Anchors of Religious Commitment in Adolescents

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Abstract

This study explores adolescent religious commitment using qualitative data from a religiously diverse (Jewish, Christian, Muslim) sample of 80 adolescents. A new construct, *anchors of religious commitment,* grounded in interview data, is proposed to describe what adolescents commit to as a part of their religious identity. Seven anchors of religious commitment are discussed: (a) religious traditions, rituals, and laws; (b) God; (c) faith traditions or denominations; (d) faith community members; (e) parents; (f) scriptures or sacred texts; and (g) religious leaders. The findings broaden the conceptual understanding of commitment as a relational construct and not just a behavioral or attitudinal construct. Implications for future research on adolescent religious commitment are discussed along with practical implications for parents and religious leaders.

Keywords

religion, commitment, adolescence, spirituality, identity

The majority of the world's youth are religious (Smith & Denton, 2005). Religiousness has consistently been linked to higher positive outcomes (e.g., prosocial behavior) and lower negative outcomes (e.g., risk taking and

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psychological disorders) for youth (Koenig, 2008; Smith & Denton, 2005; Wagener, Furrow, King, Leffert, & Benson, 2003). In addition, for many adolescents, religious commitments are foundational to their moral development (Walker & Reimer, 2006), identity formation (King, 2003), and family relationships (Loser, Klein, Hill, & Dollahite, 2008). Nevertheless, it remains unclear how adolescents make, experience, and maintain their commitments to religion and thus become more likely to experience these adaptive outcomes. Furthermore, there seems to be little agreement on how to conceptualize and measure religious commitment in adolescence. Therefore, the present study sought to expand our view of how religious commitments are experienced by adolescents. More specifically, this study examined the following research questions using a grounded theory qualitative methodology: (a) Are there different ways that adolescents experience their religious and spiritual commitments? (b) What is it about religion that adolescents commit to? (c) How do adolescents express their religious commitments?

Importance of Religious Commitment

Much research has examined links between religious commitment and various positive and negative outcomes for youth. Generally, youth who are more religious exhibit higher levels of positive outcomes and lower levels of negative outcomes than their less religious peers. For example, religious commitment is predictive of greater prosocial behavior (Hardy & Carlo, 2005), less depression (Pearce, Little, & Perez, 2003), less substance use (Wills, Yaeger, & Sandy, 2003), and postponed sexual intercourse (Hardy & Raffaelli, 2003). There are a number of possible reasons for these associations; for example, religion teaches prosocial values (Hardy & Carlo, 2005), and provides social controls (Hardy & Raffaelli, 2003) and social capital (King & Roeser, 2009).

Religious commitment is also relevant to moral development. Compelling evidence suggests that religious and moral development are interconnected for many (if not most) people (Walker & Reimer, 2006). For example, Colby and Damon (1992) conducted an in-depth qualitative study of moral exemplars (i.e., individuals identified for their high levels of moral commitment). Interestingly, although the criteria for moral exemplar nomination did not include anything regarding religious commitment, religious commitment was central to how moral exemplars viewed the world and integrated their goals and concerns. Similarly, for individuals working in a residential community for developmentally disabled individuals, religious commitments helped frame their moral commitments and order their goals (Walker & Reimer, 2006).

Furthermore, Walker, Pitts, Hennig, and Matsuba (1995) found that many people ground their moral judgments in their religious commitments.

Religious commitment also provides a context and grounds for identity formation for many youth (Good & Willoughby, 2007; King, 2003). Erikson (1968) argued that the making of religious commitments was an important part of identity formation for most people, because religion provides salient ideologies for youth to adopt. In fact, many common measures of identity formation (e.g., the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status, Adams, 1998) tap religious commitments as one of the key domains of more general identity formation. Evidence also suggests that religious involvement and identity formation are linked developmentally (Hardy, Pratt, Pancer, Olsen, & Lawford, IN PRESS).

Finally, religious commitment can impact family relationships and dynamics. For example, Loser et al. (2008) showed that highly religious families experience the religious and spiritual dimensions of their lives differently than those who are less religious. The individuals in highly religious families reported that their religion was central to their life and the processes and structures within the family. The centrality of religion is reflected in the routines, rituals, relationships, and choices that create the identity of the family.

Conceptualizing and Measuring Religious Commitment

Although religious commitment has consistently been linked to positive and negative behaviors, moral development, identity formation, and family relationships, researchers have not yet developed a consistent, thorough way to conceptualize and measure commitment. Prior studies have generally assessed religious commitment in one or more of the following ways (Gartner, 1996): (a) religious affiliation (e.g., member of a faith community); (b) frequency of participation in religious activities (e.g., church attendance); (c) attitudes about or salience of religious experiences in life (e.g., the degree to which religion influences other areas of life); (d) belief in traditional religious creeds (e.g., orthodoxy); and (e) typologies of religious orientations (e.g., intrinsic vs. extrinsic).

A few scholars have proposed schemas for organizing the various facets of religious commitment. For example, Dudley (1993) defined three components of commitment: a cognitive or belief component, an activity or involvement component, and an experiential component. More recently, Smith and Snell (2009) used five components in their conceptualization of religious

commitment in the National Study of Youth and Religion. Those five components included the following: (a) church attendance, (b) personal prayer, (c) scripture reading, (d) importance of faith in everyday life, and (e) closeness to God. They cite these five components as "specific characteristics" that describe "common cultural understandings of specific religious types of people" (p. 259).

Worthington et al. (2003) created a two-factor, ten-item scale to measure religious commitments for research and clinical use that includes interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions. Interpersonal commitment captures the individual's commitment to values and beliefs, time spent in studying the religion, salience of faith, and the influence of faith on other areas of life, while intrapersonal commitment captures the individual's affective, behavioral, and relational commitments within the religious group or organization. The relationships between the individual and the members of a religious congregation are emerging as a potentially important factor in adolescent religious commitment. Referencing a term used by Garbarino (1995), King (2003) asserted that religious congregations are "spiritual anchors" that provide youth with a context "in which to grapple with the spiritual issues . . . critical for commitment to identity" (p. 201).

Consistent with the demonstration that religious commitment has both interpersonal and intrapersonal factors (Worthington et al., 2003), Mahoney's (2010) review proposed the construct "relational spirituality" to describe the "multidimensional interface between the search for relationships with the search for the sacred" (p. 8). While Mahoney did not address issues of religious commitment, our understanding is that the pathways connecting religion with individuals and families are highly relational, as we hoped to demonstrate in this study.

