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# Parent-Child Dynamics and Emerging Adult Religiosity: Attachment, Parental Beliefs, and Faith Support

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Parental religiosity has been shown to predict child and adolescent religiosity, but the role of parents in emerging adult religiosity is largely unknown. We explored associations among emerging adult religiosity, perceived parental religiosity, perceived similarity to mother's and to father's religious beliefs, parental faith support, and parental attachment. Participants were 481 alumni of two Christian colleges and completed surveys online. Emerging adult religiosity (measured by Christian orthodoxy and intrinsic religiosity) was high and similar to parents' religiosity. Perceived similarity to parents' religious beliefs, faith support, and attachment to fathers predicted emerging adult religiosity. However, parental religiosity alone was a weak predictor and functioned as a negative suppressor variable when combined with similarity to parents' beliefs and faith support. Findings underscore the importance of parental support and parent-child relationship dynamics more than the level of parental religiosity and point to possibly unique roles for mothers and fathers in emerging adult religiosity.

*Keywords:* emerging adulthood, religiosity, religious beliefs, parental attachment, gender

Establishing a coherent worldview, including navigating religious and spiritual beliefs, is a major developmental task during emerging adulthood (roughly 18–25 years of age; Arnett, 2000). Little research has explored the role of parents in this process. Parental socialization of their children's religiosity has been documented primarily during childhood and adolescence (Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001; Smith, 2003). As children age, less is known about the degree to which parents shape their religiosity, and some evidence suggests there is little commonality between emerging adult and parental religiosity (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). However, for some young people, parents may continue to play a role in shaping their belief systems, depending on the family context and the quality of the parent-child relationship (Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006).

Our aim is threefold: to learn more about the complexity of emerging adult religiosity, to explore the degree of similarity between parent and emerging adult religiosity, and to examine which aspects of parental religiosity and the parent-child relationship predict emerging adult religiosity. Our unique sample will enrich existing research on emerging adults in two important ways. First, our participants already graduated from college, whereas many studies of emerging adults survey only college students. Second, our participants attended religiously affiliated colleges, providing an interesting population and cultural context in which to study religious beliefs (Barry & Nelson, 2005). The sample is representative of the roughly 25% of young people in the United States who self-identify as evangelical Christian in national surveys (Sax, Astin, Korn, & Mahoney, 2004; Smith, Faris, Denton, & Regnerus, 2003) and the growing segment of young Christians who are returning to orthodox traditions (Carroll, 2002). However, little research on emerging adults has focused on this population (e.g., Railsback, 2006).

Research has shown that parents play an important role in adolescent religiosity. National data (Smith & Denton, 2005) indicate that many American adolescents model their parents' religious beliefs, worship service attendance, and affiliation. For both private (e.g., prayer) and more public (e.g., attending services) aspects of religiosity, correlational studies have found positive associations between parents' and adolescents' religiosity (Boyatzis, 2005, 2009; Flor & Knapp, 2001; Smith, 2003). Parents can serve as role models of faith and can shape their children's religious development through dialogue or instruction (Schwartz, 2006). Perhaps more indirectly, parents expose their adolescents to religious communities that reinforce the principles of their religion

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or religious behavior (Bartkowski, Xu, & Levin, 2008). Emerging adults may be less exposed to parental religiosity and religious community while being more exposed to other socialization agents (e.g., friends, romantic partners); hence, it is plausible that parental religious socialization of their emerging adult children would be reduced.

### Theoretical and Empirical Framework for Emerging Adult Religiosity

Existing research on emerging adult religiosity is grounded in Arnett's (2000) assertion that the development of a worldview is a defining feature of emerging adulthood. Our participants attended colleges whose missions include explicit references to shaping students' worldviews. Several major theories illuminate emerging adult worldview or religiosity.

Erikson (1968) posited that identity formation is enhanced by participation in a religious group or social institution that provides transcendent meaning. Accordingly, religion offers young people an ideological anchor, which may become especially important during the exciting but also potentially confusing explorations of emerging adulthood. Likewise, Fowler (1981) proposed that a major psychological task of adolescence and young adulthood is to choose a set of beliefs, or faith, to live by. To Fowler, adolescents have synthetic-conventional faith, or a conforming, noncritical faith. By contrast, emerging adults have an individuative-reflective faith, or a more "owned" faith in which the identity and worldview constructed in one's upbringing is critically examined and perhaps revised or even jettisoned.

Recent research supports this kind of growth in identity and faith during emerging adulthood. In a nationally representative sample of adolescents (13–17 years), Smith, Faris, Denton, and Regnerus (2003) found that the majority (60%) regularly participated in religious activities and few reported negative attitudes toward organized religion. When Smith followed these adolescents in to emerging adulthood (18–23 years), they showed greater individualization in their religious beliefs, more skepticism of organized religion, and less connection to religious institutions (Smith, 2009). Thus, for adolescents, religiosity may be more shaped by external influences of parents and religious institutions (synthetic-conventional faith). For emerging adults, however, religiosity may reflect greater individuation due to decreased contact with parents and religious communities and increased opportunity for reflection. Similarly, Arnett and Jensen (2002) found a differentiation from family religious affiliation and a more individualized religiosity in a sample of mostly Christian emerging adults (20–29 years). There was little similarity between childhood religious beliefs and behaviors and their later emerging adult beliefs and behaviors. Rather, emerging adults seemed to adopt a new, reconfigured religiosity. Yet, they found that some emerging adults were still well-versed in the religious tradition of their upbringing despite increased exploration.

