

The Effects of R-Rated Movies on Adolescent and Young Adult Religiosity: Media as Self-Socialization

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Abstract Arnett (*J Youth Adolesc* 24:519–533, 1995) has suggested that media are a form of self-socialization, meaning that people choose the media they consume and in turn become socialized into certain beliefs and values. Research has suggested that viewing R-rated movies may lead to decreases in religiosity (Barry et al. in *J Adult Deviance* 19:66–78, 2012), but the direction of causality in this study is questionable. This research improves upon Barry, Padilla-Walker, and Nelson’s study by including control variables for peer and family influence while utilizing panel data for longitudinal data analysis. Findings from the 2003, 2005, and 2007–2008 waves of the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) suggest that viewing R-rated movies does indeed lead to decreases in church attendance and salience of religious faith, but it does not influence certainty and selective acceptance of religious beliefs. These results are discussed in light of self-socialization and their implications for how future studies might examine the relationship between R-rated movies and religiosity.

Keywords Adolescent religiosity · Religious socialization · Emerging adulthood

Introduction

Much research has been devoted to the topics of peers and family in the study of adolescent and young adult religious socialization (Desrosiers et al. 2011; Gunnoe and Moore 2002; Martin et al. 2003), while other potential agents of socialization, such as entertainment media, have received less attention. Entertainment media may include influences from sources such as movies, television, and books. While some studies have examined how adolescents and young adults relate these forms of

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media to their faith (Clark 2003), few have examined how these influences might lead to decreases in religiosity. One reason for this may be that the direction of causality between media content and religiosity is uncertain. Any cross-sectional examination of religiosity and media content cannot determine if consumption of certain types of media content lead people to be less religious, or whether people who are less religious are led to consume certain types of media content. Several studies have corroborated this explanation by showing that individual characteristics influence the types of media people choose to consume, including what they watch on television (Bobkowski 2009; Brown 2006). These findings are consistent with Arnett's (1995) research that classifies media as a form of self-socialization. Media differ from other traditional agents of socialization, such as family and education, because adolescents and young adults choose the media content they consume, which in turn plays a role in their socialization (1995).

A few studies have used longitudinal data to untangle the direction of causality between exposure to certain types of movie content and behavioral outcomes, such as adolescent drinking and smoking (Tanski et al. 2010; Titus-Ernstoff et al. 2008), but no such study has been undertaken for religious outcomes. The only research that has tested how entertainment media may affect religiosity is cross-sectional (Barry et al. 2012). This study seeks to clarify the causal direction of this relationship, and will improve upon Barry, Padilla-Walker, and Nelson's research by using longitudinal data analysis with appropriate peer and parental control measures to examine whether R-rated movies affect adolescent and young adult religiosity.

Adolescents and Young Adults in America

Much recent research has examined religiosity in the lives of American adolescents and young adults (Smith and Denton 2005; Smith and Snell 2009). Contrary to common notions, today's teens are generally not rejecting the religion of their parents (Smith and Denton 2005). Rather, their religious beliefs and practices are becoming less salient and are degenerating into what Smith and Denton (2005) have termed Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Despite the fact that teens have generally not abandoned the faith of their parents as they become young adults, they are still the least religious age group in the United States (Smith and Snell 2009). Competing concerns at this life stage may be one reason adolescents and young adults become relatively inactive in their religious faith, thereby relegating religion to a secondary role (Clydesdale 2007). While much of the decline in religiosity of young adults can be attributed to the life course (Desmond et al. 2010; Petts 2009; Regenerus and Uecker 2006; Uecker et al. 2007), there are still many teenagers and young adults with vibrant faith lives (Smith and Denton 2005; Smith and Snell 2009), suggesting that other factors control the extent to which religiosity will change during the adolescent and young adult years.

Much of the literature on religious socialization has focused on the effects of peers (Barry et al. 2010; Erickson 1992; Gunnoe and Moore 2002; Regnerus et al. 2004; Schwartz 2006), education (Hill 2011; Mayrl and Uecker 2011; McFarland et al. 2011; Uecker 2009), and family (Armet 2009; Desrosiers et al. 2011;

Martin et al. 2003). Families provide the foundation for religious socialization, with parental religiosity strongly influencing the religion of children (Armet 2009; Desrosiers et al. 2011; Martin et al. 2003). When children leave the family to attend school, influences from peers and the school itself emerge as new types of socialization (Larson and Richards 1994). During teenage years, peers may provide alternative definitions of religion that diverge from the values transmitted by parents. Peer influence may also lead to increases in adolescent religiosity as Gunnoe and Moore's (2002) work suggests, with the number of church attending peers leading to strong increases in religiosity.