The Present Study

The study of religious commitment is still in a nascent stage, particularly as it pertains to the period of adolescence. Hence, this is an ideal time to further explore religious commitment in depth using qualitative research methodology. A key strength of qualitative methods is that they are positioned to uncover the ways in which adolescents themselves experience, understand, and describe their religious commitments, and the functions and meanings these commitments have for them in their lives. Therefore, the present study will complement this developing body of literature by revealing the landscape of religious commitment by exploring (a) how adolescents talk about their religious commitments, (b) the different dimensions and expressions of these commitments, and (c) how their families and faith communities impact how they experience their religious commitments. It was hoped that this study would broaden and enrich the conceptual understanding of adolescent religious commitment and point to more adequate measurement strategies.

Method

Sample

The sample for this qualitative study included 80 adolescents (41 female, 39 male; age range 10-21 years; *M* age = 15.1) from 49 families in the northern California and New England areas of the United States. The distribution across religious affiliations is as follows: 6 Baptist, 10 Catholic, 1 Christian and Missionary Alliance, 3 Christian Scientist, 2 Congregationalist, 3 Episcopal, 2 Jehovah's Witness, 16 Jewish, 11 Latter-day Saint, 3 Lutheran, 2 Methodist, 7 Muslim, 5 Orthodox Christian, 1 Pentecostal, 3 Presbyterian, and 5 Seventh-day Adventist. The ethnic distribution for the parents, which reflects the ethnic distribution for the adolescents, was 82% White and 18% ethnic minorities (4 African American, 4 Latino, 2 Puerto Rican, 4 East Indian, 1 Asian, 1 Native American). On average, the parents were in their mid-forties and had been married 21 years.

Participants were selected using a criterion-based purposive sampling strategy. Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland (2006) explain, "purposive sampling is appropriate when the population parameters are not known and/or when you want to learn about select cases or variation across a set of cases" (p. 91). Since the phenomenon of interest is the religious and spiritual identity of adolescents, and since it is hypothesized that exposure to spiritual and religious contexts promotes spiritual identity development, the cases that will be most helpful in illuminating this phenomenon are adolescents who are involved in those religious and spiritual contexts. Thus, the criterion used to select the sample was that adolescents need to be actively involved in a faith community. This increases the likelihood that "all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon" (Cresswell, 2007, p. 128).

To recruit the participants, we contacted religious leaders of different Christian (Baptist, Catholic, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Christian Science, Congregationalist, Episcopalian, Greek Orthodox, Jehovah's Witness, Latter-day Saint, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Seventh-day Adventist); Muslim (Shiite and Sunni); and Jewish (Conservative, Modern Orthodox, Reform, and Ultra Orthodox) faith communities in New England and northern California and asked them to recommend families in their faith community who had adolescents and who they felt were representative of the activity level, beliefs, and practices of the faith tradition. These families were contacted and asked to participate in the study.

Of the families that agreed to participate in the larger research project, 49 families had youth between ages 10 and 21 and were included in the sample for the present study. The adolescents were interviewed in a family group

setting including the parents and any adolescents in the family between ages 10 and 21 who were available and consented to be interviewed. In any given family, the number of interviewed adolescents ranged from 1 to 5, with the mean number of siblings per family group being 1.6.

Interviews

The adolescents were interviewed by the second author in the home, with other members of the family present, in an effort to gather the richest data possible about the adolescents' lives. While some adolescents may have felt inhibited by the presence of parents or other siblings, this setting allowed the interviewer to "triangulate or obtain various types of data on the same problem, such as combining interview with observation" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 27). Both the adolescents and the parents were given the opportunity to respond to the questions, which provided multirespondent perspectives. The adolescents interviewed often expressed views different from their parents or siblings, indicating that while some may have felt inhibited, others clearly did not.

The second author used "intensive interviewing" to gather the qualitative data. According to Lofland et al. (2006), this methodology involves "the use of an interview guide consisting of a list of open ended questions that direct conversation without forcing the interviewee to select preestablished responses" (p. 17). The interview guide for the adolescent interviews consisted of 26 open-ended questions that were used to guide the conversation (e.g., Does your religion guide your life? How? How has your religion influenced your efforts to define who you are? What challenges arise from being a religious family in the surrounding culture?). Often follow-up questions were used to clarify the parents' or adolescents' responses to the original questions. Most interviews lasted about an hour. The interviews were recorded and transcribed following the interviews.

Analysis

Lofland et al. (2006) assert that a grounded theory approach should be "pursued in a persistent and methodical fashion" (p. 196) in which the researchers, as the central agents of the analytic process, immerse themselves in the data. The analysis for this study was conducted using NVivo 8 software and was completed in four stages (see Table 1).

Stage 1: Broad Coding. In the first stage of analysis, we used a process we refer to as "broad coding" to extract from the original interviews all references

Table 1. Description of Four Stages of Analysis

	Stage			
	1	2	3	4
Data source	All of the in-depth interviews	All references coded as *commitment* in Stage 1	All references coded as *anchors of religious commitment* in Stage 2	All of the references coded for each of the *seven anchors of religious commitment* in Stage 3. Seven analyses were done in this stage
Type of coding	Broad coding	Initial coding (open)	Focused coding	Focused coding
Description	Conceptual analysis informed by the literature but grounded in the data	Line by line coding to analyze different dimensions of commitment	Descriptive coding to analyze distinct kinds of commitment anchors	Descriptive coding of each commitment anchor to describe the different types of expressions within each anchor
Examples	Commitment, exploration, spiritual experiences, autonomy, belongingness, etc.	Anchors of religious commitment, congruence of commitment, etc. (see Table 2)	Commitment to God, faith tradition or denomination, parents, etc. (see Table 3)	Family or personal rituals, intergenerational relationships, source of authority, etc. (see Table 3)

that addressed issues of commitment. Given the diverse existing approaches to religious commitment, in this first stage of coding we wanted to be as inclusive as possible in identifying issues of commitment. For this purpose, commitment was broadly conceptualized based on interpersonal and intrapersonal factors, behaviors, beliefs, affective expressions, experiences, priorities, and use of discretionary time. Every interview was coded by the lead author and an undergraduate research assistant to ensure that no potentially relevant information was omitted from the collection of commitment references.

Stage 2: Initial Coding. For the second stage of analysis, the references coded in Stage 1 as relating to commitment (more than 560 participant–quote references) were coded using "initial coding." This process involved coding all of the references line by line to identify prominent themes (Lofland et al., 2006). Through this stage, extensive annotations (i.e.,

memos) were kept, as recommended by Corbin and Strauss (2008), to facilitate the analysis process and to explore developing themes. As a result of this second stage of analysis, 16 categories were identified that describe different dimensions of how adolescents experience, talk about, develop, and contextualize their religious commitments (e.g., congruence of commitment, internal vs. external commitments, origin of commitments, and individual vs. family commitments).