Though emerging adults may question their family's religious beliefs, several studies demonstrate that their beliefs still possess traces of parents' beliefs. Pearce and Thornton (2007) found that mothers' religious affiliation, attendance, and ideology when children were young positively predicted emerging adults' religious ideology when they were between 18 and 31 years. This continuity of parents' religiosity in emerging adults' beliefs also emerged in

the work of Smith (2009). They found that emerging adult religiosity, compared to adolescent religiosity, incorporates a broader range of belief systems and complexity but includes detailed explanations of the religious beliefs and practices of one's upbringing. Like Arnett and Jensen (2002), Smith and Snell claim that emerging adult religiosity is highly individualized but, unlike Arnett and Jensen, found that emerging adult religiosity is still anchored in family religious traditions and overlaps with parents' religious beliefs.

Despite these findings, there is still a sense that emerging adults are somehow less traditionally "religious" than adolescents. Perhaps inconsistent reports of emerging adult religious behavior contribute to the impression that the emerging adult's overall religiosity has declined since adolescence (Smith, 2009). One study found that college females placed more importance than males on religious beliefs but both genders showed a decline in religious behavior (Stoppa & Lefkowitz, 2010). In another study of female college students (roughly 75% from Christian backgrounds), the majority reported changes in religious affiliation or inconsistent religious service attendance but little to no change in religious beliefs and even an increase in some areas of religious belief (Lefkowitz, 2005).

Further evidence for emerging adults' relative stability in religious beliefs but fluctuation in religious service attendance appears in national data sets, typically of college students (Koenig, McGue, & Iacono, 2008; Petts, 2009; Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007). A report from the Pew Research Center (2010) found that millennials (today's emerging adults) attend religious services less regularly than older adults (33% of 18- to 29-year-olds in comparison to 41% of adults 30 years and over). However, the Pew survey, like Smith (2009), found surprising similarity in the religious beliefs of some emerging adults and older adults, such as traditional beliefs regarding the existence of God and life after death. Collectively, the literature suggests that despite some deviation from the religion practiced while living with their families, emerging adults may still share parents' religious beliefs.

### Emerging Adult Relationships With Parents: Attachment, Gender, and Parental Perception

Given the role of the family in religious socialization, we felt it essential to investigate emerging adults' religiosity in the context of the parental attachment relationship. Classic attachment theory claims that most young adults have individuated from their families of origin but continue to derive security from their relationships with their parents (Ainsworth, 1989). Studies on parental attachment and adolescent religiosity suggest that a more secure attachment increases the likelihood that the adolescent will adopt their parents' religious beliefs (Granqvist, 2002; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008). Moreover, warmth and acceptance in the parent-child relationship (yers, 1996; Bao, Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Conger, 1999; Schwartz, 2006) may be equally important as parental religiosity for the child's religiosity.

If a strong attachment relationship continues into emerging adulthood, the sharing of the parents' religious beliefs is likely to continue. Parents remain important attachment figures at a time when much in emerging adults' lives is in flux (Scharf, Mayseless, & Kivenson-Baron, 2004) and many emerging adults feel their relationship with their parents generally improves during the col-

lege years (Lefkowitz, 2005). Thus, the parent relationship has the potential to serve as a secure base for emerging adults' religious exploration. In a sample of college students, strong parental attachment, especially to mothers, was associated with the highest levels of identity commitment and exploration (Samuolis, Layburn, & Schiaffino, 2001).

Other research on religious socialization has identified structural or dynamic processes that seem to promote higher religiosity in the child. For example, mothers seem especially crucial (Boyatzis et al., 2006; Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008); open and reciprocal communication that respects children's views may enhance adolescents' faith (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008) and an authoritative parenting style may promote religiosity in adolescence (Hardy, White, Zhang, & Ruchty, 2011). Among emerging adults, spiritual support from mothers and fathers was positively associated with emerging adults feeling a close connection to a higher power (Desrosiers, Kelley, & Miller, 2010). Another study found that emerging adults who use God to mediate difficult discussions reported greater satisfaction in their relationships with their fathers (Brelsford, 2011). Thus, there is ample evidence that many aspects of the parent-child relationship may foster emerging adult religiosity.

An important methodological note is studies reviewed here often utilized emerging adults' reports of the parent-child relationship or parental religiosity. Some work has found that adolescent religiosity is more related to their *perception* of their parents' religiosity than to their parents' own self-reported religiosity (Okagaki & Bevis, 1999) and many studies rely on adolescents' reports of their parents' religiosity (e.g., Hardy et al., 2011). Thus, our study relied on emerging adults' perception of parental religiosity, their parents' role in their own religiosity, and the attachment relationship as a way to explore this dynamic from the emerging adults' perspective.

### The Current Study

Our study is based on a highly religious sample that is a relatively neglected group in existing research. To counter the tendency in the literature to draw conclusions from limited or singular measures, we employed several different measures of religiosity. A major outcome variable was the Christian Orthodoxy Scale (Fullerton & Hunsberger, 1982), chosen for its suitability for our Christian-college sample and because it allows us to test prior claims that emerging adults prefer individually derived and less orthodox beliefs. Another major outcome variable was the widely used measure of intrinsic religious orientation from the Intrinsic/Extrinsic-Revised Scale (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989), which assessed how our emerging adults internalize and are motivated by their religious faith.

In sum, we tested four hypotheses: (a) participants would report high religiosity for themselves and their parents; (b) participants' perceptions of parental religiosity would positively predict their own Christian orthodoxy and intrinsic religiosity; (c) parental attachment, alone and in conjunction with parental religiosity, would positively predict emerging adult religiosity; and (d) parent gender would play a role—mother variables would be stronger predictors than father variables of emerging adult religiosity for both male and female emerging adults.

