Religious Socialization: A Test of the Channeling Hypothesis of Parental Influence on Adolescent Faith Maturity
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Recent research on intergenerational faith transfer has argued that (a) parents have a direct effect on the adolescence acquisition of religiosity and (b) parental effects are mediated through congregation and peers. This study tests the channeling hypothesis, which argues that parental influences are mediated through both peer selection and congregation selection. It examines both direct and indirect effects that parental influence has on the religiosity of offspring. A national survey of 11,000 adolescents and adults in six Protestant denominations produced a subsample of 2,379 youth. Contrary to the channeling hypothesis, the research showed that peer influence and parental influence remained stable during the adolescent years. Parental influence did not dramatically increase or decrease with age. Some findings support the channeling hypothesis, particularly the mediating effect of parents through peer influences. The findings of this study are discussed in light of the contradictory findings from other studies.

Keywords: religion; socialization; theory; faith maturity

Many scholars believe that the family is the most influential socializing agent in children’s development of religiosity. Although exceptions (e.g., Hoge, Johnson, & Luidens, 1994) and inconsistencies can be found, numerous studies have demonstrated a link between parental and offspring religiosity (see, e.g., Clark, Worthington, & Danser, 1986). A central question in this regard is “How do parents influence the religiosity of their offspring?”

This study approaches this question from the perspective of Fowler’s (1981) cognitive-developmental model of faith maturity. We examine the transmission of religiosity among Protestant youth using faith maturity as operationalized by Benson, Donahue, and Erickson (1993) and Roehlkepartain...
and Benson (1993). These authors defined faith maturity as “the degree to
which a person embodies the priorities, commitments, and perspectives char-
acteristic of vibrant and life transforming faith, as these have been under-
stood in ‘mainline’ Protestant traditions” (Benson et al., p. 3).

Contradictions in the Literature

Research on religious socialization shows that there are inconsistent
results when studying the influence of parental religiosity on the religiosity
of their offspring. First, there is the question of whether there is any signifi-
cant influence. Although most researchers (Clark et al., 1986) believe paren-
tal religiosity to be central in determining adolescent religiosity, Hoge et al.
(1994) concluded that parents’ involvement in a local church had no deter-
mining influence on the patterns of their children. Their study showed a nega-
tive relationship between the religiosity of the mother and the church involve-
ment of the youth.

Another example of the inconsistencies is the significance of family types
and styles of parenting. Nelsen (1980) found that warmth between the parent
and adolescent was not a factor in religious transmission. On the other hand,
Myers (1996) reported that family type and style of parenting were signifi-
cant in aiding or hindering parental influence in religious socialization.
Myers found families that were described as warm and caring were more fer-
tile to parental intergenerational transmission of religiosity. Myers also noted
that traditional single-income family structures aid in the process of religious
inheritance. In contradiction, yet another report indicated that parental edu-
cation, income, and class had no significant effects on the religiosity of off-
spring (Francis & Brown, 1991). Results became even more confusing when
Wilson and Sherkat (1994) noted that parents of higher income may produce
offspring that are less likely to resemble themselves.

Clark et al. (1986) provided a final example of contradictory findings in
their review of 12 different studies analyzing the influences of gender of par-
ent on the child’s socialization. In 7 of the studies, the mother was more influ-
ential in determining the offspring’s religiosity, 2 found the fathers more
influential, and 3 found no difference. Some researchers have suggested that
the pattern of religious participation has little to do with family transmission
at all but is more the result of macro influences that shape the life course.
Stolzenberg, Blair-Loy, and Waite (1995) showed that by separating the
effects of marriage and childbearing from the effects of age alone, the data
demonstrated that current age and family formation change religious partici-
pation. Firebaugh and Harley (1991) supported this perspective and con-
cluded that church attendance is simply a result of aging.
Theory Development

Theory development in the study of the transmission of religiosity is weak at best. Although several theoretical perspectives have been applied to this study, there is little in the way of a unified approach. Ozorak (1989) wrote that for almost a century, psychologists have been studying the adolescent period as a significant time of religious development. She identified Starbuck (1895), Allport (1950), and Hastings and Hoge (1976) as some of the major researchers who contributed to this field. Allport’s intrinsic-extrinsic distinctions have been criticized on both theoretical and methodological grounds (Kirkpatrick & Hood, 1990). In spite of these objections, Donahue (1985) stated that Allport’s framework has been the single most influential perspective to date in the study of the psychology of religion.