Although a thorough understanding of commitment is only possible when all of the dimensions are explored in depth and then brought together, that is beyond the scope of a single study. Thus, in this study, we explore only one of the dimensions and leave the others for future research. Based on the number of references, *anchors of religious commitment* (155 participant–quote references) was the most salient dimension of commitment at this stage. The next two closest dimensions were "congruence of commitment" with 150 participant–quote references and "internal vs. external commitments" with 88 references (see Table 2).

Stage 3: Focused Coding. For Stage 3 of the analysis, we used "focused coding" (Lofland et al., 2006) to explore all the references coded as "anchors of religious commitment" in Stage 2. This involved breaking down the references about what the adolescents were committing to into conceptually distinct categories. Categories were grounded in the data and developed through the coding process. At the end of this stage, categories that were seen as similar were collapsed together into one. As a result of this stage of analysis, we identified seven different commitment anchors, which will be described with the results (see Table 3).

Stage 4: Repeated Focused Coding. For the fourth stage of the analysis, we took each of the seven anchors of religious commitment identified in Stage 3 and used "focused coding" again to identify the different types of expression of the commitments. The number of references for each type ranged from 1 to 23. Since the aim of this study was to describe the construct thoroughly, categories with a small number of references were still included when they were seen as conceptually distinct from other type categories. These types of expression of the anchors of commitment will be described with the results.

Through all stages of the analysis, steps were taken to ensure rigor and validity. Multiple coders were used during the first stage of analysis to increase internal validity and to ensure that the phenomenon in question—commitment—was accurately identified in the original sources and that no potentially useful information was overlooked. In an effort to minimize interpretive bias, as the interview segments were coded during Stages 2, 3, and 4, NVivo 8 provided a coding context (the comments directly before and after the coded reference) so that the

Table 2. Dimensions of Commitment from Stage 2 of Analysis

Dimension of commitment	Number of	
	sources	references
Anchor of commitment	40	155
Congruence of commitment	44	150
Internal vs. external commitments	36	88
Origins of commitment	25	59
Personal commitment (independent of family)	24	55
Fruits of commitment	22	53
Future trajectory of commitment	28	42
Commitment as a mediator with peers or others	24	41
Commitment as developmental	22	38
Across different domains of life	19	38
Actively sharing commitments with others	15	27
Self-labeling	17	26
Wishes commitments were different	20	25
Active versus passive commitment	11	21
Standing up for commitments in specific experiences	10	10

Note: This table lists the dimensions of commitment that resulted from Stage 2 of the analysis. They are listed here with the number of sources (different interviews) and references (different quotes) coded in each category. Source and reference numbers cited in this study include both positive and negative instances of the theme, as well as both adolescent and parent references.

references were not interpreted out of context. When necessary, we returned to the original interview for a broad context to better understand the adolescents' responses. In addition, as part of the analysis, the lead author met frequently with the interviewer to discuss the progress of the analysis and to ask him questions regarding the specific beliefs and practices of the different faith traditions. This knowledge of and respect for different faith traditions was important in informing the analysis. To address issues of reflexivity and our inclination to view religion as a positive influence on families and adolescents, we intentionally coded both positive and negative instances of the themes and dimensions being explored. These negative instances are included with the results.

Results

Anchors of religious commitment is the term we use to describe what adolescents were committing to, or in other words, where they focused their commitments.

Table 3. Summary of Anchors of Commitment and Types of Expression

Anchor of religious commitment	Types of expression
Religious traditions, rituals, and laws	Commitment to religious traditions Commitment to religious rituals Family ritual Personal ritual Commitment to religious laws
God	Source of authority Relationships with God Affective dimension Seeking counsel Sense of responsibility
Faith tradition or denomination	Self-labeling Source of authority Values and belief systems Personified entity Center of family Generational component
Faith community members	Sense of community Personal support Intergenerational relationships Serving the congregation Fun
Parents	Source of authority Affective dimension Duty to parents
Scriptures or sacred text	Source of authority or truth Life models
Religious leaders	Source of authority Relational component

Commitments connect or tie the individual to something else. Just as a tent is anchored to the ground and stabilized by a connection with multiple stakes, the religious commitments of these youth seemed to be anchored by their connection with different people, ideas, and experiences. The construct anchors of religious commitment encompasses the connections forged to these other entities through the commitments adolescents make.

As described previously, the first stage of analysis yielded a collection of participant–quote references related more broadly to commitment. The result of the second stage of analysis was the collection of participant–quote references related specifically to anchors of religious commitment. The purpose of the third stage of analysis was to identify what it was the adolescents were committing to, or where they grounded their commitments. We identified the following seven categories of anchors of religious commitment (listed with the number of sources referenced and the number of total quotes referenced): Religious traditions, rituals, or laws (42, 90); God (24, 66); faith tradition or denomination (20, 37); faith community members (12, 18); parents or family (10, 29); scripture or word of God (10, 16); and religious leaders (5, 10). Both positive and negative examples of commitment and lack of commitment in these areas will be given to present both sides of the anchors of commitment and how they compose the broader picture of adolescent religious commitment. In addition, we will report on specific forms or expressions of each anchor of commitment that resulted from the fourth stage of analysis (see Table 3). General observations of gender and faith tradition distributions are provided in an effort to illustrate that different groups of youth are emphasizing different anchors for their commitments.

The illustrative quotes are representative of the ideas of the adolescents in the sample. However, given that space does not allow for direct quotation of all the adolescents, the quotes here give voice to 39 adolescents from the sample (18 male, 21 female) representing the variety of faith traditions included in the sample. In addition, quotes from some parents are included when they help illustrate the findings. Finally, to clarify the ideas being expressed, some quotes were edited without ellipses (e.g., to remove verbal pauses such as "um").

Commitment to Religious Traditions, Rituals, and Laws

The most common anchor of religious commitment for the youth in this sample was religious traditions, rituals, and laws. These are the external, observable behavioral indicators that are often associated with religious commitment.

Commitment to Religious Traditions. The first form of this type of religious commitment was expressed through religious traditions. The most common traditions were religious celebrations, though marriage traditions and traditions of self-discipline, such as fasting and observing Lent, were also mentioned. Though commitment to these religious traditions is related to commitment to the faith tradition or denomination, this type of commitment is conceptually distinct because youth spoke of specific behavioral aspects of the faith tradition that were event oriented and they seemed to speak about them as somewhat distinct from the faith tradition as a whole.