## Method

### Participants

Our sample was comprised of college alumni from two evangelical Christian liberal arts colleges, one located in New England and one in the Midwest. Both schools belong to the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU), an organization of 110 evangelical institutions of higher learning. The entire graduating classes of 2006 and 2008 were, during the summer of 2008, asked via e-mail to participate in a study about life after college. A total of 805 alumni from the class of 2006 and 1,014 alumni from the class of 2008 were contacted; 479 alumni (288 from 2006 and 192 from 2008) completed the survey (26% participation rate). Participants were an average age of 23 years (range 20–30 years), largely Caucasian (92%), and mostly female (70%). The majority (89%) identified themselves as Protestant and the remainder described themselves as Catholic, Jewish, other religious tradition, or not religious.

### Measures

**Emerging adult religiosity.** We assessed participants' religiosity in four ways. First, participants rated on 4-point scales their frequency of attendance at religious services (1 = *never*, 4 = *once a week or more*) and the importance of religion in their lives (1 = *not at all important*, 4 = *very important*) and on a 9-point scale their general interest in religion (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *extremely*). These three items (attendance, importance, and interest) were summed to create an indicator of general religiosity ( $\alpha = .83$ ). Second, we created a religious identity score by summing participants' responses to two items, on 7-point scales (1 = *not at all important*, 7 = *very important*), that assessed how central religion or faith is to the participants' overall identity and how important their religion or faith was to others' understanding of them (Cohen & Hill, 2007;  $\alpha = .94$  in our sample). These first two variables, general religiosity and religious identity, will be reported solely to reflect the degree of religiosity in our sample.

Third, participants completed the Christian Orthodoxy scale (Fullerton & Hunsberger, 1982) with 24 items that assess the degree to which participants ascribe to core foundational and orthodox Christian religious beliefs (e.g., nature of the Trinity, divinity of Christ, life after death, God as creator, virgin birth of Jesus). The Christian Orthodoxy measure has strong psychometric properties (in this sample,  $\alpha = .85$ ), consists of a single factor on which all scale items load, and correlates highly with standard assessments of religiosity (Hill & Hood, 1999). Lastly, we used the eight items that tap intrinsic religiosity from the I/E-Revised Scale (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989), which also has strong psychometric properties (in this sample,  $\alpha = .81$ ) and assesses the degree to which one's faith is internalized and central to everyday life.

**Parental religiosity.** Participants rated their parents' religiosity on two similar questions: how often their parents attend religious services (1 = *never*, 4 = *once a week or more*) and how important religion is to them (1 = *not important at all*, 4 = *very important*). A perceived parental religiosity score was created by summing responses on these two questions ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

**Parental similarity and support.** To assess the degree of similarity to their parents' religiosity, participants separately rated,

on 7-point scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *we believe the same*), the perceived similarity of their own religious beliefs to their mothers' and fathers' beliefs. Participants also completed the Perceived Faith Support—Parents scale (PFS-P; Schwartz, 2006), in which they rated, on a 4-point scale (1 = *never*, 4 = *a lot*), eight items on the degree to which participants feel supported in their faith and discuss their faith with their parents (e.g., "I read and talk about the Bible with my parents"). Internal reliability was strong ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

**Parental attachment.** Participants rated their level of attachment with their parents on the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). Separate subscales of 12 items each assessed attachment to mother ( $\alpha = .81$ ) and father ( $\alpha = .84$ ) on a 5-point scale (1 = *almost always or always true*, 5 = *almost never or never true*) such that lower scores mean higher attachment.

## Procedure

Graduates of the classes of 2006 and 2008 received a recruitment e-mail that explained the purpose of the study and provided a link to an online survey. If the alumni clicked on the link, they were automatically guided through an informed consent process before beginning the survey. The survey took approximately one hour to complete.

## Results

To test our hypotheses, we provide descriptive analyses of emerging adult and parental religiosity, then correlational analyses between emerging adult and parent variables, and finally regression analyses to test predictors of emerging adult religiosity. Within our presentation of regressions, we show that perceived parental religiosity functions as a "negative suppressor" variable (Garbin, 2011; Lancaster, 1999). We tested for simple and multiple suppression using the bootstrapping procedure recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008), a procedure designed to estimate and test the sampling distribution of the indirect effect.

## Descriptive Analyses

**Emerging adult religiosity.** The emerging adults in our sample generally displayed high levels of religious belief and behavior. Their mean general religiosity score was 15.49 out of 17 ( $SD = 2.19$ ); nearly half (46%) of participants reported the maximum

score of 17, indicating high attendance, importance, and interest in religion. The mean religious identity score was 12.53 out of 14 ( $SD = 2.17$ ). Responses to the Christian Orthodoxy Scale were similarly high. The mean score was 158.43 of 168 ( $SD = 19.67$ ), confirming that this sample largely accepted traditional Christian beliefs but with substantial variation around the mean. (In comparison, Fullerton and Hunsberger [1982] found that the average Christian Orthodoxy score across many samples of adolescents and young adults ranged from 112 to 130.) The mean intrinsic religiosity score was 54.37 out of 68 ( $SD = 6.95$ ), demonstrating that participants' religious faith was highly internalized and integrated into their lives. Males and females were largely similar across measures, with gender differences only on the Christian Orthodoxy Scale: females reported higher orthodoxy scores ( $M = 160.09$ ,  $SD = 17.33$ ) than males ( $M = 154.46$ ,  $SD = 23.99$ ),  $t(479) = -2.88$ ,  $p < .01$ .