In addition to peers, education is also a strong source of socialization (Uecker 2008). Secondary schools may influence religious outcomes, with research suggesting that adolescents who attend Protestant schools are more religious as young adults than those who attend Catholic or secular schools (Uecker 2009). Higher education has also been considered as a potentially detrimental influence on religiosity, although results have shown that higher education itself does not lead to decreases in religiosity (Desmond et al. 2010; Petts 2009; Regenerus and Uecker 2006; Uecker et al. 2007). Others have debated whether college attendance leads to theological liberalism, with Reimer's findings showing that church-going Protestants who attend secular institutions experience some theological liberalism (Reimer 2012), while Mayrl and Uecker's (2011) study suggests there is no influence.

Media are another potential source of socialization for adolescent and young adult religiosity, and many have suggested its influence on religious identities (Ammerman 2003; Berger and Ezzy 2009; Clark 2003; Hoover 2006). One study showed emerging adults integrating the concept of the "force" from Star Wars into the description of their religious beliefs (Arnett and Jensen 2002). Even though media influence the behaviors and religiosity of adolescents and young adults (Barry et al. 2012; Berger and Ezzy 2009), media have received less attention as a source of religious socialization, despite the fact that media use has become ubiquitous and is a strong source of socialization during emerging adulthood (Arnett 2007).

Unlike family socialization, adolescents and young adults usually choose the type of media they consume, and their choice of media is the result of who they are as a person (Bobkowski 2009; Brown 2006). This is consistent with Arnett's (1995) suggestion that media are a form of self-socialization. Media socialize adolescents and young adults by reinforcing their current beliefs, or proposing new beliefs and values that may be tangential to their reason for having chosen that form of media in the first place.

Other fields have studied how media influence adolescents and young adults, with numerous studies tying entertainment media to substance use and abuse (National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse X 2005; Tanski et al. 2010; Titus-Ernstoff et al. 2008). Viewing R-rated movies is associated with an increased risk of using marijuana (National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse X 2005), and doubles the risk of smoking (Titus-Ernstoff et al. 2008). Teens who watch more than three R-rated movies per month are five times more likely to drink alcohol compared to teens who do not watch R-rated movies (National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse X 2005). Other forms of media, such as violent video games, have been tied to drinking and drug use (Padilla-Walker et al.

2010). Parenting may serve to mitigate the negative effects of media, with parental restriction of R-rated movies having a protective factor on underage alcohol use (Tanski et al. 2010).

However, research on the interplay between media and religion has not generally focused on how media encourage or discourage religiosity (Arnett and Jensen 2002; Berger and Ezzy 2009). One example of research that did examine the positive and negative effects of media on religiosity was Barry, Padilla-Walker, and Nelson's (2012) study, which used structural equation modeling to clarify the effects of parents and frequency of media use on church attendance and salience of religious faith. The results showed that violent video games and pornography have direct and indirect effects on religious faith, often by affecting the internalization of prosocial values. One limitation of this study was that the data were cross-sectional, which casts some doubt on the direction of causality between media and religiosity (Barry et al. 2012).

Theoretical Foundation

Even though several studies have shown that viewing R-rated movies is related to delinquency (National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse X 2005; Titus-Ernstoff et al. 2008), these studies have failed to provide a theoretical explanation for this connection. Barry et al. (2012) suggest that violent video games and pornography lead to decreases in religiosity because they inhibit the internalization of prosocial values. But the question remains, do other forms of entertainment media such as R-rated movies affect religiosity? Glaser's Differential Identification Theory (1956) may shed light on this question. Originating in the field of criminology, Differential Identification Theory extended Sutherland's Differential Association Theory (1955) by suggesting that the reason why certain definitions of crime are favored over others is because of identification with the person who presents the definitions of crime. This theory has not been applied to religion, but its application would suggest that identification with those who put forth favorable or unfavorable definitions of religion would influence religiosity. While parents or religious leaders may provide definitions suggesting that adolescents and young adults attend church and that faith should be important in their lives, fictional characters from R-rated movies may provide definitions that suggest church attendance and living a life guided by religious faith are less desirable. Even if R-rated movies do not provide definitions that are opposed to religious belief, they may relegate religious practice and salience to be of secondary concern in life. Even when adolescents experience parental definitions of religion that are favorable to religiosity, the definitions of peers and media may create cognitive dissonance. Others have suggested that when cognitive dissonance exists between religious beliefs and media usage, decreases in religious practice occur (Nelson et al. 2010).