This distinction was evident in how some youth spoke of traditional celebrations. For example, one 10-year-old Jewish girl enthusiastically explained all of the ritual celebrations that gave meaning to her experience of faith:

> Well I like Rosh Hashanah because it's just, it's cool to be, well it's fun to be able to miss school and everybody says well where were you? And you say, "No, I was celebrating New Year." And they say, "No, the New Year is in January," or something like that. And Yom Kippur is fun because I get to see how far I can fast, and every year it gets longer. . . . And Sukkah is fun because it's festive and it's on my birthday . . . And I like Hanukkah, just because it's our version of Christmas, even though there, we don't need the gifts or anything. But it's just, it's fun to be able to light your own menorah, and to invite friends over to come do it with you . . . and Purim is fun because you get to dress up, and Pesach is fun because the whole family's there and all that sort of stuff.

Her description of these events shows that it is not necessarily the religious meaning behind the celebrations that she is committed to having in her life but the tradition of the celebrations. In particular, she is focusing on the fun experiences and the relational aspects of the traditions, such as being with family and friends. Many other youth spoke of this relational aspect of traditions and how it changes over time. Some spoke of an increase in the sense of connection, and others, such as this 18-year-old Seventh-day Adventist young man, described a waning of that sense of connection.

> Like the Feast of Tabernacles, I mean we did that a few years ago, or a couple years ago, but it just wasn't the same as it used to be, 'cause you don't have everyone else doing it, and it's just not the same closeness. Even within your family it's like, it's sort of an anti-climax. It used to be fun. And it used to be so much a big part of life. We used to all look forward to it, now it's like . . . "Why, why do we have to do this?" You know, why you're doing it, it's just not as powerful as it used to be.

He identifies that the closeness he used to feel as a result of the tradition was not there now and his commitment to that tradition was negatively affected. Though his commitment to religion was strong in other areas, he was not as committed to the traditions of his faith as he once was.

A 17-year-old Jewish young man explained that his religious commitment has also changed and he only attends for traditionally important days.

> After bar mitzvah, I've only really gone, I've gone to temple not really
> that much. . . . [I] stopped going to the classes. And I've only really
> been going on the high holy days and some bar mitzvahs. I mean if it's
> like a bar mitzvah I'm invited to, then I go to their service. But after
> that, it's definitely dropped off after my bar mitzvah.

This reference shows a commitment to the traditions associated with special days but not a commitment to the more regular rituals of his faith, particularly regular temple attendance. This was echoed by a 15-year-old Congregationalist boy who described his attendance as "I still go on the big days, you know—Easter, Christmas."

Commitment to Religious Rituals. Commitment to rituals was the second form of this anchor. One Catholic mother of a 13-year-old daughter and 15-year-old son described these rituals as, "the little things that we do that have that spiritual meaning to us." In contrast to traditions, which are conceptualized here as the larger events that occur on special occasions, rituals are the daily and weekly routines that are commonly associated with religious observance. Those include, but are not limited to, church attendance, scripture reading, prayer, and family meals and gatherings. Many of these rituals have a personal and a familial expression.

Personal ritual. One expression of commitment to religious ritual was through personal ritual. One 15-year-old Catholic boy expressed that religious rituals are central to how he sees his personal religious identity.

> Compared to other kids my age, I think I'm pretty religious, 'cause I go
> to church every Sunday. I pray every day. I altar serve. I go to CCD
> [religious instruction]. And religion is a big part of my life.

A 19-year-old Muslim young woman described her commitment to personal prayer during school time.

> We pray five times a day. And usually two of those prayers are, well
> in the winter time, two of them are during school hours. And so what
> I would do is like during lunch time or whenever I didn't have a class,
> I had already like talked to the principal or whoever was the head of
> the school, and they gave me a room where I could go pray. And so I
> would just go do that.

This is an example of commitment to regular personal religious ritual, even when it took great effort.

Family ritual. Another expression of this commitment was a commitment to family rituals. A 15-year-old Christian and Missionary Alliance girl described a family ritual of attending church:

> It's a break in the week. It's something that's consistent, that we do every week together. We get in the car and go to church and come home. And it's nice to sort of step back from the busyness of everything and just have something that we all do together.

A 14-year-old Catholic boy also demonstrated a commitment to family-based rituals.

> Well, I, we try to do something with faith, or religion, a lot of times. And we say prayers every night and before meals and stuff. And they really try to teach us. And we go to church every Sunday. And I guess they just really want to . . . bring religion into our lives and to make us better.

It is interesting to note that he began the sentence with the personal pronoun *I* but quickly changed to the collective pronoun *we* to describe the religious traditions in his life. He speaks here of the "they" who are the motivating factor behind the commitment to the rituals. Some youth expressed this passive commitment to family traditions, meaning they participated in but did not initiate observance of traditions, and other youth were more active in facilitating family traditions, even when parents were not consistent.

Both personal and familial rituals seemed to be an important part of religious commitment for these youth, even though these rituals take effort to maintain. Some individuals and families expressed that the commitment to rituals was not always consistent amid competing demands for time and attention, as did this 18-year-old Baptist young man: "It's been a little different now with, I mean there's four of us kids, so it's sort of hard to get us all together at the same time."

Commitment to Religious Laws. The third form of this anchor was commitment to the specific laws of the faith tradition. The most common manifestations of this were modesty in dress, wearing religious clothing, dietary regulations, abstaining from broader societal holidays, and abstaining from traditional medicine. When asked about her feelings regarding her commitment to cover herself with the hijab, an 18-year-old Muslim young woman said, "I look at it basically as just obeying the laws of my faith, just like any other faith." This awareness of and commitment to the laws of his religion was described by a 20-year-old Jewish young man:

> Judaism is a very legal religion, and if you are dedicated to following [the laws] then it's, then there practically isn't any aspect of your life that isn't going to be affected. You can't separate the other things that you do from the religious things that you do. There really isn't any separation.

This commitment to the laws and the external behaviors associated with those laws was a salient part of the religious commitment of some youth in this sample. Some other youth acknowledged the laws of the religious tradition even though they did not observe them. When asked if his religious beliefs influenced his lifestyle, including food and media, a 17-year-old Jewish young man simply stated, "Not really. We don't keep kosher."

Summary. In these three areas—religious traditions, rituals, and laws—the youth in this sample demonstrated that their religious commitment is largely defined by their commitment (or lack of commitment) to these observable behaviors. This anchor was evident in youth of all faith traditions and was equally represented by male and female youth.

Commitment to God

The second most common anchor of religious commitment discussed by youth in this sample was commitment to God or other forms of deity. For ease in theoretical description, the general term *God* is used here, since that was the term most commonly used by this sample. In this religiously diverse sample, youth used other terms and also spoke of other forms of deity that are included in this anchor, including, "Jesus Christ," "Jehovah," "our Creator," "Allah," and "all the Saints and Angels." The fourth level of analysis showed five different ways that youth experienced their commitment to God. These different forms of commitment to God are not mutually exclusive; they overlap and the same youth may find expression of his or her commitment to God in more than one way.