**Parental religiosity.** Emerging adults perceived their parents as currently displaying high levels of religiosity. The mean perceived parental religiosity score (sum of attendance and importance) was 7.49 of 8 ( $SD = 1.16$ ) with no gender differences.

**Parental similarity and support.** Participants generally perceived their own religious beliefs as similar to their mothers' and fathers', although perceived similarity to mother's religious beliefs ( $M = 5.35$  out of 7,  $SD = 1.49$ ) was higher than to father's beliefs ( $M = 4.93$ ,  $SD = 1.86$ ),  $t(480) = 5.85$ ,  $p < .01$ . The mean score on the perceived faith support scale was 23.52 out of 32 ( $SD = 5.51$ ), indicating a moderate level of parental support of emerging adults' religiosity. There were no gender differences in reports of perceived faith support or father similarity but females perceived themselves as being more similar to their mothers ( $M = 5.46$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ) than males did ( $M = 5.08$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ),  $t(479) = -2.60$ ,  $p < .01$ .

**Parental attachment.** Parent scores on the IPPA ranged between 25 and 125, with lower scores indicating higher attachment. On average, participants rated their mother attachment ( $M = 49.30$ ,  $SD = 18.54$ ) as higher than their father attachment ( $M = 56.79$ ,  $SD = 21.39$ ),  $t(480) = 7.49$ ,  $p < .01$  with no differences between male and female participants.

## Correlational Analyses

Associations among all emerging adult religiosity, parental religiosity, parental religious context, and parental attachment variables were explored using Pearson correlations (see Table 1).

Table 1  
Pearson Correlations Among Emerging Adult Religiosity and Parental Religiosity Variables

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Intrinsic religiosity	.59**	.10*	.35**	.32**	.38**	.17**	.11*
2. Christian orthodoxy	—	.11*	.45**	.38**	.33**	.19**	.10*
3. Perceived parental religiosity	—	—	.39**	.42**	.56**	.15**	.18**
4. Similarity mother beliefs	—	—	—	.57**	.50**	.34**	.17**
5. Similarity father beliefs	—	—	—	—	.56**	.24**	.47**
6. Perceived faith support	—	—	—	—	—	.48**	.45**
7. Mother attachment <sup>±</sup>	—	—	—	—	—	—	.40**
8. Father attachment <sup>±</sup>	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Note.  $N = 481$  for above items.

<sup>±</sup> Attachment scores are reverse coded; the signs of the correlation coefficients were changed to ease interpretation.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Correlations were in the expected positive direction between emerging adult religiosity and perceived parental religiosity, and coefficients ranged in magnitude from .11 to .57 ( $p \leq .01$ ). Emerging adults' Christian orthodoxy and intrinsic religiosity scores were significantly associated with parent variables such as similarity with parents' beliefs ( $r = .32$  to  $.45$ ) and perceived faith support by parents ( $r = .33$  to  $.38$ ). However, correlations were weak (albeit significant due to sample size) between orthodoxy and perceived parental religiosity ( $r = .11$ ), intrinsic religiosity and perceived parental religiosity ( $r = .10$ ), and both orthodoxy and intrinsic religiosity and parental attachments ( $r = .10$  to  $.19$ ).

### Regression Analyses Predicting Emerging Adult Religiosity

**Overview.** Christian Orthodoxy and intrinsic religiosity were chosen as key indicators of emerging adult religiosity because they are well-established, central measures of religiosity for Christian samples. Further, both showed greater variability than either the general religiosity or religious identity scores. Forward stepwise regression analyses tested our hypotheses that perceived parental religiosity and parental attachment would predict emerging adult religiosity. Predictors included gender, perceived parental religiosity, similarity to mother and father's religious beliefs, perceived faith support, and mother and father attachment. Two interaction variables—the interaction between perceived similarity to mother's beliefs and mother attachment and between perceived similarity to father's beliefs and father attachment—were included to test whether attachment moderates the parental religiosity-emerging adult religiosity relationship. Correlation coefficients were inspected for multicollinearity and no tolerance values were below .20. All variables were standardized prior to regression analyses.

**Predicting emerging adult orthodoxy.** As shown in Table 2, gender was a significant predictor of Christian Orthodoxy ( $\beta =$

.09). Surprisingly, perceived parental religiosity was a negative predictor of emerging adult Christian Orthodoxy scores ( $\beta = -.20$ ). Similarity to mother's ( $\beta = .31$ ) and father's ( $\beta = .21$ ) religious beliefs and perceived faith support from parents ( $\beta = .22$ ) were positive predictors of orthodoxy scores. Attachment with father, but not mother, negatively predicted orthodoxy ( $\beta = -.11$ ); neither interaction between perceived similarity to mother's/father's religious beliefs and mother/father attachment were significant. Overall, the model accounted for 26% of the variance in emerging adults' Christian Orthodoxy scores (Adjusted  $R^2 = .26$ ,  $SE = 16.93$ ,  $F(6, 480) = 29.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Given that gender was significant in the overall model, separate regression models were run for males and females (see Table 2). For male emerging adults, Christian orthodoxy scores were significantly predicted only by similarity to mother's ( $\beta = .45$ ) religious beliefs, accounting for 20% of the variance (Adjusted  $R^2 = .20$ ,  $SE = 21.51$ ,  $F(1, 141) = 35.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In comparison, several predictors of women's Christian orthodoxy scores together accounted for 29% of the variance (Adjusted  $R^2 = .29$ ,  $SE = 14.62$ ,  $F(5, 338) = 28.30$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Similarity to mother's ( $\beta = .27$ ) and father's ( $\beta = .26$ ) religious beliefs and perceived faith support ( $\beta = .32$ ) predicted orthodoxy. Surprisingly, perceived parental religiosity ( $\beta = -.25$ ) and father attachment ( $\beta = -.16$ ) were negative predictors of orthodoxy; that is, higher parent religiosity and stronger attachment predicted lower orthodoxy in emerging adults. Interactions between similarity to mother's/father's religious beliefs and mother/father attachment were not significant.

