

CHAPTER 13

Religion and Spirituality in Adolescent Development

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This chapter marks the first time that the topic of adolescent religiousness and spirituality has appeared in the *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*. Although significant attention was devoted to the religious development of adolescents in the early part of the twentieth century (e.g., Hall, 1904), and again in the 1960s and 1970s (see Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003), this topic was relatively neglected for much of the latter part of the twentieth century. It is only relatively recently that renewed interest in the topic of religious and spiritual development during adolescence has developed within the developmental sciences (e.g., Barrett & Richert, 2003; Bloom, 2007; Lerner, Roeser, & Phelps, 2008; Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener, & Benson, 2006).

Benson, Roehlkepartain, and Rude (2003) documented this recent lack of attention to religious and spiritual development during childhood and adolescence by reviewing the frequency of publications on these topics in six top-tiered journals (*Child Development*, *Developmental Psychology*, *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *Journal of Early Adolescence*, and *Journal of Research on Adolescence*). Of the 3,123 articles published in these journals between 1990 and July 2002, only 27 or 0.9% referenced “religion,” “religious development,” “spirituality,” or “spiritual development” as key

words. Repeating this search for the period from August 2002 to January 2008, we found that only 20 of the 1530 published articles, or 1.3%, referenced these key words.

These searches document that religion and spirituality are still rare topics of inquiry in the field of developmental science. Nonetheless, interest is increasing. The Society for Research on Adolescence’s Study Group on Adolescence in the 21st Century, for instance, noted that one of the areas most in need of research “across all nations” is the development of spiritual and religious values and identities during adolescence (Larson, Wilson, & Mortimer, 2002). As noted in Roehlkepartain et al. (2006), special issues on the topic have also appeared recently in peer-reviewed journals such as the *Journal of Adolescence*, *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, *Applied Developmental Science*, *Review of Religious Research*, *Journal of Health Psychology*, *Journal of Personality*, *New Directions for Youth Development*, and *American Psychologist* (special section). Another indicator of emerging interest in this area is the inclusion of chapters on spiritual and religious development in prominent handbooks in the field of developmental science such as this handbook. For example, for the first time since its original publication in 1946, the sixth edition of the *Handbook of Child Psychology* included a chapter on

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spiritual development (Oser, Scarlett, & Bucher, 2006). In addition, comprehensive synthesis of existing research and theory in the *Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence* (Roehlkepartain et al., 2006) and the *Encyclopedia of Religious and Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence* (Dowling & Scarlett, 2006) have recently been published.

Given this emerging area of interest in the study of adolescence, we pursue four aims in this chapter. First, as a way of demonstrating the importance of the growing scholarly attention to religiosity and spirituality, we provide a demographic portrait of the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of adults and adolescents in the United States in particular. We present facts that show religion/spirituality to be an important part of the everyday lives of tens of millions of Americans young and old. To ignore this domain of study in human development as has been the case historically (Donelson, 1999) is thus to ignore something rather central to adolescent development (e.g., Lerner et al., 2008; Roehlkepartain et al., 2006), to the life of our nation (e.g., Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008d) to the global challenges of our times (e.g., Harris, 2004). After presenting a case for the importance of religion and spirituality in adolescent development, we review theoretical perspectives on religious and spiritual development during adolescence with a particular emphasis on a developmental system, social ecological perspective. This perspective provides a framework for organizing our review of extant evidence regarding how different social contexts influence religious and spiritual development during adolescence, as well as the role of religion and spirituality in broader aspects of adolescent development such as health, subjective well-being, education, risk behavior, and civic engagement. Finally, we examine the problematic and sometimes pathological role of religion/spirituality in adolescent development. We conclude with suggestions for future research.

THE ROLE OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN ADOLESCENTS' LIVES: DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

In 1999, Gallup International (1999) surveyed over 50,000 people in 60 countries across the world about their religious beliefs. The sample represented approximately 1.25 billion people. Results showed that 87% of respondents self-identified with a collective religious tradition, and approximately two-thirds reported that "God" was very important in their lives. These trends were particularly strong in West Africa, Latin America, and North America. These findings and others document that: (1) religion/spirituality is a central part of the lives of a majority of the people across the world, particularly in developing nations; (2) the United States stands out as one of the most religious nations in the developed world, especially compared to western European countries; and China remains much less religious than other developing nations (Pew Forum, 2002).

U.S. Adult Trends in Religious and Spiritual Self-Identification

According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2008), the religious affiliations of the U.S. adult population are changing in dramatic ways. Currently, the adult population identifies religiously as 51% Protestant Christian; 24% Catholic Christian; 16% unaffiliated with a religion; >2% Jewish, >2% Mormon, and >1% Muslim. About 4% were affiliated with other major faiths, and 1% refused to answer or didn't know.

These numbers reflect five basic trends in American religious life. First, for the first time in the history of the United States, a nation founded on Protestant Christianity, Protestantism represents only a slight religious majority (51%) or may even now be less than 50% of the country (Portes & Rumbaut, 2007) due to long-term declines in church membership. Second, a small but increasingly significant number of Americans identify religiously as Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or Orthodox Christian (e.g., Eck, 2007). Third, despite

declines in church membership among U.S.-born Catholics, the membership of the Catholic church has remained stable (24%) in the United States due to immigrants, mostly from Latin America, the Philippines, and, to some extent, Vietnam, who identify as Catholic (Portes & Rumbaut). Fourth, an increasing proportion of Americans identify themselves as unaffiliated with any religious tradition. That approximately 14%–16% of American adults affiliate with no religious tradition, and that this percentage has increased over the past decade and a half, is taken as evidence of an increasing but still minority trend toward secularization in the United States (Portes & Rumbaut).

Finally, evidence suggests that there is great fluidity among American adults with respect to their religious affiliations. The Pew Forum study (2007) found that more than one-quarter of American adults (28%) have left the faith in which they were raised during childhood in favor of another religion or no religion at all. If one included switching churches within the Protestant faith in estimates of fluidity, this percentage of changing denominations rises to 44%. Add to this kind of fluidity Americans' tolerance for exploring practices beyond their tradition and the increase in interreligious marriages, and the religious context in America seems fluid indeed.

U.S. Adolescent Trends in Religious and Spiritual Self-Identification

Given the high levels of religiosity among American adults, it is not surprising that representative studies of American youth have documented that the vast majority of adolescents in the United States tend to affiliate with one particular religious group (84%–87%; Smith & Denton, 2005; Wallace, Forman, Caldwell, & Willis, 2003). In addition, a significant minority of young people today do not identify with any religion (13%–16%; Smith & Denton; Wallace et al.). Similar to the findings for adults (Pew, 2008), the number of religiously unaffiliated adolescents seems to be rising (Wallace et al.).

In terms of specific religious identifications, results of the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) show that religious affiliations among adolescents parallel those of adults (Smith & Denton, 2005). Results documented that most youth in the United States self-identify as *Christian* (75%); mainly *Protestant* (52%) and *Catholic* (23%). In addition, 2.5% self-identify religiously as *Mormon*, 1.5% as *Jewish*, 0.5% as *Muslim*, and another 1%–2% identify with other religions (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses, Hindus, Buddhists, Eastern Orthodox Christian, Unitarian Universalist, etc.). Furthermore, results showed that approximately 3% of adolescents self-identify with two different religions, likely due to the increase in interreligious marriages in U.S. society (Eck, 2007). The rest of adolescents in the NSYR, reflective of a substantial minority of adolescents (16%), did not report any collective religious identity (see also Wallace et al., 2003). These youth were labeled *nonreligious* (Smith & Denton, p. 31). Among adolescents whom Smith and Denton called *nonreligious*, most self-identified themselves as “just not religious” (10%), “atheist” (1.5%), or “agnostic” (1.5%). The remaining 3% of the 16% “nonreligious youth” seemed uncertain about their religious identity, suggesting a small percentage of young people may have relatively “unexplored” religious identities in adolescence (Smith & Denton). Some of these young people who did not identify with a religion in fact were raised in a household where there was religion. The main reason for why U.S. adolescents raised in a religion said they were nonreligious was, by far, intellectual skepticism and disbelief (Smith & Denton).

Religious Importance and Attendance Among U.S. Adolescents

Perhaps the most studied variables indexing religiosity beyond religious self-identification is individuals' self-rated importance of religion to themselves (or in their lives) and religious attendance—usually frequency of attendance or time spent in religious services. These

measures are often combined and called religiosity or religiousness—an unfortunate mixing of what can be considered psychological identity beliefs and religious behavior. Nonetheless, using these measures, several nationally representative studies in the last 10 years suggest that between 50%–60% of American adolescents can be considered “strongly religious” (Benson et al., 2003; Wallace et al., 2003). Smith and Denton (2005) report that about half of all U.S. adolescents (ages 13–17 years) indicate a strong, positive orientation to matters of religion, faith and religious experience in their lives. They point out that this means “the other half of U.S. teenagers express weak or no subjective attachment to religion and have fewer or no religious experiences” (p. 68).

Interestingly, Benson et al. (2003) also found sizeable proportions of youth who reported high attendance at religious services also reported low personal importance of religion. They speculated that parental pressures to attend services or voluntary youth attendance for the social rather than the religious aspect of religious activities with same-aged peers are the primary motivators behind such adolescents’ attendance at religious programs, activities, and services. These results highlight the importance of (1) conducting research on the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of adolescents; (2) attending to the diversity of motives youth have for such attendance; and furthermore (3) allowing for the possibility in such research that in fact religion/spirituality plays little to no role in the development of some youth.

Age Differences

Research on age-related differences in indicators of religious attendance and salience is equivocal. Findings from one longitudinal study showed widespread continuous levels of religious attendance and importance across adolescence. In a study of 370 youth, Benson, Scales, Sesma, and Roehlkepartain (2005) found that about two-thirds showed continuous levels of religious importance from the

middle to high school years. Nonetheless, that finding means that the other third of their sample showed a discontinuity during this period with attitudes changing from both favorable to unfavorable and vice versa. Wallace et al. (2003) reported less attendance among older adolescence and Smith and Denton (2005) reported minor age-related differences in various indicators of religiosity in their cross-sectional, national study of 13–17 year olds. These authors posit that declines in religiosity noted in other studies may begin after age 17.

Cohort Differences

Using data from the 1976–1999 panels of the Monitoring the Future Study, Wallace et al. (2003) found a decline in religious attendance among high school seniors across the 1970s and 1980s, and a stabilization of attendance among 12th graders across the 1990s. A conservative interpretation of their findings, the authors write, is that “religiosity has been fairly stable for over a decade among 8th and 10th graders and for more than a quarter century among 12th graders” (Wallace et al., p. 121).

Sex Differences

Several studies have shown that sex differences in religiosity are evident among adolescents (Smith & Denton, 2005; Wallace et al., 2003). Smith and Denton reported that, compared to adolescent boys, adolescent girls aged 13–17 years old (1) attend religious services more frequently, (2) see religion as shaping their daily lives more; (3) are more likely to have made a personal commitment to live life for God; (4) are involved more often in religious youth groups; (5) pray more alone; and (6) feel closer to God. These gender differences, consistent but fairly small in magnitude, remain after accounting for youths’ social backgrounds. Furthermore, such sex differences persist into adulthood (Batson, Schoenrade & Ventis, 1993; Donahue & Benson, 1995).

Geographic Trends

There are also geographic differences in the level of religiosity among adolescents. Smith

and Denton (2005) found that adolescents in the Northeast were generally the least religious, those in the South the most religious, and those in the Midwest and West fell in between. Wallace et al. (2003) reported slightly different findings from data collected in the late 1990s. Among this cohort of adolescents, those living in the South indeed reported the most attendance and highest centrality of religion to self and those in the Midwest showed intermediate levels of religiosity. These findings corroborate those of Smith and Denton. However, youth in the Monitoring the Future study in 1999 who lived in the West and the Northeast were found to be less religious on these measures than those in the South and Midwest. These findings concerning youth growing up in Western states differ from the NSYR findings. It may be that 10 years of immigration in Western states, especially immigration of Latin Americans who tend to be very religious, may account for this difference (Eck, 2007).

In addition to these major geographical differences, research shows that adolescents who live in the most rural and sparsely populated counties in the United States tend to be more religious than those living in more populated, urban environments (Smith & Denton, 2005; Wallace et al., 2003). Furthermore, studies within rural communities in Iowa show that European-American adolescents living on farms had stronger ties to religious institutions and were more committed to religious values than their peers who do not live on farms (King, Elder, & Whitbeck, 1997).

In sum, demographic evidence in the United States shows that formal religious participation is important in about 50% of U.S. adolescents' lives, with some decline in religiousness among older adolescents. There are also sex differences in which female adolescents are more religious than their male peers. There is also evidence to suggest that living in the South, the Midwest, and to some degree the West, as well as the less densely populated and more rural areas of the country, is associated with greater religiousness among youth. These levels of

youth religious involvement may impact the development of adolescents. Such influences would, of course, depend at least in part on the nature of religious and spiritual development. Accordingly, in the next section, we provide an overview of theories of religious and spiritual development during adolescence.

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES OF RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN ADOLESCENCE

The study of religion and spirituality in developmental science hinges on whether it is possible to formulate *good* theories from which scientists derive clear and scientifically tractable definitions of what religion and spirituality *are* substantively, what they *do* functionally (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Weaver, Pargament, Flannelly, & Oppenheimer, 2006), and how they *develop* systematically over ontogenetic time (cf. Lerner et al., 2008; Oser et al., 2006; Roehlkepartain et al., 2006). Indeed, the challenge of having "good" theories is one that has historically plagued the study of the psychology of religion (Batson, 1997). Having good theory remains a significant challenge in the contemporary study of religious and spiritual development (RSD) during adolescence.

