more positive parental practices (e.g., less verbal aggression and corporal punishment). Bartkowski, Xu, and Levin (2007) examined the sanctification thesis using data from the 2000 wave of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. They reported that parental religiosity, religious homogamy, and the family religious environment (indicators of family sanctification) were associated with the development of pro-social behavior in children. However, when religion was a source of conflict in the home, a child's development could be undermined and, in some situations, family functioning may be harmed. Examples of such harm include when faith creates a divide between adolescents and parents (Stokes & Regnerus, 2008), when pain and loss of self comes after divorce (Jenkins, 2010), when individuals violate sacred trusts, and when chronic conflict occurs as a result of disagreements about religious precepts (Mahoney et al., 2003).

There is growing evidence of the maladaptive potential of religion: fundamentalist driven terrorism, the potential for domestic abuse (Ellison & Anderson, 2001; Lehrer, Lehrer, & Krauss, 2009; Nason-Clark, 1997), or the failures of institutionalized religion to control the sexual behaviors of individuals in authority (e. g. Chaves & Garland, 2009) and respond to domestic violence (Kroeger, Nason-Clark, & Fisher-Townsend, 2008). But research on religion and family has been primarily focused on the adaptive functions and positive outcomes of religion rather than these negative aspects.

Scholars who study micro-level effects of religion on family life tend toward an understanding of religion and religious institutions as stable social phenomenon, ignoring the macro-level changes that affect both religion and the family (Coleman, 1993; Houseknecht & Pankhurst, 2000b). For example, D'Antonio, Newman, and Wright (1982), conceptualized two social mechanisms by which religion influenced family life: *control* and *social support*. Control involves such issues as the regulation of fertility, cohabitation, as well as premarital and extramarital sex. Social support takes the form of familial love, family solidarity, self-esteem, marital stability, marital satisfaction, and family values/meanings. In fact, religious institutions themselves have changed substantially. Examples include the fact that the majority of Protestant denominations now ordain women as priests (Chaves, 1997), gender role attitudes in the United States have changed dramatically across *all* denominations since 1970, and some religious congregations welcome gay and lesbian congregants. To more fully theorize the causal linkages between religion and family, scholars need to pay more attention to what is known about institutional level change.

Religion, Family, and Institutional Change

The dominant paradigms in the study of religion (secularization) and family (modernization) draw upon functionalist and institutionalist accounts of differentiation and complexity (Durkheim). These paradigms explore themes of rationality and "disenchantment" in reference to modern life (Weber). Important emphasis has been placed on the transition from kinship-based (*Gemeinschaft*) relationships to market-based relationships and the emergence of the state and civil society (*Gesellschaft*) (Tönnies).

Secularization

Secularization has been variously conceptualized as the privatization of religion (Berger, 1967), the decline of individual piety and religiosity (Shiner, 1967; Swatos & Christiano, 1999), or religion's loss of regulatory power over other societal subsystems (Chaves, 1994). It is most typically conceptualized as occurring at three distinct levels—institutional, organizational, and individual (Dobbelaere, 2002). For example, Dobbelaere (2009) defines secularization as a process "by which overarching and transcendent religious systems of old are confined in modern

functionally differentiated societies to a subsystem alongside other subsystems, losing in this process their overarching claims over these other subsystems" (p. 600). Those who subscribe to the secularization thesis focus on the separation of religion from other institutions and the loss of hegemony as other institutional arrangements emerge—education, labor markets, civic and political organizations, law, science and technology (Bruce, 1992; Wilson, 1966, 1976). Despite contestations that secularization is a failed theory (Stark, 1999; see also Stark & Bainbridge, 1985), scholars continue to theorize social change in the religious sphere. Challenges to secularization include strictness theory (Iannaccone, 1994; Kelley, 1972) and supply-side or religious economy models (Brewer, Jozefowicz, & Stonebraker, 2006; Chaves & Gorski, 2001; Finke & Stark, 1998; Finke & Stark, 2003; Hill & Olson, 2009; Stark & Finke, 2000). Supply-side or religious economy models are based on the premise that the demand for religion is relatively constant, but that the supply varies. The focus is on religion as a marketplace, with churches and congregations being more vital to the extent that they compete for customers. Religious decline can be explained in part by the development of "lazy monopolies."