Source of Authority. First, some adolescents commit to God as a source of authority, as did a 19-year-old Jehovah's Witness young woman: "We appreciate the fact that He's our Creator and who better to give us guidelines for how to live our lives." A 14-year-old Christian Scientist girl also illustrated this idea of God as an authority:

> We tend to think about it like there's only one mind and that's the right mind. Not that there's two minds and one's right and one's wrong. There's only one mind and that one mind belongs to God.

Relationship with God. Other adolescents spoke of a personal relationship with God, as did a 15-year-old Catholic boy: "Being religious is kind of like

you have another friend. It's God and Jesus; you just feel like you're able to lean back on someone, if the going's tough." An 18-year-old Baptist young woman said:

> I'm so happy that I have some place where I can go and God loves us unconditionally. And no matter what I do He's always there, and He always loves me. And just thinking that you know the creator of the universe; thinking that God actually loves me is just amazing.

Affective Dimensions. A third way adolescents described their commitments to God focused on affective dimensions to the commitment—such as those centered on devotion, trust, honor, respect, and gratitude. When asked why she was willing to sacrifice for her faith, an 11-year-old Orthodox Christian girl responded, "I would say because it's like something to show your devotion to God." Similarly, a 21-year-old Baptist young man explained his commitment to marry a Christian woman by saying, "Well, I think, again for reasons of trust, first of all, I think it would be the most pleasing to God. It's what He would want."

Seeking Counsel. A fourth description of a commitment to God was evident as the youth talked about seeking counsel from God about decisions in their lives, as a 15-year-old Christian and Missionary Alliance girl described, "Well, now that I'm thinking about getting a career and everything, He's my counselor, and so I would like to do something that would be in His will." As another example, a 17-year-old Muslim young woman said:

> When I had to choose which school to go to . . . I knew my parents were very worried, and I was very worried what [the] environment's going to be for me. And I knew that there was a greater population of Muslim students at one particular high school. And I just made personal like, ask God, "Please, if it's better for me to be there in that environment with them, send me there." And you know, at times I thank God that I did go there.

Sense of Responsibility. A fifth way adolescents spoke of their commitment to God was as a sense of responsibility or duty toward God, as with a 16-year-old Baptist girl:

> And just like, the fact, the idea that you are what you are a living sacrifice. It's not living for itself, it's living for being a sacrifice. And its whole purpose is to sacrifice itself for some other means, and like, in

this case to glorify God and hopefully like attract some sort of attention of others that are lost.

Summary. These five approaches reflect the variety of ways that adolescents described their commitment to God. The youth who spoke of a commitment to God did not always describe a strong or positive commitment. One 15-year-old Lutheran girl said this about her commitment to God:

It's something that I think about daily. But, I don't know how much it influences what I do. . . . I talk about it a little bit with my friends, but I want what, you know, God says we should do to influence me more, but it doesn't influence me or teach me to do the right things like I think I should.

Though she recognizes her commitment to God is not as salient as she thinks it should be, her comment illustrates that she still sees the connection to that source as a reflection of her commitment. This anchor of commitment—commitment to God—was more common among the Christian youth in this sample and was more common for female than male youth.

Commitment to Faith Tradition or Denomination

Commitment to their particular faith tradition or denomination was the third most common anchor of commitment among the youth in this sample.

Self-Labeling. The most common way youth expressed this commitment was through self-labeling as an adherent of the tradition, as demonstrated by a 12-year-old Jewish girl who explained why she is willing to sacrifice for her faith:

Well, it's worth it because being Jewish is very special and we're different and I kind of like that a little bit. And I'm willing to make sacrifices so I can be Jewish, more Jewish than I can be if I don't do it, I guess.

A 15-year-old Episcopalian boy who did not feel a strong commitment to his faith tradition also demonstrated self-labeling as a form of noncommitment through his desire not to label himself according to his faith tradition.

I don't necessarily say that I'm Christian. I mean I've gone to church every Sunday, with a few exceptions maybe. . . . I've brought some of my friends along because they just moved here, or I've just encouraged

them to come. Not just because I wanted them to be Christian or any-
thing, just because it was a place where there was a lot of really nice
people that they could really get to know well.

A variation of this form of commitment was also used by a 21-year-old
Protestant young man who described that being "Christian" was an important
attribute for the kind of woman he wanted to marry.

I think for me, yeah, in terms of marriage, the person I marry, I hope,
especially would be Christian, but that it wouldn't just be that they
hold the label Christian or that they come from a Christian family, but
that they actually practice their faith in a real meaningful way.

This comment suggests his own determination to carry on his religious
commitments in his married life. He uses "other-labeling," a variation of the
self-labeling form, by using the term *Christian* to describe the commitment
he hopes for in a future mate.

Source of Authority. The second most common way youth spoke of the
commitment to their faith tradition or denomination was as a source of
authority to guide or inform their choices. This is illustrated by a 20-year-old
Orthodox Jewish young man: "And in the sense of, you know, I go about my life
and yet Judaism is always right there at this side of my mind, but it's not
necessarily the guiding force so much as the, you know, informing force." A
15-year-old Muslim boy also illustrated this when he said:

Islam is doing my religion because Islam is not just something you're
doing at certain times of the week or whatever. It's real, like you do it
all day, when you sleep . . . it's part of what you do. Part of the way
you eat, the way you treat other people.

Values and Belief Systems. A third way youth experienced this anchor was
as a commitment to the values and beliefs of the faith tradition or denomina-
tion. One way youth spoke of their commitment to the values associated with
their faith traditions was as adopting or accepting a structure of beliefs or
moral guidelines by which they lived and governed their choices. For exam-
ple, a 20-year-old Jewish young man described himself as "taking on an ethi-
cal and moral framework provided by Judaism." This "framework" of values
and morals was important to youth as well as to their parents. The father of a
15-year-old Lutheran girl explained:

The values that we like are in the church system. We're not really happy with the values that we see in American culture, a lot of consumerism. We're really not happy with all of that, that we see there. This kind of greed, this . . . where everybody's out for themselves. That's just not, the kind of value system that we really want. And they'll get that, unfortunately, but, so we bring them to church, to get this whole other value system.