Recently, several authors have contributed to an emerging theory called the channeling theory or channeling hypothesis. Most researchers have identified three agents of religious socialization: the family (Greeley & Rossi, 1966; Greeley, McGready, & McCourt, 1976), the church, and peers (Cornwall, 1988; Fee, Greeley, McGready, & Sullivan, 1981). Some researchers have argued that the family is the principle agent of religious socialization (E. H. Erickson, 1963), whereas peers and religious institutions are secondary agents. Himmelfarb (1980) suggested that family, church, and peers were related by what he termed channeling: “Parents socialize their children by channeling them into other groups or experiences [e.g., schools and marriage] which will reinforce [have an additive influence on] what was learned at home and will channel them further into similar adult activities” (p. 478).

Both Himmelfarb’s (1980) study of American Jews and Cornwall’s (1989) study of Latter-day Saints provided empirical support for the channeling effect of the family. Both studies support that religious socialization by parents not only shapes their children’s religious paradigms but also channels them into social institutions and settings that reinforce and help maintain the individual’s religious beliefs and commitment to religious norms. Cornwall found that in her Mormon sample, family variables had little direct influence on adult religiousness. She clarified that this does not mean that the family is not influential. Rather, it means that it exerts influences that are indirect. Parental church attendance and home religious observance serve to channel offspring into peer networks that reinforce the home values. The peer influences directly affect the adolescent’s subsequent adult behavior patterns. J. A. Erickson (1992) also reported that his data supported the channeling hypothesis of Himmelfarb and Cornwall. J. A. Erickson also argued that religious education contributes to religiosity because of its blending of the religious institution with peers who are religious.
The channeling hypothesis has been challenged by competing theoretical formulations. Myers (1996) introduced alternative theories that have been used in the study of intergenerational religious transmission and raised doubts regarding the validity of the channeling theory. For example, Myers cited Iannaccone’s (1990) religious capital theory as an alternative to the channeling hypothesis. Religious capital is accumulated during childhood through household participation. It affects beliefs and parent-child interaction. Iannaccone suggested that this accumulation is more likely to occur in more devote, stable, and harmonious households in which the socialization of the children is a primary focus of the parents. The ability to successfully socialize one’s children is dependent on a variety of family variables including parental control, support, and the gender of the primary parent. Another alternative has been provided by cultural broadening theory (Hoge et al., 1994). This theory argues that adolescents and young adults receive greater educational opportunities than their parents and as a consequence become more liberal and less traditional in their behaviors and attitudes. Cultural broadening may act to diminish the importance of religious values while encouraging the exploration of different lifestyles that also discourage religious beliefs and behaviors.

Myers (1996) argued that contrary to findings from Cornwall (1988) and J. A. Erickson (1992), parents have a primary and lasting influence on the religious socialization of offspring. He also argued against the conclusions of Francis and Brown (1991) that found the influence of parents on offspring’s religious development decreased as offspring age. Myers believed that his data showed both the direct effect and the staying power of parental religiosity on their children.

There remain divided opinions and conflicting data over the type of influence families have in passing their religious heritage to their offspring. Within the religious socialization literature, the three major groups of variables are family, congregation, and peer influences. This study examines whether there is support for the channeling hypothesis.

Hypotheses

The purpose of this project is to test the channeling hypothesis as refined by Cornwall (1988). Cornwall proposed that family religious socialization channels children into further religious socializing institutions and groups. These groups influence the type and number of friends and peers they have. It is the peer network that has the strongest direct effect on subsequent adult church commitment (Thomas & Cornwall, 1990). The models include the direct main effect of parents’ influence as well as the parents’ influence being
independently mediated by congregational and peer influences (Figure 1). This model suggests the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** There is a direct effect for family socialization on faith maturity (channeling hypothesis and Myers’s, 1996, stability hypothesis).

**Hypothesis 2:** Both congregational influences and peer influences will have a direct main effect on the dependent variable, faith maturity (channeling hypothesis).

**Hypothesis 3:** Both congregational and peer influences will act as mediators of the relationship between family influence and faith maturity (channeling hypothesis).