Gorski and Altinordu (2008) most recently called for a strategy that would "invoke [secularization] less and use more analytically specific, and less politically laden, concepts whenever possible." At the very least, secularization should be treated as an analytical variable—specifically defined and explained by other concepts or social mechanisms. Secularization should not be invoked, they argue, as "both explanans and explanandum" (p. 75). Three biases make theorizing and empirically testing secularization theories difficult (see Gorski & Altinordu, 2008): (1) *modernism* or the tendency to assume the existence of a pre-modern golden age of faith and that contemporary religious observance is the result of modern transformations; (2) *pastoralism* or the tendency to use church attendance, belief in God and life after death, and other "priestly standards" as indicators of true religion; (3) *methodologism* or the tendency to select research questions on the basis of available data and select methods. That is, because the available data taps measures of individual religiosity much of the research has focused here, but other processes must be examined as well.

Contrary to secularist explanations, there is little *empirical* support for a consistent downward trend of religion in modern society. The growth of fundamentalism around the world is well documented (Marty & Appleby, 1993) and several scholars provide evidence that, despite the decline of some religious groups, religious identities continue to be created and sustained in the modern world (Berman, 2009; Konieczny, 2009; Sands, 2009). The growth of conservative churches (Perrin, Kennedy, & Miller, 1997) and, more recently, the mega church (Ellington, 2007; Thumma & Travis, 2007) and emerging church (Wellman, 2008) phenomena in the United States are indicators of religious vitality. Casanova (1994) provides evidence of the *de*privatization of religion in some regional contexts (see Achterberg et al., 2009 for more recent evidence in European countries).

The spread of a post-Christian spirituality has accompanied the decline of religious participation in Europe (Houtman & Aupers, 2007). New Age, a religious movement that emphasizes getting in touch with one's true or deeper self in the long-term process of personal growth, may be replacing traditional forms of religion in Europe and elsewhere (Heelas, 2008). The lack of religious participation and/or affiliation may not mean that people are becoming less religious. Davie (1994) has described religiosity among the English as a "believing without belonging," whereas, Voas (2009) has coined the term "fuzzy fidelity" to label European religiosity. Other scholars such as Storm (2009), building on the work of Voas (2009), identified four types of "fuzzy fidelity," the prevalence of which varies by nation. Examples of fuzzy fidelity included that a sizable minority of the Dutch population believe without belonging and that Scandinavians are more likely to belong without believing.

Religious change may be a function of the religious proclivity of individuals or a response to changes at the institutional and organizational levels of society. This may include such examples of changes as period effects as well as age and cohort effects. Thus, assumptions of an era gone by characterized by universal faith and a powerful centralized religious authority which has given way to secular organizations, disinterest, and apostasy of individuals are difficult to test empirically, especially when normative and coercive mechanisms have limited individual opportunity and choice in different ways over time. Even so, available data raise important questions about the impact of family and social change on religious vitality. Wuthnow (2007), for example, argues that delayed marriage, lower fertility, economic uncertainties, the need for greater investment in higher education, the loss of community, globalization, and development of new media may be influencing how the children of the baby boomers view and participate in religion. While the religious participation of married couples did not decline between the baby boomer generation and their children's generation, religious service attendance did decline for single adults and the divorced. If religion is a "family affair" how do congregations accommodate those who do not fit the traditional family model (Edgell, 2006)?

However, there is evidence of increasing numbers of people who claim no religion, both in the United States (Glenn, 1987; Hout & Fischer, 2002) and in Europe (Houtman & Aupers, 2007). Between 1991 and 2010, the proportion of adults claiming no religion more than doubled from 7 to 16% in the United States (Schwadel, 2010). Some of the increase may be due to children being raised with no religion and some may also be accounted for by delayed marriage and parenthood. Most individuals reporting no religious preference hold on to conventional religious beliefs and the unchurched believer contributed most to the increase in numbers with no religion. More significantly, political moderates and liberals were more likely to become religious "nones" in response to the politicization of religion during the late 1980s and 1990s (Hout & Fischer, 2002).[1] Schwadel's (2010) analysis of cohort and period effects is consistent with the Hout and Fischer research. However, his findings also suggest that the growth in religious "nones" in younger cohorts may result from children being raised with no religious preference, rather than from disaffiliation.

Modernization

Other chapters in this *Handbook* detail more fully the scholarly exchanges about modernization, individualism, and individuation as a social process. The dominant paradigm concerns itself with many of the same social processes reflected in standard secularization theories—functional differentiation and the emergence of alternative subsystems which challenge the power and control of kinship/family systems (e.g., the state, law, education, the market economy). According to the writings of twentieth century family scholars industrialization modified family relationships (Smelser, 1959). With the deepening of capitalism and the expansion of market-based exchange, production shifted away from the household (Clark, 1990). Modernization processes (industrialization and urbanization) encouraged the development of new family forms—nuclear (Murdock, 1949) and conjugal families (Goode, 1963) freed from the restrictions of kin and