Nonetheless, several key theoretical strands can be discerned in current research on religious and spiritual development (RSD) during adolescence. Specifically, RSD has been discussed in terms of (1) a relational system affording security and anxiety reduction; (2) a meaning system affording existential answers in the context of life's "boundary conditions" (e.g., death) and unexplainable life events; (3) the development of cognitive schemas indexing conceptions of religious phenomena such as prayer and God; (4) an identity-motivation system organized around particular religious and spiritual goals, values, and ultimate concerns; (5) states and stages of awareness that transcend ego-consciousness and its boundedness in time and space (e.g., mystical experiences,

construct-aware stages of functioning); and (6) a dynamic developmental systems perspective in which RSD is seen in relation to multiple contexts, people, symbol systems, and opportunities and risks that foster or frustrate such development across the life span. In addition, not all current scholarship about RSD is theoretically framed. Accordingly, we begin this discussion by describing two atheoretical definitions that nevertheless have served as a point of departure for more theoretical approaches.

Atheoretical Approaches and the Study of Religion and Spirituality

A proliferation of atheoretical, descriptive taxonomies of RSD and of the question of how to distinguish religion and spirituality in human development characterize the field of the psychology of religion and spirituality today (Paloutzian & Park, 2005). Traditionally, the field of psychology of religion subsumed the terms *religion* and *spirituality* under the construct of religion (Spilka et al., 2003). However, recent years have seen a divergence in these constructs, both in the culture as well as in the sciences (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). Thus, debate over the substantive and functional distinctions between *religiousness* and *spirituality* is one of a number of central conceptual challenges in the psychology of religion today, and one that bears centrally on developmental science theories of religious and spiritual development.

One prominent atheoretical approach to distinguishing between religion and spirituality is to conceptualize religion at the level of an organized sociocultural–historical system, and spirituality at the level of individuals’ personal quests for meaning, happiness, and wisdom. For instance, in chapter 1, Definitions, of the *Handbook of Religion and Health* (Koenig et al., 2001), religion is defined substantively and functionally as:

. . . an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols that serve to (a) to facilitate individuals’ closeness to the sacred or

transcendent other (i.e., God, higher power, ultimate truth) and (b) to bring about an understanding of an individual’s relationship and responsibility to others living together in community. (p.18)

In contrast, spirituality is defined as:

. . . a personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, about meaning, and about relationship to the sacred or transcendent, which may (or may not) lead to or arise from the development of religious rituals and the formation of community. (p. 18)

This perspective is close to Pargament’s (2007) view of personal religiousness or spirituality as a “quest for the sacred” in which the “sacred” is defined in terms of individuals’ “concepts of God, the divine and transcendent reality, as well as other aspects of life that take on divine character and significance by virtue of their association with, or representation of, divinity” (Pargament, 2007, p. 32). Koenig et al. posit that there are five “types” of (individual-level) spiritualities that are either “moored” or “unmoored” to an established (social-level) religious tradition. For the vast majority, they posit that the spiritual life is “moored” or tied to a formal religious tradition. Nonetheless, Koenig et al. (2001) also acknowledge the existence of individuals who search for meaning to ultimate questions through unmoored spiritualities such as “humanist spirituality” in which the focal concerns center on humanity as a whole, universal ethics, and the cultivation of human potential rather than around a Transcendent God or Transcendental Reality. This approach of assigning religion to the level of context and spirituality to the level of the person as a means of differentiating religion from spirituality is somewhat elegant. Rather than having to then decide if the person is religious or spiritual at the individual level (which tells one little about the meaning and functional significance of these terms), Koenig et al. propose that researchers focus

attention on “religiously moored” or “religiously unmoored” forms of spirituality at the individual level. As mentioned earlier, given that nearly a half of adolescents report no formal religious engagement, and more and more are identifying with no religion, a focus on unmoored forms of spirituality during these years is warranted in the future.

The notion of “moored spiritualities” is akin to the situation when individuals identify as “religious.” The notion of “unmoored spiritualities” is akin to the situation in which individuals identify as “spiritual, not religious.” Zinnbauer and Pargament (2005) summarize research on adults that also applies to U.S. adolescents with respect to identifications as “religious and spiritual” and “spiritual, not religious.” They suggest that:

1. Most people identify as both religious and spiritual.
2. A minority of people identify as “spiritual not religious,” sometimes using this identification as a repudiation of institutional religion (e.g., Hood, 2003).
3. Religiousness and spirituality are constructs that overlap in the United States and are very similar, but not identical.
4. The terms are both multidimensional and multilevel constructs crossing biological, mental, and social levels of analysis.
5. Both religiosity and spirituality develop and change over time at the level of individuals and groups.
6. Religiousness and spirituality are developing different connotations in U.S. culture and science, with a trend toward religion being associated with the social system or group level, and spirituality being associated with the individual level of analysis.

For purposes of this chapter, we use the generic term *religious and spiritual development* (RSD) to capture the development of both moored and unmoored forms of spirituality during adolescence. This general notion provides a point of departure for discussing

several theories of the development of religiously moored and unmoored spiritualities.

Religion and the Development of Relational Security

Freud saw religion as a “universal obsessional neurosis” derived from infantile human wishes for love, comfort and security (Freud, 1961, p. 43). Religion was an “opiate” derived across human evolution to provide an illusory sense of safety and security against the frailty of life and the ubiquity of suffering. Despite the fact that psychoanalytic accounts of religion have been criticized thoroughly on a number of grounds (see Spilka et al., 2003), Freud’s “opiate theory” of religion informed and was transformed by subsequent object relations and attachment theorists.

With respect to Object Relations Theory, Rizzuto (1979) argued that representations of God are a universal outcome of a child’s relationships with their parents or other caretakers. According to object relations theory, individuals internalize affectively charged representations of their relationships with significant others such as parents as “psychic objects.” Internalized images of parents become “templates” for comprehending and understanding the development of God images and relationships in individuals.

For Rizzuto and other object relations theorists, God images are posited to serve as “transitional objects” that can reduce attachment insecurity as the child develops more independence from caregivers (e.g., Dickie et al., 1997), and at other times in the life course characterized by significant life change and stress. Of course, one such time in the life course is adolescence and its suite of biopsychosocial changes. Evidence shows that many young people in the United States and around the world report relationships with God (Gallup, 1999) and that as distance from parents increase, intimacy with God increases (Dickie et al.). Furthermore, there is some evidence of important changes in conceptions of God toward a more relational view during

adolescence. In one study, Deconchy (1965) found three stages in such development from ages 7 to 16 years among French Catholics. In the first stage, from about 7 to 11 years, God was seen as having concrete anthropomorphic attributes. From 11 to 14 years, these attributes of God became more abstract, following general trends in cognitive development. Interestingly, from 14 onward, youth reported more abstract and relational conceptions of God—focusing on their personal relationships with God in terms of themes of love and trust. These findings suggest that conscious relational images of God may become more salient during adolescence. Similarly, evidence suggests that in adolescents' prayer life, there is a development from instrumental forms of prayer towards a dialogic style of prayer in which attempting to get closer to God is central (Scarlett & Perriello, 1991).

A related view of RSD comes from an adaptation of the evolution-based theory of parent-child attachments put forth by Bowlby (1988). Kirkpatrick (1997) likened individuals' relationships with God to their relational attachments to parents and also posited that the parent-child relationship serves as a template for the kind of God image children develop. Such attachment schemas, in both cases, are assumed to serve the functions of protection and comfort during times of stress. Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) posited two main hypotheses. First, they forwarded the compensation hypothesis in which individuals with insecure parental attachments are hypothesized to develop a belief in a loving, personal, and available God as a means of compensating for the absence of relational security in infancy. Second, they presented the mental model hypothesis, in which attachments, secure or insecure, provide a mental model upon which individuals base their later religious beliefs and relational images of God.

In a study of adults, Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) found that the relation between attachment style and individuals' own religiosity was moderated by their mothers' religiosity.

Among those who reported growing up with religious mothers, those with any of three types of attachment styles were more highly religious. Those with secure attachments to "nonreligious" mothers reported less religiosity themselves later. These findings were interpreted as examples of basic "mental modeling effects." The study also showed that those with avoidant attachments to "nonreligious" mothers reported more of an orientation toward religion, more religious activity, and greater closeness to God later. This finding was interpreted as a "compensation effect." These individuals were also more likely to report having had a "sudden conversion experience" as well. Kirkpatrick and Shaver note, "religion may function in a compensatory role for those with a (retrospectively) reported history of avoidant attachment; that is, God may serve as a substitute attachment figure" (1990, p. 315). Those individuals with ambivalent attachments fell in between, but were more like the securely attached in that they followed the role of their mother in religion. Other research with adults has also appeared more to support the correspondence hypothesis—that individuals develop attachments with God that are similar to their attachment with parents (Piedmont, 2005).

Research with youth utilizing the attachment theory perspective on religion has been conducted in Sweden, where the evidence suggested support for the compensation hypothesis. Youths with insecure early attachments were more likely to believe in a loving God (Granqvist, 2002). These results suggest a number of possibilities for adolescents. Those with secure attachments to parents are likely to adopt the faith and God images (or lack thereof) of their parents (e.g., Hertel & Donahue, 1995). However, those with insecure attachments are likely to seek security by joining a religious organization and seeking social support in that setting. Alternatively, they may reject their parents' religion altogether as a function of their distant or difficult relationships with parents (e.g., Smith, 2003b).

In sum, several of the notions originally discussed in psychodynamic theories of religion live on in the contemporary study of religious and spiritual development in adolescence in spirit if not specific content. One is the focus on the relational elements of religious faith. The notion of religious or spiritual development as involving the development of a relationship with that which is perceived as the Transcendent (i.e., God) or that of transcendental value is present in many definitions of religion today (e.g., Pargament, 2007). Indeed, in a sense, William James's (1902) view of religion was relational in that he defined *personal religion* as "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, as far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" (p. 32). In sum, one way of understanding RSD is in terms of the elaboration and internalization of specific God images, with specific affective tones, across time that serve nonconscious relational functions, such as anxiety reduction. The research on such conjectures suffers from methodological weaknesses however, such as the relative lack of ability of researchers to accurately measure unconscious "God images" (Piedmont, 2005).

Religion as a Meaning/Coping System

Another related way that scholars have conceptualized RSD is in terms of the development of an attributional meaning system that addresses certain kinds of life events, experiences, and existence writ large. Meaning systems can be defined as "personal beliefs or theories [individuals] have about themselves, about others, about the world of situations they encounter, and their relations to it. These beliefs or theories form idiosyncratic meaning systems that allow individuals to give meaning to the world around them and to their experiences, as well as to set goals, plan activities, and order their behavior" (Silberman, 2005, p. 644.). Religions provide individuals with meaning-enhancing capabilities in the face of unexplainable events by providing individuals with a ready set of

religious attributions for such purposes—God's grace, karma, sin, salvation, and so on. Evidence suggests that religious attributions for events are more likely in circumstances in which naturalistic attributions (e.g., to people, physical events, chance, etc.) prove unsatisfactory (Spilka, Shaver, & Kirkpatrick, 1997). Such events usually involve "boundary conditions" in life such as inexplicable suffering, moral transgressions, and death. According to psychologists of religion, the motivational impetus for religious attributional processes in the face of such unexplained events and the consequent meaning systems that evolve from them includes the need to establish meaning, personal control, and a sense of well-being (Spilka et al., 2003). Over developmental time, attributional processes are both contributory to and a function of religious beliefs systems. Such systems develop across the life span, beginning with intuitive or folk belief systems and changing towards more abstract belief systems during adolescence (e.g., Bloom, 2005; Park, 2005).

Bering (2003) hypothesized that there exists a unique attributional meaning system he called the "existential domain" whose function is to ascertain the meaning of events that happen to oneself. As such, Bering described this domain as an abstract ontological domain within which the subjective narrative self is said to be contained and whose function is said to be to make meaning of, in order of developmental complexity and abstractness, one's life events, one's experience, and one's existence in totality. This domain is hypothesized to be independent of both the physical domain, and its function in explaining the movements and dynamics of inanimate objects, and the social domain and its function in the comprehension of intentional agents and other minds. It is also hypothesized to be independent of the biological domain and its function in explaining animate objects and their dynamics of growth and decay. Nonetheless, the domain often involves elements of these other meaning making systems. The triggers for meaning

making through the existential rather than the physical, social, and biological domains of mental life, according to Bering, are events whose causes are not easily interpretable through these other domains and whose causes therefore demand some form of alternative interpretation. For instance, individuals who have a close encounter with death and can find no logical explanation for their good fortune may invoke attributions about invisible forces (karma) and intentional agents (God) as a means of establishing existential meaning. Furthermore, Bering sees this system as tied to a more general intentional system that has been documented to tend towards the attribution of teleological purpose to an abstract agency (i.e., God) that is envisioned to be responsible for events personal and otherwise (e.g., Bloom, 2005). Such a system, if proven to exist, would have significant implications for religious and spiritual development during adolescence, insofar as identity development and questions about purpose and existence become focal during these years (Damon, 2008).

Smith and Denton (2005) described the prevailing religious meaning system among adolescents in the United States today—the vast majority of whom self-identify as Christian—in terms of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD). They suggested that MTD among adolescents in the United States is “diesm” because it is centered on a diety—an ultimate being called “God” (or, less so in America, “Allah” and “Yahweh”) who created the universe, orders it with divine moral laws, and then watches over human life on earth. Given the central role of God in such a worldview, questions about “What, in the end, does God want for us and want for us to do?” and “What is the way to God and happiness?” arise. The MTD worldview is “moralistic” in that it teaches that living a good and happy life on earth requires that one be a good and moral person. Adolescents in the United States believe that God wants them to be happy, and that the way to happiness is by being morally good and obeying the moral laws laid down in religious

scriptures. Being morally good not only leads to happiness, but in general, youth believe that “good people go to Heaven when they die” (Smith & Denton, p. 163). Third, the MTD worldview is “therapeutic” in that it frames God as an ultimate and benevolent being who assists us in feeling good and happy about ourselves and our lives through grace and the scriptures. Finally, Smith and Denton suggested that the “God” of MTD is “not one who is particularly personally involved in one’s affairs—especially affairs in which one would prefer not to have God involved” (p. 164). This “distant God,” they suggest, is selectively available for taking care of needs, coping with stress, and providing meaning to otherwise unexplainable personal experiences and events.

