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# Secular Sells: How Secular Lifestyle Influences Religiosity

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**Secular Sells: How Secular Lifestyle Influences Religiosity**

By

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**Abstract**

This study examines the relationship between secular behaviors and religious behaviors among youth in the United States. While there is no doubt that these two things are intrinsically linked, the nature of that relationship has been predominantly studied in the direction of religion affecting secular behavior. However, in today's society with secularization and the prevalence of the mass media, it makes more sense to examine the relationship the opposite way and see how secular behavior affects religiosity. Using the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) dataset and change in change modeling, causality can be established showing how behaviors such as drinking, smoking, and marijuana usage affect religiosity in youth. Smoking had the most wide-reaching effect on youth religiosity, followed by drinking. Marijuana usage did not seem to affect religiosity at all. These behaviors are all classified as deviant behaviors though, and while there are significant relationships between them and religiosity measures, the trends seen also mimic frequency tables of only the religiosity measures over time, bringing into doubt just how much change can actually be accounted for by these deviant behaviors. Non-deviant secular behaviors relating to the vast shifts in lifestyle over the past fifteen years need to also be examined for their effects on religiosity to see if consumption of media and popular culture is a bigger culprit of secularization than deviant behavior is among youth.

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## **Preface & Introduction**

This paper emerged out of an interest in how major societal shifts concerning popular culture, mass media, and secularization changed the way Americans relate to religion and navigate religious beliefs and behaviors. Because of these major shifts, the way that we look at religion may be outdated, and instead of examining causality as going from religion to the secular, causality may in fact run from the secular to the religious, meaning that the secular culture we consume affects our religious beliefs and behaviors. That this reverse causality is real is the main hypothesis of the paper.

The study of religion in the context of sociology and in particular the sociology of the United States has been a fruitful and enduring area of research among scholars. In recent years, the question of secularization has become a main focal point, and researchers have been searching for answers to the questions: is the United States becoming more secular? and if so, what is causing it? Perhaps some of the debate around what is causing secularization can be solved if indeed we look at the arrow of causality the other way around and see that secular behavior is the driving force behind religious change.

Chapter One of this paper focuses on existing literature on the topic and is split into three main sections: secularization, mass media and popular culture, and changing religiosity. Chapter Two offers a look at the methods used to explore this relationship between the sacred and secular and gives further details about the units of measure used for each. Chapter Three gives the results of this analysis and Chapter Four offers a discussion of themes that emerged in the process of analysis. Chapter Five gives some

conclusions on the study, detailing the significance of the findings, the limitations of the study, and making some suggestions for further research into the topic.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review

### **Background**

American society is heavily focused on ideas of individualism and personal autonomy, with its members choosing more often to look at what makes them different rather than what makes them similar (Smith and Snell 2009: 48). Yet social institutions are instrumental in dictating behaviors, and the institution of religion in particular not only dictates proper behavior, but also proper morality. But religious pluralism also leads to many different versions of what that morality is (Smith and Snell 2009: 50). One person put it like this: “Being raised in a certain culture you have certain norms for what are moral...But if someone else is coming with a different perspective, they would maybe have a different outcome, based on what they believe” (Smith and Snell 2009: 51). It is apparent through this that individuals can draw their moralities from different sources, and there is not one common “correct” morality that everyone adheres to.

While religious institutions have served this guiding purpose in the past, the shape of religion in America is changing. Mainline Protestant denominations in particular are losing members, but Catholics are experiencing this as well, and those members it does retain do not rank religion as highly important in their lives as their counterparts in other Christian denominations such as Evangelical Protestants (Smith and Snell 2009: 96). Even as people age, which tends to lead to higher degrees of religiosity, trend predictors indicate that future generations will still be less religious than those before them (Smith and Snell 2009: 102). This begs the question: what is replacing religion as a moral and behavioral guide for people in the United States today?

This paper examines the many factors we must consider when asking this question, such as overall secularization trends and measures of religiosity, but also the role of the mass media and popular culture in the lives of people today. Mass media and popular culture have been on the rise since the mid-20th century, and their ability to expose and saturate users with a variety of information from different traditions, cultures, and beliefs could play a key role in explaining where people learn their morality in modern America and also how the possible shift of power from religion to mass media affects individual's religious behaviors.

### **Secularization**

The concept of secularization and worries about its potential effects is nothing new in the United States. From the Puritan settlers who first came to the country to the present day, the threat of declining religion has many concerned. But debate continues about whether or not there is even a phenomenon to get up in arms about or if the patterns we see regarding things like declining church attendance are inconsequential and possibly symptomatic of a cyclical relationship with religion (Smith and Snell 2009: 100).

Secularization is broadly defined as a social process through which religion loses its institutional power over members of a society in both their private and public lives (Fallding 1974: 212 McCaffree 2017: 133). A few scholars conjecture that secularization's roots extend back to the Enlightenment, but many are hesitant to make that bold of a claim. The majority of scholars do however acknowledge that



secularization is happening in modern society and particularly in the Christian religious tradition (McCaffree 2017: 249).

The question of how to accurately measure religion has been discussed and debated for decades, but in general sociologists have found it is best not to examine the phenomenon itself, but rather the multifaceted behavior surrounding it. These religious behaviors contribute to a person's religiosity, which we can then measure and analyze (Fichter 1969:169). Religiosity is still difficult to measure, however, due to the large degree of change in societal norms that we have experienced in the past several decades. Measures of religiosity from the 1960s may say support for birth control constitutes weak religiosity, whereas measures from the 2000s may say just the opposite due to a shift in societal values and ideas on what makes a good religious person (Fichter 1969: 170).

According to the General Social Survey (GSS) religious affiliation is in mild decline throughout all branches of Christianity, although Evangelical Protestants are faring better than both Mainline Protestants and Catholics in regards to membership (GSS 2017). Judaism and other minority religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, however, are experiencing an increased presence in the population, with membership numbers steadily increasing (GSS 2017). Looking at these trends, one might assume that secularization is not a major influence on American religion today, but when speaking about secularization it is most important to look at the fastest growing religious affiliation in the United States: no religion at all. People with no religion constitute the fastest growing demographic in the landscape of American religion, growing from just 14% of the population in the year 2000 to 22% in 2016. While over half of Americans still

believe in God with no doubts and the level of prayer has remained fairly consistent throughout the years, the public religious behaviors of many people have also been declining over the years. In 2004 only 15% of respondents said they never attended religious services, a number which dramatically increased to 25% in 2016 and 58% said that they either had a weak affiliation to their religion or no affiliation at all (GSS 2017).

But it can be difficult to look at precisely what the process of secularization has looked like in the United States, as it has not been a linear process throughout the years. Periods of intense religious revival have occurred, generally in response to some outside social or economic crisis, but these spikes in religiosity are the exception rather than the rule, and soon continue their downward trend once more (McCaffree 2017: 1). In fact, while economic crisis can be cited as a reason for increased religiosity, a steady economy may work in the opposite direction, driving religion downward. According to McCaffree, it is people living steady economic and social lives with access to good education and the internet that are driving secularization in America (2017:1).

Many scholars suggest that higher education in particular was having a secularizing effect on young men and women in the United States (Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007: 1668). Data from the General Social Survey (GSS) did in fact show a linear association between education and apostasy, leading researchers to theorize that higher education led to a decline in religiosity due to increased exposure to different and perhaps countercultural views (Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007: 1669). Many believe that this is the reason Protestants, who are traditionally better educated, are also experiencing

greater declines in religious membership and participation than Catholics or Orthodox Christians (Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007: 1669).

