Predicting the Consequences of Imperfect Religious Socialization

Simon Brauer
Ph.D. Candidate
Sociology, Duke University
Background
Secularization theory today

Mechanisms: theorized and tested

Pluralism makes it more difficult to believe only one religion is true

Science makes belief in the supernatural implausible

Higher education removes people from their established social support systems and exposes them to secular theories

Conclusion: mixed or contrary evidence for each
Cross-generational/cohort decline

Move away from change *within* individuals to change between one generation/cohort and the next

...as backlash against the political activities of the religious right

OR

..as a self-reinforcing, demographic process
Cohort vs generational processes

Cohort processes
People have unique experiences, influenced by when they grow up

Generational processes
People have unique experiences, influenced by what their parents are like
Whose children are religiously most similar to them?

**Sociologists**
- Married, biological parents
- Parents who share the same religion
- Working fathers and stay-at-home mothers

**Psychologists**
- Parents with a *close* relationship with their child
- Parents with a *warm* relationship with their child
Goal

Use Voas’ three-category measure of religiosity to test whether generations slowly become less religious, even when taking into account parental and demographic characteristics.
Methods
Data

Main difficulty
Data needs to be multi-generational with multidimensional measures of religiosity

Longitudinal Study of Generations (LSoG)
Panel study of California families, starting in 1971 (Wave 1) and continuing to 2005 (Wave 8)
Defining religious categories

The “Religious”

*Self-reported religiosity*: Moderately or very religious

**AND**

*Service attendance*: at least monthly

**OR**

*Importance*: ranked in top 3 values OR strongly agrees that religion is the most important part of respondent’s life
Defining religious categories

The “secular”

Self-reported religiosity: Not at all religious

AND

Service attendance: Never

AND

Importance: ranked in bottom 2 values AND

*strongly disagrees that religion is the most important part of respondent’s life

*Excluded for waves 1 and 2
Defining religious categories

The “fuzzy”
Everyone else who wasn’t missing data
Matching parents and children

Children were matched with their “assigned” parent (that is, the participant believed to be their parent)

Some respondents gave information about someone other than the assigned parent
Parents’ religiosity

Respondents are matched with their parents using *the closest wave to when the respondent was 12*

Fills in some missing data when parents drop out of the survey

Many 2nd and 3rd generation respondents are matched to their parents’ religion much later than their adolescent years
Respondent variables

Year of birth (standardized)

Ethnicity (Ref = “White”)
Female

Has a college degree
Income (standardized)
Does not work
Parent variables

Parent-Respondent relationship variables
Closeness to mother/father (standardized)

Parent Variables
Mother’s/Father’s religiosity
Mother and father have same religion
Mother/Father has a college degree
Mother/Father does not work
Analyses

Multilevel ordinal regression models
Level 1: response at time X
Level 2: Respondent
Level 3: Family

Estimated in Stata using meologit
Results

Descriptives
Sample

3,681 in the complete LSoG sample

3,481 could be categorized (religious, fuzzy, secular) in at least one wave

3,642 had an identifiable and plausible age (though some with less certainty than others)

1,684 could be matched to their mother

1,399 could be matched to their father
Percent religious, fuzzy, and secular in each generation

- Secular
- Fuzzy
- Religious
Mother's religiosity, by generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2nd Gen</td>
<td>503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Gen</td>
<td>572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Gen</td>
<td>609</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Secular**
- **Fuzzy**
- **Religious**
Father’s religiosity, by generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2nd Gen</td>
<td>510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Gen</td>
<td>445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Gen</td>
<td>444</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bar chart showing the distribution of religiosity levels across different generations.
Proportion of respondents whose mothers do not work, by generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Count (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2nd Gen</td>
<td>488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Gen</td>
<td>537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Gen</td>
<td>657</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bar chart showing the proportion of respondents whose mothers do not work, categorized by generation and mother's religiosity (Secular, Fuzzy, Religious) for each generation.
Average closeness to mother, by mother’s religiosity and respondent generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2nd Gen (420)</th>
<th>3rd Gen (571)</th>
<th>4th Gen (604)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely close</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very close</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pretty close</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat close</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not too close</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Not close</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Mother's religiosity

Secular  Fuzzy Religious  Secular  Fuzzy Religious  Secular  Fuzzy Religious
Average closeness to father, by father’s religiosity and respondent generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2nd Gen (373)</th>
<th>3rd Gen (444)</th>
<th>4th Gen (440)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely close</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Very close</td>
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</table>

Father's religiosity:
- Secular
- Fuzzy Religious
Proportion of respondents whose parents have the same religion, by generation and respondent religiosity

2nd Gen (347) | 3rd Gen (343) | 4th Gen (336)

- Secular
- Fuzzy
- Religious

Respondent religiosity
Results
Model coefficients
Religiosity predicted by year of birth with respondent-level controls

Yearborn
Female
Hispanic
Black
Asian
Native American
Other race
Income
Education
Does not work

Coefficient value (log-odds); 2,293 Resp.
Religiosity predicted by year of birth with parent religiosity and alignment

Yearborn
Female
Hispanic
Black
Asian
Native American
Other race
Income
Education
Does not work
Fuzzy (Mom)
Religious (Mom)
Fuzzy (Dad)
Religious (Dad)
Parents have same religion

Coefficient value (log-odds); 683 Resp.
Religiosity predicted by year of birth with closeness to parents

- Yearborn
- Female
- Hispanic
- Black
- Asian
- Native American
- Other race
- Income
- Education
- Does not work
- Fuzzy (Mom)
- Religious (Mom)
- Fuzzy (Dad)
- Religious (Dad)
- Parents have same religion
- Education (Mom)
- Education (Dad)
- Mom does not work
- Dad does not work
- Closeness to Mom
- Closeness to Dad

Coefficient value (log-odds); 573 Resp.
Results

Predicted probabilities
Predicted religious makeup of the population, by year of birth (Neither parent is Religious)
Predicted religious makeup of the population, by year of birth (Father is Religious)
Predicted religious makeup of the population, by year of birth (both parents are Religious)
Take-aways, theory, and next steps
Take-aways

Across-cohort decline is evident even when controlling for parental religiosity, closeness, and socio-economic status

Children of religious parents are increasingly likely to become less religious across cohorts, even if their trajectory is delayed relative to others
Theory

Secularization as the *removal* of supportive forces as opposed to the *introduction* of disruptive forces

Parents still are highly influential through socializing their children

However, society no longer reinforces a religious identity or religious involvement if and when specific individuals become less religious than their parents
Future analyses and limitations

Account for political values

Address missing data

Explore other data sources
National US data
International data
Thank you.

simon.brauer@duke.edu
simonbrauer.github.io (website)
Figure 3: Religious makeup of Europe, the United States, and Israel by cohort.