Another area of study that builds on this religion as meaning system perspective is what Pargament (2007) refers to “religious coping.” Religious coping is defined as “a search for significance in times of stress in ways related to the sacred.” This definition means that some individuals will use religious and spiritual knowledge and imagery in their search for the causes of and ways of responding to life stress. For instance, some individuals interpret the causes of certain life stressors in terms of “sanctification”—a challenging experience that is “God given” in some sense. Other people use religious responses as a means of addressing life stress—for instance, not only attributing life stressors as “God given” but reframing them in a positive light such that they are spiritual tests or learning experiences associated with suffering.

Despite the burgeoning literature on religious coping among adults (Pargament, 2007), research on religious coping among adolescents is not very well developed at this time (Mahoney, Pendleton, & Ihrke, 2006). In one of the few studies done on religious coping with youth to date, Dubow, Pargament, Boxer, and Tarakeshwar (2000) found that Jewish adolescents used three different kinds of religious coping strategies in the face of stressors: asking God for help in times of need, seeking

support from Jewish culture and social relationships, and seeing one's difficulties in a spiritual light.

Religion as a meaning system can also serve as a buffer against the effects of racial and ethnic discrimination on minority and immigrant youth (Eck, 2007). For example, the use of Afrocentric coping strategies involving spirituality has been an important coping resource for the African-American community for much of its history (McCrae, Thompson, & Cooper, 1999). In a sample of 106 African-American high school-aged adolescents, Constantine, Donnell, and Myers (2002) found that the use of religious coping strategies was greatest among those with a secure sense of their African-American identity. In a different sample of 50 African-American high school-aged adolescents, Brega and Coleman (1999) found that those who were more religious were less likely to internalize stigmatizing messages in the wider society about African Americans.

In sum, a second way of understanding RSD is in terms of the elaboration and internalization of a specific meaning system and worldview that provides answers to the existential questions of life that defy naturalistic explanations. In turn, questions take on emergent significance during the adolescent years as young begin to conceptualize the world in increasingly abstract ways and encounter increasingly adult-like life experiences, such as unjust treatment at the hands of others.

Religion as Cognitive/Conceptual Development

Another notion of RSD is one that sees religion as involving a distinct representational domain with its own focal psychological content, functions, and stage structures (see Oser et al., 2006, for a review of such approaches). In contrast to psychoanalytic and objects relations theories which focused on religion in relation to basic motives of the personality and the quality of caregiver relationships, stage-structure theories drew upon notions of constructivism and Piaget's theory of cognitive development.

These theories focus on age-related changes in the kinds of mental representations that young people could construct around religious topics and issues, as well as their functional implications for the motivation and regulation of behavior across development. Focal content includes elements such as the development of conceptions of prayer and God concepts over time (e.g., Spilka et al., 2003). Stage-structure theories have shown that, from childhood to adolescence, religious concepts generally followed the Piagetian stages of representational development from more concrete and single domain to more abstract and multidimensional representations (see Oser et al. for details).

Faith Development Theory

One of the most comprehensive and enduring stage-structure theories of religious development was offered by James Fowler (1981). Fowler's Faith Development Theory is rooted in genetic structuralism and describes development that leads from the particular to the universal and from heteronomy to autonomy. Fowler's theoretical approach establishes significant age trends and the stages, drawing heavily from Piaget, Erikson, and Kohlberg. Faith Development Theory offers a framework for understanding the ontogeny of how people conceptualize God, or a Higher Being, and how the influence of the divine has an impact on core values, beliefs, and meanings in their personal lives and in their relationships with others. Erikson's stage theory greatly contributed to the development of Faith Development Theory (1981; also see Fowler & Dell, 2006). Thus, Fowler (1981) contends that faith has broadly recognizable patterns of development. He describes this unfolding pattern in terms of developing emotional, cognitive, and moral interpretations and responses (for a discussion of all six stages of his theory see, Fowler or Fowler & Dell).

Fowler (1981) described the substance of *religious faith* as an individual's personal way of responding to that of "transcendent value and power as perceived and grasped through

the forms of the cumulative tradition” (Fowler, p. 9). Fowler describes faith as an “orientation of the total person” involving an “alignment of the will” and “a resting of the heart” in accordance with “a vision of transcendent value and power, one’s ultimate concern” (p. 14). Faith, as such, is “the human quest for relation to transcendence” (p. 14) and to “that which is universal” (p. 15). Functionally, Fowler hypothesized that religious faith serves “to give purpose and goal to one’s hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions” (p. 14). Although Fowler’s theory has been criticized for its strong cognitive basis and for its suggestion that children are limited to less mature forms of faith (e.g., Balswick, King, & Reimer, 2005), it put the study of religion, spirituality, and faith on a serious developmental footing.

Specifically during adolescence, Fowler attributes developments in cognitive functioning as the basis for faith development. Based on Piaget’s conception of early formal operational thinking, Fowler suggests in this *synthetic-conventional stage*, that adolescents are capable of abstract thinking and begin to reflect upon their own thinking and their stories and to name and synthesize their understandings into higher order, abstract concepts, and conceptual systems. In addition, Fowler also credits the emergence of mutual interpersonal perspective taking (e.g., Selman, 1980) as an important influence on faith development at this stage. He suggests that a young person’s capacity to be aware of what other people think of them can make youth very sensitive to the evaluations they have of others and the evaluations others might have of them. In addition, because some adolescents may lack “third person” perspective taking, they are over dependent on the responses and evaluations of others.

Because of these cognitive developments, identity development becomes a more self-reflective process. Fowler contends that at this stage youth construct transcendent understandings in terms of the personal and the relational. God representations often have personal qualities such as love, understanding, loyalty, and

support. During this stage, young people commit to beliefs, values, and aspects of identity that link them to significant others in their lives. Within this synthetic-conventional stage, normative to adolescence, dependence on others for confirmation and clarity about one’s sense of self and meaning can trap the adolescent in the “tyranny of the they.” At this stage, ideology is lived and asserted, and only in later stages it is critically reflected on.

Cognitive–Cultural Foundations

A cognitive science approach to religion has arisen that in some ways challenges and also extends constructivist notions such as Faith Development Theory with respect to religious and spiritual development (Bloom, 2007). In contrast to Piaget’s conception that children are confused about religious/spiritual things until they have acquired the ability to think abstractly and differentiate reality from fantasy, current cognitive–developmental research points to young people’s seemingly inherent intuitive capacities to differentiate objects into those of natural and supernatural kinds (Bloom, 2005). The conjecture underlying the development of such an intuitive capacity is that it evolved from cognitive features designed for other evolutionary tasks. These features, when combined together, give rise to new and unexpected things – in this case, beliefs in souls, Gods, and supernatural phenomena more generally (Bloom, 2007). Mithen (1996), for instance, traces the emergence of spirituality to *cognitive flexibility*—the connection of previously separate domains of intelligence.

Alternatively, according to Bloom (2007), the existence of different intuitive cognitive mechanisms for understanding physical reality and social reality present at or near birth give rise to a fundamental dualistic outlook in human functioning and to the universal themes of religion as well. These mechanisms evolved separately and allow humans to distinguish between a world of material things, on the one hand, and the world of immaterial things like goals, desires and agency, on the other. Johnson and Boyatzis

(2006) note the human attraction to representations of agents that combine the ordinary with the extraordinary, as in the case of God. In support of these ideas, studies show that very young children all over the world, often despite their parents' own beliefs, seem to generate concepts of God (Barrett & Keil, 1996; Barrett & Richert, 2003). Young people (and adults) often view God in concrete, anthropomorphic terms. Nevertheless, they also see God as special and someone who is not limited by the laws of nature. The coapplication of these mechanisms to ourselves and other humans, according to this view, causes us to believe our bodies, as material things, are different in kind from our minds or our souls, as immaterial things.

According to Bloom (2007), the intersection of these mechanisms gives rise to the ideas of bodies without souls, souls without bodies, and the possibility of "life after death." Contrary to the popular belief that children cannot fully grasp the concept of death, recent research (Bering & Bjorklund, 2004; Boyer, 2001) points to afterlife beliefs held even by youngsters. Young people can appreciate the cessation of physical functioning. However, they simultaneously struggle with death's elimination of mental functioning, due to the application of different information processing modules to understand the body and the mind.

In addition, the application of our social information processing module to non-social events causes human beings to be hypersensitive to signs of agency in the natural world and to over impute intentionality to complex phenomena like the weather or the design of nature. The consequence of this cognitive functioning is to read agency into events in the form of Gods and other supernatural beings that are intuited to control events and personal experiences. Studies by Evans (2000, 2001), for instance, reveal that 7- to 9-year-old children typically hold creationist views whether or not they grow up in secular or fundamentalist Christian homes. Children, that is, tend to explain the origin of things in teleological, creationist ways.

A key point in both classic Piagetian and new cognitive science accounts of RSD during adolescence is that with the development of abstract symbolic representation and meta-cognition during these years, intuitive religious beliefs from earlier life and the insights that they have provided children about nature, human nature and God can be challenged by new inquiries and doubts and by new sources of information from school, the media, peers, and so on. Elkind (1997), for instance, posited adolescence to be a period in which cognitive development heralds a new "search for comprehension." With respect to religion, Elkind saw adolescents' emergent desire for comprehension as leading to two possibilities—a deepening commitment to faith and its ability to render life comprehensible; or a reflective inquiry into and perhaps a repudiation of the articles of faith that were assimilated earlier. Given the widespread belief in souls, angels, afterlives and so on among many adults in the United States and the world, it seems these early mechanisms are more often than not co-opted into the shape of traditional religious beliefs and doctrines than questioned in any serious manner that leads to a new kind of inner spiritual life for individuals (see Bloom, 2005, for discussion). Nonetheless, it is clear that adolescence represents a time of spiritual questioning, doubting, and questing (see Hunsberger, Pratt & Pancer, 2002).

In sum, a third way of understanding RSD is in terms of the elaboration or repudiation of intuitive religious concepts concerning faith, God, the supernatural, creation, and so on, in terms of the new information-processing capacities that normatively emerge during adolescence.

Religion as Identity System

A fourth and related way that scholars have defined RSD in adolescence is in terms a domain or set of domains of identity development (Allport, 1950; Roeser et al., 2008a; Templeton & Eccles, 2008). Such conceptualizations often are founded on the notion that

religion, like any other salient domain of social experience, constitutes an important source of individual differences in the kinds of social–cognitive–affective self-schemas or representations that are elaborated across development as a function of experience (e.g., Epstein, 1990; Harter, 2006).

One early scholar who conceptualized religion as part of one's broader psychosocial development was Erik Erikson (1968). In contrast to early psychoanalytic perspectives, Erikson was interested in the objective relationships between the person (ego) and their social and cultural environments (ethos), and the implications of these person–context relations for psychosocial identity development.

In his epigenetic theory of psychosocial development, Erikson (1950) gave considerable attention to the role of religion and spirituality in development. According to Erikson, identity development during adolescence involved a more or less conscious recycling through and reworking of prior developmental task resolutions from infancy, toddlerhood, and childhood. Erikson proposed that earlier task resolutions associated with security and belonging (e.g., trust versus mistrust), self and will (e.g., autonomy and initiative versus shame, doubt, and guilt), and personal and social competence (e.g., industry versus inferiority) were reworked during adolescence in the process of identity exploration and commitment and in the context of (emerging) adult roles, relationships, institutions, and ideological systems. Specifically, earlier task resolutions around trust were said to be renegotiated during adolescence in terms of the kinds of people, role models, cultural ideals, and social institutions in which the growing young person could (or could not) have *faith*; earlier task resolutions around issues of autonomy and initiative were renegotiated in terms of the self-images, purposes, and corresponding activities and ideologies to which youth could (or could not) freely choose to commit; and previous task resolutions around issues of industry were renegotiated in terms of desired social,

occupational roles in which youth could (or could not) expect to excel. Depending on the relative fit or mismatch of the social contexts of adolescents development with respect to accomplishing the general stage-salient task of identity development, and the specific stage-salient task involving a renegotiation of issues of trust and faith as a key facet of identity development, Erikson posited subsequent paths of positive and problematic development, respectively, in terms of well-being, achievement, and social integration and participation.

Erikson suggested that the successful resolution of the first stage of development in infancy (trust versus mistrust) shaped the life virtue of hope, which “is the enduring belief in the attainability of fervent wishes” (1964, p. 118). Hopefulness is linked to beliefs about whether the social, natural, and supernatural worlds are trustworthy or not. Fowler (1981) described the substance of *religious faith* as an individual's personal way of responding to “transcendent value and power as perceived and grasped through the forms of the cumulative tradition” (Fowler, p. 9). Fowler describes faith as an “orientation of the total person” involving an “alignment of the will” and “a resting of the heart” in accordance with “a vision of transcendent value and power, one's ultimate concern” (p. 14). Faith, as such, is “the human quest for relation to transcendence” (p. 14) and to “that which is universal” (p. 15). Functionally, Fowler hypothesized that religious faith serves “to give purpose and goal to one's hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions” (p. 14). Thus, for both Erikson and Fowler, religion was conceptualized as an institution that confirms and supports individuals' hopes throughout the life span.