But education is not the only secularizing force scholars of religion have examined. While some research suggests that religiosity may be inherited from parents or other influential figures in early life, most scholars refute this, however, pointing to trends such as Mainline Protestant children being much more likely to lose their religiosity and affiliation than children raised in the Evangelical tradition (Regnerus, Smith, and Frisch 2003: 10). Other factors that may contribute to this decline in religiosity are the strength of relationships with pastors, opportunities for religious involvement, and the influence of both peer groups and the mass media (Regnerus, Smith, and Frisch 2003: 12). Another cause may be that religious youth and young adults are more likely to blame God for negative events in their life and in the world, which may push them away from religion (Regnerus, Smith, and Frisch 2003: 14). This is an example of reconciling cognitive dissonance, which is defined as “the gap between what they [people] are doing and what they think they ought to be doing” (Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007: 1670). Growing up in a tradition with a loving god and then being faced with negative and traumatic events are two things that run contrary to one another, and therefore the individual’s belief in one has to decline. It seems that a majority of the time, the thing that declines is religiosity. Evidence has also emerged that belief in the devil has no effect on youth and young adult’s likelihood to perform delinquent acts (Regnerus, Smith, and Frisch 2003: 27).

Scholars point to these traumatic events as what is driving the trend of secularization. Mike King (2009) talks about secularization stemming from the 9/11 terrorist attacks, saying that the trauma and outrage directed at the religious extremists who carried out the attacks caused “the ‘mutual ignorance pact’ between secular culture and faith tradition” to break down (5). What this argument means is that religion is no longer popularly viewed as a quaint and polite aspect of society, but rather one that can threaten the stability of society as a whole and therefore is being displaced from political and media spheres in an attempt to decrease its power and influence (King 2009: 6).

Much of this theory has to do with the media and the changing ways we socialize and interact with one another in modern society. In the theory of the Multidimensional Self, forces acting upon the individual begin with the individual themselves, then moves to their family and friends, community, and society respectively in concentric circles (McCaffree 2017: 175). This manner of thinking may be getting outdated however, particularly with the rise of the internet and mass media and particularly of portable personal devices with which they can be easily accessed. Through these things such as cell phones, computers, and tablets, society — and even typically underground deviant sections of society such as White Nationalist Movements, Ecoterrorists, and a myriad of other extremist groups — have an easy, accessible way to cut through all the intervening circles and directly influence the individual. For example, research has been done on how increased online pornography usage is driving religiosity down in youth and young adults in the United States (Perry and Hayward 2017). Pornography is still considered deviant within modern society, but the ease of access to it through the internet makes it more

likely that an individual can either passively or actively encounter it in their everyday lives. Data seem to suggest that this more normalized exposure is actually causing youth to decrease their religiosity in an attempt to reconcile the cognitive dissonance appearing from the conflict between their religious values and those in larger society that say pornography viewing is not the great evil the church makes it out to be and in turn decrease their moral engagement based on their religion (Perry and Hayward 2017: 1763). This demonstrates the increased importance of larger society in an individual's life and behavior, and shows that in an increasingly secular society it is logical that there would also be an increasing secularizing effect on individuals within that society.

This raises the question of what specific social institutions fill the space in people's behavior and attitudes that religion has deserted. Many people are reluctant to completely abandon all semblance of religion, taking comfort in the familiar beliefs and perhaps benefiting from them in the sense that it give some sense of direction and purpose in a person's life as well as easy guidelines for "proper" morality (McCaffree 2017: 130). But individual's religious behavior such as church attendance, daily prayer, and specific religious affiliation all are declining (McCaffree 2017: 132). In the past, these religious behaviors were what conditioned member's behaviors in the secular world beyond church walls and losing this influence greatly decreased the role of the church as an institution in people's lives.

## **Mass Media and Popular Culture**

People's social circles and resources used to be limited in a way that is hard for us to comprehend now. In the past century, the way we interact with one another and the world at large has changed dramatically, with small communities and limited access to knowledge giving way before the force of mass media such as the radio and television, which have connected people across a broad spectrum and also made a plethora of information available to almost anyone, and even in the mid-1950s scholars were discussing the power of mass media to affect communities (Nature 1954: 345). This exposure to new ideas and information has especially become influential in the age of the internet, where anything you want to know is accessible at your fingertips (Bagdikian 2007: 2). The way Americans view religion has also changed, with society shifting towards a greater degree of societal differentiation, or change in the ways people process and display public and private religiosity, turning public religion into a phenomenon connected primarily to social institutions such as churches and keeping private religiosity only loosely connected to an individual's public life in society (Jindra 2000: 167). This explains why in the GSS trend data, religious behaviors such as prayer, which are private and most often carried out in an individual's home have remained constant throughout the years, while more public displays of religion such as attending religious services has declined (GSS 2017).

Before radio was popularized, people received much of their information, and certainly a majority of their moral information, from the church that they belonged to. That began to change when radio and television took center stage in American life in the

20th century, however, and mass media in particular became a key force in determining collective community consciousness, which in turn dictates socially agreed upon morality (Gabel 2011: 51). Three of the strongest socializing institutions in modern American society are schools, the family, and the mass media (Smith et al 2011: 62). In terms of morality, mass media is by far the most saturated and diverse of these institutions, with access to a wide variety of world views and moral guidelines available at the click of a button (Smith et al 2011 :64). While some religious institutions have chosen to rebel against this mass media infringement on what is traditionally their territory — think of the Amish for example — completely removing oneself from the discourse prevents a healthy dialogue and level of awareness between the group and society at large, which can be quite damaging to a group (Gabel 2011: 52).

Religious groups have come to find that even if they try to stay away from the mass media and keep it out of their day to day business, the media finds a way of involving itself. Despite the Catholic Church's best efforts, the news of the massive number of priests repeatedly involved in the sexual assault of children in their parishes got out to the media and was instantly published all over newspapers, radio, and television (Carroll et al. 2002). People came forward with their own stories and even now fifteen years later it is still a widely known event, having just been the inspiration for an Oscar Winning film, and paints people's understandings of the Catholic Church as a whole. Other media focusing on religious controversies have also surfaced, with one such production being the 2006 documentary *Jesus Camp*, whose depictions of what some viewed as the radicalization of evangelical Christian youth did not sit well with many

viewers who found its content disturbing and wrong (Ewing and Grady 2006; Hesse 2016: 1). In response to *Jesus Camp*, one child psychologist said that “One of the problems with faith-based teaching is it teaches children not to trust their own reason and intuition, undermining their ability to have confidence in their own knowledge and ability... There is a lot of psychological damage that follows when people are trained not to trust themselves” (Hesse 2016). Her opinions that the way the children depicted in the film were being treated was borderline child abuse was echoed in many audience members of the film, and collectively raised eyes at the Evangelical Christian tradition (Hesse 2016).

These jarring images and stories of religion and the abuse of power prevalent in certain churches and faith traditions created a stir among the American public in a way that would not have been possible without the existence of a distribution system like mass media, which flung every controversial statement and opinion out into the world for everyone to find. Unlike in prior years where such scandals could have been easily contained, there was no stopping the newspapers, radios, televisions, and laptops from opening up all the dirty laundry the church had tried to sweep under the rug. It seemed at this point inevitable that people began falling away from the church as a primary institution in their lives, and specifically as a moral guidepost, which many people saw as a ridiculous notion given the information on moral corruption and sin in the church that mass media had exposed.