**Hypothesis 4:** As adolescents age, the relationship between family influences and faith maturity will become weaker (both channeling and cultural broadening).

**Hypothesis 5:** As adolescents age, the relationship between peer network influences and faith maturity will become stronger (channeling hypothesis).

**METHODS**

**Data**

The data for this study were collected by Peter Benson in 1988 (see Benson et al., 1993) as part of a stratified sample of churches representing the six major U.S. Protestant denominations that yielded 900 congregations based on 150 randomly chosen congregations for each denomination. The congregations selected were stratified to represent the four geographical regions and four congregational sizes (under 200, 200 to 499, 500 to 999, and 1,000 and over). The questionnaires eventually yielded a sample size of 2,379 youth from Grade 7 to Grade 12 representing youth from the five major U.S. denominations that remained in the study. The attrition rate was due to the loss of many of the cases with the Southern Baptists and those under or over the age requirements for this study. The denominational youth from Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), and United Church of Christ were surveyed in 1988 and 1989. The Southern Baptists were also asked to participate in this study, but because of a low response rate and the fact that the Southern Baptist results were outliers on almost all the findings, this group was not included in the final analyses of these data.

The data for this study are from a subsample (2,379) of youth who reported on their interactions with church, parents, and peers. The use of youth reports alone removes the problem of the discrepancies in reporting encountered when comparing parental and youth reports. Furthermore, although youth reports about parents’ and peers’ behavior may be discrepant
with the reports of others, the youth reports must be viewed as valid in terms of their perception of parental religiosity and peer support. Last, the sample, although not longitudinal, contains sufficient variation in ages to analyze the maturation effects on faith maturity.

**Measures**

**Dependent variable: Faith maturity.** The dependent measure faith maturity is designed to "measure the complicated, controversial construct of faith maturity" (Benson et al., 1993). The scale was developed by a diverse panel of denominational executives, seminary scholars, and researchers in the field of religion and denominational studies. Eight facets of faith maturity were proposed: trusts in God's saving grace and believes in the divinity of Jesus; experiences a sense of personal well-being, security; integrates faith and life; seeks spiritual growth through study, reflection, and prayer; seeks to be part of a community of believers; holds life-affirming values, including commitment to racial and gender equality; advocates social and global change to bring about greater social justice; and serves humanity through acts of love and justice. These eight core facets are measured by 38 single items developed by the expert panel (Benson et al., 1993).

The predictive validity of the scale was reported by J. A. Erickson (1992). All the major predictions of the scale were confirmed: Pastors scored highest on the scale ($M = 5.32$), followed by the religious education coordinators ($M =$...
4.89), teachers ($M = 4.77$), parents ($M = 4.66$), and young people ($M = 4.1$). It was also noted that the scale values increased with age as predicted. The Faith Maturity Scale has also been shown to have concurrent validity with other measures of religiosity. There is moderate to strong correlation with intrinsic religion ($r = .58$) and a four-item Good Samaritan Index ($r = .65$) (Benson et al., 1993).

The 38-item scale showed high reliability with Cronbach’s alpha for the Faith Maturity Scale being robust across age, gender, respondent type, and denomination (Benson et al., 1993). Each of the five stakeholder groups (adults, pastors, Christian education coordinators, teachers, and adolescents) used in the original study had internal consistency reliability estimates of .88 to .89. In another subpopulation test, the estimate for 16- to 18-year-olds was .86. In the sample group for this project, the Faith Maturity Scale showed a high Cronbach’s alpha of .88. The removal of any one item did not bring the alpha above .89, showing high reliability for this global scale composed of 38 items. A principle components analysis showed that the first factor accounted for one quarter of the total variance. There was no clear pattern to the remaining six factors that loaded higher than one eigenvalue. The total variance accounted for by all seven factors was about 50%, with the first factor accounting for about half of that. This supports the use of the global measure of faith maturity as it captures all dimensions and does not restrict variation as would the factored scale.

**Independent Variables**

**Age.** The youth’s reported age is treated as having independent effects on faith maturity that are due to the respondent’s maturation.