Religion not only provides a transcendent worldview, moral beliefs, and behavioral norms, but religious traditions also embody these ideological norms in a community of believers who can act as role models for youth (Erikson, 1968). For many youth, it is clear that religion and spirituality represent important sources of hope, ideals, worldviews and role

models that influence the course of identity development during adolescence (King, 2003, 2008; Roeser, Issac, Abo-Zena, Brittan, & Peck, 2008; Smith & Denton, 2005). One of the shortcomings of Erikson's work, however, was the lack of a clear empirical basis for his views on identity and the general lack of a more domain-specific approach to identity-related phenomena (e.g., gender identity, religious identity, etc.). Neo-Piagetian views of identity have been more helpful in this regard (e.g., Harter, 2006) and have recently been applied to the question of how to differentiate between religious and spiritual development.

Roeser et al. (2008a) recently proposed a new conceptualization in which they posited that religious identities as primarily cultural and collective in nature (see also Templeton & Eccles, 2006), and spiritual identities as primarily transcultural and contemplative in nature (see also Ho & Ho, 2007). From this perspective, the core of a religious identity is a personal identification of oneself with a social collective (group) characterized by a particular cultural-historical-religious tradition (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Templeton & Eccles). Individuals who claim membership in a particular religious tradition share in common with other group members collective sacred worldviews and their associated "beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols designed (1) to facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent (God, higher power, or ultimate truth/reality) and (2) to foster an understanding of one's relationship and responsibility to others in living together in a community" (Koenig et al., 2001, p. 18). Self-identification with a particular religious group; the meaning of that identification to the person in terms of his or her representations of self, world, life purpose, and the (prescribed) good life; the centrality of the identification to a person's overall sense of identity; and shared religious practices and the nature and number of social bonds with group members are all key substantive aspects of a *collective religious identity*. Functionally, collective religious identities

fulfill individuals' basic needs for meaning and purpose, social belonging, esteem, self-understanding, transcendence, and contribution to something greater than the self through organized cultural forms (cf. Fowler, 1981).

In contrast to a religious identity, Roeser et al. (2008a) posited that the core of a spiritual identity is a personal identification of oneself with that which is pan-human and transcultural, in terms of shared humanity and universal values, ethics, and wisdom concerning life's ultimate existential questions that are relevant to all human beings (Ho & Ho, 2007). These ultimate concerns focus on the nature of life and death, on how to lead a good and satisfying life, and on the nature of human identity and our relationality with all that is "not self" (or not only "my in-groups" which is "ego-self" extended socially; Roeser et al.). The spiritual domain of identity development can evolve from, co-evolve with, or evolve independent of the religious domain of identity development. That is, individuals can self-identify as spiritual, religious, both, or neither. The function of a spiritual identity is to foster an embodied realization of identification with that greater whole of being, whether conceived of in terms of an ultimate being, an ultimate state of being, or an ultimate reality that represents the (hypothesized) unity behind the apparent diversity of being (e.g., Piedmont, 1999). This functional definition is consistent with the view of James (1902), who noted that the function of personal religion was to motivate individuals to realize a more satisfying existence. "Not God, but life, more life, a larger richer, more satisfying life, is, in the last analysis, the end of religion. The love of life, at any and every level of development, is the religious impulse" (p. 453). For James the core of religion/spirituality at the individual level is fundamentally about being whole, being wholly human, and being part of the whole that is existence.

The conceptualization of religion and spirituality in identity-related terms is consistent with other contemporary scholarly movements

aimed at defining religion at the individual level of analysis in terms of idiosyncratic meaning systems (e.g., Silberman, 2005). By operationalizing religion and spirituality at the individual level of analysis in terms of cognitive-affective belief systems concerning the self and the world (e.g., Epstein, 1990) that function to afford meaning and to motivate and regulate behavior, scholars have successfully been able to relate such religious meaning systems to issues of engagement in religious practices (e.g., Roeser, Rao, Shah, Hastak, Gonsalves & Berry, 2006); contribution to others (e.g., Roeser et al., 2008b), prejudice (e.g., Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005), terrorism (Silberman, Higgins, & Dweck, 2005), coping (Park, 2005), parenting and discipline practices (Mahoney, 2005), and so on. Thus, framing religion and spirituality in terms of identity and meaning systems regarding self and world is one scientifically useful way to study both the common and divergent functions and correlates of these two facets of human development.

RSD as Evolution of Awareness

Another way RSD has been discussed is in relation to spiritual experiences and corresponding phenomenological states of awareness—those that transcend the limits of normal, everyday, waking, ego-consciousness (King, 2003, 2008; Roeser, 2005, 2008a). Ego-consciousness is, by definition, centered in the ego (on “Me”). According to the contemplative traditions of the world (Wilbur, 2006), the state of ego-consciousness is said to be permeated with a sense of uniqueness, separation, lack, fear, desire, and division. States of awareness that transcend ego-consciousness are often labeled “religious,” “spiritual,” “mystical,” or “non-ordinary” (Hood, 2003) because they transcend this limited state and bring one temporarily into communion with “something more.” Such states are often accompanied by particularly powerful emotions such as awe, wonder, elevation, and love which signal experiences beyond the limits of self that often have transformative value (Haidt, 2003).

Boyatzis (2005) has pointed out the commonness of spiritual experiences of children and the lack of their study in the development of beliefs and faith. The same situation holds for adolescents who, as a function of developmental changes in brain, mind, and social worlds may be even more likely to have such experiences that inform their religious and spiritual development (Good & Willoughby, 2008).

Conceptions of spirituality as “transcendence” often rest upon this notion of spirituality as “states of consciousness” that may, through practice, become “traits of consciousness.” The capacity to turn transient states of ego-transcendence into enduring traits of awareness in which a stable and clear state is continually realized is a core goal of spiritual development from a contemplative perspective (Wilbur, 2006). This perspective is associated with wisdom (Roeser, 2005).

Developmental Systems Theories

Stage-structural theories, once so prominent in developmental science, have been subject to greater levels of criticism with regard to human development in general (Kagan, 1996) and RSD in particular (Spilka et al., 2003). Developmental scholars have been moving away from attempts to identify universal and invariant stages of development and towards an understanding of developmental pathways, lines of development, and the role of culture and context in the process of development. Developmental Systems Theory (DST) shifts the focus from individuals to transactions between individuals and their various embedded sociocultural contexts of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lerner, 2006; Sameroff, 1983). In the rest of the chapter, we use DST as a key theoretical frame to discuss the contexts and processes involved in RSD during adolescence.

Central to DST are the roles of plasticity, context, and developmental regulation (Lerner, 2006). *Plasticity* refers to the potential for individuals to change systematically in both positive and negative ways throughout his or

her life. Such plasticity is important in that it legitimates the optimistic search for characteristics of people and their contexts that promote positive development generally and RSD during adolescence in particular. Although people have the capacity to develop along a vast array of possible trajectories, the number of actual developmental trajectories is constrained by both individual and contextual factors.

Also foundational to DST is the significance of *context* and person-by-context transactions. From a developmental systems perspective, spiritual development is also located not in the person but in the ongoing transactions between the person and her or his multiple embedded sociocultural contexts of development (Lerner et al., 2008). It is the goodness of fit between person and environment that is of primary concern in determining different developmental trajectories. In particular, optimal development occurs when the mutual influences between person and environment maintain or advance the well-being of the individual and context. This bidirectional relation is referred to as *adaptive developmental regulation*. From a DST perspective, RSD is best characterized by the transactions between individuals and their various embedded contexts over time, as well as the fit of the developmental affordances of those contexts with the salient developmental needs of adolescents (e.g., Eccles, Lord, & Roeser, 1996). If the transactions of the young person and their context leads to adaptive developmental regulation, Lerner et al. (2008) posit that youth will gain a growing sense of transcendence—a sense of connection to something beyond themselves as well as a growing sense of self or identity. This experience of transcendence is hypothesized to motivate a growing commitment to contributing to the well being of the world beyond themselves.

Positive Youth Development and Spirituality

A developmental systems approach has been useful in studying positive youth development. Based on the notion that the central

task of adolescence is identity development (Erikson, 1968), researchers have used a DST perspective to hypothesize that youth whose interactions with their contexts are adaptive—mutually beneficial to the young person and society—are more likely to commit to a sense of identity that promotes reciprocity with their family, community, and society (Lerner, Alberts, Anderson, & Dowling, 2006). This idea was originally Erikson's (1968), in that he hypothesized that youth who successfully resolve the identity crisis gain a sense of fidelity—a sense of loyalty to an ideology that engages the young person in the world beyond themselves (Furrow, King, & White, 2004; King & Furrow, 2004; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1999). Such an understanding of spirituality is more than a feeling of transcendence, but a motivational force that propels individuals to care for self and others and contribute to something greater than themselves. As such, spirituality nurtures a sense of thriving (see Lerner et al., 2006; King & Benson, 2006) in young people by providing the awareness of responsibility and the passion to initiate and sustain commitment to agency.

This perspective is an important lens for spirituality, but it is also important to note that adolescents are often co-opted into and become faithful to things that are actually destructive to others beyond the in group as in the case of child soldiers or Hitler's youth movement during World War II (Erikson, 1950). Thus, it is important to note that a developmental systems theory provides a helpful framework for thinking about negative spiritual development as well. Just as a youth may interact with their family, peers, and society in such a way that brings about a moral spiritual sensitivity, transactions between individuals and their contexts may bring about deleterious forms of spirituality. For example, families may interpret and enact religious ideologies to create cultures of abuse (i.e. "Spare the rod, spoil the child) or cultivate generosity and a spirit of gratitude and contribution.

History is full of examples where youth have been socialized with an immoral and

destructive spiritual sensitivity, and such issues are discussed more at the end of the chapter. In the next section, we review evidence about the core tenet of a DST perspective on RSD during adolescence—that the nature of social contexts really matter for RSD.

THE ECOLOGY OF ADOLESCENT RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

From a developmental systems perspective, religious and spiritual development, similar to other domains of development, are embedded within networks of social relationships in proximal and more distal social settings across the life span. Nonetheless, as Regnerus, Smith, & Smith (2004) note in their review article on the state of this research:

Social scientists know more about which American teenagers are religiously active than how they got to be that way. We know less about the social environment in which religious development occurs, apart from the parent–child relationship . . . scholars have often appeared less concerned about the role of ecology and social relationships than about personality, emotions, and stages in the religious development of the individual. (p. 27)

In this section, we review existing evidence on how relationships with parents, peers, and mentors, and experiences in families and schools can shape religious and spiritual development during adolescence. We then offer a macrosystemic analysis of religion and spirituality as cultural phenomena and consider the role of ethnicity and culture in RSD. We discuss the role of religious institutions in adolescents' RSD in a later section.

Family Influences

Parents play an important role in the religious and spiritual development of adolescents (e.g., Boyatzis, 2005; Spilka et al., 2003). Similar to research in other areas of socialization, parents are posited to be key interpreters of religion

for young people, and parental beliefs and practices are thought to provide the foundation for young people's development of their own religious beliefs and practices (Ozorak, 1989), both directly through explicit socialization practices, and indirectly through the influence of religion on parenting behaviors (Spilka et al.). Dollahite and Marks (2005) found that families foster religious and spiritual development in children through processes such as formal teaching, parent–child discussion, role modeling, and coparticipation in prayer and other rituals.

The quality of the parent–adolescent relationship is key to the religious socialization process. Studies in the United States and Scotland have shown that family cohesiveness is related to stability of religious participation of sons and daughters over time (Ozorak, 1989). Parent–child relationships characterized by frequent interaction and a high degree of trust have been linked to greater religious socialization (King & Furrow, 2004), and warm close relationships are also linked to greater correspondence of offspring's religious beliefs with those of their parents (Hoge, Petrillo & Smith, 1982). Bao, Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Conger (1999) found that parental acceptance (trust, care, absence of fault finding) was important for the socialization of religious beliefs and practices from parents to children with greater acceptance leading to greater influence. Other studies indicate that greater parent–child closeness leads to less religious rebellion over time (Wilson & Sherkat, 1994). This literature suggests that warm, supportive relationships with religious parents is a means of enhancing the RSD of adolescents.

There is some indication that mothers may be more important in the religious socialization of adolescents than fathers (Boyatzis, Dollahite & Marks, 2006; Erickson, 1992; Hertel & Donahue, 1995), although the research in this area is somewhat equivocal (Mahoney & Tarakestwar, 2005; Spilka et al., 2003). The apparent greater impact of mothers, makes sense, given that women traditionally have

been called upon to organize the religious education of children in the home (Slonim, 1991). Mothers who experience depression are less able to carry out this role in the intergenerational transmission of religion, however (Gur, Miller, Warner, Wickramaratne, & Weissman, 2005).

Other studies have looked at parental religious socialization and have found that daughters are more influenced by their parents than are sons. For instance, in a study of highly religious parents, results showed that parental efforts to control their adolescent sons with respect to problem behavior involvement can backfire, whereas such strategies are more effective with daughters (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005). On the other hand, Bao et al. (1999) found that parents who were perceived as accepting had equal influence on both sons and daughters in the religious domain. These findings suggest that controlling parenting practices, in conjunction with religious teachings, may be particularly problematic with adolescent sons, whereas support for autonomy and warmth can facilitate religious socialization in sons and daughters equally well during adolescence.