So if people cannot get those moral beliefs from their religious institution, where can they get them from? The answer became mass media programming, and specifically



television programming, both fictional and based in reality and competition. Joyce Carol Oates observes: “The decline of religion as a source of significant meaning in modern industrialized societies has been extravagantly compensated by the rise of popular culture in general, of which the billion-dollar sports mania is the most visible manifestation” (as quoted in Price 2000: 202).

The National Football League and other professional sports leagues became major cultural touchstones among the American public, with fans of different teams sorting themselves out into sometimes fanatical groups with their own uniforms and traditions, forming what some scholars have called a civil or folk religion (Price 2000: 203). Price writes that: “For tens of millions of devoted fans throughout the country, sports constitute a popular form of religion by shaping their world and sustaining their ways of engaging it” (2000: 202). Why it is classified as a civil religion is that sports teams and leagues adhere to a notable number of religious markers: it has a deity, authority, tradition, beliefs, faithful followers, ritual sites, and material elements (Price 2000: 204). They also demand their adherents meet high standards of expectation, are disciplined, and look to achieve perfection whenever possible, which are values often echoed in religious traditions (Price 2000: 207).

Also notable is the timing of when major competitions, especially in football, are held. Most everyone, if not everyone in the United States, knows about Sunday Night Football, which usually is comprised of the biggest and most anticipated matches of the week (Price 2000: 204). This trend of sport’s matches taking over the Sunday religious day began gaining prominence in the mid 1970s, with one expert noting that “the

churches have ceded Sunday to sports...Sport owns Sunday now, and religion is content to leave a few minutes before the big games” (Price 2000: 204). Sports became a major point of social cohesion among the American public due to their continuing popularity, but sports were not the only mass media program that truly captured the religious fervor of the populace by giving them religious guideposts in a non-religious institution that they needed after splitting with what they see as a morally corrupt church.

Science Fiction is known for having an enthusiastic and engaged audience, but perhaps no science fiction program has been able to capture the hearts and minds of its fans like Star Trek in its many iterations. The Trek fandom is in its own way a “New age” movement, with a small intimate network held together by commercialization (think of all the fan conventions that take place annually around the United States such as ComicCon) and shown in popular culture (Jindra 2000: 168). Jindra (2000) notes that Star Trek shares many similarities with more conventional religious movements: there is “an origin myth, a set of beliefs, organizations, and some of the most active and creative members found anywhere” (167). He also equates the stigma directed at Star Trek fans in particular by the rest of society to persecution experienced by other religious groups throughout history, further entrenching this movement that grew out of a pop culture television show as a religious entity (Jindra 2000: 167). Jindra (2000) argues that the appeal of Star Trek as a religion is its positive view of the future where many problems faced by society today such as poverty, war, and disease have been completely eliminated and we live in not only a post-racial society but a society in which even differences of species are inconsequential, and the emphasis is placed on exploring the stars in pursuit

of knowledge, guided by logic, science, and technology rather than faulty emotion or bigotry (169).

It is only logical that this utopian view of the future would capture the imaginations and hearts of people, and it certainly has been shown to do just that. Star Trek fan conventions have been taking place since 1972, over the last 30 years the Star Trek franchise has sold over 2 billion dollars in merchandise, several dictionaries of the alien languages from the show have been created and sold commercially, and fans themselves are engaged in creating magazines, clubs, and role-playing opportunities (Jindra 2000: 166). These clubs are in many ways the congregations of the Star Trek civil religion, with ranks modeled after the show (Ensign for the newest members, Captain for the oldest and most involved) bestowed upon members based on involvement and members referring to one another as family and describing themselves as incredibly close and sometimes even closer than biological family would be (Jindra 2000: 171).

Fans of the show also have seen it have a real and profound effect not only on their economic behavior but on their social behavior as well. Fans have noted the show as a catalyst for choosing courses of study in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields and also leading them to actively take control of their lives and participate in community service projects organized by the local Star Trek fan clubs that they belong to (Jindra 2000: 171, 173). One fan notes that Star Trek is not necessarily about a television series, but that it is rather about “faith in our future” (Jindra 2000: 174).

As to why Star Trek and science fiction in general seems to have such an enduring appeal, Jindra notes American’s tendency to be very forward thinking and always have

their eyes set on the next unknown, such as during the space race where the country was enthralled by the idea of getting to the moon (2000: 176). Science fiction is by nature very forward looking — always imagining humanity's next step and next iteration, whereas organized religion, to many Trek fans, is seen as being somewhat traditionalist and not exciting or useful in the same way that the ideals presented in Star Trek are, and that without traditional religion fulfilling that forward-thinking desire that many people have pop culture has to step in and do it instead (Jindra 2000: 176).

Mass media does not only provide alternate forms of religion or “civil religion” to replace perceived morally corrupt and backwards thinking denominations, it also provides a place for the de-sacrification of religion itself. Since the early years, television in particular has been taking religious and especially Christian, iconography and holidays and turning them into secular, capitalist spectacles and ventures. Many popular television shows and movies such as Monty Python's *Life of Brian*, *South Park*, *Bruce Almighty*, and *The Good Place*, have used religion as a source of material and turned it into a joke or a humorous quirk rather than something sacred that should be taken seriously. Monty Python's *Life of Brian* in particular experienced severe backlash at the time of its release, with the film even being banned in several countries and publicly condemned as blasphemy by the Catholic Church (Roche 2011). But comedians in particular still experience threats concerning possible blasphemy in their work to this day. The *South Park* creators have received death threats for their depictions of religion, as has David Letterman, and cartoonists have come under fire for images depicting the prophet

Mohammed (Roche 2011). However, the sheer volume of popular culture content mocking or making light of religion has normalized it to a degree in society.

One aspect of pop culture and the mass media that hasn't been discussed up to this point is that of music. Music is highly influential and permeates our entire society (Wallis 2011: 160), from stores to elevators to radio and homes. Music is everywhere and therefore has a lot of power in forming people's opinions about religion. Music videos in particular, due to their dynamic nature of being both sound and visual based can speak multitudes about religion and religious iconography, and because of the nature of pop culture, secularize those images by treating them as inspiration for secular works rather than sacred images reserved for sacred settings.

Madonna is one notable example of a musical artist littering her music with religious themes and iconography. Her music video for "Like A Prayer" featured her positioned in front of burning crosses and also used Catholic symbols such as stigmata and liturgical words, which are seen as holy, in the context of sexual desire and violence (Lambert 1989). The Vatican was outraged over this and publicly condemned the video, also using its network to boycott all Pepsi products after the company used the song in its advertisements. But even the fact that a major corporation such as Pepsi would use the song despite its religious controversy shows that religion as an institution has very little control in modern times over the secular world around it.

In more recent years, Lady Gaga has also faced backlash for religious iconography in her music videos, specifically her video "Alejandro," which garnered criticisms of blasphemy from the Catholic League (Donohue 2010). In the video, Gaga

wears a red latex habit in the style of a Catholic Nun and eats a set of rosary beads, which was the source of much of the outrage (RedOne and Lady Gaga 2010). Bill Donohue (2010) described Lady Gaga in the music video as a “Madonna copy cat [who] has now become the new poster girl for American decadence and Catholic bashing, sans the looks and talent of her role model” (1). Nonetheless, the music video has been viewed over 322 million times on YouTube and was popular despite having its detractors (RedOne and Lady Gaga 2010).