[1]Much of the available research is focused on Western societies and within the Christian tradition, particularly among various Protestant denominations—most recently Evangelicals have been the primary focus—and Catholics. The vitality of other religious groups such as the Seventh Day Adventists, Pentecostals, and the Latter-day Saints is more difficult to assess simply because their adherents are underrepresented in large scale surveys. Latter-day Saints represent less than 2% of the US population, as do Jews. A variety of religious groups are neglected because of insufficient data. Information about adherents of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam is also lacking. See Gorski and Altinordu (2008) for a brief and useful accounting of secularization or the lack thereof in the Middle East. See Sherif-Trask (2004) for an analysis of Muslim families in the United States.

extended family. More companionate forms of marital relationships emerged (Burgess, 1963; Burgess & Locke, 1960). As the modern democratic state developed, it began regulating marriage and divorce (Cott, 2000), instituted public education in industrialized countries (Meyer, Ramirez, & Soysal, 1992), and became responsible for protecting the "best interests of the child" (Friedman, 1995). Much of the family literature continues to focus on women's rapid movement into the labor force after World War II and the rise of mid-twentieth century social movements—particularly the feminist movement—as the beginnings of dramatic changes in family life (Popenoe, 1993). But such assumptions have long since been dispelled as reflecting the experience of middle class white women, historically a small percentage of the population. Black women and working-class immigrant women were being drawn into the industrializing labor force as early as the 1870s (Goldin, 1990). There is growing evidence that much of the social change that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s as women moved into the labor force had less to do with the women's movement and a great deal more to do with technological and economic change (Goldin, 1990; Thistle, 2006).

The family decline debate exploded in the 1990s (Popenoe, 1993). Demographers documented the markers of family decline: divorce, growing numbers of out of wedlock births, a declining proportion of traditional two-parent family households and the increase in single parent family households, growing numbers of mother's in the labor force, delayed marriage and fertility, and cohabitation (Moynihan, Smeeding, & Rainwater, 2004). Lesthaeghe and Neidert (2006) described a second demographic transition spreading across Europe and has since argued that similar trends can be found in the United States. Cherlin (2004) now describes the deinstitutionalization of marriage, and in the tradition of Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2000), Amato (2007) considers modern marriages as "alone together" partnerships.

Feminists like Stacey (1990) offered evidence of accommodation rather than decline, whereas, Coontz (1992, 1997, 2005) argued that the family decline literature was built on assumptions of a golden era of family life that never really existed. Family scholars remain highly focused, however, on factors that threaten family life, especially as it relates to premarital sex, cohabitation, divorce, and child outcomes (see, e.g., Treas, 2002). But there are signs that family life remains highly valued, as suggested by the marketized reproductive strategies of adoption, in vitro fertilization, surrogate mothering, and sperm and egg donation (Spar, 2006; Zelizer, 1994). While childless rates may be on the rise, so are the number of in vitro cycles performed each year; the frequency of multiple births is also up, a result of successful in vitro cycles. Surrogacy is now a legitimate strategy for family formation (Markens, 2007).

An emerging paradigm focuses less on family decline and more on the increasingly risk-laden world families now confront. The "third industrialization" presents individuals and families with greater economic insecurities (Townsend, 2002). Institutionalized individualism requires much of the individual in the way of creating the self through participation in highly differentiated institutions—the labor market, the state, complex legal systems that regulate citizenship rights and responsibilities, lengthy training in systems of higher education, and welfare systems. In all of this, the individual must manage his or her own family ties and kin relations (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

But the debate about the well-being of traditional family life suffers from some of the same problems as the debate about the decline of religion in modern society: (1) *modernism or* the tendency to assume the existence of a pre-modern golden age when family life and family relations were more valued and fundamental; (2) *nuclear familialism*[2] or the tendency to define and

[2]Nuclear familialism ignores the importance of adult sibling relationships, extended family relations, relations between parents and their adult children who may live in another residence but continue to have frequent contact with one another, and the private economic transfers and exchanges between adult children and their parents.

measure family relations based on the nuclear family model, a modern invention itself. This model, in turn, not only constrains the definition of family to husband/wife/child relationships, but also restricts the definition of family to residency in the same household; and (3) *methodologism* or the tendency to select research questions on the basis of data and methods available from large scale demographic surveys. Families are indeed undergoing rapid social change—sufficiently so that Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2004) describe it as a "runaway world." But the problem is not only the variety and rapidity of change, but also the "difficulty of stabilizing elementary concepts and definitions because, in a runaway world, the basic categories themselves become unclear and unfocused" (p. 499).