**Parental influences.** Youth were asked several questions about their parents’ religiosity. In addition, the youth were asked to describe their mother’s and father’s religious behaviors at home. The items indicate how often they saw their mother (or father) go to church, pray, or do “other religious things.” Family conversations about faith and family religious activities were also assessed by asking the respondents, “How often do you talk with your mother (or father) about religious faith?” Two final items included in the parental measure were based on whether the mother and/or father were listed in response to the questions “Which of the following had the most positive influence on your religious faith?” and “Who would you go to for help or advice if you had important question about life?”
The measures for mothers and fathers were maintained separately to allow the testing of gender effect. This fact, however, eliminated a collective parental or family measures that may have given more depth to the influence of the home environment. Scores were standardized before creating an additive measure. The alpha levels for the measures of mother’s and father’s influence were .77 and .86, respectively.

Congregational influence. Youth responded to the questions “How many adults in your church do you think you know well (not counting parents or relatives)?” and “If you had an important question about your life, how many adults in your church would you feel comfortable going to for help (not counting parents or relatives)?” A third question asked, “How many times, if ever, during the last 12 months have you ever done each of the following—felt the care of an adult in your church (don’t count relatives)?” Two items in the congregational measure were based on whether the pastor or other adult in the adolescent’s church were listed in response to the questions “Which of the following had the most positive influence on your religious faith?” and “Who would you go to for help or advice if you had an important question about life?” One final item was based on the response to the question “During your life, how often did you experience the feeling that adults in a church cared about you?” All scores were standardized before creating an additive measure. The alpha level for the measure of congregational influence was .68.

Peer influence. This variable is designed to measure influence of peers on faith maturity. The first question asked how religious, on average, the respondents’ three or four best friends are. Another item asked “Which of the following had the most positive influence on your religious faith?” If the respondent selected friends as a positive response, this dummy variable was coded as 1. Three other items were included that looked at three time periods during the respondent’s life. “During your life, how often did you do the following—participate in a church youth group, talk with your best friends about God or faith, experience the feeling that other youth at your church cared about you?” A final item in the peer influence measure asked “Who would you go to for help or advice if you had an important question about life?” This dummy item was coded as 1 if the respondent listed “a friend my own age.” Once again, all scores were standardized before creating an additive measure. The alpha level for the measure of peer influence was .69.

Control variables. Sex and race have been shown to relate to religiosity (Clark & Worthington, 1987) and are treated as dummy variables in this study. In addition to these variables, parental education and family type were
also controlled. Myers (1996) stated that traditional family structures aid religious inheritance. He said that families in which mothers have little schooling lead to an increase in religious inheritance of offspring, as do families in which the father is well educated. Aldous (1987) discussed the extra challenges that reconstituted families have in passing on family values due to limited social support experienced between the stepparent and child.

RESULTS

Description of the Sample

The final sample of 2,379 youth contained 1,014 male and 1,365 female participants. The average age of the respondents was 14.95 years (SD = 1.81). Family type was overwhelmingly composed of two parents, with 79% of the total respondents coming from intact biological families, 7% from blended families, and 5% from adoptive families. The remainder of the sample consisted of 7% single-parent families and 1.8% from parents who were divorced or separated. Examining the religious activity level of the youth, 20% were classified as inactive, 60% as moderately active, and 20% as highly active. Inactive youth were those who attended services “never” or “a few times a year” or indicated that they spent no time in church programs in the past month and spent no time volunteering in the church. Table 1 shows the means and correlations, respectively, among the main variables in this study.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 stated that family influence would have a direct main effect with the dependent variable faith maturity. A four-model regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis (Table 2). Model 1 includes the control variables identified as important by other researchers in this area of study: family type, denomination, race, sex, mother’s educational level, and father’s educational level. In this analysis, only gender had a significant beta, indicating that girls are higher in faith maturity than boys. Once the control variables had been entered, then each of the parental variables was entered separately to test for mother’s and father’s effects (Models 2 and 3), and finally in Model 4, both parents’ data were entered.