The Christian church has even to a substantial degree lost control of the secular world in regards to its most important holiday: Christmas. Network programming around Christmas time can often only be identified as religious through its use of hymns and hymn lyrics for music, but other than that any religious undertones are kept firmly as undertones (Thompson 2000: 48). Christmas television specials like the kind seen on the Hallmark channel are a staple of the holiday season, but many producers and screenwriters are very cautious so as not to offend and alienate non-Christian audiences (Thompson 2000: 48). They do this through use of non-religious but seasonal characters such as Santa Claus, Rudolph, and Frosty the Snow Man and allowing viewers to read a religious theme within the secular movies and television shows they produce (Thompson 2000: 48).

But nonetheless, Christmas is a Christian holiday, and Christianity as a religion does not lend itself well to the hyper consumption that retailers and other mass media outlets want consumers to buy into during the holiday season. Christianity itself rejects visible wealth and consumption and places an emphasis on humble living, but Christmas

specials themselves have found a way around this by choosing to emphasize instead the nostalgic themes of home, family, and generosity that are commonly associated with the image of the good Christian family from the 1950s (Thompson 2000: 48-49). The goal of bringing out these themes, some argue, is to create a sense of guilt in the consumer that their lives do not measure up to the themes and influence them to go shopping in an attempt to prove their closeness to their family as well as their generosity (Thompson 2000: 49).

The idea of generosity in Christmas Specials has especially been associated with the idea of presents, which are a purely capitalistic theme throughout the holiday season (Thompson 2000: 50). Gifts or the lack thereof are emphasized throughout almost every Christmas special: from Santa bringing presents to good boys and girls, to Scrooge withholding presents from his deserving worker, to even the Three Magi bringing baby Jesus gifts while he is in the manger, gifts are an inescapable part of the pop culture Christmas landscape (Thompson 2000: 50). Advertisers use this emphasis on gifts and generosity to further guilt consumers into spending, using lines such as “When You Care Enough to Send the Very Best,” which of course implies that if you do not gift your loved ones that specific present you do not care enough about them to send them the best, which leads to feelings of guilt (Thompson 2000: 51).

This secularization of Christianity’s most sacred holiday through the mass media in pop culture demonstrates the scale of the phenomenon that is mass media’s influence on religion and people’s values. While people may become outraged at the idea of a comedy special poking fun at religion, they are equally if not more likely to become

outraged when the media exposes them to a tell-all about the improprieties and criminal actions that their church has been complicit in over the span of many years. This challenge to the morality of the church itself combined with the secularizing of the sacred sphere in popular culture has led to a decreased influence that religion has over its adherents and society as a whole, with pop culture and the mass media more than willing to step in with a moral replacement as the religious institution falters.

### **Changing Religiosity**

Cognitive dissonance and deviance are interesting factors when considering declining religiosity, particularly among youth in the United States. Scholars have theorized that religious socialization and activities would lead to greater development of self control and therefore a decline in deviant behavior (Desmond, Ulmer, and Bader 2013: 385) due to the fact that religious organizations are an external source of discipline (Desmond, Ulmer, and Bader 2013: 386). Another way this was hypothesized was that religiosity can act as a balance for poor self control by increasing desire to have self control so an individual could live up to the ethical standards demanded of them from their religious beliefs (Desmond, Ulmer, and Bader 2013: 388). Indeed, the study found that religiosity and self control both reduce deviant behavior such as marijuana use and underage drinking, but they could not determine a significant causal relationship between religiosity and degrees of self control when related to deviant behavior, as the results were found to be substantively the same between the first and second waves of data (Desmond, Ulmer, and Bader 2013: 400).



This is somewhat surprising, as one would assume religious teachings that steer youth away from behaviors such as underage drinking would have more of an effect on their actual behavior, but the evidence does not support this and therefore there must be some internal justification for their behavior going on in the youth's minds. The relationship makes more sense when other research showed that deviance was having a more profound effect on religion and religiosity in youth than religion was having on deviance (Matsueda 1989: 446). This trend extends beyond just youth as well. For example, 42% of Mormons who no longer attended church reported that their lifestyles had changed to the point where it was no longer compatible with participation in the church and cited that as their reason for disengagement (Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007: 1670). This is a powerful example of reconciling cognitive dissonance between religious tradition and value and secular lifestyle, and in the end secular lifestyle seemed to be the more dominant factor.

Another example of this phenomenon is a test of cognitive dissonance that found a variety of delinquent and deviant behaviors including drug use, which is often viewed as more severe than alcohol consumption and abuse, can predict declining religiosity and increasing secularization amongst users (Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007: 1671). This may be due to the fact that religious traditions are more severely opposed to drug usage than they are to alcohol use, which increases the cognitive dissonance for those who identify as religious but also use drugs, and therefore increases the likelihood that they will abandon or diminish their religious beliefs to suit their drug behaviors (Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007: 1671).

So while secular factors seem to have an entirely negative effect on an individual's religiosity, there are some secular factors that seem to increase religiosity at least for certain groups. These include marriage, which has been shown to increase religiosity in men but have no culpable effect on the religiosity of women (Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007: 1671), as well as parental status, as parents of all ages have been shown to have higher degrees of religiosity than non-parents (Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007: 1672).

But as the GSS shows through the decline of Mainline Protestant and Catholic membership, strong parental religiosity is not an overly strong predictor of their children's religiosity (GSS 2017). Pornography is a good example of the effects of cognitive dissonance on declining religiosity in youth, particularly among males. Sexuality is one of the most discussed and regulated aspects of religious life, and deviance from prescribed norms on sexuality, such as cohabitation with a partner rather than pursuing marriage, has been shown to be very damaging to individual's religiosity (Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007: 1672). Pornography is generally acknowledged across religious groups as immoral behavior, and yet that does not stop religious people from consuming it. GSS data from 2008-2012 show that 62% of men and 36% of women between the ages of 18 and 26 reported watching at least one pornographic movie or video in the past year (Perry and Hayward 2017: 1757-1758). Data drawn in 2010 by another study said that of religious young men who reported watching pornography, 8.6% reported watching pornography a few times a month and 8.6% reported watching it daily or every other day, despite every one of those men also reporting that they believed

watching pornography was morally wrong (Nelson, Padilla-Walker, and Carroll 2010: 140). These young men also reported lower levels of self-worth and higher levels of depression than their peers who did not report watching pornography, which may be a manifestation of the cognitive dissonance that manifests between their pornography habits and their belief that pornography is wrong (Nelson, Padilla-Walker, and Carroll 2010: 144).

Perry and Hayward's (2017) study delved deeper into attitudes about pornography and the effects of viewing it on adolescents and young adults. The conclusions from their study show that pornography's effect on religion is consistent across gender and has the strongest effects on importance of faith, closeness to God, and religious doubts during the respondent's early teenage years (1758). Research has also suggested that many people rationalize their pornography usage as being preferable to sexual promiscuity, and thereby legitimize their consumption of it despite their religious belief saying it is morally wrong (Perry and Hayward 2017: 1760). Perry and Hayward (2017) reclassify this cognitive dissonance as scrupulosity, which they define as "a psychological disorder characterized by pathological guilt, often stemming from violations of deeply held religious convictions" (1761). They claim that in order to minimize this guilt, adolescents decrease their religious convictions so that they no longer are dissonant with their secular behaviors, which is also classified as moral disengagement (Perry and Hayward 2017: 1762). They also looked towards the future of religiosity in America, concluding that if pornography, as it seems to, decreases religious attachment and more and more people are being exposed to pornography at younger ages, then there is likely to be a drop in

both institutional and personal religiosity amongst those age cohorts (Perry and Hayward 2017: 1776).