Despite the fact that Differential Identification Theory provides rationale for testing whether viewing R-rated movies affects religiosity, demonstrating that this theory is the best explanation for the relationship between R-rated movies and

religiosity is difficult. Movie content would need to be examined and respondent identification with characters would need to be measured in order to make claims about the explanatory power of Differential Identification Theory. Unfortunately, this depth of analysis cannot be performed, given the available data. Nevertheless, applying Differential Identification Theory to the study of media and religiosity suggests a possible connection, thereby providing the rationale for this study.

Aims of This Study

This study seeks to examine the relationship between viewing R-rated movies and religiosity. Are adolescents and young adults who frequently view R-rated movies more likely to experience decreases in religiosity and religious belief? The literature suggests that certain forms of media such as violent video games and pornography do indeed influence religiosity (Barry et al. 2012). While it is difficult to determine the exact mechanisms of how R-rated movies influence religiosity, it is reasonable to expect that compared to movies of other ratings, R-rated movies would contain more characters, ideas, and themes that are contrary to the norms and values of religion. By viewing these R-rated movies, adolescents may identify with characters who view religious faith as unimportant, which would lead to declines in church attendance and salience of faith.

In addition, the characters and themes from R-rated movies may lead adolescents and young adults to question or reject certain religious beliefs or values that are questioned or rejected in R-rated movies. This study will examine these ideas by testing whether viewing R-rated movies leads to decreases in church attendance and salience of faith, and if viewing R-rated movies affects one's certainty and selective acceptance of religious belief.

Data and Methods

This study uses weighted data from the 2003, 2005, and 2007–2008 waves of the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), which is a series of national surveys of adolescents, young adults, and their parents. In the 2003 wave of the survey, all respondents were adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17, but in future waves of the survey some of the respondents entered young adulthood. All three waves of the survey are utilized in order to capture the necessary control and dependent variables. Parents of respondents were only interviewed in the 2003 wave of the survey, which is used for several of the parental controls. All of the key independent variables for this study are from the 2005 wave. The 2007–2008 wave was used to measure the dependent variables, as well as some of the control variables, such as whether the respondent was attending college at the time the third wave of the survey was administered. All of the dependent variables from the 2007–2008 wave were also contained in the 2005 wave of the survey, which allows for longitudinal analysis using lagged dependent variable models.

Dependent Variables

Religiosity is measured using self-described salience of religious faith and church attendance. Salience of faith is measured on a five point scale ranging from “not at all important” to “extremely important,” and church attendance is measured on a seven point scale ranging from “never” to “more than once a week.” In addition, the effects of R-rated movies and non-religious peers will be regressed on certainty of belief and selective acceptance of religious belief. Certainty of belief is measured using the question: “In the last year, how much, if at all, have you had doubts about whether your religious beliefs are true?” The response categories for this question were “many doubts,” “some doubts,” “a few doubts,” and “no doubts.” In addition, the effects of peer and entertainment media socialization will be tested on selective acceptance of religious belief using the question: “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?” This question is different from other measures of moral relativism on the NSYR, as it specifically tests whether the respondent believes that they can pick and choose beliefs within their own religion. Table 1 shows the distribution of the dependent variables.

Table 1 Frequencies of dependent variables

	%
Importance of faith	
Extremely important	18.7
Very important	23.9
Somewhat important	29.4
Not very important	14.6
Not at all important	13.3
Church attendance	
More than once a week	6.8
Once a week	12.5
2–3 times a month	10.3
Once a month	7.5
Many times a year	6.6
A few times a year	19.6
Never	36.6
Religious doubts	
Many doubts	4.8
Some doubts	11.4
A few doubts	29.6
No doubts	54.2
Pick and choose beliefs	
Yes	52.1
No	47.9

Key Independent Variables

One potential source of religious socialization may be entertainment media. In order to measure the potential effects of entertainment media, respondents were asked “about how many, if any, of the movies and videos that you watch are rated R?” The possible responses include “all,” “most,” “some,” “a few,” and “none.” Previous research has also suggested that peers influence religiosity (Gunnoe and Moore 2002; Regnerus et al. 2004; Baker and Smith 2009), so a measure of the number of the respondent’s five closest friends that “are not religious” is included. Parental religiosity also influences the religiosity of emerging adults, so a measure of parents’ salience of religious faith is included (Vaidyanathan 2011). Only the parent who responded to the 2003 wave of the survey is included in this measure of salience of faith. Possible responses to this question range from “extremely important” to “not at all important.”