Model 4 examined the significant variables left after Model 3. Its main purpose was to see if the separate parental variables of mother’s and father’s influence were going to cancel each other out in their ability to influence adolescent faith maturity. Mother’s influence was dummyed using the median
# TABLE 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Main Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Congregation Influence</th>
<th>Peer Influence</th>
<th>Mother's Influence</th>
<th>Father's Influence</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faith maturity</td>
<td>0.059*</td>
<td>0.203**</td>
<td>0.320**</td>
<td>0.173**</td>
<td>0.116**</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>2,051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father's influence</td>
<td>-0.053*</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.158**</td>
<td>0.407**</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>1,607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother's influence</td>
<td>-0.026</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>0.220**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>1,662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer influence</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>0.124**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>1,715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregation</td>
<td>-0.028</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>1,619</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01.
because of significant skew (−.695, SE = .061). The betas for mother’s and father’s faith influence were reduced to .152 and .136, but both were significant at p < .001. The $R^2$ for Model 4 was a modest .076 ($p < .001$).

These results give support to Hypothesis 1 with both the mother’s and father’s influence significantly related to faith maturity even after controlling for family type, denomination, race, sex, mother’s educational level, and father’s educational level. Mothers are more influential overall, and gender of the adolescent plays a significant part in the process.

### Hypothesis 2

This hypothesis tests the direct main effect of the other two socializing agents, congregational and peer influences, on the dependent variable faith maturity. There were two sets of regression analyses (Tables 3 and 4) used to test this hypothesis. Set 1 used a three-model regression analysis (Table 3) to isolate the congregational influence variable, and Set 2 used a three-model regression analysis to isolate the peer influence variable (Table 4). In the first set of regressions, when congregational faith influence was added, it produced a beta of .194 ($p < .001$), indicating a direct main effect for congregational influence on adolescent faith maturity. There was little change in the results of Model 3 over Model 2. This analysis supports the direct main effect of congregational influence on faith maturity after controlling for family type, denomination, race, sex, mother’s educational level, and father’s educational level.

The analyses found in Table 4 examine peer influence in the same way as Table 3 analyzed congregational influence. Peer influence had a strong
effect. In Model 2, it had a beta of .297 \((p < .001)\). Model 3 slightly increased explained variance \(R^2 = 0.117\). This set of regressions showed a stronger relationship between peer influence and faith maturity in adolescents than any of the other independent variables.

### Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 states that both congregational influences and peer influences will act as mediators between family influence and faith maturity to increase the relationship in a significant way. Following the research strategy suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986), four criteria were set up to examine if any mediating effects were taking place between family influence and congregational or peer influences and faith maturity. The first criterion is that the
predictor variable must be significantly associated with the hypothesized mediator. Second, the predictor must be significantly associated with the dependent measure. Third, the mediator must be significantly associated with the dependent variable, and finally, the effect of the predictor variable on the dependent variable is less after controlling for the mediator variable.

The channeling hypothesis indicates that parents channel their offspring into other socializing institutions that then influence the type and number of friends they have. Three potential mediating effects need testing. The first is the potential mediation of family influence on faith maturity by congregational influence, and the second is the potential mediation of family influence on faith maturity by peer influence. (A third possibility is that family influence on peer influence may be mediated by congregation influence and congregation influence on faith maturity may be mediated by peer influence.)

The first step in testing this hypothesis was to examine the potential mediation of the family influence on peer influence by congregational influence. A test showed no significant relationship between parents’ faith influence ability to predict congregational influence after controlling for effect of family type, denomination, race, sex, mother’s educational level, and father’s educational level. This means that this relationship does not meet the first criterion set out by Baron and Kenny (1986) and therefore eliminates the potential for congregational influence to act as a mediator between family influence and peer influence or family influence and faith maturity.