While religiosity itself is still very tricky to accurately measure, especially through quantitative means because of issues of construct validity and debate over whether religiosity is truly being measured at all, compelling research seems to show that religiosity is declining in America due to a combination of several different secular factors. With increased moral disengagement from religion, people are beginning to turn towards other sources in culture and perhaps increasingly their own internal moralities and behaviors that are independent of any institutional influence to decide what they believe is right and wrong and how they will implement those beliefs into their daily routines.

## **Conclusion**

The real question to be asked when looking at secularization, mass media and popular culture, and religiosity is one of directionality. While much of the research on secularization focuses on how secular society has diminished religious behaviors among Americans, research on religiosity runs in the opposite direction, focusing on physical, observable manifestations of religious belief in individual's lives with little regard to the secular forces acting upon them in conjunction with the religious forces. But attention has now begun to be devoted in the opposite direction to how individuals tailor their religious lifestyles to fit their secular beliefs and behaviors.

There is a gap in the literature though suggesting opposite directionality, where individual's secular lifestyles are what influences their religious beliefs and behaviors. While some research has been done in this area (see: Perry and Hayward 2017), it is still relatively new and minimal, and also examines very small and specific secular factors that may influence religious beliefs such as pornography and recreational drug usage. The idea that mass media and pop culture are in fact what develops moral beliefs in individuals and that they in turn tailor their religious behaviors to fit those secular beliefs is one that has not been explored in a general sense at all, which is what this paper seeks to examine and explain.

## Chapter 2: Methods

This paper uses data from the first three waves of the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR). The NSYR is a nationally representative, longitudinal telephone survey. Wave I took place in 2003, Wave II in 2005, and Wave III in 2007-2008. In Wave I respondents were between the ages of 12 and 18. In Wave II they were between 16 and 21, and in Wave III the age range was between 18-24. This makes the data incredibly useful for tracking changes in religiosity through the formative adolescent years and into young adulthood. Other demographic information such as gender, race, and education level can be seen below. It should be noted that gender in Wave I was reported by the parents of the respondents, and in Wave II and Wave III it was reported by the respondents themselves.

### Gender Frequencies

	Wave I	Wave II	Wave III
Male	50.4%	49.5%	48.7%
Female	49.6%	50.5%	51.3%

### Race Frequencies

White	63.9%
Black	16.6%
Other	19.5%

### Education Frequencies

	Wave I	Wave II	Wave III
Less than High School	31.0%	1.2%	1.1%
Some High School	57.9%	49.1%	15.2%
High School Diploma	9.3%	27.2%	35.9%
Vocational/Tech School	0.0%	1.1%	1.7%
Some College	0.2%	21.1%	40.8%
College Degree	0.0%	0.1%	5.3%

\* Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding

The data from these three waves were retrieved from the Association of Religious Data Archives (ARDA) website in the form of IBM SPSS files. These three waves were then compiled into a single SPSS file and analyzed. Some variables that were analyzed were recoded for concision, clarity, and to establish consistency of measure across the different Waves.

Secular variables that were used in this analysis were DRINK (how often do you drink alcohol not at religious services?), SMOKE (do you smoke cigarettes regularly?), and POT (how often, if ever, have you used marijuana). All three of these variables were present across all three Waves and therefore could be used in establishing causality.

Religious variables used included SPIRITUA (Some people say that they are "spiritual but not religious." How true or not would you say that is of you.), GODCLOSE (How distant or close do you feel to God most of the time?), OKAYPICK (Some people think that it is okay to pick and choose their religious beliefs without having to accept the teachings of their religious faith as a whole. Do you agree or

disagree?), FAITH1 (How important or unimportant is religious faith in shaping how you live your daily life?), MORALREL (Some people say that morals are relative, that there are no definite rights and wrongs for everybody. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree?), RELPRVT (Religion is a private matter that should be kept out of public debates about social and political issues. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree?), MORALCHNG (Some people say that the world is always changing and we should adjust our views of what is morally right and wrong to reflect those changes. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree?), and UNMARSEX (It is alright for two unmarried people who are not in love to have sex. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree?).

To establish causality, a change-in-change method was used to compare various secular behaviors to measures of religiosity. Each of the secular variables used in this analysis (DRINK, SMOKE, and POT) was defined as the independent variable and was recoded into a new variable to show change in behavior between Wave I and Wave II. Religiosity variables were defined as the dependent variable and were recoded into a new variable to show change between Wave II and Wave III.

DRINK was originally coded as 1 (drink once a day or more), 2 (drink a few times a week), 3 (drink about once a week), 4 (drink a few times a month), 5 (drink about once a month), 6 (drink a few times a year), and 7 (never drink). A new variable was then computed by taking  $DRINK - DRINK\_w2$  and was coded as DRINK\_1\_2\_chng. This is the variable used in the change in change model. The more negative the number in this model, the less a respondent drank in Wave II compared to Wave I.



SMOKE was similarly recoded into SMOKE\_1\_2\_recode by taking SMOKE - SMOKE2. In SMOKE\_1\_2\_recode, -1 indicates that the respondent stopped smoking between Wave I and Wave II, 0 indicates no change in smoking habits, and 1 indicates that the respondent stopped smoking between Wave I and Wave II.

POT was also recoded into POT\_1\_2\_change, where -1 indicated that the respondent has stopped using marijuana between Wave I and Wave II, 0 indicating no change in behavior, and 1 indicating that the respondent has begun using marijuana between Wave I and Wave II.

FAITH1 was coded from 1 (extremely important) to 5 (not important at all), and when calculated into FAITH1\_2\_3\_change, the more negative the number the more importance of faith diminished over time. MORALCHG\_2\_3\_change, MORALREL\_2\_3\_change, and UNMARSEX\_2\_3\_chng were all coded from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree), and when recoded into their change in change model variables, the more negative the category the more they grew to disagree with the question being posed.

Each of the relationships included in the Results section was significant at the .05 level. Relationships that were not significant are not included but may be discussed.

### Chapter 3: Results

#### **Frequencies**

Using the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), eight religious variables and three secular variables were examined in change-in-change models to allow theorizing about causality. Two more secular variables were used in cross-sectional analysis with the same eight religious variables in order to see whether or not there were relationships between non-deviant secular behavior and religiosity. The results of these cross tabulations were analyzed to see whether or not secular behavior is responsible for driving down religious behavior. Frequency tables for each of the religiosity variables across all three waves of data are included below.

