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Parental Divorce and the “Switching” of Religious Identity

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This article examines the impact of parental divorce on the likelihood that an individual has changed their religious identity. Using data from the National Survey of Family and Households, we use a theoretical framework of family structure and community ties to test the hypothesis that religious mobility is more likely among children of divorce compared to those from intact families. Distinguishing between parental divorce in childhood and parental divorce in adulthood allows us to assess the impact of parental divorce on religious socialization. For individuals raised as either moderate Protestant, conservative Protestant or Catholic, parental divorce increases the likelihood of both switching to another religion and apostasy. The impact of divorce is particularly strong for Catholics and conservative Protestants, who are, in general, less likely to be religious mobile. These findings add religious disaffiliation to the set of likely sequelae of parental divorce. In addition, the results of the study highlight the need to consider the relationship between family structure and religious processes in a community context.

The impact of parental divorce on the subsequent religious behavior of their children is unclear, despite well-established connections between divorce and religion (Chan and Heaton 1979; Wilson and Filsinger 1986; Brodbar-Nemzer 1986; Stoltzenberg, Blair-Loy and Waite 1995). Indeed, high levels of apostasy among children of divorced parents suggest that family disruption is closely related to religious disaffiliation (Hadaway and Roof 1988). Further, the stability of religious identification is associated with the strength of bonds to family and religious communities, as evidenced by Sherkat (1991) and Hadaway and Marler (1993) in their studies of the effects of family background on the propensity to change religious affiliation.

In this article, we hypothesize that religious mobility is more likely among children of divorced parents than among those from intact families. Parental divorce can produce discontinuities in social structures that lead to a weakening of bonds to both one's family and religious community. Because of this weakening of ties, it is likely that children of divorced parents will experience weakened ties to their childhood religious identification. When that happens, crossing the boundary out of one religious community and into another may be both more feasible and desirable.

Other researchers have observed that modern religions are increasingly expected to meet the dictates of personal lifestyles and are subject to selection in an “open market” (Warner 1993, Bellah et al. 1985, Sherkat and Wilson 1995). Because of the erosion to community ties, including religious community ties, divorce may be one of the factors precipitating the consideration of a new religious identity and community. Thornton (1989) noted that because there are similarities in trends of religious and family life in the United States, there are solid theoretical reasons to expect a causal or reciprocal relationship to exist between them. In addition, because religion and family are the two remaining dimensions of modern society relegated to the private sphere (Berger 1967), investigating the impact of parental divorce on affiliation to religious groups should provide a clearer understanding of both family and community.

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PARENTAL DIVORCE AND SOCIAL TIES

Previous research has examined the effects of parental divorce on adult children's familial, emotional, and professional well-being. There is substantial evidence that the long-term consequences of parental divorce on children include instability later in life. Compared to those from intact families, children of divorce usually do not fare as well academically (Astone and McLanahan 1991), professionally (Biblarz and Raftery 1993), or emotionally (Kulka and Weingarten 1979; McLanahan 1988; Glenn and Kramer 1985). They tend to rely more on peers than on family members (McLanahan and Bumpass 1988). At the same time, the ability to form and maintain new interpersonal relationships is weakened. Children of divorce are less likely than children of intact families to get married or stay married (Kobrin and Waite 1984; Keith and Finlay 1988; Glenn and Kramer 1987). They are more likely to cohabit (Thornton 1989) and worry about getting divorced if they are married (Webster et al. 1995).

The parent-child relationship in later life also exhibits signs of disunity following parental divorce in childhood. Compared to married parents and adult children, weaker emotional ties exist between adult children of divorce and their parents (Aquilino 1994; Hamon 1992; Spitze and Miner 1992; Umberson 1992). They tend to exchange less instrumental and social support than stable families (Eggebeen 1992; White 1992). Social interactions between parents and adult children of divorce are less frequent (Lawton, Silverstein and Bengtson 1994; Aquilino 1994) and they are less likely to live nearby (Climo 1992). Therefore it is likely that another consequence of the intergenerational distance and relationship instability resulting from parental divorce may be a greater propensity among children of divorce to change their religious identity.