Step 2 examined the same problem as Step 1 but used the peer influence variable as the potential mediator. Step 2 of the process examined whether parental influence was related to the dependent (mediating) variable peer influence (Table 5). In this equation, several of the control variables were significantly related to peer influence as well as both mother’s and father’s influence (see Model 1). Model 2 introduced the parental influence. Mother’s influence is significant (beta = .144, \( p < .001 \)), and father’s influence is also significant (beta = .156, \( p < .001 \)). Family influence was able to predict peer influence and so meets the first criterion set out by Baron and Kenny (1986). The second criterion was that the predictor family influence must be significantly associated with the dependent variable faith maturity. This assumption is met based on the results of Hypothesis 1. The third criterion requires that the mediator peer influence must be significantly associated with the dependent variable faith maturity. This was confirmed in Hypothesis 2. The last criterion to be met to confirm that peer influence is acting as a mediator between family influence and faith maturity is that the effect of the predictor variable family influence on the dependent measure faith maturity is less after controlling for the mediator peer influence.
To test these criteria, two regressions were compared. The first regression is used from Hypothesis 1, which already confirmed a significant relationship between family influence and faith maturity. The results from the fourth model (Table 2), which had controlled for only significant variables, had the following values: The beta for mother’s and father’s faith influence was .152 and .136, respectively, and both were significant ($p < .001$). The second regression to compare to this had four models. Model 1 introduces the control variables, Model 2 the family influence variables, Model 3 the peer influence variable, and Model 4 retained all the significant variables. In Model 4, family type and sex remained significant as well as each of the predictor variables. Mother’s influence had a beta of .122 significant at $p < .001$. Father’s influence was also significant (beta = .081, $p < .01$). Peer influence was significant at $p < .001$ with a beta of .271. The $R^2$ of Model 4 was .140 ($p < .001$).

When comparing these two equations, the results show a definite decrease in both mother’s and father’s influence on faith maturity, meaning that peer influence is acting as a mediator between family influence and faith maturity. Mother’s standardized regression coefficients dropped from .154 to .122 while father’s scores dropped from .136 to .081.

The testing of Hypothesis 3 confirms that peer influence has a slight mediating effect on the relationship between family influence and faith maturity for both mothers and fathers, but congregational influence does not act as a mediator.

### Table 5: Standardized Regression Coefficients for Hypothesis 3, Step 2: A Test of Parental Influence on Peer Influence ($n = 1,429$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family type</td>
<td>-.021</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denomination</td>
<td>-.078**</td>
<td>-.072**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>-.051*</td>
<td>-.055**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>.143***</td>
<td>.171***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level of mother</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level of father</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>-.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother's Influence</td>
<td></td>
<td>.144***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father's Influence</td>
<td></td>
<td>.156***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.029***</td>
<td>.084***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$. 

To test these criteria, two regressions were compared. The first regression is used from Hypothesis 1, which already confirmed a significant relationship between family influence and faith maturity. The results from the fourth model (Table 2), which had controlled for only significant variables, had the following values: The beta for mother’s and father’s faith influence was .152 and .136, respectively, and both were significant ($p < .001$). The second regression to compare to this had four models. Model 1 introduces the control variables, Model 2 the family influence variables, Model 3 the peer influence variable, and Model 4 retained all the significant variables. In Model 4, family type and sex remained significant as well as each of the predictor variables. Mother’s influence had a beta of .122 significant at $p < .001$. Father’s influence was also significant (beta = .081, $p < .01$). Peer influence was significant at $p < .001$ with a beta of .271. The $R^2$ of Model 4 was .140 ($p < .001$).

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Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 is based on the aspect of the channeling hypothesis that claims a decline in the direct main effect from parents on faith maturity as the adolescent moves into early adulthood. To test this hypothesis, it had to first be established that there was an age by parental influence interaction. If there were a significant interaction, then the hypothesis would be broken down to test for specific effects. We examined an analysis of variance with faith maturity as the dependent variable and age and parental influence as factors. Parental influence was recoded based on quartiles for this analysis. The choice of analysis of variance over regression was based on the need to examine possible nonlinear relationships. The results indicated that there is no significant effect for the interaction of age by parental influence. An examination of the correlations in Table 1 suggests that only father’s influence might be combined with age to produce an effect. Father’s influence was recoded by quartiles. A subsequent ANOVA revealed no significant interaction effect for father’s influence by age on faith maturity ($p = .284$). The results suggest that as adolescents age, parents do not become either more or less influential.

Hypothesis 5

The channeling hypothesis proposes that as adolescents enter the young adult years, peer networks become the dominant faith influence in a person’s life. If this is the case, as adolescents age they are more influenced by their peers than when younger. We examined this hypothesis using ANOVA as with Hypothesis 4 to establish an age by peer interaction. In this analysis, the key interaction term was not significant ($p = .094$). Thus, the testing of Hypothesis 5 seems to also contradict the channeling hypothesis by showing no support for any significant interaction to be taking place between peer influence and the age of the adolescent. It appears that peer influence on adolescent faith maturity is relatively stable across the teen years in this sample.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between adolescent faith maturity levels and the predictor variables of parental, congregational, and peer influences with a focus on development by age. The study tested five hypotheses suggested by the channeling hypothesis that was originated by Himmelfarb (1980) and refined by Cornwall (1988). This
hypothesis suggested that the influence of parents on adult religious behavior is not direct but is channeled through socializing groups and peer networks.