**FAITH1 Frequencies**

	Wave I	Wave II	Wave III
Extremely Important	19.2%	18.7%	18.7%
Very Important	30.5%	25.7%	23.9%
Somewhat Important	32.1%	30.3%	29.4%
Not Very Important	11.2%	14.2%	14.6%
Not Important At All	7.0%	11.1%	13.3%

**SPIRITUA Frequencies**

	Wave I	Wave II	Wave III
Very True	9.3%	11.7%	15.6%
Somewhat True	47.2%	48.3%	45.4%
Not True at All	43.5%	40.0%	39.1%

## GODCLOSE Frequencies

	Wave I	Wave II	Wave III
Extremely Distant	3.3%	4.2%	5.2%
Very Distant	4.8%	7.9%	8.2%
Somewhat Distant	17.9%	23.4%	23.2%
Somewhat Close	36.0%	35.5%	34.2%
Very Close	25.7%	21.0%	21.1%
Extremely Close	12.3%	8.1%	8.1%

## OKAYPICK Frequencies

	Wave I	Wave II	Wave III
Yes	47.8%	49.5%	52.2%
No	52.2%	50.5%	47.8%

## MORALREL Frequencies

	Wave I	Wave II	Wave III
Yes	47.7%	58.2%	48.1%
No	52.3%	41.8%	51.9%

## RELPRVT Frequencies

	Wave I	Wave II	Wave III
Strongly Agree	N/A	14.6%	18.3%
Agree	N/A	42.8%	42.6%
Disagree	N/A	33.3%	30.9%
Strongly Disagree	N/A	9.4%	8.2%

## MORALCHNG Frequencies

	Wave I	Wave II	Wave III
Strongly Agree	N/A	10.8%	9.9%
Agree	N/A	51.1%	53.4%
Disagree	N/A	28.1%	27.8%
Strongly Disagree	N/A	10.1%	8.9%

## UNMARSEX Frequencies

	Wave I	Wave II	Wave III
Strongly Agree	N/A	6.3%	7.9%
Agree	N/A	46.8%	51.5%
Disagree	N/A	34.4%	30.9%
Strongly Disagree	N/A	12.5%	9.7%

**Change in Change Models**

Of the eight religious variables, two had significant relationships with change in drinking habits at the .05 level, and four had significant relationships with change in smoking habits at the .05 level. None of the religious variables were significantly related to marijuana usage. Variables were recoded to remain consistent across the three Waves.

*Alcohol*

The first religious variable that was significantly related to a change in alcohol usage was a measure of faith that asked respondents “How important or unimportant is religious faith in shaping how you live your daily life?” Analysis showed that importance of faith in daily life and change in drinking habits had a chi-square value of .000 with

2,241 valid cases. Somewhat surprisingly, although the highest concentration of answers indicated no change in importance of faith based on change in drinking habits, those who reported drinking less were almost all more likely to indicate faith becoming less important to them over time. Those who reported drinking more tended to be more evenly split between faith becoming more or less important to them, and respondents who fall into category 4 (drank substantially more) or 5 (drank significantly more) were the only groups where the majority of respondents who reported a change in their religiosity said that faith had become more important to them over time. The data are shown in the table below.



Second, respondent's change in drinking habits was also significant with change in their opinions on whether or not morality should adjust to a changing world, with a chi-square value of .005 and 2,195 valid cases. Once again the mode for each secular value was 0, which indicates no change in their religiosity over time, and almost every group was more likely to agree or strongly agree that morality should adjust to a changing world. It was only when respondents drank more over time that this started to shift, and respondents in category 4 (drank substantially more) were likely to disagree that morality should change, and those in category 6 (went from never drinking to drinking once a day or more) were evenly split between agreeing and disagreeing. These data are on the next page.





### *Smoking*

These two values of religiosity, change in importance of faith and opinions on morality changing with the world, which were significantly related to change in drinking habits, were also significantly related to change in smoking habits. In addition, change in smoking habits were also shown to be significant with change in opinions on whether morality was relative and change in acceptance of unmarried sex.

First, change in smoking habits and change in importance of faith to daily life had a relationship with a chi-square value of .000 and 2,242 valid cases. The mode for those who began smoking, stopped smoking, and whose habits remained consistent were all 0, which indicates no change in their religiosity measure. After that, respondents who started smoking were slightly more likely to say faith was more important to them and those who stopped smoking were the same. The only group who was more likely to say faith had become less important to their everyday lives was the group whose smoking habits did not change between Wave I and Wave II.

started

stopped

FAITH1\_2\_3\_change \* SMOKE\_1\_2\_recode Crosstabulation

			SMOKE_1_2_recode			Total	
			-1.00	.00	1.00		
less important	FAITH1_2_3_change	-4.00	Count	1	1	0	2
			% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
		-3.00	Count	3	18	0	21
			% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	0.6%	1.1%	0.0%	0.9%
		-2.00	Count	19	92	0	111
			% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	3.7%	5.4%	0.0%	5.0%
		-1.00	Count	103	373	3	479
			% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	20.2%	21.8%	13.6%	21.4%
		.00	Count	249	886	9	1144
			% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	48.7%	51.8%	40.9%	51.0%
more important		1.00	Count	103	276	8	387
			% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	20.2%	16.1%	36.4%	17.3%
		2.00	Count	23	58	1	82
			% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	4.5%	3.4%	4.5%	3.7%
		3.00	Count	7	5	0	12
			% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	1.4%	0.3%	0.0%	0.5%
	4.00	Count	3	0	1	4	
		% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	0.6%	0.0%	4.5%	0.2%	
Total			Count	511	1709	22	2242
			% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Second, the mode in the relationship between change in smoking habits and change in opinions on whether or not morality should adjust to modern society was also 0, meaning no change. These variables had a chi-square value of .000 and 2,915 valid cases. Again, the odd group out was those who had no change in their smoking habits. Both those who began smoking and stopped smoking between Wave I and Wave II were more likely to disagree that morality should change with a changing world. Only those

whose habits did not change were more likely to agree that morality should shift than disagree.

MORALCHG_2_3_change * SMOKE_1_2_recode			started			stopped
			SMOKE_1_2_recode			Total
			-1.00	.00	1.00	
disagree more	MORALCHG_2_3_change -3.00	Count	6	4	0	10
		% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	1.2%	0.2%	0.0%	0.5%
	-2.00	Count	10	47	0	57
		% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	2.0%	2.8%	0.0%	2.6%
	-1.00	Count	107	356	8	471
		% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	21.4%	21.3%	36.4%	21.5%
agree more	.00	Count	263	817	9	1089
		% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	52.6%	48.8%	40.9%	49.6%
	1.00	Count	100	383	2	485
		% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	20.0%	22.9%	9.1%	22.1%
	2.00	Count	11	64	2	77
		% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	2.2%	3.8%	9.1%	3.5%
	3.00	Count	3	2	1	6
		% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	0.6%	0.1%	4.5%	0.3%
Total		Count	500	1673	22	2195
		% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Third, change in smoking habits and change in opinions on whether morality was relative had a chi-square value of .006 and 1,357 valid cases. For those who started smoking and whose smoking habits did not change, the mode was no change in religiosity, but for those who stopped smoking, the mode was both no change and slightly disagreeing that morality is relative. They are also only half as likely to agree that

morality is relative than they are to disagree. This is different from the other two categories, both of whom were more likely to agree than disagree that morality is relative.

started                      stopped  
**MORALREL\_2\_3\_change \* SMOKE\_1\_2\_recode Crosstabulation**

			SMOKE_1_2_recode			Total		
			-1.00	.00	1.00			
MORALREL_2_3_change	disagree more	-2.00	Count	11	14	0	25	
			% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	3.6%	1.3%	0.0%	1.8%	
		-1.00	Count	43	115	4	162	
			% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	14.1%	11.0%	40.0%	11.9%	
		.00	Count	158	493	4	655	
			% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	51.6%	47.4%	40.0%	48.3%	
		1.00	Count	79	353	1	433	
	agree more		% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	25.8%	33.9%	10.0%	31.9%	
		2.00	Count	12	59	1	72	
			% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	3.9%	5.7%	10.0%	5.3%	
		3.00	Count	3	7	0	10	
			% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	1.0%	0.7%	0.0%	0.7%	
		Total		Count	306	1041	10	1357
			% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Finally, change in smoking habits and change in opinions about unmarried sex had a chi-square value of .005 with 2,205 valid cases. Once again, the mode was 0, which indicates no change in religiosity over time, and all categories of respondents were more likely to agree that unmarried sex between two people who are not in love is acceptable. Although they all were more likely to agree that unmarried sex is fine, those who started smoking were least likely to approve of the three groups, followed by those whose smoking habits did not change. Respondents who stopped smoking were the most likely

to agree that unmarried sex is alright. This runs contrary to what many people think about deviant behavior and its effect on religiosity in youth and young adults.