Another way parents can socialize adolescents in the religious domain has to do with engagement in family rituals around religion. For instance, results of the NSYR showed that 54% of U.S. families engaging in "giving thanks before or after meals," and 44% of youths said they talked with their families about God, the scriptures, prayer, or religious and spiritual matters one or more days a week. Family prayer is very common in conservative Protestant, African-American Protestant, and Mormon families and likely is one major way that parents socialize religious practices in their offspring (e.g., Ozorak, 1989). In a national Seven-Day Adventist population, Lee, Rice, and Gillespie (1997) found that family worship patterns that involved a high degree of adolescent participation was positively linked with active adolescent faith scores. Erickson (1992) found that parental religious

participation with adolescents was more efficacious than mere parental religiousness. Similarly, another study on Protestant youth found that talking with parents about religious issues and participating in religious activities together predicted an adolescent's experience of God and their report of the importance of religion (King, Furrow, and Roth, 2002).

Although many studies have documented the importance of parents, some longitudinal findings have failed to support the importance of family life in long-term patterns of religiosity in children. For instance, O'Connor, Hoge, and Alexander (2002) found no relation between various indicators of religious socialization taken when adolescents were 16 years of age and their religious participation at age 38. The relative dearth of longitudinal studies on this topic make inferences about the long-term effects of parenting on the religion of offspring, especially given the considerable fluctuation of religious affiliations noted earlier (e.g., Pew Forum, 2007), unclear at this time. In addition, other sources of influence in the family, including siblings, aunts and uncles, and grandparents are important to consider in the religious development of youth (Boyatzis et al., 2006). Despite the importance of family in RSD, adolescence is clearly a time when religious and spiritual doubts increase (Levenson, Aldwin, & D'Mello, 2005). Factors other than the family, such as peers and mentors, are likely important in this developmental trend.

Peer Influences

The research on the effects of peers on adolescent religiosity is still in a nascent stage and results are not yet conclusive. Several findings are worth mentioning at this point. First, according to NSYR results (Smith & Denton, 2005), American youth generally report having peers that share their religious beliefs. When youths are asked to report on characteristics of their five closest friends, between two to three of these friends, on average, are said to "hold similar religious beliefs" to the target adolescent; in turn about one of these

friends, on average is said to “be involved in the same religious group.” Conservative, African-American Protestant, and Mormon teens were more likely to have friends in their same religious group (Smith & Denton, 2005). King and Furrow (2004) found that compared to their less religious peers, religious youth reported higher levels of positive social interaction, shared values, and trust with their closest friends.

These findings suggest the existence of both selection effects (youth pick religiously similar peers) and socialization effects (peers shape each other). For instance, in longitudinal study of children from ages 7 to 22 years of age, results showed that the best childhood and adolescent predictors of religiosity during early adulthood were ethnicity and peers’ church attendance during high school (Gunnoe & Moore, 2002). Similarly, Regnerus et al. (2004) found that peer church attendance was an important predictor of youth church attendance. Hoge and Petrillo (1978) found that friends have at least moderate influence on religious practices (e.g. youth group attendance, enjoyment of that participation). Having friends who verbally talk about religion and spirituality has been found to be associated with higher self-reported religious belief and commitment among individuals, compared to those with friends who did not talk about their faith (Schwartz, Bukowski, & Aoki, 2006). In addition, Schwartz (2006) found that not only did friends’ spiritual modeling and dialogue account for significant variance in adolescent religious belief and commitment, but that these factors actually mediated the influence of parents on religiousness. Similarly, King et al. (2002) found that talking with friends about religion and participating with friends in informal religious activities (i.e., studying religious or sacred texts, listening to religious music, or attending religious camp), explained significant variance in religious commitment over and above parental influences (King et al.). Similarly, in a large sample of Christian

adolescents aged 16 years, Schwartz (2006) found that perceived faith support from Christian friends was one of the most important influences on adolescents’ faith net of family variables.

Mentors and Gurus

Despite the known role of adult mentors in the lives of youth (see Rhodes & Lowe, vol. 2 of this *Handbook*), only a small body of literature examines the roles of adult RS mentors and teachers in adolescent RSD. Some research has documented that the relational quality of the mentor–mentee relationship impacts the level of influence on spiritual development. One study of more than 3,000 Christian adolescents conducted by Schwartz (2006) found that when a young person described their relationship with their youth pastor as including strong religious instruction, spiritual modeling, and being known (i.e., intimacy), these relationships contributed significantly to youths’ perceptions of their own spiritual development. Another study found relationships between youth pastors and their youth that are characterized by both relational intentionality and spiritual focus, result in spiritual development, as is indicated by outcomes such as personal relationship with God, moral responsibility, hopeful and positive attitudes, and engaging in mission and service (Strommen & Hardel, 2000). In a rare comparison study, Cannister (1999) found modest support for mentoring as supportive of the maturing spiritual development of adolescents. The study compared first-year college students who had a formal mentoring relationship with a professor who was intent on nurturing spiritual growth and those who did not have such a relationship. Those who were being intentionally mentored reported enhanced spiritual development.

Although only a few studies exist, research suggests that the presence of intimate and interactive relationships with spiritual mentors may provide a rich context for spiritual development. These studies and others demonstrate

the importance of non-parental roles models in the RSD of adolescent youth. Not only are relationships important within the developmental systems of RSD, but institutions play an important part as well.

School Influences

A few studies have examined how schooling may affect the religious and spiritual development of young people. In one strand of research, the focus has been on the direct effects of attending a religious school on adolescents' academic development. In a second strand of work the focus has been on understanding how the religious composition of the student body may exert indirect effects on adolescents' religious lives. Oddly, rarely have studies looked at the religious and spiritual developmental effects of religious schooling (Spilka et al., 2003). Thus, this is an area ripe for future research.

Benson, Yeager, Wood, Guerra, & Manno (1986) found that Catholic high schools serving large proportions of low income youth affected the religious development of youth if they stressed both academics and religion simultaneously. In a study of an African-American Muslim school, Nasir (2004) documented how a shared religious ideology allowed teachers and staff ideational and relational resources by which they could offer a positive identity to students. Specifically, teachers viewed a particular student as a spiritual being waiting to be developed rather than as a behavioral problem worthy of diagnosis and labeling. This social positioning based on a spiritual ideology afforded these young people a unique set of supports and a unique identity position from which to move forward despite adversity.

In a case-comparative study of eleven private, English-medium religious secondary schools in India, Roeser (2005) found a relation between aspects of adolescents' student and religious identities and the nature of their school culture. Through examining Hindu and Christian schools, they found that students reported views

of spirituality and self-consistent with the under-lying religious philosophy and practices in their schools. This finding was true even when students attended schools with a different faith tradition than their own.

Other studies have examined the "religious climate" of schools. Regnerus et al. (2004) used National Longitudinal Data of Adolescents Health data to examine how the mean level of adolescents' schoolmates' inclinations toward religion were associated with adolescents' own religious service attendance and perceived importance of religion. Findings indicated that the level of religiosity among classmates predicated individual religiosity, even after accounting for family religiosity, peer religiosity, and a host of demographic factors. In fact, these authors found that aggregate student body religiosity was a more powerful predictor of individual religiosity than was attending a religious school. These effects make sense given the power of peer influences in schools specifically, and the more general influence of climate variables over school sector variables in mediating school effects generally.

Barrett, Pearson, Muller, and Frank (2007) posited that the private religiosity of schoolmates, especially popular ones, may create a climate and discourse community in which religious matters are normative and valued. In addition, the authors posited that to the extent youth are motivated to conform to such norms due to their level of shared denominational affiliations with schoolmates, and due to religiosity of high status peers in the school, student-body religiosity may affect personal religiosity.

Culture, Diversity, and Ethnicity

There exist additional macro-level contextual influences on RSD. Adolescence is a particularly important time in which cultural influences in the shaping of the religious and spirituality development of young people "show through" in the forms of rituals and ceremonies marking the transition from child to adult status in the eyes of the religious community. For instance,

in some Protestant Christian communities, voluntary baptism during this stage marks a moment of sacred rebirth, inclusion, and adult membership in one's church. Similarly, the Bar and Bat-Mitzvahs are transitional ceremonies in which youth move from childhood to adult religious status within the Jewish cultural-religious tradition. In still other contexts, children may go through formal rites of transition in which physically painful rituals are used to evoke courage and emphasize the passage from one life stage to another (Magesa, 1997). Such initiation rites are important cultural opportunities to teach youth about self-sacrifice, cooperation, and survival; and provide an opportunity for adolescents' to acknowledge to willingly participate in serving the community.

Unfortunately, biases in the field of study concerned with religion in psychology have limited our knowledge of religious and spiritual development among diverse religious, ethnic and culture groups within and beyond the United States (Mattis, Ahluwalia, Cowie, & Kirkland-Harris, 2006). Leaders in the field of the psychology of religion, for instance, have acknowledged that the field has been dominated by a largely Protestant Christian orientation to date (see Hill & Pargament, 2003). What is less acknowledged is that this orientation includes a tacit emphasis on dualist metaphysics (spirit versus matter, sacred versus profane, soul versus body); theistic conceptions of divinity (God as a Being); singular pathways of spiritual development (e.g., devotion to God); and specific Western cultural issues in the study of religion and spirituality (Roeser et al., 2006).

Specific cultural issues that are intertwined with Western Christian religious traditions include a focus on the sinful nature of human beings and the Veneer Theory of morality with its impact on economics, law and government (de Waals, 2007); concern with differentiating between whether one is spiritual or religious (e.g., Fuller, 2001); and a focus on racial differences in religiosity (e.g., Mattis et al.,

2006). The fact of the matter is that religions are deeply cultural in nature, reflecting large scale national, historical, ethnic/racial and geographical influences (Geertz, 1973). Thus, to study religion without regard to culture is to miss something fundamental about its origins and manifestations.

Non-Western, Abrahamic forms of spirituality also diverge significantly from the assumptive frameworks and worldviews of Western Christianity. In some cultural contexts, for instance, spiritual development is assumed to begin prior to birth. In some communities in which reincarnation is accepted, adults may believe children inherit the spirit/soul of a dead ancestor; thus, children are born with spiritual powers, wisdom, and even physical attributes that can reflect their spiritual maturity. In addition, the early stages of a child's spiritual development are usually perceived as times of spiritual vulnerability in such cultures due to the evil eye phenomenon (Leach & Fried, 1972; Obermeyer, 2000). Some believe that malevolent and benevolent forces exist and manifest themselves in the child's immediate family and extended community, impacting all aspects of the child's new life. Consequently, the child's survival and healthy development depend on others' protection from spiritual harm. Thus, in cultures that believe in the existence of the evil eye and its power, rituals are performed to protect children from malevolent forces (Ruble, O'Neil, & Collando Ardán, 1992).

In sum, although it is evident that adolescent religious and spiritual development occurs within the developmental-contextual systems in which young people live, the processes by which this development occurs have been less explored. In the following section, we provide an overview of the theoretical explanations for how religious congregational and youth group contexts may influence not only religious and spiritual development of youth, but also wider, aspects of development during adolescence. Many of the processes discussed in this section are also relevant to other social contextual influences on RSD outside religious institutions.

RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONAL INFLUENCES ON ADOLESCENT RSD AND POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Erikson (1950, 1964, 1968) pointed to religious institutions as important parts of the sociohistorical-cultural matrix in which identity development takes place. He argued that religion was an important institution in the promotion of fidelity during adolescence—defined as commitment and loyalty to an ideology. This may still be true today for perhaps half of all American youths who regularly attend services (Smith & Denton, 2005). In this section, we explore the role of religious congregations in shaping RSD and positive development through a variety of mechanisms involving social relationships, identity and skill development, and opportunities for transcendence through spiritual practices. Nonetheless, we note at the outset that only a little is known about how the dynamics of participation in religious congregations and how they affect youth spiritual development.

The term *congregation* refers to an organized community associated with a religion such as a church, parish, or cathedral (Christian); synagogue (Jewish); masjid/mosque (Muslim); temple (Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish), ward (Latter-Day Saint); gurdwara (Sikh); or assembly (Bahai). According to the NYSR, 48% of American youth attend religious services once a week or more, with another 27% attending at least many times a year. Of these attending youth, 89% find that their congregations usually or sometimes make them think about important things and 94% report that their congregation is usually or sometimes a welcoming place for youth. About 38% of the sample are currently involved in a religious youth group, and 69% are presently or have previously been involved (Smith & Denton, 2005).

Congregations have been linked to promoting faith maturity (Roehlkepartain & Patel, 2006), which refers to the degree to which a person exemplifies the priorities, commitments, and perspectives indicative of “vibrant

and life-transforming faith” (Benson, Donahue, & Erickson, 1993, p. 3). Search Institute conducted a series of studies that examined the relationships between congregational dynamics, religious education, and faith maturity in mainline Protestant Christian churches. The findings suggested that personalized educational practices, caring and effective leaders, a climate of warmth and caring, a thinking culture, support for families, engagement in practical life issues, and opportunities to serve others were important for faith development (Benson & Elkin, 1990). Similar findings resulted from replication studies in other Christian faith traditions, including Seventh-Day Adventists, Catholics, and the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (see Roehlkepartain & Patel), suggesting that the multifaceted educational, relational, and emotional nature of congregations may promote spiritual development, at least as operationalized by faith maturity.

Secondary analysis of the Survey of Youth and Parents yielded results substantiating the claim that religious congregations provide rich settings for increasing closure in networks involving youth (Smith, 2003a). These relational ties may operate as extra familial resources, reinforcing parental influence and oversight. Similarly, in an ethnically diverse sample of urban youth, research found that religious youth reported higher levels of network closure and social capital resources including social interaction, trust and shared values among parents, close friends, and a nonparental adult (King, 2004; King & Furrow, 2004). As such, religious institutions provide unique support systems for youth that have the potential to influence religious and spiritual development.

Other types of religious organizations besides congregations such as paracongregational youth programs and organizations, faith-based social services, (nonreligious) youth organizations, camps, and schools can also affect RSD in adolescents. Sometimes these organizations intentionally promote adolescent religious and spiritual development and sometimes these ends are accomplished unintentionally.