Personified Entity. A fourth form of commitment to the faith tradition or denomination involved seeing the faith tradition as a personified entity. For example, a 20-year-old Latter-day Saint young woman said, "I think a big thing is our church doesn't believe in [viewing] pornography and to me that is such a blessing." This personification of the faith tradition was also illustrated when a 16-year-old Catholic boy spoke of how his religion influences what media his family lets in and keeps out of its home:

Let's say we're watching something on TV and some of it's against what the Catholic Church teaches, they usually just explain it and sometimes you already know it, sometimes you don't, but they'll just explain how it's different and what the right way we believe. And like listening to music . . . I don't really listen to stuff that's against my religion.

Center of Family. The fifth form of commitment to a faith tradition was as a center point for the family or the individual to come back to or something to fall back on or rely on when times are challenging. When speaking of how important her religion is in her family life, a 15-year-old Latter-day Saint girl said:

It's the most important thing that influences our family because without it, I don't think we would be a full and complete family, because through the hard times where we're all kind of going our separate ways, but then I know that each of us think about the religion and we're all like, yeah we're supposed to make up and that's what we're supposed to do. And that's what we do and we feel better about it.

Generational Component. A sixth way youth spoke of their commitment was as a generational commitment to the faith tradition. A 20-year-old Orthodox Jewish young man explained his father's commitment to the faith tradition and how that has influenced him:

He tells me that he very strongly felt you know, particularly again because I think he's someone who feels very much sensitive to the Holocaust and having lived right at that time just after it that he felt sort of the weight of all of the sacrifice that had been made for three thousand years so that a father could pass to their son to their son to their son the knowledge that we're Jewish and this is what it means.

Summary. These six forms of expression capture how the adolescents in this sample spoke of their faith tradition as an anchor of their religious commitment. This anchor was more common among Jewish, Muslim, and Latter-day Saint youth and was more common among male than female youth in this sample.

Commitment to Faith Community Members

The fourth most common anchor of commitment for this sample was the members of the congregation with which the adolescents were affiliated.

Sense of Community. Enjoying a sense of community and the feeling of family was the most common way youth experienced their commitment to the congregation. This was expressed by a 17-year-old Orthodox Jewish young woman, whose commitment to having a strong community of believers influenced her decision of where she wanted to attend college:

I visited the Chabad [Jewish Student Center] on campus, you know, I went to a barbecue there, I met the rabbi, I really liked the family you know and that has really dictated why I'm going there. Just the religious community that surrounds it.

The sense of belonging within the faith community was also illustrated by a 16-year-old Presbyterian young man:

Religion has sort of taken on a new role in my life from being something just to turn to in a time of need to something that I really care about and I participate in just for the joy of connecting to the people I'm worshipping with.

Later, in his interview, that same individual was speaking of his interest and skill in music and the role his faith community has played in that:

It is that religious, that really strong feeling of family in the church that allowed me to have confidence in the arts. So I'd say it definitely

began with religion and it began with the support that I felt from the people in the community.

Personal Support. The second form of commitment to a faith community is feeling personal support or strength from its members. Some youth expressed that feeling of support in their personal life like the previously quoted young man, and others expressed a feeling of support or strength in matters of faith, as did this 20-year-old Lutheran young woman, "There's a lot of strength that I draw from being able to share communion with other believers and the reminder and the forgiveness that comes through that is definitely, I guess strengthening."

Intergenerational Relationships. The third way youth experienced their faith community is through intergenerational relationships, as described by a 15-year-old Episcopalian boy:

When I talk to my friends, if I say I have to go to church or something, they immediately think it's a bunch of old people and they think I'm just being dragged along. But there's a lot of people; and it's a fun place to go because there's so many people. . . . When I was really young, there weren't as many people and I'd sit with my parents throughout the service. And I'd go out and all these old people would shake my hand, and I didn't know any of them. And it wasn't as fun for me. But I look forward to going to church to see those people. And I'll sit through as much of the service as I can.

Serving the Congregation. A fourth form of commitment to the faith community was demonstrated by youth who emphasized serving in their congregation. When asked why she liked being an altar server, one 14-year-old Catholic girl responded simply, "I just like serving the church. It makes me feel good that I'm serving the community." Other examples of serving the faith community that youth spoke about were helping with fundraising activities and teaching classes at church for younger children.

Fun. A fifth way youth were committed to their faith community was simply because they thought it was fun to be with those people, as evidenced in this comment made by an 12-year-old Jewish girl:

I think it's really fun to have Shabbat with like a lot of other families that are Jewish. And just meeting with them and stuff and you know speaking about like stuff. I'd also have to say things where there's like a big quantity of people for me is most fun because I like it when everybody sings songs and stuff like that at Passover.

The fun was also important for a 14-year-old Jewish boy who described the reason for his renewed commitment to religion:

> The first time when my parents took me to [synagogue], my mom came downstairs and was dancing around the *bimah* [Torah podium]. . . . I was having a fun time. And so after *kiddushin* [prayer of sanctification] and everything else, after dinner I said to my mom, can we come back here again? And so that's when I started getting more and more religious.

Summary. The adolescents in this sample experienced members of their faith community as an anchor of religious commitment in five ways. This anchor of religious commitment—commitment to members of the faith community—was evident in youth from all faith traditions in this research sample (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) and was equally represented in male and female youth in this sample. Some adolescents and families in this sample did not feel committed to a particular faith community, and, as illustrated by this 12-year-old Jewish girl and her mother, this was generally because they did not feel a sense of connection there.

> Daughter: Since we move a lot, it's sometimes hard to get too connected to them. We were in Kansas for four years and we got very connected and it was hard to leave them, but here it's not as easy because . . . .
> Mother: Well we don't go, that's part of it.
> Daughter: We don't go that much anymore. We usually went for my mom's *Shiray Shabbat* [songs of Sabbath] services and they don't really seem to care for it as much.

Though causality cannot be assigned in either direction, the lack of commitment to participating in the faith community and the lack of connection to the members of the faith community were both part of the larger religious experience of this family. Though they expressed strong commitments in other ways, this was clearly not an anchor of their commitment.

Commitment to Parents

Parents were the fifth most common anchor of commitment for the adolescents in this sample. This included references to mothers, fathers, and parents together.

Source of Authority. The most common form of this anchor was viewing parents as a religious authority in the adolescents' lives. This form was manifest in two ways—seeing the parent(s) as a religious authority, and seeing the

parent(s) as an authority in matters related to religion. For example, a 20-year-old Lutheran young woman stated, "Dad's the spiritual head of the family." She identified him as the authority but is also vesting that authority with religious significance. In contrast, a 15-year-old Episcopalian boy stated:

> My mom wants me to go to church, and my dad. . . . And sometimes I'll want to hang out with a friend on Saturday night, but I have to go to church the next morning. And that's not an issue, I'm going to church the next morning.

He identifies his parents as authority figures in his religious commitments, but he does not see that role as being endowed with religious significance.