Theorizing Religion and Family Linkages

Institutional Forms and Social Change

Scholars of religion and family have been quick to identify linkages between religion and family, generally assuming a mutually supportive relationship. Most obvious, perhaps, Abrahamic religious traditions draw heavily on images of family and family relationships (Turner, 2007). Religion has been the source of prescriptions about family life, sexuality, sexual division of labor, and male authority in the public and private spheres. As institutional forms, religion and family share overlapping responsibilities for the socialization of children, not only within families but within religious communities. Gallagher (2006) found "children themselves [to be] a religious resource whose presence in worship, service, and discourse help to create and maintain a sense of identity, place, and meaning in the lives of worshiping adults" (p. 182). Religious teachings emphasize the expectations that devotees will care for the indigent and the poor. The intergenerational nature of family life—birth, life course transitions, and death—is entwined within religious ritual, binding individuals at the micro-level, as well as reinforcing institutional processes.[3]

The family and religion linkage is also apparent in the way some scholars describe modern modes of living. Family scholars find a greater emphasis on companionship and romantic love in the modern context (Amato, 2007; Coontz, 2005), religion scholars note a shift in religious imagery "away from sin, punishment, and damnation, toward a God who is, above all, the source of something like Abraham Maslow's 'unconditional positive regard'" (Swidler, 2002:41; see also Bellah, 1996). Both Swidler (2002) and Wuthnow (1998) suggest that the complexity of the new interinstitutional order has presented problems for individuals. In response, individuals have constituted new religious meanings; "… what people seek from religion is less salvation from sinfulness than help in recuperation" (Swidler, 2002:43). Smith and Denton describe a new religious orientation in American adolescents which they label as Moralistic Therapeutic Diesm—a feel good, happy, and secure feeling, a sense of being at peace. God helps a person to succeed in life, helps them feel good and get along with others (Smith & Denton, 2005:163–169).

Wuthnow draws an account of American religion in the 1950s as a "spirituality of dwelling." "A spirituality of home implied warmth and fellowship, indeed, unconditional acceptance, expressed in godly abundance by fellow inhabitations…" (1998:34). But, he suggests, this spirituality of dwelling is soon replaced with a spirituality of seeking, a spirituality more consistent with a mobile and voluntaristic society where individuals are less reliant on place and less intent on permanent investments. They concentrate instead on information flows readily available to help with "particular needs they have at the moment" (p. 7).

[3] In the summer of 2009, the contrasting public memorials for Michael Jackson (music icon) and Senator Edward M. Kennedy demonstrated the continuing significance of religious ritual in the social construction of family and friendship relations.

Religious Organizations as Agents of Change

Lenski's *Religious Factor* (1961) is a classic in the study of religion and family life. He provided empirical evidence that white Protestants valued kinships ties less than white Catholics (black Protestants valuing of kinship ties was intermediate between white Protestants and Catholics). Middle-class Protestants visited their relatives less often that working-class Protestants and white Protestant church goers were more likely to exhibit an extra-familial orientation—it was the active church goers who valued family ties less and this was associated with their greater involvement in voluntary associations.

Since Lenski's time, research at the denominational and organizational level of analysis has flourished in the social scientific study of religion. Whether the analysis has centered on religious traditions (Hefner, 2009), denominations (Ammerman, 1987; Smith, 1998), congregations (Ammerman, 2005; Becker, 1999; Chaves, 2004; Edgell, 2006; Gilkes, 1998), social movements (Bartkowski, 2004; Cadge & Wildeman, 2008) or counter movements (Bartkowski, 1997; Wilcox, 2004), religion scholars have documented the emergence of organizational niches, new organizational forms, and congregational accommodation to changing family forms (Edgell, 2006). Three paradigms dominate: religion as a marketplace, organizational accommodation, and denominational subcultures.

Religion as marketplace. Religion, particularly religion in the United States and Canada, operates as an open market. Religious groups compete for adherents and for the resources of individuals and families. The competition is among religious groups as well as with other cultural institutions (Finke & Stark, 1992; Iannaccone, 1994; Sherkat & Wilson, 1995; Warner, 1993). Religious pluralism is not, as it turns out, positively associated with religious participation (Chaves & Gorski, 2001), but conceptualizing religion in the modern context as an open market has been useful for understanding other religious dynamics. Religious switching has become a common practice, especially among Protestants, but even to a certain extent among Catholics, Jews, and Latter-day Saints (Sherkat & Wilson, 1995; Smith & Sikkink, 2003). One consequence for families is that most families and kin networks are now interreligious or interdenominational. Consequently, Americans are much less likely to believe that only people who belong to their particular religious tradition will go to heaven (Wuthnow, 2010). Whether or not an open religious marketplace contributes to the vitality of religious organizations, pluralism and the associated tendency for people to switch religions may have unintended consequences for doctrines built on theological exclusivity.