Larson, Hansen, and Moneta (2006) found that students participating in faith-based youth groups reported significantly higher rates of identity work. About 66% of the students in faith-based activities endorsed the item “This activity got me thinking about who I am,” compared to 33% of youths in other types of organized activities. Others have shown that religious youth organizations help integrate adolescents into a community of youths and adults (see Regnerus, 2000; Smith, 2003b). Larson et al. (2006) also found that youth involved in faith-based youth programs were significantly more likely to be engaged in positive relationships and in adult networks than youth not engaged in faith-based programs. For example, 75% of youths in faith-based programs reported that “We discussed morals and values,” compared with 24% of youths involved in other organized activities. Furthermore, significantly more youths in faith-based activities stated that the activities improved their relationships with parents/guardians and helped them form new connections with nonparental adults in their faith community.

Theories of Religious Congregational Influence

Smith (2003b) theorized that there are three different ways that religious institutions can exert positive, constructive influences on youth development:

1. By providing youths with resources in the form of moral and religious worldviews (i.e., seeking reconciliation instead of vengeance, treating body as temple of Holy Spirit, respecting mother and father), spiritual experiences (e.g., experience of profound peace and belonging), and role models and mentors
2. By providing opportunities for skill development (i.e., leadership and coping skills) and cultural knowledge development (e.g., Biblical events)

3. By providing social capital in the form of social ties across differently aged peers, nonparental adults, and members of wider communities and society.

In short, religious institutions afford adolescents resources that provide moral guidance, meaning, and purpose; learning opportunities that provide coping and life skills; and social relationships that provide support, social capital, and network closure. In addition to discussing potential ideological and contextual resources embedded within religion and spirituality, the spiritual practices often associated with RSD offer unique benefits to youth.

Ideological Context

Relationships and contexts that provide youth with ideological and moral directives provide adolescents with a structural framework of normative beliefs and values that reinforce their existing belief system. Young people strive to make sense of the world and to assert their place in it. The beliefs, worldview, and values of religious traditions provide an ideological context in which a young person can generate a sense of meaning, order, and place in the world that is crucial to adolescent development (King, 2003, 2008). Religion intentionally offers beliefs, moral codes, and values from which a young person can build a personal belief system (Smith, 2003b). Benson (2006) indicated the function of spiritual development is to make sense of one’s life by weaving the self into a larger tapestry of connection and meaning. Spirituality entails the intentional identification and integration of beliefs, narrative, and values in the process of making meaning. Whether this process is one of personal construction or socialization, the intentional act of relying on personal, religious, or cultural ideology is central to spirituality and crucial to the development of identity, meaning, and purpose—all foundational to positive youth development.

Relationships, organizations, and institutions that intentionally provide clear ideology

provide important contexts in which young people can internalize moral directives, clarify their beliefs, integrate a prosocial identity, and find meaning and make sense of the world (Lerner et al., 2006). Such environments nurture religious and spiritual development as well as other important aspects of adolescent development. In addition to providing ideology, such developmental systems provide social contexts that nurture adolescent religiousness and spirituality as well as overall positive adolescent development.

Social Context

Religion not only provides a transcendent world view and morality, but religious faith community members more or less embody these ideological norms in a community setting and thereby act as role models for youth (Erikson, 1968). Although religion and spirituality do not exclusively offer these social resources, research documents that they may very effectively offer social capital, helpful networks, social support, and mentors.

Social Capital

Social capital models posit that religion's constructive influence on young people may be accounted for by the nature and number of relationships—and the benefits associated with them. For instance, through religious involvement young people have access to intergenerational relationships that are recognized as rich sources of social capital (King & Furrow, 2004; Putnam, 2000; Smith, 2003a). Few other social institutions afford the opportunity to build trustworthy cross-generational relationships and link youth to sources of helpful information, resources, and opportunities. King and Furrow (2004) found that religiously engaged youth reported significantly higher levels of social capital resources than less active youth. They found that relationships characterized by social interaction, trust, and shared values are most strongly related to positive youth outcomes. Social support available through religion may be particularly effective

for promoting adolescent thriving. In addition, religious institutions and the relationships that they afford may promote *network closure*, providing relatively dense networks of relationships within which youth are embedded, providing oversight of and information about youth to their parents (Smith, 2003b).

Social Channeling

Religious institutional involvement also involves social channeling, conscious process on the part of adults to steer their children toward particular individuals positioned to discourage negative behaviors and to promote positive life practices among young people (Smith, 2003b). In addition, social channeling is a major way that parents socialize their children's religious development—they put them into groups, activities, and contexts that reinforce their own efforts at religious socialization (e.g., Martin, White, & Perlman, 2001; Wallace & Williams, 1997). For youths in urban, low-income neighborhoods, Regnerus and Elder (2003) have shown that church attendance is particularly important because it channels youths into relationships with those who support academics and who help them build “a transferable skill set of commitments and routines” (p. 646) useful for success in school. Similarly, Schreck, Burek, and Clark-Miller (2007) found that religious involvement serves as a protective factor for adolescents by encouraging less contact with deviant peers and more contact with parents and school officials.

Social Support and Coping

Religious institutions and the relationships they afford also provide forms of social support that are particularly important to adolescent coping, resilience, and well-being. For instance, the coping resources offered in a religious setting may include group level shows of support through prayer. A study of young adolescents showed the social support of religious community members was the strongest negative predictor of depressive symptoms

(Pearce, Little, & Perez, 2003). These findings were replicated in a sample of over 3,000 16-year-old adolescent girls at various stages of pubertal development (Miller & Gur, 2002). Specifically, findings showed that not only was the expectation of social support from religious congregations in times of need associated with less depressive symptoms among youth, but also the expectation that religious congregations were critical of teenagers generally was associated with increased depressive symptoms (Pearce et al.). Thus, religious communities can be sources of social support or socioemotional distress based on the ways adults in those communities perceive and relate to youth.

Spiritual Modeling

Spiritual modeling and mentorship are two other ways theorists have discussed how adults socialize young people's religious and spiritual identities in the direction of the beliefs, norms, and expectations of a particular religious group (Cornwall, 1988; Oman, Flinders, & Thoresen, 2008). Spiritual modeling refers to emulating another in order to grow spiritually. This effect occurs through observing and imitating the life or conduct of a spiritual example or model who may be a living or historic example of religious or spiritual ideology and values. Spiritual modeling is based on social modeling and observational learning in the acquisition and maintaining of human behaviors (Bandura, 1986, 2003). Foundational to this approach is the notion that the people with whom we regularly associate, either by force or by choice, shape the behavioral patterns that will be repeatedly observed and learned most thoroughly. Acknowledging the complexity of spiritual development involving the acquisition of beliefs, attitudes, and skills, Bandura (2003) argues that spirituality is difficult to teach and is better understood when exemplified or embodied.

Mentors and Gurus Spiritual mentors provide opportunities for young people to experience being a part of something beyond

themselves (see Schwartz et al., 2006). Mentors or gurus often occur within a religious context. For example, within the Hindu religion, gurus are teachers that are widely considered to be self-realized masters and embodiments of the divine (Martignetti, 1998). In such relationships, followers of such teachers often treat devotion or service to this teacher as a major focus of their lives. In some forms of Judaism, sages serve as important role models who illustrate right living and wisdom. In the Christian tradition, young people are often disciplined by youth pastors or adult volunteers at churches. Whether a young person perceives himself or herself as a being a follower or by being mentored or disciplined, these individuals connect the young person to a larger whole and enables the youth to identify with a community beyond himself or herself. Furthermore, the worldviews provided by spiritual models and mentors are powerful cultural resources that can inform adolescents' quests for a sense of meaning, order, and their place in the world (King, 2003, 2008). This is particular true during adolescence and puberty when one's body, thoughts and feelings, and social relationships are all changing and creating both possibility and uncertainty.

Developmental Assets The developmental asset framework also provides a similar account of the resources available to youth through religious involvement. Through secondary analyses, Search Institute assessed the developmental resources embedded within a congregation that may contribute to positive outcomes in young people. Using a subsample of 20,020 randomly selected 6th–12th graders of youth in the United States, Wagener, Furrow, Ebstyn STET King, Leffert, and Benson (2003) found that the positive benefits of adolescent religiousness was partially mediated through developmental resources available to these youths.

These developmental resources are based on Search Institute's framework of developmental

assets, which includes eight categories consisting of support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive values. Although the study found that religious variables do have some independent effect on risk behaviors, the study showed that the positive benefits of religion are significantly mediated by these assets. The authors contended that religious influence might be better understood by the network of relationships, opportunities, and shared values common to religious congregations. These findings suggest that the developmental assets or social nutrients available through congregations promote thriving. The outcomes examined in this study were not homogenous with religious or spiritual development, and are better described as indicators of aspects of spiritual development, such as positive values and helping others. Nevertheless, this study sheds light on how congregations may influence RSD among young people not through mere participation, but through the provision of developmental resources such as caring adults, boundaries and expectations, and opportunities to serve others.

Spiritual Context Congregations not only provide important developmental resources and social relationships that may nurture RSD and positive development, but they also provide opportunities for spiritual experiences. Religion and spirituality provide opportunities for transcendence when young people can experience something greater than themselves.

Spiritual Practices Specifically, a process that shapes RSD during adolescence involves patterns of participation in spiritual practices. Spiritual practices can be defined as everyday, deliberate activities, engaged in solitude or in the company of others, in which individuals seek to explore and extend their relationship with some conception of the sacred or divinity. Thus, spiritual practices may enrich one's spiritual life; such practices can also have

beneficial side effects through their relation to coping and resilience.

Prayer is one such practice. In a study of a community-based sample of 155 men and women aged 25–45 years of age, researchers found that the use of religious coping strategies such as trusting in God, seeking God's help, praying, and taking comfort in religion in the face of stressors, was associated with reduced ambulatory blood pressure among African-American, but not European-American adults (Steffen, Hinderliter, Blumenthal, & Sherwood, 2001).

Another practice is meditation. In a national study of religion and spirituality, Smith and Denton (2005) found that 10% of all youth reported "practicing religious or spiritual meditation not including prayer" during the prior year. What is the effect of such practices on adolescent development (Roeser & Peck, 2008)? Barnes, Johnson, and Treiber (2004), for instance, found the practice of meditation was associated with reduced ambulatory blood pressure among African-American adolescents.

In sum, the various environments in which youth live will foster positive development insofar as they offer clear ideology, social resources, and transcendent, spiritual experiences. Whether secular or faith-based, settings can promote spiritual development by "helping young people along the quest for self-awareness, meaning, purpose—shaping their core identity and their place in their families, communities, and the larger world" (Benson & Roehlkepartain, in press). Relationships, programs, and institutions that provide clear beliefs, moral directives, and values; peer and adult relationships that model and reinforce these prosocial norms; and experiences that move young people beyond their daily concerns and connect them with something beyond themselves are apt to nurture youth on such a quest. Such influences may therefore enhance adolescent development more generally. Accordingly, we next discuss some of the impact of adolescent RSD on overall adolescent development.

DEVELOPMENTAL CORRELATES OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY DURING ADOLESCENCE

Adolescent religion and spirituality have gained increased attention within the academy largely due to the growing evidence suggesting that religion serves as a protective factor, buffering young people against health-compromising behavior and promoting their engagement in health-promoting behavior through many of the mechanisms just reviewed (e.g., Benson et al., 2003; Kerestes & Youniss, 2003; Smith, 2003b; Spilka et al., 2003). Studies have generally revealed that measures of religious attendance and religious importance are negatively correlated with indicators of risk behavior such as delinquency, substance abuse, violence, sexual activity, and suicide. Furthermore, these reviews reveal a positive relationship between religiousness and positive outcomes like life satisfaction, wearing seat belts, and civic engagement. In the following section, we examine studies of RSD during adolescence and indicators of both positive and problematic development.

Health

Evidence shows a strong correlation between denominational religious involvement and health in adults (Koenig et al., 2001) and adolescents (Gottlieb & Green, 1984; Oman & Thoresen, 2005). Jessor, Turbin, and Costa (1998), in an ethnically and racially diverse, longitudinal sample, found that adolescents' frequency of church attendance and the reported importance of religious teachings and values was strongly correlated with their engagement in healthy lifestyle behaviors such as keeping a nutritious diet, getting enough sleep, keeping up with dental hygiene, using seatbelts, and exercising.

Similarly, using Monitoring the Future data from nationally probability samples of 15,000 to 19,000 high school seniors collected annually since 1975, Wallace and Forman (1998) found that more highly religious adolescents (as measured by reported importance, attendance, and denominational affiliation) reported higher

levels of health-promoting behaviors such as consuming breakfast, fruit, and green vegetables, in addition to obtaining seven hours or more of sleep per night.

Psychological Distress and Well-Being

The relationship between religiosity and mental health has also been clearly demonstrated in adults (Hackney & Sanders, 2003) and adolescents (Cotton, Zebracki, Rosenthal, Tsevat, & Drotar, 2006). For instance, adolescent religiosity, assessed in terms of church attendance and reported importance of religion, was inversely related with feelings of depression, hopelessness, and loneliness (Pearce et al., 2003b; Schapman & Inderbitzen-Nolan, 2002; Sinha, Cnaan, & Gelles, 2007; Smith & Denton, 2005; Wright, Frost, & Wisecarver, 1993) and positively related to life satisfaction (Varon & Riley, 1999).