**Predicting emerging adult intrinsic religiosity.** Intrinsic religiosity scores were significantly predicted by similarity to mother's beliefs ( $\beta = .20$ ) and perceived faith support ( $\beta = .39$ ). Intrinsic religiosity was negatively predicted by perceived parental religiosity ( $\beta = -.23$ ), indicating that higher perceived parental religiosity predicted lower intrinsic religiosity in emerging adults. A significant interaction between similarity to father's beliefs and father attachment ( $\beta = -.11$ ) indicated that higher perceived similarity to father's beliefs coupled with lower father attachment predicted higher intrinsic religiosity, whereas lower similarity with higher attachment predicted lower intrinsic religiosity in emerging adults. Together, these predictors accounted for 21% of the variance in emerging adults' intrinsic religiosity scores (Adjusted  $R^2 = .21$ ,  $SE = 6.19$ ,  $F(4, 480) = 33.07$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### Analyses for Suppressor Effects

Because these initial regression models found that parent religiosity was surprisingly a negative predictor of emerging adult religiosity, we used a procedure suggested by Garbin (2011) to identify specific variables that could be functioning in our analyses as suppressor variables. A suppressor variable increases the predictive validity of another variable by its inclusion into a regression equation despite having a relatively low correlation with the outcome variables (in our study,  $r$ s of .10 and .11 with Christian orthodoxy and intrinsic religiosity, respectively). Drawing from Lancaster (1999), we conclude that parental religiosity functioned as a negative suppressor because it had a positive correlation with both outcome variables but in the presence of other key predictors (perceived faith support or both similarity to mother's and father's religious beliefs) becomes a negative predictor. In doing so, pa-

Table 2  
Model Predicting Emerging Adult  
Christian Orthodoxy

Variable	B	SE B
Overall sample ( $N = 480$ )		
Gender	.09**	1.71
Perceived parental religiosity	-.20**	.96
Similarity mother beliefs	.31**	1.01
Similarity father beliefs	.21**	1.10
Perceived faith support	.22**	1.13
Father attachment <sup>±</sup>	-.11*	.94
Male sub-sample ( $n = 141$ )		
Similarity mother beliefs	.45**	1.79
Female sub-sample ( $n = 338$ )		
Perceived parental religiosity	-.25**	1.03
Similarity mother beliefs	.27**	1.06
Similarity father beliefs	.26**	1.15
Perceived faith support	.32**	1.12
Father attachment <sup>±</sup>	-.16**	.92

<sup>±</sup> Attachment scores are reverse coded; the signs of the coefficients were changed to ease interpretation.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

rental religiosity improves the predictive ability of the model by helping to eliminate error variance from other predictors.

To demonstrate the widespread robustness of this negative-suppressor pattern, we computed all possible regression models for Christian orthodoxy and intrinsic religiosity with both parental religiosity and perceived faith support as predictors. With parental religiosity and perceived faith support combined with two of the four additional predictor variables (similarity to mother's and father's religious beliefs, and mother and father attachment), there were five possible 4-predictor regression models. For Christian orthodoxy, parental religiosity was a negative predictor four times and for intrinsic religiosity five times. Similarly, in the 10 possible 5-predictor regression equation models and 10 possible 6-predictor regression equation models, parental religiosity was a negative predictor of Christian orthodoxy eight times and nine times, respectively, and of intrinsic religiosity 10 times each. In the two possible 7-predictor regression equation models, parental religiosity was a negative predictor of Christian orthodoxy and of intrinsic religiosity. Thus, all possible regression models indicated that parental religiosity was a negative suppressor variable that alone was a weak predictor but when combined with perceived faith support enhances the strength of other predictors.

To similarly demonstrate that parental religiosity is a negative suppressor that enhances the predictive ability of similarity to mother's and father's beliefs to Christian orthodoxy, all possible models that included perceived faith support and similarity to mother's and father's beliefs were also run. In every case in which both similarity to mother's beliefs and similarity to father's beliefs appeared, parental religiosity became a negative predictor. Although the direction of the relationship between parental religiosity and Christian orthodoxy changed when included with these other predictors, more variance is accounted for overall.

Given that a suppressor effect represents a type of mediation, bootstrapping was used to measure the indirect effects of the mediators, following Preacher and Hayes (2008). Parental religiosity alone significantly and positively predicted Christian orthodoxy ( $R^2 = .01$ ,  $\beta = .11$ ,  $p < .05$ ). When combined with perceived faith support, parental religiosity became a negative predictor of Christian orthodoxy ( $R^2 = .01$ ,  $\beta = -.11$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and perceived faith support accounted for more of the variance than perceived faith support ( $R^2 = .11$ ,  $\beta = .39$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Indirect analysis indicated that, although parental religiosity alone was a significant predictor of Christian orthodoxy ( $c = 1.89$ ,  $SE = .88$ ,  $t = 2.46$ ,  $p = .014$ ; see Figure 1), its indirect effect through perceived faith

support was larger than its direct effect ( $ab = 3.68$ ,  $c' = -1.79$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .11$ ,  $F(2, 478) = 31.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ; see Figure 2). Thus, parental religiosity had a stronger positive association with emerging adult orthodoxy when combined with perceived faith support.