Control Variables

Standard demographic controls such as age, race (white = 1), gender (female = 1), and region (South = 1) are included in this analysis. Family background is also included, as the literature suggests the importance of controlling for whether one’s biological parents are married to each other (Denton 2012; Ellison et al. 2011; Petts 2009), share the same religious beliefs (Bader and Desmond 2006; Petts 2011), and how close the respondent is to their parents (Myers 1996). Recent research by Uecker and Ellison has challenged the notion that growing up in a single-parent household affects parental religious affiliation and church attendance (Uecker and Ellison 2012), but this measure of parental stability will still be included as the debate seems to be ongoing. A measure of parental closeness is also included, since it has been shown to be an important factor in religious socialization (Myers 1996). To create the measure of parental closeness, the respondent’s indication of how close they are to each parent was combined to create a measure of total parental closeness. If the respondent was from a single-parent household, then the level of closeness to that parent was doubled. This methodology for creating a measure of parental closeness matches previous methodologies (Bader and Desmond 2006).

Finally, a measure of personal autonomy is included, as it has been shown to lead to decreases in adolescent religiosity (Potvin and Stone 1985). The effects of attending a four-year college or university will be examined, since much recent research has debated whether college attendance influences religiosity (Desmond et al. 2010; Petts 2009; Regenerus and Uecker 2006; Uecker et al. 2007). Religious faith salience and church attendance from the 2005 wave of the survey have also been included as controls. Finally, the “RELTRAD” scale is used as a control for the religious affiliation of the youth respondent (Steensland et al. 2000).

Analytical Model

First, the connection between salience of faith and viewing R-rated movies will be examined, to ensure that respondents with different levels of faith view R-rated movies. Next, ordinary least squares regression analysis will be used to study the relationship

between peers, media, and levels of religiosity and religious belief. Finally, logistic regression will be used to determine if the respondent believes they can pick and choose their religious beliefs. For the logistic regression model, the Hosmer and Lemeshow (2000) statistic will be used to measure goodness of fit, with an insignificant statistic indicating a good fit. The ordinary least squares and logistic regression models were run as lagged dependent variable models by controlling for the dependent variable using its wave two measure. Longitudinal analysis is important for this study as one's religious identity may also determine the types of media they choose (Bobkowski 2009; Brown 2006). Previous research does not suggest an optimal lag time for examining the relationship between viewing R-rated movies and religiosity, and the NSYR only offers a lag time of 2 years. However, using a lagged dependent variable model is necessary because it helps to ensure the relationship between viewing R-rated movies and religiosity does not exist solely because less religious respondents choose to view more R-rated movies. Using a lagged dependent variable will help to clarify the direction of causality, strengthening the idea that certain forms of entertainment media, such as R-rated movies, may sometimes lead to decreases in religiosity.

Results

Table 2 below examines whether salience of religious faith is connected to the frequency of viewing R-rated movies. As Table 2 shows, there is some decrease in the frequency of viewing R-rated movies for respondents who claim that faith is important to them, yet many still view R-rated movies. Among respondents whose faith is "very important" to them 31.0 % claim that most of the movies they view are rated R, and 20.9 % whose faith is "extremely important" to them claim that most of the movies they view are rated R. While these percentages are lower than those whose faith is "not at all important" to them (45.3 %), it still represents a sizable percentage of the respondents whose faith is important to them. Only 13.2 % whose faith is "extremely important" to them claim that none of the movies they watch are rated R, meaning that the overwhelming majority of respondents from different levels of faith salience view at least some R-rated movies.

The results for the analysis of the effects of viewing R-rated movies on adolescent and young adult religiosity are presented below in Table 3. The frequency of viewing R-rated movies from the second wave does negatively influence self-reports of faith salience ($-.07^{**}$) from the third wave. The number of non-religious friends has a significant, negative effect on salience of faith as well ($-.07^{***}$), while parental measures of faith salience from the first wave had significant, positive effects ($.09^{***}$). In addition, parental monitoring of media had a significant effect on salience of faith in wave 3 ($.05^{**}$), suggesting that parental monitoring of media is a protective factor.