In studies in Germany, Spain, and the United States, adolescent religiosity, assessed in terms of church attendance and reported importance of religion, was positively related to self-esteem (Donahue & Benson, 1995; Smith, Weigert, & Thomas, 1979). In a study of 615 ethnically and denominationally diverse adolescents, Kelley and Miller (2007) found that frequency of spiritual experiences in the context of daily life (e.g., seeing the sacred in others) was associated with life satisfaction. In a study of 134 college students, Leake, DeNeve, and Greteman (2007) found that youth who reported spiritual strivings (see Emmons, 1999) were more likely to experience positive emotions such as vitality and zest, in addition to greater psychological health as operationalized by tendencies toward self-actualization and achieved identity status. The one exception to these trends are pregnant adolescent girls who may be more likely to experience feelings of guilt and shame due to their pregnancy and its incongruence with religious – moral teachings (Sorenson, Grindstaff, & Turner, 1995).

These studies documenting a relationship between religious involvement, less psychological distress, and greater positive emotional

experience, esteem, and life satisfaction also extend to immigrant youth. In a national study of adolescent health, Harker (2001) found that 1.5 generation immigrant adolescents experience less depression and greater positive well-being than their native-born peers from similar demographic and family backgrounds.

Suicide

Adolescents who experience feelings of worthlessness and depression are at heightened risk for suicide. Population analyses point to a relationship between having a religious affiliation and lower rates of suicide in both male and female adolescents (e.g., Baker & Gorsuch, 1982; Gartner, Larson, & Allen, 1991; Sturgeon & Hamley, 1979; Trovato, 1992). Other studies have shown indicators of religiosity (attendance, importance) are associated with lower levels of fatalism and suicidal ideation and fewer suicide attempts in large representative samples of American adolescents in grades 6–12 (Donahue & Benson, 1995; Jamieson & Romer, 2008; Nonnemaker, McNeely, & Blum, 2003). In a cross-sectional sample of 1,456 American Indian tribal members (ages 15–57 years old) living in Northern Plains reservations, orientation to traditional spiritual practices was associated with reduced suicide attempts (Garrouette et al., 2003).

Risk-Taking Behaviors

A solid body of evidence documents a negative relationship between adolescent RSD and risk-taking behavior (Smith & Faris, 2003). It is not that religious or spiritual youths are not taking risks or engaging in dangerous activities; rather, research has suggested that they do so to a lesser extent (e.g., Donahue & Benson, 1995; Bridges & Moore, 2002).

Substance Use

Adolescents RSD is negatively related to their use of marijuana, tobacco, steroids, and alcohol (e.g., Bartkowski & Xu, 2007; Regnerus & Elder, 2003; Sinha et al., 2007; Wallace & Forman, 1998; Yarnold, 1998). Cross-sectional

research shows that religious adolescents are significantly less likely to smoke cigarettes regularly, to drink alcohol weekly, or to get drunk, whereas less religious adolescents are likely to smoke marijuana (Smith & Denton, 2005). In native populations of Native American adolescents, orientation to indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices has been associated with reduced substance use among (Garouette et al., 2003). Longitudinal research that followed adolescents from grades 7 through 10 showed that religiosity reduced the subsequent impact of stress on substance use initiation and on the rate of growth in substance use over time (Wills, Yaeger, & Sandy, 2003).

The inverse relationship between religion and substance abuse is not as clear among gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered adolescent populations. Rostosky, Danner, and Riggle (2007) cautioned against overgeneralizing the protective effects of religion to all adolescent populations, as their study of sexual minority adolescents found that religiosity was not protective against substance abuse for these youth in the way it was for heterosexual adolescents.

Sexual Activity

Evidence also documents that adolescent religiosity is associated with increased age of sexual debut and decreased number of sexual partners. Although religious youths engage in sexual behaviors, they tend to be less sexually active and have fewer sexual partners than their less religious peers (Donahue & Benson, 1995; Holder et al., 2000; McBride, 1996). Adolescent religiosity has also been found to be inversely correlated with risky sexual behaviors (Lammers, Ireland, Resnick, & Blum, 2000; Murray, 1994; Thornton & Camburn, 1989). Smith and Denton (2005) documented striking differences in teens' sexual attitudes based on their level of religious involvement and religious commitment that likely are behind these behavioral differences. Almost all religiously devoted youths believed in sexual abstinence until marriage. Only 3% of religiously devoted teens agreed that as long

as teenagers were emotionally ready for sex, it was okay to engage in it. By comparison, 56% of religiously unengaged youths endorsed this position.

Similarly, Bridges and Moore (2002) found that adolescents who attended church, valued religion, and held strong religious beliefs had lower levels of sexual experience and held conservative attitudes about sexual activity. These findings have been replicated among Latin-American, African-American, and European-American populations of youth (Edwards, Fehring, Jarrett & Haglund, 2008). However, females who considered themselves highly religious were less likely to use contraception during their initial sexual experience, which leads higher risk in sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. Similar reports were found among males in which those who associated more with religiosity were less likely to partake in sexual activity at early ages and hold more conservative sexual attitudes and beliefs in one 13- to 16-year old sample.

In a national longitudinal study of 3,691 adolescents assessed at age 15 (time 1) and age 21 (time 2), Rostosky, Regnerus, and Wright (2003) found that adolescent religiosity at age 15 predicted delayed onset of coital debut for both males and females assessed at time 2 after accounting for adolescents' demographic background and number of romantic partners.

Delinquency

The inverse relationship between religiosity and delinquent behavior among adolescents has also been well established (Baier & Wright, 2001). Adolescent religiosity has also been linked to lower delinquent and violent problem behavior (Donahue & Benson, 1995; Johnson, Jang, Larson, & Li, 2001; Regnerus & Elder, 2003) and has increasingly become a focus of research for criminologists seeking to explore the mediating factors of crime deterrence, particularly in juveniles (Evans, Cullen, Dunaway, & Burton, 1995). For instance, Sloane and Potvin (1986), in a national probability sample, found that youth ages 13-18

who considered religion to be of considerable influence in their lives and attended church frequently were 50% less likely to engage in serious fighting than their nonreligious peers.

Johnson et al. (2001) found that adolescent religiosity was negatively correlated with adolescents' attitudes toward delinquent behaviors, their association with delinquent peers, and their engagement in delinquent behaviors after controlling for their sociodemographic backgrounds. Pearce, Jones, Schwab-Stone, and Ruchkin (2003) found that frequent exposure to religious content (e.g., reading, watching, or hearing religious information) decreased the likelihood of antisocial practices, witnessing violence, or being the victim of violence. In a nationally representative sample of youth in grades 7-12, Regnerus (2003) found evidence for a cyclical trend in the relationship between adolescent religiosity and delinquency. In this sample, religiosity was related to a slight decrease in delinquent behaviors in early adolescence, disappeared as a predictor of delinquent behaviors during middle adolescence, and finally emerged as a stronger negative predictor in late adolescence.

In sum, the current literature paints a clear picture of the protective relationship between adolescent religiosity and various risk behaviors. Participating in various forms of religion is clearly linked to a reduction in dangerous activities among young people. However, this buffering effect is less explored with specifically spiritual variables. Do these salutary impacts of religiosity and spirituality exist as well when we turn from problem behaviors to positive ones? In the next section, we examine the relationship between adolescent religiosity and spirituality and positive developmental outcomes.

Positive Development and Thriving

A growing body of literature has documented associations between adolescent RSD and various indicators of positive youth development and thriving. A thriving young person, as defined in this chapter, is one who is developing a posi-

tive identity and a meaningful and satisfying life, who experiences a sense of well-being, and who develops personal competencies. In addition to these things, however, a key attribute of thriving is an individual's contributions to the well-being of his or her family, community, and society (King et al., 2005; Lerner et al., 2006; Scales, Benson, Leffert & Blyth, 2000). As such, the term *thriving* has referred to positive development that is characterized over time by a pattern of functioning indicative of the individual's ability to adapt to environmental opportunities, demands, and restrictions in a way that satisfies individual's developmental needs and the needs of others and society. This section examines the empirical work that supports the claim that spirituality and religion are associated with indicators of positive youth development and thriving.

Thriving

Dowling et al. (2004) found that adolescents' spirituality (defined as experiencing transcendence and defining self in relationship to others and having genuine concern for others) and religiosity (defined as institutional affiliation and participation with a religious tradition and doctrine) had direct effects on an omnibus measure of thriving (defined as a concept incorporating the absence of problem behaviors and the presence of healthy development). In addition, adolescent spirituality mediated the effects of religion on thriving. These findings suggest that both spirituality and religiousness may play roles in the development of thriving. Although most existing research has confirmed the positive role of religion, this study demonstrated that spirituality may have an influence on youth thriving beyond that of religion. In another study, Benson et al. (2005) found that religious salience and importance were positive predictors of eight thriving indicators across sex and racial/ethnic subgroups of youth.

Meaning and Identity

Adolescent RSD can contribute to thriving by influencing psychosocial identity development

and the broader search for purpose, meaning, and fidelity characteristic of adolescence (Damon, 2008; Roeser et al., 2008; Templeton & Eccles, 2006). However, research using Marcia's identity statuses paradigm has yielded equivocal findings. For instance, Markstrom-Adams, Hoftstra, and Dougher (1994) examined the relationship of religious participation to Marcia's (1966) identity commitments. They found that identity commitments of foreclosure and achievement were related to church attendance. Subsequent studies showed that intrinsically religiously motivated youth were most likely to have attained Marcia's stage of identity achievement (Fulton, 1997; Markstrom-Adams & Smith, 1996). Other studies have shown identity diffusion has been associated with lower levels of religious importance and participation, orthodoxy of Christian beliefs, and intrinsic religious commitment (Markstrom-Adams et al., 1994). However, Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer (2001), however, found only weak associations between religious commitment and achieved identity status. Clearly, better conceptualization of RSD as well as "identity development" is needed to clarify the interaction of these domains of development. What has proven more fruitful is the focus on how RSD affects adolescents' sense of meaning, hope, and purpose.

It is not surprising that religion has been shown to have a positive impact on adolescents' development of a sense of personal meaning (Chamberlain & Zika, 1992). For instance, in a national probability sample of U.S. adolescents showed that their religious and spiritual commitments are positively associated with their overall sense of meaning and hope for the future (Smith & Denton, 2005). Tzuriel (1984) and Francis (2000) found that religiously involved youth reported higher levels of commitment and purpose when compared to less religiously engaged youth. Furrow et al. (2004) found that youth reporting a strong religious identity were more likely to have a meaning framework that added direction and purpose to their lives than their nonreligious peers. It has

also been shown that youths participating in religious communities are more likely to report having a sense of purpose indicative of a commitment to a personal philosophy (Markstrom, 1999). Also consistent with these findings, Showalter and Wagener (2000) found among youths attending a Christian summer camp that religion served as a productive source of meaning.

Contribution

Several studies have indicated a positive relationship between religion and indicators as community service and altruism. For instance, Youniss and colleagues found that religious youth were more involved in community service compared to those adolescents reporting little religious activity (e.g., Kerestes, Youniss, & Metz, 2004; Youniss et al., 1999). Using Monitoring the Future data, Youniss et al. reported that students who believe that religion is important in their lives were almost three times more likely to participate in community service than those who do not believe that religion is important. Similarly, Smith and Denton (2005) reported that religiously devoted youth committed twice the national average of acts of service to homeless and needy people and significantly more acts than less religious youth.

Tracking religious development from the sophomore year to the senior year, Kerestes et al. (2004) found that civic integration, measured by participation in civic activities such as working on a political campaign and demonstrating for a cause, and willingness to perform volunteer service, were positively associated with stable or upward religious developmental trajectories among a sample of predominately white, socioeconomically middle- to upper-class students. Religious salience (Crystal & DeBell, 2002) and religious values (Serow & Dreyden, 1990; Smith, 1999) have both shown to be associated with various forms of civic engagement.

Teenagers' religious commitment and attendance has been associated with free time activity involvement and peer characteristics. Youth

who reported greater importance of religion in their lives and who attended public religious services more were involved in constructive after-school activities. Furthermore, these youth were more likely to have friends with similar religious commitments and conventional value profiles, and who were similarly involved in formal religion and constructive free-time activities (Jessor & Jessor, 1977; Smith & Denton, 2005). In turn, Hart & Fegley (1995) noted the positive role of religion in the lives of youth nominated for their commitment to caring and contributions to others. For many, caring values, attitudes, and behaviors were not independent of their spirituality. Rather, all aspects of their morality were governed by their religious beliefs and experiences, which informed their goals of service and care and were closely related to their identity.

In summary, although the research just reviewed is suggestive of how RSD in adolescence is associated with other positive developmental outcomes (Wallace & Williams, 1997; Frank & Kendall, 2001; Regnerus, Smith, Christian, STET & Fritsch, 2003). Furthermore, work with national longitudinal research designs and samples, rather than cross-sectional, correlational designs and samples of convenience are needed to strengthen our knowledge base in this area. Nonetheless, the reviewed findings do point to potential avenues for further research.

Negative Outcomes of Adolescent RSD

It is important to consider adolescent RSD in its entirety, lest we identify religion and spirituality as a social panacea. Although there is ample evidence to make the case for the beneficial role of religion and spirituality in adolescent, RSD may also lead to problematic social outcomes and developmental forms of psychopathology (see Silberman et al., 2005; Wagener & Maloney, 2006; Oser et al., 2006). The notions of developmental systems theory concerning transactions, contexts, plasticity and different forms of person-environment fit in different sociocultural and historical

environments is useful for understanding both positive and negative forms of religion and spirituality.

For instance, the change of Tibet from a nation of warriors to a nation of Buddhist contemplatives necessitates a complex, multilevel sociocultural-contextual and historical systems analysis to understand. A similar lens is needed to comprehend Nazi Germany and the religion of German youth generally and the Hitler youth (Hitler Jugend) in particular. Both societies transformed themselves in the direction of spiritual worldviews, one becoming a place in which the ethics of universal compassion and nonviolence thrived, and the other one where pseudospeciation and the holocaust unfolded. Indeed, the notion of “meaning systems” at the level of institutions and communities of religion, and “identity systems” at the level of individuals, have proven very fruitful for applying systems concepts to both spiritual thriving and pathology (e.g., Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2005; Roeser et al., 2008a; Silberman et al., 2005).