Organizational accomodation. In a pluralistic religious system, religious traditions, denominations, and congregations position themselves relative to others in the same organizational field. These religious organizations vary both in terms of the existence of a centralized authority and degree of centralized control over organizational resources (Chaves, 1993, 1997). Chaves (1997) demonstrated that the decision to ordain women is best explained by cultural and environmental factors (e.g., pressures from other "like" organizations), the degree of centralization, and the presence or absence of an autonomous women's mission society.

Religious organizations also vary with regards to their position on family values (e.g., cohabitation, divorce, premarital sex, and homosexuality). For example, Roof and McKinney (1987) reported that Catholics had accommodated to the center of the American political debate and that Protestant denominations had variously situated themselves in the debate about family values. Liberal protestants (Episcopalians, the United Church of Christ, and Presbyterians) were more accepting of women's rights and the "new morality" (abortion, extramarital sex, premarital sex, homosexuality, divorce, and marijuana use) than moderate and conservative groups.

Recent research on congregational and denominational accommodation to gay and lesbian activism indicates that accommodation is linked to whether issues are defined as moral or political,

the response of clergy, and the presence of interdenominational coalitions and special interest groups (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Cadge & Wildeman, 2008; van Geest, 2007).

Edgell (2006) studied the integration of religion, family, and work in four US communities. These communities were more heavily Catholic and mainline Protestant than the national average, but nonetheless, findings offer a useful exploration of accommodation to family and employment models. She identifies taken-for-granted "good family" models that serve as powerful family schemas and religious involvement styles. The family-oriented religious involvement style is common among conservative Protestants and Catholics and is associated with more conservative gender role attitudes and work-family arrangements. The self-oriented religious involvement style "displaces family life from the center of religious commitment" and is practiced by people in a wider range of family forms (single and married, with or without children). This style "is rooted in a particular lifestyle and associated with egalitarian beliefs, a distrust of publicly involved religious institutions and leaders, and an understanding of work-family management as a public issue that ought to be facilitated by the state and by business" (p. 150–151). While the family-oriented schema emphasizes obedience and authority in raising children, and draws upon a language of families as "broken" and homosexuals as "sinners," the self-oriented style draws upon a language of social justice to both critique the gender order and include lesbian and gay members in their congregations. Thus across congregations, she finds different ways of "thinking about the public or private nature of religion and the family" (p. 152).

Denominational subcultures. Roof and McKinney (1987) demonstrated what scholars came to assume were "subcultural" denominational differences. However, Gay, Ellison, and Powers (1996) called this into question by looking more closely at intragroup homogeneity as well as differences in central tendency. They found that Episcopalians, Jews, and the "unaffiliated" were not only more liberal, they were uniformly liberal on three pro-family issues: gender roles, abortion, and premarital sexuality. Because this uniformity was found net of education levels, affluence, and urban living, they concluded a subculture of liberalism was evident. But more importantly, they found a great deal more heterogeneity among conservative protestant groups and suggested two transformative processes: a selective accommodation to the social and political environment and the possibility of generational change as suggested by younger cohorts of evangelicals with more flexible theological and social values. More recently, however, Smith and Johnson (2010) report that although young Evangelicals are more concerned about the environment than older Evangelicals, there is no evidence that younger Evangelicals hold significantly different views than older Evangelicals on abortion, same-sex marriage, stem cell research, marijuana use, government welfare spending, spending on the nation's health, or the war in Iraq. In another study, Farrell (2011) finds that compared to older Evangelicals, young Evangelicals *are* more likely to report liberal attitudes regarding same-sex marriage, premarital sex, cohabiting, and pornography, but not abortion. Educational attainment, delayed marriage, and shifts in moral authority among emerging adults account for much of the difference.

Indeed, research has examined subcultural groups *within* several religious traditions and denominations. Such studies have been conducted on women's market behavior following marriage and childbirth (Glass & Nath, 2006), headship discourse among evangelicals (Bartkowski, 1997), conflicts over gender ideology among evangelical Christian and Catholic women (Hunt, 2009; Ingersoll, 2003), and the response of mainline protestant clergy to homosexuality (Cadge & Wildeman, 2008; McQueeney, 2009). Despite the existence of these sometimes embattled subcultures within denominations, Gallagher's (2003) study of evangelical Christians demonstrates that "some cultural tools have remarkable staying power" (p. 178) because they are useful. For example, husband's headship may eventually fade, she predicts, but there are other tools that are available to reinforce and bring stability to

traditional family ideals: partnership, individual gifts, and mutual respect. History and tradition, she argues are available for elaboration in a way that often reinforces rather than reforms.