started                      stopped

**UNMARSEX\_2\_3\_chng \* SMOKE\_1\_2\_recode Crosstabulation**

			SMOKE_1_2_recode			Total	
			-1.00	.00	1.00		
UNMARSEX_2_3_chng	disagree more	-3.00	Count	0	5	1	6
			% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	0.0%	0.3%	4.5%	0.3%
		-2.00	Count	7	15	1	23
			% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	1.4%	0.9%	4.5%	1.0%
	agree more	-1.00	Count	75	264	1	340
			% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	14.9%	15.7%	4.5%	15.4%
		.00	Count	305	934	12	1251
			% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	60.8%	55.6%	54.5%	56.7%
	1.00	Count	102	400	6	508	
		% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	20.3%	23.8%	27.3%	23.0%	
	2.00	Count	13	58	1	72	
	% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	2.6%	3.5%	4.5%	3.3%		
	3.00	Count	0	5	0	5	
		% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.2%	
	Total	Count	502	1681	22	2205	
	% within SMOKE_1_2_recode	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

### **Cross-sectional Analysis**

In addition to the change-in-change models, cross-tabulations from the data in Wave III were used to examine whether or not a relationship existed between non-deviant secular behaviors and the same eight measures of religiosity. However, because these analyses are only cross-sectional, causality cannot be established. These variables had to be analyzed cross-sectionally because they do not appear in Wave I and Wave II of the NSYR.

Two of the secular variables were significantly related to religiosity. The first secular variable was SOCNET4 (About how often do you visit social networking sites?) and was coded as 1 (several times a day), 2 (about once a day), 3 (three to five days a week), 4 (one to two days a week), 5 (every few weeks), and 6 (less than every few weeks). The second secular variable was MATER4, which asks whether respondents get a lot of pleasure respondents gain from shopping and buying things. It was recoded as 1 (strongly agree), 2 (agree), 3 (disagree), and 4 (strongly disagree). Of the eight religiosity measures, SOCNET4 was significantly related to FAITH1 and MATER4 was significantly related to every variable excluding OKAYPICK.

Respondent's social media habits didn't seem to have a dramatic impact on the importance of faith in their daily lives in terms of overarching trends. The chi-square value of the relationship was .011 with 1,973 valid responses, with respondents being most likely to report faith as somewhat important in shaping their daily lives in every category except the one for respondents who use social media less than every few weeks. For that category, respondents were most likely to report faith being very important in

shaping their daily lives. Despite social media habits, however, all respondents were more likely to say their faith was important to them than not important. The data are below.

(faith1\_w3) F:1. How important or unimportant is religious faith in shaping how you live your daily life? Is it: \* (socnet4\_w3) [IF A MEMBER OF A SOCIAL NETWORKING WEB GROUP] H:21. About how often do you visit social networking sites? Would you say . . . Crosstabulation

			(socnet4_w3) [IF A MEMBER OF A SOCIAL NETWORKING WEB GROUP] H:21. About how often do you visit social networking sites? Would you say . . .						Total
			Several times a day	About once a day	Three to five days a week	One to two days a week	Every few weeks	Less than every few weeks	
(faith1_w3) F:1. How important or unimportant is religious faith in shaping how you live your daily life? Is it:	Extremely important	Count % within (socnet4_w3) [IF A MEMBER OF A SOCIAL NETWORKING WEB GROUP] H:21. About how often do you visit social networking sites? Would you say . . .	67a 15.0%	95a 15.2%	54a, b 17.3%	42a, b 17.4%	52c 25.9%	32b, c 22.4%	342 17.3%
	Very	Count % within (socnet4_w3) [IF A MEMBER OF A SOCIAL NETWORKING WEB GROUP] H:21. About how often do you visit social networking sites? Would you say . . .	123a 27.5%	134b 21.4%	78a, b 24.9%	55a, b 22.7%	41a, b 20.4%	42a 29.4%	473 24.0%
	Somewhat	Count % within (socnet4_w3) [IF A MEMBER OF A SOCIAL NETWORKING WEB GROUP] H:21. About how often do you visit social networking sites? Would you say . . .	129a, b 28.9%	196a, b 31.3%	90a, b 28.8%	80b 33.1%	62a, b 30.8%	33a 23.1%	590 29.9%
	Not very	Count % within (socnet4_w3) [IF A MEMBER OF A SOCIAL NETWORKING WEB GROUP] H:21. About how often do you visit social networking sites? Would you say . . .	69a 15.4%	108a 17.2%	54a 17.3%	33a, b 13.6%	26a, b 12.9%	12b 8.4%	302 15.3%
	Not important at all	Count % within (socnet4_w3) [IF A MEMBER OF A SOCIAL NETWORKING WEB GROUP] H:21. About how often do you visit social networking sites? Would you say . . .	59a 13.2%	94a 15.0%	37a 11.8%	32a 13.2%	20a 10.0%	24a 16.8%	266 13.5%
Total			447 100.0%	627 100.0%	313 100.0%	242 100.0%	201 100.0%	143 100.0%	1973 100.0%

Levels of pleasure gained from the purchase of goods was also significantly related to importance of faith in daily life, with a chi-square value of .022 and 2,499 valid cases. Within this relationship, all groups except the ones who reported getting no pleasure from buying items were most likely to say that faith was somewhat important in how they live their daily lives. Respondents who reported getting no pleasure from purchasing things were most likely to report faith being not very important in shaping their daily lives. Interestingly, however, those who reported getting the most pleasure from buying things were the least likely to say that religion was extremely important in shaping their daily lives.

**(faith1\_w3) F:1. How important or unimportant is religious faith in shaping how you live your daily life? Is it: \* MATER\_4 recoded**  
**Crosstabulation**

			MATER_4 recoded				Total
			1.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	
(faith1_w3) F:1. How important or unimportant is religious faith in shaping how you live your daily life? Is it:	Extremely important	Count % within MATER_4 recoded	52a 17.9%	243a 18.1%	144a 19.6%	25a 19.1%	464 18.6%
	Very	Count % within MATER_4 recoded	71a 24.5%	337a 25.1%	165a 22.5%	28a 21.4%	601 24.0%
	Somewhat	Count % within MATER_4 recoded	89a, b 30.7%	418b 31.1%	198a, c 27.0%	26c 19.8%	731 29.3%
	Not very	Count % within MATER_4 recoded	47a, b 16.2%	179b 13.3%	114b 15.5%	30a 22.9%	370 14.8%
	Not important at all	Count % within MATER_4 recoded	31a 10.7%	167a 12.4%	113a 15.4%	22a 16.8%	333 13.3%
Total		Count % within MATER_4 recoded	290 100.0%	1344 100.0%	734 100.0%	131 100.0%	2499 100.0%

Each subscript letter denotes a subset of MATER\_4 recoded categories whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level.



All other relationships shown to be significant at the .05 level between materialism and the religious variables (SPIRITUA, GODCLOSE, MORALREL, RELPRVT, MORALCHNG, UNMARSEX) followed similar trends where all groups tended to agree. All groups agreed that religion should be kept out of public affairs, were more likely to say morality is not relative and there are definite rights and wrongs, but that morality should shift along with a changing world. Respondents across all degrees of materialism also reported feeling there was nothing wrong with unmarried sex. When it came to whether or not they identified as “spiritual but not religious,” respondents in categories 1, 2, and 3, which accounts for everyone except the least materialistic, were most likely to say that was somewhat true, while the least materialistic were most likely to say that statement was not true at all for them. The least materialistic respondents were also substantially more likely to report feeling extremely close to god than any other group.