Similarly, when parental religiosity was combined with similarity to both mother's and father's beliefs (but not when combined with either alone), parent religiosity contributed stronger indirect than direct effects. Both similarity to mother's beliefs and similarity to father's beliefs accounted for more of the variance in Christian orthodoxy ( $R^2 = .21$ ,  $\beta = .38$ ,  $p < .001$ , and  $R^2 = .02$ ,  $\beta = .22$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively) than did parental religiosity. Indirect analysis indicated that, whereas the direct effect of parental religiosity on Christian orthodoxy (i.e., the  $c$  path) produced a coefficient of 1.89 ( $SE = .76$ ,  $t = 2.46$ ,  $p = .014$ ), indirect effects were again stronger ( $ab = 3.98$ ; Adjusted  $R^2 = .23$ ,  $F(3, 477) = 50.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ; see Figure 2). Thus, parental religiosity proved to be a more powerful predictor of emerging adult orthodoxy when combined with similarity to mother's and father's religious beliefs.

Finally, bootstrapping indicated that parental religiosity alone significantly positively predicted emerging adults' intrinsic religiosity ( $R^2 = .01$ ,  $\beta = .10$ ,  $p < .05$ ) but when combined with perceived faith support became a negative predictor in a regression equation driven by perceived faith support. In this equation, parental religiosity negatively predicted intrinsic religiosity, accounting for less than 1% of the variance ( $R^2 = .02$ ,  $\beta = -.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ), whereas perceived faith support was a positive predictor and accounted for more variance ( $R^2 = .15$ ,  $\beta = .48$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Indirect analysis indicated that the direct effect of parental religiosity on intrinsic religiosity (the  $c'$  path) produced a coefficient of  $-1.03$ , and although this direct effect was significant, the indirect effects were larger ( $ab = 1.61$ ; Adjusted  $R^2 = .16$ ,  $F(2, 478) = 47.48$ ,  $p < .001$ ; see Figure 3). Thus, emerging adults' intrinsic religiosity is best predicted by parental religiosity in combination with perceived faith support.

In summary, even though parental religiosity was weakly positively correlated with Christian orthodoxy and intrinsic religiosity, it increased the predictive power of perceived faith support and of similarity to mother's and to father's religious beliefs when used together in a regression equation. It exercised its effect by becoming a negative predictor, parceling out extraneous error variance from the remaining variables. Thus, although the regression equations were driven by perceived faith support or by the combination of similarity to mother's and father's religious beliefs, including

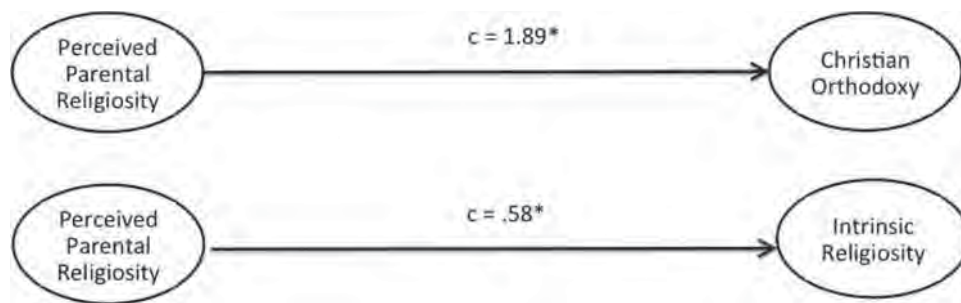


Figure 1. Direct effects of Perceived Parental Religiosity on emerging adult religiosity as measured by Christian Orthodoxy and Intrinsic Religiosity. \*  $p < .05$ .

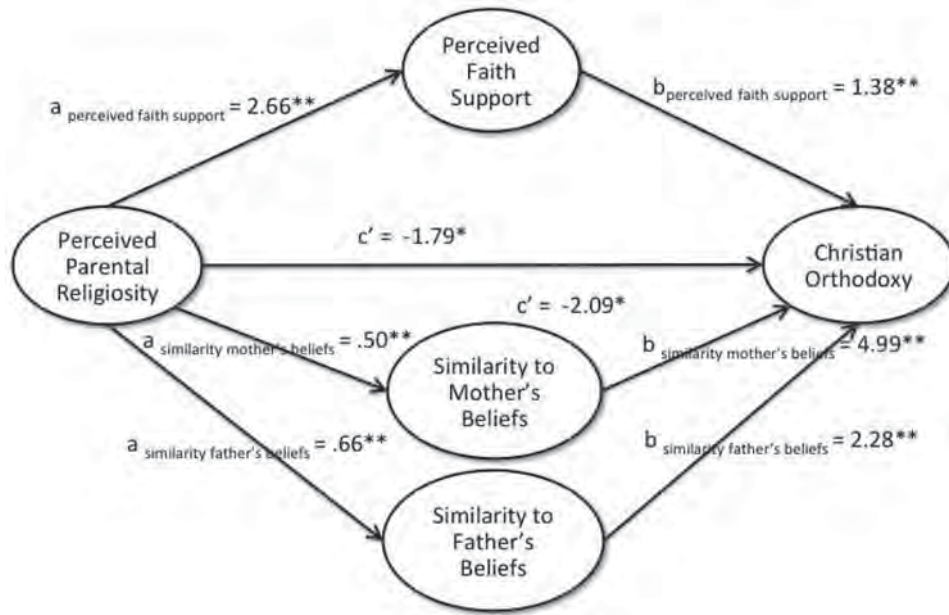


Figure 2. Mediation model showing Perceived Parental Religiosity as a negative suppressor of Christian Orthodoxy. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

parental religiosity consistently but minimally improved our prediction of emerging adults' Christian orthodoxy ( $\Delta R^2$  ranges from .01 to .02). Similarly, although the second regression equation was driven by perceived faith support, including parental religiosity improved our prediction of intrinsic religiosity.