Religion and Family at the Individual Level

A large literature now exists demonstrating the effects of religious factors on family life including research on timing of first marriage (Eggebeen & Dew, 2009; Xu, Hudspeth, & Bartkowski, 2005), marital stability (Call & Heaton, 1997), gender negotiations in marriage (Bartkowski, 2001), variations in marital infidelity (Burdette, Ellison, Sherkat, & Gore, 2007), child development (Bartkowski et al., 2007), adolescent sexual values and practices (Regnerus, 2007), family processes (Dollahite & Marks, 2009), and cohabitation (Thornton, Axinn, & Xie, 2007). While most micro-level studies of religion and family posit an influence of religion on family life, some studies explore the influence of family life on religion. At the very least, familial practices have been found to reinforce religious identities (Berman, 2009) and the material culture of homes reinforces religious identities and allows for the individual expression of religious selves (Konieczny, 2009). Religious socialization influences the religious choices and practices of youth (Martin, White, & Perlman, 2003). On the one hand, parental influence may channel adolescents into peer networks and adult relationships that reinforce family religious values (Cornwall, 1988; Erickson, 1992; Himmelfarb, 1980). Or, as Iannaccone (1990) posits, religious capital is accumulated during childhood as a result of family religious practices. In devout, stable, and harmonious households, the socialization of children is a primary focus and family religious practice encourages the development of religious capital.

Using pooled data collected from the children of NLSLY79 mothers for the years 1988 and 2004, Petts (2009) examined the religious participation trajectories of youth and young adults, identifying six distinct participation trajectories. While he found evidence of declining participation during adolescence and into young adulthood, 30% were either *always* nonattenders (7%) or *only occasional* attenders (23%) throughout the study period. The study also highlights the importance of life events in altering trajectories. For example, "individuals following a trajectory of low religious participation (i.e., early declining attenders) are more likely to marry a spouse with no religious affiliation, and therefore may not increase their religious participation after marriage" (p. 567). Moreover, these youth may be relatively invisible to religious organizations and receive little or no encouragement to participate.

In a study of the sexual behavior of teenagers, Regnerus (2007) argues that we may be overestimating the force of denominational identity, emphasizing that teens must also be embedded in a "network of like-minded friends, family, and authorities" (pp. 203–204). Studies of religious participation among college students (Hill, 2009) and "hooking up" in college (Burdette, Ellison, Hill, & Glenn, 2009), demonstrate a complex pattern of religious development involving not only degree of religious socialization, but also whether one attends college and whether the college is religiously affiliated. In their study of the timing of first marriage, Eggebeen and Dew (2009) conclude that "the linkage between choices about forming intimate unions and religious identity, behavior, and belief is more complex, subtle, and probably dynamic than as is often portrayed…. Understanding the role of religion in the lives of young adults will require a careful examination of the form and structure of changing religious beliefs and behavior over this developmental period" (p. 119).

Nagging Problems in the Study of Religion and Family Effects

Micro-level studies predominate in the literature and the same limitations apply to micro-level studies as to the macro-level theories of social change—the lack of good empirical evidence. Four nagging problems must be addressed: (1) the adequacy of current methodologies, (2) attention to the size of statistical effects, (3) assertions of causality, and (4) theorizing the causal mechanisms.

Adequacy of current methodologies. Much of the published research is based on large N, cross-sectional studies utilizing standard measures of religiosity and self-reports of family behaviors. The available panel studies go a long way in providing better data (e.g., Add Health, NLSY79, NLSY97, and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, for example[4]), but these studies use measures based on "priestly standards of good or true religion," for example, what Gorski and Altinordu (2008) call *pastoralism*. In large scale surveys, the measures of religiosity are typically limited to affiliation, participation, identity, salience, beliefs, and frequency of prayer. Use of affiliation as a marker of religiosity has over-emphasized the Evangelical experience in the United States. Moreover, too much emphasis has been placed on biblical literalism as a marker of religiousness. Finally, there appears to be a significant amount of "noise" in indicators of religious participation (Hadaway & Marler, 2005; Hadaway, Marler, & Chaves, 1998) as well as the "no religion" category (Baker & Smith, 2009; Voas, 2009). Moreover, at least some of the unchurched believers are unchurched in reaction to the politicizing of the religious sphere (Pew Research Center, 2006). Miller and Hoffmann (1999) have suggested that the alignment of the political and religious have created new social constructions of "liberal" and "conservative."