#### Chapter 4: Discussion

This study has extended previous research by utilizing longitudinal data to examine causality between multiple religious and secular behaviors and whether or not it is secular behavior that affects religiosity and not the more commonly thought of converse. It has also identified a possible source of causality within the secular sphere other than deviant behavior, which has not been studied by prior researchers.

One of the most interesting trends that can be gathered from these data is also one of the most innocuous: that across every cross tabulation and nearly every category within those cross tabulations, the mode was 0, or no change. When comparing measures of religiosity against deviant secular behaviors, one would expect that an increase in secular behavior would mean a decline in religiosity, but that does not seem to be the case.

Part of this may be due to the fact that those engaging in deviant behaviors already have lower levels of religiosity, and therefore do not change much compared to peers who did not initially engage in these deviant behaviors. What seems to be more likely, however, is that although many studies have focused on how deviant behavior drives down measures of religiosity (Desmond, Ulmer, and Bader 2013; Perry and Hayward 2017; Thompson and Jang 2016), deviant behavior does not appear to be one of the main forces that affects religiosity.

If this is the case, the question then becomes what really is driving down religiosity measures. One possibility is that the decline is due to increased secular behaviors relating to the rise of mass media and popular culture and therefore are not

categorized as deviant. Social media usage and consumerism could be accounting for a portion of change in religiosity measures, but have not been examined by previous studies. This is shown particularly in the correlations between the reported amount of pleasure respondents get from shopping and buying items and seven of the eight measures of religiosity that were examined in this study.

Change in reported importance of faith in daily life in cross tabulations with both change in drinking habits and change in smoking habits showed faith becoming slightly less important across almost every category, which is interesting when compared to the general trends of responses to just the importance of faith to respondent's daily lives over time, which also declined slightly. Looking at this, the question becomes in spite of the statistical relationship between the importance of faith and drinking and smoking, do these deviant behaviors really have any distinct effect on religiosity, or does the general trends of religiosity change account for most of the change in the relationship? Without having other non-deviant secular behaviors to analyze alongside the deviant ones, it is difficult to say conclusively.

This same trend of the change in change models mimicking the trends seen in just the religious variables continues when looking at the tables comparing drinking and smoking habits to opinions about whether or not morality should change along with the world. A net score of 0 is still the most likely for every category in each table, but after that almost every category was most likely to agree that morality needs to shift with a changing world. This is the same trend that we see in the frequencies, which show that as

respondents age they are more likely to say that morality should shift along with the world.

There were a few categories that did not follow the general trend, however. They were category 4 of drinking, which indicates a substantial increase in drinking frequency between Wave I and Wave II, and those who started smoking between Wave I and Wave II (-1). Both were more likely to disagree more over time that morality should not shift along with the world. These are strange categories to stick out, because both indicate an increased level of deviant secular behavior along with higher scores of religiosity..

Change in smoking habits and opinions on whether or not morality was relative had some slight variation in the mode across the different categories of secular behavior. While for those who started smoking or whose smoking habits remained consistent it was most likely that there was no change in religious behavior, those who stopped smoking were equally as likely to report no change in religiosity as they were to be slightly more likely to disagree more than previously that morals are relative and there is no true right or wrong.

The topic of unmarried sex is one that is frowned upon by many religions and is explicitly taught to young people growing up in the church as a sin. However, when looking at opinions about the acceptability of unmarried sex over time, it is shown that while it is most likely for religiosity opinions to not change over time despite deviant behavior, respondents are also more likely to be more approving as they age regardless of whether they started or stopped smoking. This again echoes the frequency table for this variable, which shows a growing approval of unmarried sex across Wave II and Wave III.

Particularly in this relationship, where every category reaches the same conclusions, it becomes clear that there is something more than deviant behavior informing these religiosity trends.

Perhaps most interestingly of all the change in change model data was that marijuana usage was not significantly related with any of the eight chosen measures of religiosity. Marijuana is the most deviant of the three behaviors examined in this study, as smoking and drinking, while considered deviant for youth, both become legal at a certain age (18 for smoking and 21 for drinking). Marijuana has seen legalization in certain states over the past few years but is still illegal in the eyes of the federal government for people of all ages. So, if as much research proposes, it is deviant behavior that negatively effects religiosity, then marijuana usage should have been significant across the most measures of religiosity, not the least. In this context, the fact that smoking, which considering the age range of the respondents in the NSYR would be legal for the highest proportion of respondents, was the deviant secular behavior that was significant with the most measures of religiosity seems odd and counterintuitive.

Because most of the data collected in the change in change models is consistent in its conclusions about religiosity despite the different levels of engagement in deviant secular behavior, deviance cannot be the only factor in play in driving down religiosity measures. Other cultural forces must be at play in the lives of these youth that are changing their opinions on these religious matters. The most likely factor would be the mass media, whose expansive influence on society is already being examined in terms of civil religion and broader religious influence (Jindra 2000; Lynch 2008; Price 2000;

Thompson 2000), and which was shown to be influential in cross-sectional examinations within this study. Youth in particular are more engaged with the mass media than ever, primarily due to the fact that mass media richly saturates our culture in recent years due to the rise of the information age and the easy accessibility of the internet to most youth.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions

While there are significant relationships between deviant behaviors and various measures of religiosity, these relationships seem to run almost entirely parallel with simple frequencies of the religiosity measures on their own, which raises the question of whether or not the deviant behavior is really the driving factor in religiosity change. This is an interesting question because it hasn't been widely examined before.

Researchers have tended to look at the relationships in terms of religious behavior affecting secular behaviors, not the other way around, but there does seem to be some cultural component affecting religiosity that studies have not found yet. Considering the massive cultural shift that the digital age has brought about, it is time to consider that maybe our causality model is outdated and that it could in fact be secular forces informing religious beliefs and behaviors in modern society. This would constitute a massive shift in the way we frame religion in modern society and would demonstrate a need for religion as an institution to change how it interacts with and reaches out to its members.

If indeed causality flows in the direction of secular behavior influencing religious behavior, then our whole framework for understanding religious trends in society is fatally flawed. Because society tends to look to religion as a place where people develop morality and beliefs, misunderstanding the significance of religion as an institution could lead to an inability to understand and address where cultural morality and belief is truly coming from, which would be problematic for those looking to address issues they see with popular morality and thinking. It is also important for those involved in religious

hierarchies themselves to understand what is going on with their members so they can best service the social, emotional, and spiritual needs of their congregations.

This study only examined three deviant secular behaviors, and then only examined them in the context of youth and young adults. While the longitudinal data provided by the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) are valuable, it does present limits in that many of its secular variables did not appear until Wave III, and therefore could not be used in the change in change models utilized by this paper. This is in part because of when the first two waves of the study took place — 2003 and 2005 — and the massive changes our society has seen even since then in terms of the development and growth of social media and its usage and the prevalence of technology as an irreplaceable tool in everyday society.

There is a need for more data to be collected in this longitudinal fashion about these secular forces so that they can be utilized in causality models. A nationally representative longitudinal dataset would also be useful in further exploration of this topic as it would let researchers compare trends across the entire population and not only youth and young adults.



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