Similar results were found for the effects of viewing R-rated movies on church attendance. Viewing R-rated movies in the second wave had a negative effect on church attendance in the third wave ($-.20^{***}$). The number of friends who are not religious in the second wave also had a negative effect on church attendance in the third wave ($-.06^*$), while parental salience of faith had a positive effect ($.06^*$).

Table 2 Importance of faith and viewing R-rated movies

Faith importance	How many...are rated R?				
	None (%)	A Few (%)	Some (%)	Most (%)	All (%)
Not at all important	0.7	12.6	36.8	45.3	4.6
Not very important	1.6	10.4	39.4	44.3	4.4
Somewhat important	2.0	16.6	38.3	40.2	2.8
Very important	5.3	23.3	38.5	31.0	2.0
Extremely important	13.2	29.9	33.3	20.9	2.7

Table 3 The effects of viewing R-rated movies on religiosity

	Faith salience (2007)		Church attendance (2007)	
	b	β	b	β
R-rated movies (2005)	-.07**	-.05	-.20***	-.09
Friends not religious (2005)	-.07***	-.08	-.06*	-.04
Parents salience of faith (2003)	.09***	.09	.06*	.04
Salience of faith (2005)	.55***	.52	.35***	.20
Church attendance (2005)	.06***	.10	.44***	.47
Parent controls				
Parents monitor media (2003)	.05**	.05	.07*	.04
Parents married (2005)	-.09	-.03	-.07	-.02
Parents same faith (2005)	.10*	.04	.22*	.05
Close to parents (2005)	.01	.02	.02	.02
Father's education (2003)	.00	-.01	.02	.02
Parents income (2003)	-.05***	-.07	.02	.01
Respondent demographics				
Age	.05***	.05	-.03	-.02
Race (white = 1)	-.17***	-.06	-.14	-.03
College (2007)	-.03	-.01	.00	.00
Gender (female = 1)	.09*	.03	-.19**	-.04
Personal autonomy (2005)	.06	.02	.18*	.03
South (= 1)	.09*	.03	.03	.01
Black protestant (2005)	-.14	-.03	-.28	-.03
Mainline protestant (2005)	-.11	-.03	-.62***	-.08
Catholic (2005)	-.17**	-.05	-.28**	-.06
Jewish (2005)	-.12	-.01	-.35	-.02
Evangelical (2005)	.02	.06	-.05*	-.05
Other (2005)	.22*	.10	.39*	.04

Faith salience model: $n = 2038$, $r^2 = .56$ Church attendance model: $n = 2041$, $r^2 = .47$ * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Again, parental monitoring of media acted as a protective factor, having a positive effect on church attendance in the third wave (.07*). One control variable of note is whether parents of the respondent had the same faith, which had positive effects on salience of faith and church attendance, respectively (.10*, .22*).

In addition to examining the effects of R-rated movies on forms of religiosity such as salience of faith and church attendance, the effects of R-rated movies on certainty of belief and selective acceptance of religious belief were also examined. Even though viewing R-rated movies had negative effects on religiosity, no significant effect was found for the effects of viewing R-rated movies on religious doubts. As Table 4 shows,

Table 4 The effects of viewing R-rated movies on religious beliefs

	Religious doubts (2007)		Pick and choose beliefs (2007)	
	b	β	b	Odds ratio
R-rated movies (2005)	.02	.02	.06	1.06
Friends not religious (2005)	.03	.04	.05	1.05
Parents salience of faith (2003)	-.01	-.02	-.04	.96
Pick and choose beliefs (2005)			.86***	2.36
Religious doubts (2005)	.39***	.37		
Salience of faith (2005)	-.08**	-.10	-.25***	.78
Church attendance (2005)	-.01	-.03	-.10**	.91
Parent controls				
Parents monitor media (2003)	.03	.04	-.02	.98
Parents married (2005)	-.05	-.03	-.09	.92
Parents same faith (2005)	.01	.01	.09	1.10
Close to parents (2005)	.01	.02	.05	1.05
Father's education (2003)	.01	.02	.03	1.03
Parents income (2003)	<.01	.01	.03	1.03
Respondent demographics				
Age	-.04*	-.07	-.03	.98
Race (white = 1)	.05	.03	.15	1.16
Gender (female = 1)	-.07	-.04	.06	1.06
College (2007)	.07	.04	.27**	1.31
Personal autonomy (2005)	-.11	-.05	-.24	.79
South (= 1)	-.06	-.04	-.14	.87
Black protestant (2005)	-.03	-.01	-.24	.78
Mainline protestant (2005)	.10	.04	.13	1.14
Catholic (2005)	.05	.03	.56***	1.74
Jewish (2005)	-.07	-.01	-.24	.79
Evangelical (2005)	-.01	-.01	-.10	.90
Other (2005)	-.05	-.02	-.25	.78

Religious doubts model: $n = 1347$, $r^2 = .19$

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

viewing R-rated movies and the number of friends who are not religious did not have any significant effects on whether the respondent experienced doubts in regard to their religious beliefs (.02). Age ($-.04^*$) was the only variable, besides previous levels of faith and doubt, to have a significant effect in the model.