We assume that optimal religion and spirituality affirms both individual development and engenders social contribution. This balance is important, for if one violates the other, healthy development does not occur. For example, if a religious tradition emphasizes the faith community, without valuing the uniqueness of its members, youths may not have the necessary opportunities to explore different aspects of identity. When youths are not given the freedom to explore, and are either forced or pressured into adopting a specific ideology, social group, or expression of spirituality, identity foreclosure is a risk.

Taken to the extreme, cults can be understood from this perspective as spiritual expressions that devalue the individuality of their members in order to elevate the ideology and group. This is graphically illustrated by spiritual groups that demand that their members all dress alike. In addition, recent current events such as suicide bombings illustrate devastation caused by religious groups that value the goals

and ends of the religion more than an individual's life.

However, some traditions might not leverage their potential as being conducive to promoting positive development because they emphasize the individual, over and above promoting a sense of community and belonging. For example, some conservative traditions within Christianity emphasize the individual believer's relationship with God to the extent that they do not expend time or resources on promoting a sense of community or contribution to larger society. When this occurs, although youths are reinforced about their personal worth, they lose out on both the support and accountability of a faith community and the value of learning what it means to belong and to contribute to a greater good. In addition, individual forms of spirituality that are not connected with a group of followers also have the potential to leave youths without the web of support present in spiritual traditions associated with a intentional group of followers.

These manifestations of spirituality are not necessarily deleterious for youth development or for society. Rather, they lack the rich social context that is so effective for optimal development. Forms of spirituality that do not connect youth with a social group or a transcendent experience of other may not promote a self-concept that fully integrates a moral, civic, and spiritual identity. However, taken to the extreme, forms of religion and spirituality that exalt the individual over a greater good can promote a sense of narcissism, entitlement, and lack of connectedness and contribution to society.

A developmental systems perspective highlights not only the goodness of fit between an individual and a religious/spiritual tradition, but also between a religious/spiritual tradition and the greater society. If such a spiritual tradition causes detriment to others, such as the case with prejudice (Hunsberger, 1995) and terrorism, then spirituality has gone awry. Numerous research studies have linked religious fundamentalism to right-wing

authoritarianism, which in turn is related to ethnocentrism and many forms of prejudice (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005). Understanding the developmental antecedents to such deleterious religious commitments is an important aspect of development science.

It is important to note that although a specific religious group might point to certain behaviors as indicators of thriving from within that group's perspective, these behaviors do not always represent "constructive development" from the perspective of developmental science. For example, as Silberman (2003) points out, the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States can be viewed from very different perspectives, which engender different assumptions about desirable kinds of world change and violence or peace as legitimate means of achieving world change. According to one meaning perspective, the attacks were religiously legitimated. From another meaning perspective, these attacks were seen as violent assaults on innocent civilians that are prohibited by religion. How to tip the "double-edged sword" of religion away from its violent world change ideological forms and toward its peaceful world change ideological forms is the challenge facing the faith communities of the world today (Silberman et al., 2005). Such change may also be a force of future theory and research in developmental science.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE THEORY AND RESEARCH

The role of religion and spirituality in informing and shaping the development of adolescents is only beginning to be explored in the developmental sciences with respect to a systems views of development in which biology, psychology, and social ecology play equally important, transacting roles. Research now shows that religion and spirituality are important for the course of youth development (Smith & Denton, 2005). However, more nuanced knowledge is required to better elucidate the precise individual and contextual relations that account for youth RSD and its

positive outcomes. In this section, we highlight what we see as a few key areas for future research that would strengthen this emerging area of scholarship.

The scientific study of religion and spirituality in human health and development necessitates definitional clarity of key concepts of religion, religiousness, spirituality, and spiritual. In the wake of stage-structural theories falling out of favor in the developmental sciences, there is a need for renewed theory in the area of what constitutes religious and spiritual development during adolescence. Innovative new approaches that incorporate and expand on these previous works exist (e.g., Wilbur, 2006), but have yet to be examined during adolescence.

Why are individuals religious or spiritual in the first place (e.g., Bloom, 2005)? Does adolescence represent a sensitive period in religious and spiritual formation (e.g., Good & Willoughby, 2008)? What processes mark "authentic" and "inauthentic" forms of development in these domains and what are the best candidate mechanisms for explaining the relation of religiosity or spirituality to various aspects of human development? How should we study religion and spirituality at the individual level – as domains of development generally, as domains of identity development in particular, etc. (Roeser et al., 2008)? In sum, it is with respect to issues of theory, construct definition, and the elucidation of mechanisms of influence where we see the most room for innovation and creativity in this emerging area of study.

There is also a great need for longitudinal research in this area. Understanding the developmental precursors and sequelae of various religious/spiritual identities and behaviors will be critical for untangling patterns of influence and pathways of continuity and change in this aspect of human development. Some of the most comprehensive studies to date remain cross-sectional in design (e.g., Benson et al., 2005; Lerner et al., 2008; Smith & Denton, 2005). A focus on particular subgroups of

interest such as those who are particularly spiritually precocious, those who undergo conversion experiences, or those who leave religion and decide they are atheists, may be one way that such studies may advance understanding of not only normative but diverse patterns of religious and spiritual development across adolescence (e.g., King, Ramos, & Clardy, 2008).

The employment of non-self-report measures of behavior and behavioral sequelae will also be important in this work. For instance, little work on the development of prejudicial attitudes with respect to religion during adolescence, using implicit measures of attitudes has been conducted (e.g., Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). In addition, in order to understand the effect of religious attendance on positive behaviors during adolescence, such as service to others, it is necessary to gain multiple informants' perspectives and to use observational methods. Recent work on the neural underpinnings of spiritual experience, as well as on basic self-regulatory functions associated with particular practices like meditation, provide other new kinds of measures that move from first person to second person to third person in nature (e.g., Newberg & Newberg, 2006; Urry & Poey, 2008).

In addition, understanding the role of social factors in religious and spiritual development in a world plagued by religious violence, as it is today, seems essential. Thus, one key direction for future research on religious and spiritual development during adolescence involves a more thorough examination of the kinds of people, opportunities, and social settings that nurture healthy and authentic forms of spirituality and spirituality \leftrightarrow positive development relations (see King & Furrow, 2004; King et al., 2008). As in any other domain of development, we believe religious and spiritual development is scaffolded and linked to the kinds of social worlds and people with whom adolescents "come of age" (e.g., Rogoff, 2003). It is the developmentally instigative role of these social contexts in religious and spiritual development that require more research in this field of study (Regnerus, 2003).

Adolescence, with its characteristic changes in thinking and feeling, is a prime time for young people to be exposed to, and engaged in, dialogue about ideas and philosophies bearing on ultimate existential questions of identity, purpose, and meaning. Spiritual mentors, in such a context, can take on considerable importance in the lives of youth (e.g., Issac, Roeser, Abo-Zena, & Lerner, 2007). Unfortunately, recent work on youth purpose highlights the relative absence of such conversations about meaning in the lives of young people at least in the U.S. today (Damon, 2008). What happens to youths when they experience a significant absence of discussions of purpose and meaning? What is the net effect of this absence on the quality and richness of the inner spiritual lives of youths? Do violence, risk behavior, and anomie provide channels for frustrated or misdirected spiritual longings?

In summary, the preceding conceptual questions are important, general issues that should be addressed in further research. In addition to these more general issues, there are more specific contextual and individual variables that require greater empirical attention.

Race, Culture, and Ethnicity

Given that religion and spirituality are key facets of ethnicity, race, and culture (Mattis et al., 2006; Slonim, 1991), a key direction for future research concerns the intersectionality among, young people's developing ethnic/racial, cultural, and religious and spiritual identities in shaping patterns of positive or problematic youth development. Virtually no research has examined the intersectionality among such identities with adolescents (e.g., Abo-Zena, Roeser, Issac, & Lerner, 2007; Abo-Zena et al., 2008; Juang & Syed 2008). New research in this area would enhance our understanding of the roles that religion and spirituality can play in the positive development of ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse youth (e.g., Nicolas & DeSilva, 2008).

For instance, despite the centrality of the church in African-American history, "almost

no research focuses specifically on Black adolescents” with respect to religion and development today (Taylor, Chatters, and Levin, 2004, p. 46). What is known is that African-American youths place more importance on religion than their European-American peers (Donahue & Benson, 1995; Wallace et al., 2003) and that religion deters deviant behavior among African-American youths. But what about its role in enhancing positive development? In addition, most existing research on adolescent religion and spirituality is based on North American samples; little research takes into consideration the role of spirituality in developing nations (King et al., 2008).

Immigrants

Similarly, we believe that religion and spirituality play a key role in the development of immigrants and their families (Abo-Zena et al., 2007; Jensen, 2008; Juang & Syed, 2008; Roeser, Lerner, Jensen & Alberts, 2008). How might religious institutions provide a “context of reception” for newcomers to the United States? How might spiritual beliefs support immigrants in their efforts to assimilate and bridge to the mainstream of American cultural and economic life? How might being an ethnic-minority immigrant who is also a member of the religious majority of the country affect youth development? Future studies examining such issues would increase our understanding of the development of immigrant youths in the United States as well.

Sexual and Religious Minorities

The role of religion and spirituality in the development of youths who are sexual or religious minorities is also important. For instance, research has documented the important influence social environments can have on the sexual identity development of gay and lesbian youths (Ream & Savin-Williams, 2004). As the research on proscribed and nonproscribed sources of prejudice in religious traditions illustrates (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005), sexual minorities remain targets for religious-based discrimination. Examining the effect of

such discrimination on the identity formation of gay and lesbian youths during adolescence is important.

Similarly, what is the role of religion in ameliorating or even exacerbating the risks associated with being a religious minority in the United States today (Abo-Zena et al., 2008)? How can religious practices such as wearing a headscarf differentially expose certain youths to risk factors like discrimination, while engagement in such practices provides a buffer against such experiences at the same time?

Worldviews and Violence

Another area for future research concerns the development of religious and spiritual worldviews during adolescence and early adulthood and their functional significance for well-being and life choices (e.g., Arnett, 2008). How do young people’s knowledge and understanding (or lack of knowledge and understanding) of the world’s religions shape their own worldviews? How can we help all young people achieve a deep appreciation for the plurality of religions and wisdom traditions that characterize different facets of humanity today and, in doing so, promote greater mutual understanding and civil society (Roeser & Lerner, 2008)? Which religious and spiritual worldviews are differentially associated with positive and problematic forms of human development (e.g., Feldman, 2008). Why are young males so vulnerable to the influence of violent worldviews and attendant forms of actual violence in nations all around the world (Wagener & Maloney, 2006)? What social ecological conditions foster such vulnerability? How can worldview beliefs be used to differentiate religious terrorism from positive forms of development (Silberman, 2005)?

Life Event Catalysts of RSD

More research on the life event catalysts of religious and spiritual development is also needed. At the time of writing, King et al. (2008) were in the process of analyzing in depth interviews

of 32 adolescent spiritual exemplars from spiritually and culturally diverse backgrounds around the globe. An emerging finding as a key factor thought to affect the emergence of a reflective and intentional approach to life, in which happiness and a more satisfying life are sought, is the experience of suffering and an inability to address it sufficiently through prevailing identity commitments and worldviews (Corbett, 2000). From this perspective, spiritual development is said to be triggered when “traditional religious beliefs and images from childhood no longer offer comfort from suffering or provide adequate reasons for injustices in the world” (Templeton & Eccles 2006, p. 255). The resultant loss of meaning and desire for livable solutions to questions of ultimate meaning (e.g., the existence of suffering) catalyze new existential questioning, exploration, and seeking. More generally, understanding how life events may trigger spiritual doubts, identity explorations, and ongoing commitments is an important topic of inquiry.

Mediating Factors

Although the relationship between religion/spirituality and positive outcomes for youth is well documented at this writing, the mechanisms behind this association have not been well explored. Although there is evidence that social support, such as social capital or developmental assets may mediate the effect of religious participation or religious salience on positive development in young people, further research is needed to clarify how social support might work for different youths in different settings. For instance, do adolescents with varying amounts of parental support benefit differently from religious social support? Research demonstrates that young people in diverse contexts benefit from social capital differently (King, 2004).

Other questions about mediating factors exist as well. Do the ideology, worldviews, and moral order available through religion and spirituality help young people navigate through the waters of adolescents (King, 2008). Is there

a significant interaction between ideology and social support available through religious or spiritual contexts (King, 2008)? Was Erikson (1959) correct in suggesting that youths who are embedded in a social context that affords and models a particular worldview and moral order have advantages when forming an identity? Longitudinal studies exploring these issues are needed to understand causal effects of these potential mediating factors.

CONCLUSIONS

There is renewed interest in the study of religious and spiritual development. For far too long the field of developmental science overlooked these important aspects of being an adolescent. As the field moves toward consensus on the conceptualization of spirituality and religiousness, social scientists will be able to advance the operationalization of these complex constructs. Our hope is that the not-too-distant future will see the rise of creative and rigorous methodologies that will begin to answer some of the questions raised in this chapter.

Varying approaches to data gathering and analysis will allow scholars to examine the presence, development, and impact of spirituality and religion in the lives of diverse young people. Increased understanding will elucidate how spirituality may serve as a potentially potent aspect of the developmental system, through which young people can gain a greater understanding of themselves and their connections to the greater world in ways that fosters a sense of responsibility and compassion to the greater good.

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