### Discussion

For our sample of emerging adults who graduated from Christian colleges, religion continues to be an important part of their lives. In support of our first hypothesis, participants reported high overall religiosity, described religion as central to their identity, ascribed to orthodox Christian beliefs, and were intrinsically motivated in their faith. Additionally, these emerging adults perceive their beliefs have a lot in common with the religiosity of their parents. Participants reported high overall religiosity for their parents (even higher than their own for attendance and impor-

tance), a high degree of similarity to the religious beliefs of both mothers and fathers, and a clear sense that their parents supported their own faith. Yet, in one of our most important findings, parental religiosity by itself did not predict emerging adult religiosity as strongly as expected; instead, it seemed to function indirectly through faith support and perceived similarity. Rather than supporting some simple direct or main effect of parent religiosity on their children, our study illustrates the value of using mediational analyses to learn how constellations of variables predict religiosity.

Such strong adherence to the Christian faith and such great similarity to their parents' faith are perhaps not surprising given that these emerging adults were from Christian liberal arts colleges. However, within the context of the broader emerging adulthood literature, this high degree of religiosity is striking. These findings underscore the importance of examining all segments of

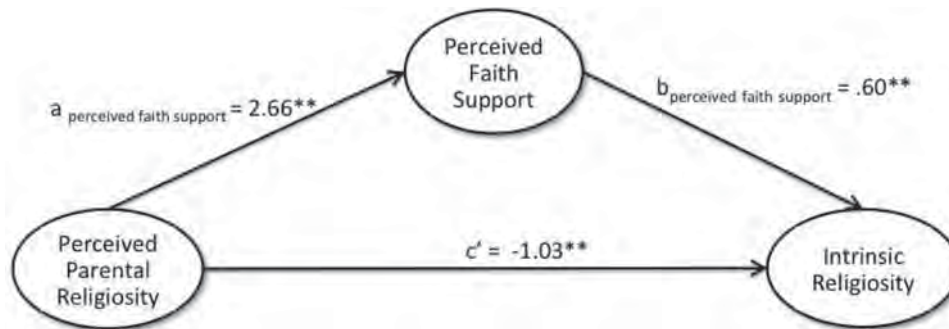


Figure 3. Mediation model showing Perceived Parental Religiosity as a negative suppressor of Intrinsic Religiosity. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

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the emerging adult population, in part because the unique experience of these highly religious individuals may be overlooked in other studies. Their high Christian orthodoxy and intrinsic religiosity scores here challenge prior characterizations of emerging adults as alienated from organized religion (Pew Research Center, 2010) and highly individualized in their religious beliefs and behaviors (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). In addition, the males and females in our sample both reported high levels of religiosity but females reported greater orthodoxy.

With respect to our second hypothesis, we were surprised to find that parental religiosity alone is only weakly associated (.10–.11; see Table 1) with emerging adult religiosity. Although regressions showed that parental religiosity positively predicts emerging adult religiosity when entered alone, it becomes a negative suppressor (see Tables 2 and 3) when combined with variables reflecting the parent–child relationship (i.e., perceived faith support or maternal and paternal faith similarity). Moreover, the direct effects of parental religiosity on emerging adult religiosity were smaller than the indirect effects of parental religiosity through both perceived faith support and similarity to parents' religious beliefs. When both parental religiosity and perceived faith support characterize the parent–child relationship, the faith support provided through openly discussing religion and faith could possibly nurture the emerging adult's religiosity (as measured by Christian orthodoxy and intrinsic religiosity).

Similarly, when parental religiosity is explored along with similarity to mother's and father's religious beliefs, the direct effects of parental religiosity are overshadowed by the indirect effects via similarity to parents' beliefs. We interpret this to indicate a more complex model of family religiosity in which two complementary processes in the parent–child dynamic seem to contribute to emerging adult religiosity: Parents contribute warmth and support toward their children's religiosity, as well as serving as religious exemplars. This interpretation is consistent with Bao, Whitbeck, Hoyt, and Conger (1999) who found that parents' and adolescents' religious beliefs were more similar when adolescents perceived their parents to be more accepting.

One might speculate that in the absence of open and warm parental faith support, emerging adults perceive their religious parents as having impersonal standards or as being members of institutions that are less relevant personally. When perceived parental religiosity is explored along with similarity to mother's and father's religious beliefs, our data suggest that the parental religious context seems crucial for supporting emerging adults' Chris-

tian orthodoxy whereas the emerging adults' perception of their parents' religiosity does not. Emerging adult religiosity may flourish with parental support but their own religiosity may seem weak in comparison to their perception of their parents' religiosity, which may help explain the suppressor effect. Thus, it is important to consider the many possible mediating and complex interactions (as in Figures 2 and 3) between parental and emerging adult religiosity given the dynamic nature of the parent–child relationship embedded in the family system.