While it is generally agreed that the family is an essential element for understanding patterns of religious affiliation, little attention has been paid to the effects of family structure on religious affiliation (Thomas and Cornwall 1990). Instead, previous research focuses on three possible paths that may link the parental relationship and religious disaffiliation later in life: (1) through the rejection of parental beliefs; (2) through the quality of emotional relationship between parents and children, and (3) through the disruption of religious socialization during childhood.

The rejection hypothesis asserts that poor family relationships may lead to a rejection of what parents symbolize, including their religious beliefs (e.g., Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977). Despite various tests of this hypothesis using a variety of social psychological measures (e.g. agreements, conflict, etc.), little supporting evidence has been found (Hunsberger 1980).

Another body of research explores the hypothesis that religious switching is more likely when the quality of relationship between the child and parents is poor. Accordingly, research focusing on apostates found that they are more likely to have distant relationships with fathers, but the causal sequence is unclear: Do poor parent-child relationships lead to apostasy, or does apostasy lead to a poor relationship? Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) find evidence suggesting that closer parent-child attachments in childhood lead to stable religiosity, whereas distant or avoidant parent-child relationships lead to a greater likelihood of sudden conversion. More recent work demonstrates that closeness to parents decreases the likelihood of apostasy and yet increases the likelihood of switching to liberal Protestant groups (Sherkat and Wilson 1995).

In addition, some evidence exists that apostasy is associated with the level of religious socialization an individual experienced in childhood (Hunsberger 1983), and that the home environment during childhood is an important determinant of apostasy (Hunsberger and Brown 1984). The family plays an important role in religious socialization in a variety of ways and is an important element in the maintenance of religious ties. Hadaway and Marler (1993) identify three characteristics of stayers: religious socialization in childhood, homogeneous affiliation patterns within families, and contact with extended family. Although there appears to be a weak relationship between family measures and switching, family characteristics are strong predictors of apostasy: Apostasy is more likely when own or parental marriages are not religiously homogamous (Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990). Apostates also tend to experience religious doubts earlier in life,

suggesting the importance of familial socialization in the establishment of a religious identity (Brinkerhoff and Mackie 1993). Our analysis offers a further test of the family socialization hypothesis by examining the impact of family disruption on an individual's religious ties.

A BRIEF REVIEW OF DETERMINANTS OF RELIGIOUS CHANGE

The rate of switching religious identity varies significantly among different denominations. For example, individuals who were raised Catholic are less likely to change religious identity than those raised Protestant (Hunsberger and Brown 1984; Bahr 1982; Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990). But it is even less likely that individuals raised as Protestant will switch to Catholicism: approximately 10 percent of persons raised Catholic convert to a Protestant denomination, yet less than 3 percent of Protestants convert to Catholicism. The lower rates of switching may reflect the greater ideological boundaries that exist between Catholicism and Protestantism than between different denominations of Protestantism (Kluegel 1980; Mueller 1971). Such boundaries may help to explain why Catholics are more likely to apostatize than to switch (Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990). Protestants are more likely to switch because the transition to a similar Protestant denomination is relatively easy (Babchuck and Whitt 1990).

Accordingly, we propose a second hypothesis to this inquiry: response to parental divorce will differ by the religion in which one was raised. Catholics are expected to react to parental divorce more strongly than do Protestants, because divorce is more problematic in Catholicism (Lanski 1963). Following a parental divorce, Catholics may feel more removed from community and therefore be more likely to switch following parental divorce than Protestants. While it is expected that Catholics will be less likely to switch overall, we hypothesize that Catholics who experienced parental divorce will be more likely to change their religious affiliation compared to Protestants.