What alternative measures might be considered? Starks and Robinson (2009) offer one example in testing the effects of a subcultural identity and moral cosmology (beliefs) on family-related political attitudes (Starks & Robinson, 2009). Subcultural identity theory is based on Berger's *Sacred Canopy* (1967). Small communities or "sacred umbrellas" allow people "to develop identity spaces associated with their own vocabulary, expectations, and leaders, where like-minded people can engage in meaning construction for the subcommunity" (Starks & Robinson, 2009, p. 652). Family values are maintained and reinforced by membership within "sacred umbrellas" or religious communities. Moral cosmology theory "assumes that people differ in their beliefs regarding the locus of moral authority and that these differences have consequences for their politics" (p. 651). The moral cosmology index includes an item regarding the belief that the Bible is inerrant, but in addition, respondents respond to a second (I believe in a God who watches over me) and third item (follow faithfully the teachings of [my] church or synagogue). The religiously orthodox rest their political positions on a God-centered moral universe. By comparison, modernists are individualist both in determining their moral codes and their libertarianness. Among self-identified Protestants and Catholics, moral cosmology beliefs and a subcultural identity independently influence family-related political attitudes (views about abortion and homosexual relations). Rather than use measures of a specific set of religious beliefs about God, the divinity of Christ, the devil, heaven, and hell, Starks and Robinson attempt to contrast "the absolute, timeless moral standards and God-directed universe of the orthodox with the contextualized ethics and individually determined fates of modernists" (p. 655).

Similarly, Hall, Koenig, and Meador (2008) challenge current approaches by suggesting more attention to "secularism." Rather than seek for better measures of religiosity, scholars may want to attempt to conceptualize and measure secular world views. Hall et al., theorize that rather than attempt to measure the advantage of religion for, in this case, health status, scholars might more appropriately focus on "a small, robust health liability associated with a deliberate secular world view" (p. 368). The implication, of course, for family scholars is that rather than study religious families and their world view in isolation, comparative research on religious families and "secular" families are needed as well.

The size of statistical effects. Ziliak and McCloskey (2008) remind scholars that statistical significance is not the standard that should be used in social science research, rather more attention must be given to the size and power of the effect. A meta-analysis of studies examining the effect of religion on marital and family domains

[4]Two recent large scale studies of religion will help to alleviate the paucity of adequate measures. The three-wave National Study of Youth and Religion and the still-in-process Panel Study of American Religion and Ethnicity.

(Mahoney et al., 2001) found the average effect size was small ($rs = 0.07–0.20$), but the authors argued the effect sizes were as "impressive as the predictive power of other global risk factors of child or family problems…" (p. 584). In a study of religion and domestic violence, Ellison and Anderson (2001) report "regular attendance at religious services bears a strong and statistically significant inverse association with the perpetration of domestic abuse" (p. 276). Partner report of domestic violence is 49% less likely for men who attend weekly or more; among women, partner report of domestic violence is 35% less likely. These "robust" results remained despite the inclusion of variables measuring social integration and support, alcohol and drug abuse, and psychological problems such as depression and low self-esteem. In a study of religious variations in marital infidelity, Burdette et al. (2007) report "robust" effects of religion (affiliation, involvement, and beliefs), which reduced the odds of infidelity by between 31 and 37% (depending upon affiliation), 66% for persons attending services several times per week, and 28% for those who regard the Bible as the Word of God. Once church attendance and religious beliefs are included in the model, religious affiliation is no longer significant. These studies advance our knowledge of religion and family life to the extent that they demonstrate an association between religious affiliation, attendance, and belief and the dependent variables. However, "robustness" is not constituted theoretically, but statistically. The effects are "robust" because they do not disappear once other factors are entered into the model. Theoretically, what might be considered a robust effect of religiosity on marital satisfaction, domestic violence, or infidelity? Moreover, what might be considered a robust effect of religiosity for at risk groups they identify such as the divorced, those employed full time, men, or different racial groups?

Assertions of causality. Religion and family scholars may be too quick to attribute causality. Take, for example, Mahoney et al.'s (2001) meta-analysis of the marital domain. Substantive (beliefs, teachings, the sanctification of marriage, mutual engagement in religious activities, cognitive and behavioral resources to cope with marital difficulties and stressors) and functional (religious networks) mechanisms influence marital quality and reduce the likelihood of divorce. More recently they have theorized that the sanctification of family relationships will promote better marriage and parent–child relationships or as a possible source of conflict (Mahoney et al., 2003). Sanctification may indeed be one of the causal mechanisms that links religion and family practices, but is this a causal effect? Given that sanctification is itself a religious process, is sanctification a unique construct, or a consequential dimension of religiosity. What are the alternative processes by which families create unity and a confluence of worldviews amongst family members? What do "secular" families do to constitute positive familial relationships? The question, therefore, is not the effect of more or less sanctification, but the influence of sanctification and other similar, but secular, processes.