Contrary to our third hypothesis, attachment was not a positive predictor of emerging adult religiosity, perhaps because the indirect effects of perceived faith support and similarity to parents' religious beliefs changed the nature of the association with attachment. Mother attachment did not predict Christian orthodoxy or intrinsic religiosity, surprising given previous studies that highlight the role of mothers in youths' religious development. Father attachment negatively predicted Christian orthodoxy but did not predict intrinsic religiosity except in interaction with measures of similarity to father's religious beliefs. This relationship captures our finding that higher father attachment and greater perceived similarity to father's religious beliefs, in combination, predicted greater intrinsic religiosity. Perhaps previous studies on the positive relationship between parental attachment and child or adolescent religiosity (e.g., Granqvist, 2002) did not account for other parental religious context variables (e.g., perceived faith support and similarity with parent beliefs) that could be more powerful predictors of religiosity than the attachment relationship, particularly when the child matures to an emerging adult. Additionally, emerging adults who are beyond the college years are likely forming primary attachments to significant others that may alter the role of parental attachment, especially if these romantic relationships are serious. Emerging adults from religious, particularly Evangelical backgrounds may be likely to get engaged or married earlier than their peers (Lehrer, 1995). Indeed, roughly 25% of our sample was married by two years postgraduation.

Overall, females were higher in Christian Orthodoxy than males were, consistent with other research (Barry & Nelson, 2005; Hill & Hood, 1999; Stoppa & Lefkowitz, 2010). Emerging adults' perceived similarity to their mother's beliefs predicted orthodoxy of both males and females, consistent with earlier findings on the importance of relationships with mothers in religious development (Bao et al., 1999; Boyatzis, 2005; Brelsford & Mahoney, 2008). For females, other variables also predicted orthodoxy, including father attachment, perceived parental religiosity, and religious context variables (similarity to each parent's religious beliefs and perceived faith support). The fact that father attachment predicted female, but not male, orthodoxy suggests a unique role for fathers in the religious development of their daughters among this population. Moreover, the interaction between father attachment and similarity to father's religious beliefs predicted higher intrinsic religiosity, which highlights a role for fathers in the internalization of faith. Similar to Desrosiers, Kelley, and Miller (2010) findings that parental religiosity is important, emerging adults tend to match the level of religiosity of their fathers particularly if they are attached to their fathers. These findings support the notion that parent gender matters in religious socialization. Fathers may play a more prominent role than expected, particularly for females in conservative Christian families.

Table 3  
*Model Predicting Emerging Adult  
Intrinsic Religiosity*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
Overall sample ( <i>N</i> = 480)		
Perceived parental religiosity	-.23**	.35
Similarity mother beliefs	.20**	.35
Perceived faith support	.39**	.37
Father attachment <sup>±</sup> × Sim. fa. beliefs	.11*	.003

<sup>±</sup> Attachment scores are reverse coded; the signs of the coefficients were changed to ease interpretation.

\* *p* < .05. \*\* *p* < .01.

The findings reveal a noteworthy commonality between parent and emerging adult religiosity. This finding is contrary to the characterization of the idiosyncratic nature of emerging adult religious beliefs (Arnett & Jensen, 2002) but consistent with others' conclusions (e.g., Smith, 2009). The fact that some emerging adults may seek to differentiate themselves from their parents' beliefs while others may maintain the beliefs they were raised with suggests how complex emerging adult religiosity can be. High scores on the Christian Orthodoxy and intrinsic religiosity scales within our sample indicate that these beliefs have become accepted and internalized, a process consistent with Fowler's (1981) proposed shift from synthetic-conventional to individuated-reflective faith and Erikson's notions of identity commitment following exploration. Despite this overall acceptance of doctrinal beliefs, there was still variability in orthodoxy among participants ( $SD = 19.67$ ), which may be due to exploration of beliefs within the Christian framework or the variety of denominational backgrounds in our participants. The reasons for this variability in Christian orthodoxy among emerging adults warrant further exploration.

Several limitations should be noted. First, although our data support the notion that parents play an influential role in their emerging adults' religiosity, our design and data preclude any clear conclusions about causal direction of influence. Additionally, our sample included considerably fewer males than females, perhaps limiting our ability to document effects of the same predictors that proved significant for the overall sample and the female subsample. In addition, our measures were self-report, and it is possible that our participants inflated ratings of their own and their parents' religiosity. Our study and other studies (e.g., Hardy et al., 2011) that rely on emerging adults' to provide data for their parents' religiosity acknowledge that the reporting is shaped by the emerging adults' perception yet view these data as informative and important in understanding the emerging adults' experiences.

Future research in this area could pursue several new directions (for an excellent review see Barry, Nelson, Davarya, & Urry, 2010). First, the role of parents in other religious traditions should be assessed. Second, longitudinal research that follows emerging adults further beyond college graduation would bolster our conclusion that a segment of the emerging adult population maintains high religiosity as well as commonality with their parents. Third, further research into religiosity as a critical component of emerging adult development should explore the many contexts emerging adults inhabit while acknowledging the continued role of parents. Some work has shown that the majority of college students' religious conversations and experiences occur with peers (Montgomery-Goodnough, & Gallagher, as cited in Barry et al., 2010). Future studies should explore religiosity in conjunction with the worlds of peers, work, and romantic relationships, other key areas of identity development outlined by Arnett (2000).

Our participants represent a theoretically and empirically important subsample of emerging adults, that is, those from conservative Christian backgrounds and who are highly religious. They warrant more attention, particularly in nationally representative data sets. Further, understanding their status as emerging adults who are working to establish their autonomy and worldview should account for the important role their parents and family religious context may continue to play and, in turn, illuminate emerging adult development more broadly.

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