**The role of peers and congregation as mediators.** The findings revealed a significant direct relationship between parental, congregational, and peer influences and the dependent variable faith maturity. These findings are consistent with Clark and Worthington (1987) and Cornwall (1988). Although congregation did not prove to be a mediator, the data suggest that parental influence on faith maturity is mediated by peers. The mediating effect through peers was small but significant at the \( p < .001 \) level. Mother’s standardized regression coefficients dropped from .154 to .122 while father’s scores dropped from .136 to .081. These results give initial support to the channeling hypothesis.

**Reconciling contradictory findings.** This study had its foundation based partially on the demonstration of contradictions in the literature about adolescent religiosity. Central to the discrepancies were the conflicting reports about the primacy of parental influence over the life course of the offspring. The findings of this study contradict the channeling hypothesis by giving support for the conclusions that neither parental nor peer influence significantly increases over the adolescent age period in relationship to faith maturity. In contrast to the findings of Cornwall (1988), J. A. Erickson (1992), and Hoge et al. (1994), these data suggest that the interactions of parental influence and peer influence with age showed no significant influence. These results support the work of Myers (1996) who argued “that parental influences have considerable staying power even as offspring move out of the home and form independent households” (p. 864).

The two main studies that represent support for declining influence and the channeling hypothesis were produced by Cornwall (1989) and J. A. Erickson (1992). In contrast, the study by Myers (1996) provided support for the idea that parents have a lasting influence on their offspring’s religious development. All three of these studies used different dependent measures, and hence it is difficult to assess the degree of contradiction between them. The findings of the current research, however, support parts of each formulation. Not only is the peer mediation of the channeling hypothesis (as in Cornwall and J. A. Erickson) supported but so is the stable influence of parents on their offspring. This implies that these studies might not be as contradictory as would seem. The findings in this study suggest that although family influence is relatively stable across adolescence, there is little doubt some of that influence is mediated by peer group. Future research might focus on
what aspects of parental support and control increase or decrease the mediating effect peers have on faith maturity.

Limitations and Strengths

Limitations of the study include the response group and operationalization of religiosity. The specific response group represented youth that were attached to a home that embraced to one degree or another the belief system of mainline Christianity in America. As a result, we cannot make any assumptions about nonchurchgoing families and their ability to influence their offspring. The sample did include both active and nonactive youth, which does give some credibility to data’s ability to describe more than just the adolescent who goes to church every week. The second limitation is in regard to the dependent variable faith maturity. There are some difficulties in operationalizing faith maturity. Several items had low correlation with the overall total. It should be noted that most of the low-scoring items were reverse coded in the survey, and the authors of the scale raised the question of the difficulty of getting accurate responses from reverse-coded religious items (Benson et al., 1993). The Faith Maturity Scale separates itself from other studies measuring religiosity in that it is not a simple measure of church attendance or frequency of prayer or homogeneity of beliefs among generations. The Faith Maturity Scale attempts to measure a much broader concept within a more developmental framework.

The importance of this study is that it helps clarify the importance of all three socializing institutions. It demonstrates that congregational influences are significant in adolescent development of faith maturity. It provides strong evidence for the strength of the peer influence in the process, and finally, it shows the lasting effect that parents have in influencing the faith maturity of their offspring. Furthermore, there is support for peers as a mediating variable in the channeling model.

Many studies examining religious socialization have focused on religious socialization as measured by the similarity between the parents and the offspring. However, religious socialization is not necessarily the replication of a list of belief or behavioral items. These intergenerational comparisons do not convey what is sought by religious socialization. In a study of a similar grouping of denominations as used in this study, Hoge et al. (1982) found that parents rated the goal of moral maturity as number one for their children. Because cohorts and period have changed, the meaning and behaviors indicating such maturity may also change. Indeed, parent-child similarities may indicate a lack of moral maturity. What this study has shown is that parents play an important role in the development of their offspring’s faith maturity.
REFERENCES


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