A similar finding occurred in regards to the effect of peers and viewing R-rated movies on whether the respondent believed it was okay to pick and choose religious views. R-rated movies are hypothesized to be related to selective acceptance of religious beliefs because respondents who view R-rated movies perhaps find some of their religious views challenged, and while maintaining belief as a whole, may eschew certain beliefs. The findings from Table 4 do not support this hypothesis, however. Neither viewing R-rated movies nor the number of friends who are not religious had any significant effect on picking and choosing religious beliefs. Besides the control measures of religiosity, only respondents who were in college (odds ratio = 1.31**) and were Catholic (odds ratio = 1.74***) were more likely to pick and choose religious beliefs.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study has improved upon previous research by utilizing longitudinal analysis to examine the effects of viewing R-rated movies on adolescent and young adult religiosity, while including vital controls that have demonstrated effects on religiosity, such as peer and family influence. The results suggest that even when controlling for these effects, viewing R-rated movies still has negative effects on salience of faith and church attendance. These results are substantively significant because they suggest that religiosity may be influenced not only by traditional modes of socialization such as peers and family, but also by media content, such as that found in R-rated movies.

In addition to measures of religiosity such as salience of faith and church attendance, this study also examined the effects that peers and media might have on whether respondents doubt their own religious beliefs, or believe it is acceptable to pick and choose religious beliefs. Neither peers nor viewing R-rated movies had significant effects on either of these measures of belief. These findings suggest that viewing R-rated movies may influence the practice and importance of religion in one's daily life, but it does not affect one's beliefs. These findings are consistent with Smith and Snell's (2009) suggestion that even though the importance and practice of religion declines for many adolescents and young adults, most do not lose their faith or change their fundamental beliefs.

One of the main challenges of examining the effects of R-rated movies on religiosity is determining the direction of causation. Viewing R-rated movies might influence the religiosity adolescents and young adults, but it also may be the case that adolescents and young adults who are less religious are more likely to choose to view R-rated movies. Arnett (1995) described this process as self-socialization. Unlike other forms of socialization, such as family and school socialization, adolescents and young adults are able to choose the types of media that ultimately play a role in their religious socialization. Adolescents and young adults choose to

consume media for many reasons, including entertainment, identity formation, and youth culture identification (Arnett 1995). Even though less religious youth being more likely to view R-rated movies may account for some of the relationship between R-rated movies and religiosity, it seemingly does not explain the entire effect of R-rated movies on religiosity, as made evident by the results from the lagged dependent variable models. Adolescent and young adult religiosity seems to be socialized in part by the content of R-rated movies, above and beyond any effect of less religious adolescents and young adults being more likely to view R-rated movies. While Differential Identification Theory suggests that the content of R-rated movies may explain the relationship between media and religiosity, the exact mechanism of how media affects religiosity remains to be seen. Hopefully future research will continue to examine the mechanisms of how entertainment media socialize adolescent and young adult religiosity.

Limitations and Future Research

As mentioned throughout this study, there are several limitations to this research. One possible limitation involves the measures of concepts such as salience of faith and religious doubt. These survey questions are subjective and respondents may interpret them differently, even in ways contrary to the intentions of researchers. As always, any conclusions that are drawn from this survey research should acknowledge this possible limitation. Another limitation involves the theoretical framework for this study. Differential Identification Theory justifies the hypothesis that viewing R-rated movies will lead to decreases in religiosity, but proving that this theory properly explains the relationship between R-rated movies and religiosity remains difficult. There is no guarantee that the R-rated movies viewed by these respondents contain characters and themes that might lead to decreases in religiosity. It is also possible that movies of other ratings (e.g. PG-13) may influence adolescents to experience decreases in religiosity. Despite the fact that this study suggests a relationship between R-rated movies and religiosity, further research that examines the content of R-rated movies would be needed to claim that Differential Identification Theory truly explains the relationship between R-rated movies and religiosity.

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