Affective Dimension. A second form of the commitment to parents anchor deals with how youth perceived the affective dimension associated with the parental relationship and authority. Youth may have acknowledged or committed to parental authority but had varying forms of affect connected to that commitment, as was also explained in the commitment to God anchor. This affect could be negative, neutral, or positive. The two references cited in the previous section are neutral. The youth did not explain how they felt about that parental authority but rather just asserted commitment to their authority. No negative expressions of affect regarding parental authority were present in the data for this sample. Trusting, respecting, and honoring parents were the primary forms of the positive expression of affect.

A 14-year-old Latter-day Saint boy demonstrated this when asked why he doesn't drink proscribed beverages when he is with his friends. He stated, "Because they've [parents] taught me not to do that and I respect them." This shows the presence of that positive affect dimension for parental authority where the authority is not necessarily seen as a religious authority. In contrast, a 21-year-old Protestant young man said, "You know, so my honoring toward God as my Father is the same as honoring my mom and my dad. So it's kind of reflective." This second example demonstrates an affective expression of a commitment to the parent as an authority with religious significance.

Duty to Parents. A third way parents served as an anchor focused on responsibility or duty to parents. This same expression was evident in the commitment to God as an anchor of religious commitment. This is demonstrated by a 17-year-old Muslim young woman:

> I want to be able to fulfill my duty in Islam upon my parents, because I wouldn't want to be like the cause of them not being able to fulfill their

duty, like if I was to disobey, and I wouldn't want them to be questioned about why, you know, why wasn't I, you know, obeying the rules of God.

Summary. Being committed to parents as an anchor of religious commitment was evident in equal numbers of male and female adolescents in this sample. It was evident in youth from diverse faith traditions, though the responsibility or duty to parents was particularly evident in Muslim youth.

Commitment to Scripture or Sacred Texts

The sixth most common anchor of religious commitment was scripture or sacred texts, often referred to as "the word of God." Sacred texts that were referred to by this religiously diverse sample included the Bible (Christian), Book of Mormon (Latter-day Saint), Torah and Talmud (Jewish), Qur'an and Hadith (Muslim), and Science and Health (Christian Scientist). This commitment is conceptually distinct from the ritual of reading the scripture or sacred texts as an individual or family. While the commitment to ritual focused on behavior, the commitment discussed here focuses on the texts being read. The youth in this sample demonstrated two forms of this commitment.

Source of Authority or Truth. The first form of commitment was seeing sacred text as "a standard," "the guiding principles," or "the foundation" of what the adolescents believed and how they chose to act. This is illustrated by an 18-year-old Baptist young woman:

> I just remember sitting in English class last year and we were discussing a lot of things and I just remember sitting there thinking how confused I'd be on this earth if I didn't have the Bible and God's standard and morality to live by. Because things can be reasoned different ways and just become so relative and then you don't know what truth is, and what right is, and what wrong is. And just sitting in that class and watching people try to like reason these things out, and thinking they don't know. They might think this one day, and then someone will present a good argument tomorrow and they'll swing over to the other side. And I was even so confused about [it]. I was thinking I want to go home and look at the Bible.

Sacred texts were also seen as a source of truth to turn to in a time of need or doubt. A 15-year-old Lutheran girl explained the role the Bible played for her and her family in difficult times:

> I mean any time we have a problem, siblings or just a problem, outside of the world, we come home and we [say], "I can't take it anymore. This is too hard" and always be ending up with, "Well what does the Bible say about it?"

A 17-year-old Muslim young woman also described her commitment to the Hadith (teachings of Muhammad) as a source for answers in her life:

> In Islam, there are, there's always an answer for everything. If you just look in the Hadith, for any problem that you may have, there's an answer. And if you can't find it, you just need to ask Allah to make it easier for me to find this answer.

Life Models. A second form of commitment to scripture was as a narrative of life experiences of others who were models or a deterrents for certain life paths. This form is articulated by a 16-year-old Jehovah's Witness young woman who explained how the stories of scripture helped her with a life choice.

> Next year they're planning on having a team. And they want me to be on the team. But my thing is, some of the people that are on the team, aren't the best examples. And they're doing things that I wouldn't approve of. And so, when we read the Bible, there's guidelines in the Bible that kind of help me out, when I like read, that help me make a decision that I wouldn't want to be on the team, because I would have those influences like constantly there. Because, when you're on the team, you're always going to be around these people. And when you read the Bible and you see the instances found in the Bible, you've seen what that association has done to, and some examples that are found in the Bible. And so that kind of helped me to make a decision on that part.

Summary. These responses reflect the commitment of these youth to the scripture or sacred text. Commitment to scripture or sacred texts was referred to by youth of all faith traditions (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim). Of those that spoke of their commitments in this way, more were female than male.

Commitment to Religious Leaders

The last anchor of religious commitment evident in this study was commitment to religious leaders. The religious leaders referenced by the youth in

this study were a spiritual father, prophet, rabbi, a Christian Science practitioner, youth group leaders, and a bishop. The two main forms of this commitment were to religious leaders as a source of authority and as a relational connection or support.

Source of Authority. The first form—commitment to religious leaders as a source of authority—is demonstrated by a 13-year-old Latter-day Saint boy:

> The prophet, he's the guy who's in charge of our whole church for the whole world, he has asked us to not drink caffeine and alcohol, so we don't drink caffeine or alcohol. . . . It's not like every second I'm thinking, "Oh I have to do this because of my religion" but I try not to do some stuff that's not appropriate because the people in the church have asked us not to and so that kind of guides our life.

Similarly, a 12-year-old Christian Scientist boy shared a time when he turned to a religious leader as an authority in his life.

> Well I was deciding which scout troop to join and I couldn't decide. We called a Christian Science Practitioner to help and I can't remember the thoughts now, but he used good thoughts and then I decided on a troop.

Though this was not a particularly religious decision, the religious leader was looked to as an authority for guidance and direction.

Relational Component. The second form of this anchor was a commitment to the relationship with a religious leader. This form generally occurred in connection with respecting the authority of the religious leader. This form of commitment was expressed by a 14-year-old Orthodox Christian girl as she spoke of how she wants her life to be when she is an adult and the important role of her commitment to having a relationship with a religious leader as an authority in her life.

> I can't think of anything that I would really do differently. I'd just follow the basic patterns set out by the church. And just consult with a spiritual father; have a spiritual father for the family and as long as you have that and base and connections with the church, really it would be just about what we're doing right now.

The mother of a 13-year-old Latter-day Saint girl explained her perception of a role of the religious leader and why some youth may feel that connection or commitment.

I appreciate the support of youth leaders in the church and the bishop and others. . . . I think it lessens our conflict because they can reinforce and support values without it always having to be us telling the kids things. I think it's a little easier to take from somebody else sometimes.