Most scholars readily admit the likelihood of reverse causality. Such admissions appear in the limitations section of published research, but few are willing to consider third variable or even unmeasured effects. One might posit, for example, that couples in homogenous marriages come from similar cultural backgrounds that facilitate greater marital functioning. In the modern context individuals self select into *both* religious participation *and* marriage. What are the mechanisms that account for this self-selection? Moreover, not enough has been done to test the assumption that religious congruity has a fundamentally distinct effect on the marital domain that is different from congruity derived from participation in political or voluntary organizations, or family-based recreational activities. Family identities may be created and reinforced via religion-based mechanisms (e.g., sanctification), or via participation in other activities, organizations, or occupations. No studies have attempted to differentiate between alternative sources of family identity or to test for a uniquely distinct effect of religious-based congruity.

A case can be made for more interpretive analyses of religion and family. For example,

Edgell (2006) suggests religious involvement "is mediated by the interpretive frameworks that individuals bring to bear in understanding the meaning of religious involvement and the cultural schemas that determine how religion fits—or does not fit—with other aspects of adult lives, including work and family." Thus religion and the religious influence on family life cannot be successfully studied if isolated from the social contexts that draw on people's time and energy and that help to establish identities, religious or otherwise.

Causal Mechanisms. Primarily as a response to the limits of positivist empiricism, some sociologists and philosophers have begun to call for a more specific focus on causal mechanisms (Archer, 1995; Gorski, 2009; Sayer, 1992, 2000).[5] As suggested throughout this paper, family and religion scholars have been mindful of the need to specify causal mechanisms—or to provide both the explanandum (religion and family linkages) and the explanans (the reason for these linkages are rooted in …). So far, despite available research, the explanans is lacking. As suggested here, the list of mechanisms by which religion might influence family life has been well articulated: social control and support; religious values, "good family" models, sanctification, the force of religious identities, etc. However, for the most part, empirical tests of these effects have ultimately rested upon standard measures of religious affiliation, involvement, and belief. In any study of the effects of religion on family life (or vice versus), we find small to moderate correlations suggesting an association between religion and family practice. The explanation for these effects still awaits.

The scholarship on religion and family would benefit from considering the "religious congruence fallacy" as described by Chaves (2010). Religious congruence is defined in three related ways: "(1) individuals' religious ideas constitute a tight, logically connected, integrated network of internally consistent beliefs and values; (2) religious and other practices and actions follow directly from those beliefs and values; and (3) the religious beliefs and values that individuals express in certain, mainly religious, contexts are consistently held and chronically accessible across contexts, situations, and life domains" (p. 2). Scholars, he argues, commit the religious congruence fallacy when they assume that individuals "act in a certain way because they are in a particular religion or because they attend religious services or because they hold this or that religious belief" (p. 6). Anyone who offers an explanation that "presumes religious congruence should bear a heavier burden of proof" (p. 11). This would require evidence that individuals had consciously reflected "on religion at decision-making moments, or really live in a setting with effective religious social control." In the case of religion and family research, the proof would require that scholars begin with a presumption of incongruence between religion and family, and then theorize when congruence might occur. The possibilities include taking mental states more seriously (rather than beliefs), attention to decision-making situations (e.g., marriage and child bearing decisions, infidelity, or domestic abuse), empirical studies of both short-term causal effects (e.g., as demonstrated in the priming literature in psychology) and medium-term effects, and then to ask how quickly short- or medium-term effects decay. In sum, he calls for a more "deeply situational model of religious influence" (p. 11–13).

Conclusion

As research progresses in the twenty-first century, much remains to be done in the study of religion and family. The simplistic models we began with over 2 decades ago must give way to more complex thinking about the connections between religion and family. Institutional change, organizational adaptations, and findings from micro-level analyses demonstrate a complex relationship between religious institutions and organizations, people's religious lives, and their family values

[5] Christian Smith has put together a helpful introduction to critical realism that can be accessed online at http://www.nd.edu/~csmith22/criticalrealism.htm.

and behaviors. A review of current paradigms of institutional change combined with the study of denominational and congregational change offers a dynamic picture of religion in the modern world. Religion and family research must inevitably move away from the secularization and modernization models that have held scholars hostage. Secularization accounts are insufficient for noting the *process* by which religion is challenged and reconstituted; modernization accounts are insufficient for articulating both the emergence of new family forms and the maintenance of traditional family values. An ahistorical religion and family analysis will always come up short. Positing causal relationships at the micro-level in a rapidly changing world is itself problematic because we face the difficulty of unstable constructs in a "runaway world."

At the very least, scholars should take seriously the questions raised about the adequacy of available methodologies and to rethink the tendency for effect sizes to be small. Given the likelihood of scholars to commit the religious congruence fallacy, more focus must be given to religious influence as situation and context specific, and involving internalization and decision-making processes. More care in asserting cause and more attention to demonstrating which mechanisms offer the best explanation of religion and family effects is sorely needed.

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