Summary. This anchor—commitment to religious leaders—was most common among Christian (particularly Latter-day Saint) youth. It was slightly more common among male than female youth, and was also noticeably more common for younger youth than for older youth.

Discussion

The present study explored how Jewish, Christian, and Muslim youth talk about their religious commitments, what they are committing to, and how they express those commitments. King (2003:201) stated that scholars lack "the terminology and conceptual understanding to explain the mechanisms" related to adolescent religiosity and how it influences the lives of youth. The construct of *anchors of religious commitment* adds to this terminology and conceptual understanding of this domain. It complements King's work which identified religious congregations as a "spiritual anchor" (Garbarino, 1995; King, 2003) and expands the idea of "anchors" to include additional contexts, relationships, and resources that have an anchoring effect on adolescents exploring spiritual issues related to their purpose and place in the world, as Worthington et al. (2003) have shown are important in religious commitment.

Relational Commitment

The findings of the present study show, as suggested by Mahoney's (2010) review of related literature, that relational pathways are at work in the domain of adolescent religious commitment. The construct of anchors of religious commitment is a multidimensional relational construct that connects the individual with the religion. The relational component here is represented by relationships with living people as well as relationships with the ideas, teachings, and stories of people who are not living (as with a commitment to sacred texts and to a faith tradition). Commitment does indeed have one part centered in the individual but it also has a second part that is anchored in the relationship with the anchor of religious commitment.

Just as a sense of belonging and relationship is important in understanding why adolescents make sacrifices for their religion (Dollahite, Layton, Bahr, Walker, & Thatcher, 2009), religious commitment cannot be fully understood

without understanding the relationship between the individual and what she or he is committing to. While this relational concept has been addressed in previous research (King, 2003; Smith & Snell, 2009), the present study provides a construct through which we can continue to explore the relationship between the individual and the anchor of commitment and how those commitments are formed and maintained. The relationships between the adolescent and the seven anchors of religious commitment (religious traditions, rituals, and laws; God; the faith tradition or denomination; members of the faith community; parents; religious leaders; and sacred texts) seemed to be distinct dimensions of the ways the youth in this sample experienced and described their religious commitments.

Authority and the Internalization of Commitment

The findings of this study make clear that perceptions of authority and the associated commitments are intertwined. In five of the seven anchors of religious commitment (God, faith tradition or denomination, parents, scripture or sacred texts, and parents) the youth spoke of viewing the anchor as a source of authority. Sometimes these sources of authority were seen as authorities in religious matters and sometimes they were seen as authorities endowed with religious significance with influence over many domains of life. A fruitful direction for future research may be to further examine how and why adolescents differentially perceive the role of these sources of authority, and the impact that it has on their lives.

The message of the present study regarding sources of authority in some ways contrasts with much prior theory and research in the social sciences. For example, movement toward increasing autonomy and the renegotiation of authority, particularly with parents, is often seen as an important aspect of adolescence (Steinberg & Silk, 2002; Williams, 2003). Furthermore, in theories of moral development (Kohlberg, 1969) and internalization of values (Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1997), appeals to authority as the basis for making judgments and acting on values is less than ideal—doing so implies that moral ideals and values are less internalized, and thus probably less motivating. However, the present results suggest the possibility that perhaps adolescents perceive the anchors of religious commitment as sacred or "sanctified" (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003), and thus the acceptance of authority may be perceived differently in the religious domain of life. For example, appealing to God as a source of authority who can guide various aspects of our lives may be ideal in the context of religious commitment.

Developmental Commitment

When discussing their commitments to the different anchors of religious commitment, the youth in this sample often spoke of changes in the relative importance of those commitments. Some commitments were more important than others at certain times in their development or the development of the family system. These changes in relative importance may have been associated with developmental processes of adolescence as well as the processes of familial change that occur during an adolescent's life.

The theoretical work of Sullivan (1953) on intimacy in adolescence used the term *targets of intimacy* to describe the persons with whom the adolescent is developing an intimate relationship, and this concept seems analogous to our idea of anchors of commitment. Steinberg (2005) noted that targets of intimacy change over time. Where Sullivan theorized that the target changes from family members to same-sex peers and then to opposite-sex peers during the transition from preadolescence to late adolescence, Steinberg has shown that typically new targets do not replace old ones, but are added to them.

Similarly, it may be that through the transitions and developmental processes of adolescence relationships with the different anchors of religious commitment will change, with new commitments not necessarily replacing old ones but simply being added to the individual's constellation of commitment anchors.

Anchors of Religious Commitment and Identity Formation

Commitment and exploration continue to be the two primary constructs used in studying religious identity (Bertram-Troost, de Roos, & Miedema, 2009). The seven anchors of religious commitment identified here seemed to serve as distinct components of these adolescents' religious identity inasmuch as identity is defined in terms of commitments made and maintained. As Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, and Beyers (2006) "unpacked" commitment in the broad domain of identity development, the concept of anchors of religious commitment may help in further unpacking commitment in the specific domain of religious identity. Future research could examine how different constellations or combinations of the anchors of religious commitment in the lives of adolescents influence their religious identity.

Limitations

Despite the contributions this study can make to the literature on religious commitment, it had some limitations worth noting. First, the study was cross-sectional

and only captured a snapshot of the lives of these youth, prohibiting direct assessment of how anchors of religious commitment developed or changed over time. Second, given the purposive sampling procedure, the conclusions may only apply to more religiously involved youth in two-parent families.

Conclusion

Our finding that religious commitment in adolescence is anchored in (a) religious traditions, rituals, and laws; (b) God; (c) faith traditions or denominations; (d) faith community members; (e) parents; (f) scriptures or sacred texts; and (g) religious leaders broadens our understanding of how youth experience their religious commitments. These findings build upon previous work to explore the contexts, relationships, and resources that influence adolescent religious commitment. Further, these findings pave the way for exploring how differences in types of commitment influence the relative impact that religion has on adolescents and associated positive life outcomes.

That relationships anchor religious commitment in the lives of religious youth has important implications for parents and religious leaders. When these relationships are seen in light of their contribution to the larger issue of religious commitment, they take on a greater meaning. Greater efforts can be made to perpetuate religious traditions and rituals, help youth learn the stories of their religious heritage, encourage youth to develop a personal relationship with God, provide opportunities for youth to engage with other members of the religious congregation, strengthen parent-child relationships and parental modeling of religious commitment, foster connections between youth and religious leaders, and engage in religious conversations with youth (see Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008). All of these practical suggestions are examples of activities that can serve to strengthen the things that anchor religious commitment in the lives of adolescents.

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