Social structural factors that are associated with religious disaffiliation include gender, age, family income, education, and race. Each of these factors is also associated with the likelihood of having strong or enduring ties to community, including religious community. Men are more likely to disaffiliate than women (Hadaway and Roof 1988, Wilson and Sherkat 1994) and may respond to changes in family situations differently than do women (Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990). However, Sherkat (1990) finds that females are slightly more likely than males to switch. Similarly, women are less likely to change, but, if they do, they are more likely to switch than to apostatize (Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990). The finding that women are more likely to switch their religious affiliation, but less likely to disaffiliate all together, is consistent with both the perception that women experience greater religious socialization in childhood and the observation that women are more likely to form and maintain other social relationships (Hagestad 1986).

Younger persons and the never married are more likely to switch than are older persons because of fewer ties to other family members (Stolzenberg et al. 1995). The higher educated are more likely to disaffiliate because intellectualism leads to individualism and away from the community orientation inherent in religious affiliation (Hadaway 1989, Caplovitz and Sherrow 1977). Higher income is also associated with more switching. Educational and occupational standing are related to switching between liberal and more conservative Protestant denominations (Roof and Hadaway 1979). In addition, changes in income and occupational status are frequently associated with changes in social networks.

Research on racial patterns of religious change suggests that African Americans are less likely experience religious change as a consequence of greater social embeddedness and cultural solidarity (Ellison and Sherkat 1990, Ellison and Sherkat 1995). Family and community ties serve to link African Americans to local religious institutions, although this relationship does not necessarily deter switching (Sherkat and Ellison 1991). In fact, African Americans are less likely to switch religions than whites (Sherkat 1991). Although previous research has not explicitly considered differences between Hispanics and other racial and ethnic groups, we expect that

Hispanics will be less likely to disaffiliate. This may, in part, be a function of the strength of their family and community ties, but it may also reflect the fact that most Hispanics are Catholics, a denomination typified by less switching behavior.

DATA AND METHOD

Data: We use the nationally representative 1987 National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH). This data set contains information on 13,017 respondents, including information on their current and childhood religious affiliation and family structure. Whereas the generalizability of many previous studies of religious mobility has been constrained by sample size and selectivity, the NSFH sample provides greater statistical power and is generalizable to more mature adults.

A limitation of the NSFH is that it lacks unambiguous information intermarriage that could have enhanced this study (Musick and Wilson 1995). First, there is no data on the religious orientation of the respondent's parents. Because religiously mixed marriages are more likely to result in divorce, we expect that being unable to control for the religious homogamy of the parental marriage may slightly overstate the effect of parental divorce. More importantly, the NSFH only provides information about whether the respondent changed religion upon entering the first marriage, but no data about subsequent marriages or any religious identity changes following. Thus the present study design does not allow for this exploration, and its scope is beyond this article.

Our sample consists of the 11,372 respondents who reported that they were raised as either Catholics or as mainline Protestants (see Mueller 1971). Of this sample, 3,461 respondents were raised as Catholics and 7,911 were raised as Protestants. Among Protestants, we further distinguish between liberal and moderate Protestants ($n=4,129$) and conservative Protestants ($n=3,782$). We exclude Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses because these two groups do not fit into the Protestant denomination structure as outlined by Mueller (1971).

Variables: Following Sherkat and Wilson (1995) and Sherkat and Ellison (1991), we define conservative Protestants identifying with any of the following religions: Baptists, Assembly of God, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Church of God, Pentecostal or Holiness churches. In general, because Conservative Protestants tend to have more rigid ideological boundaries, they are less likely to switch religions overall, but parental divorce may alter community and religious ties such that switching becomes more compelling. We also expect parental divorce to be positively associated with switching from Catholicism to Protestantism. This relationship is expected to be stronger for conservative Protestant denominations to the extent that they may offer more family-like connections. Distinguishing between moderate and conservative Protestants is also important for clarifying racial and ethnic differences in switching. Nearly twelve percent of our sample is African American, but African Americans comprise less than 3% of the Catholic sample, a little more than 6% of the moderate Protestants, and nearly 30% of the conservative Protestants (see Table 1).

Religious preference switching is defined as the changing of one's religious identity to either another religion or denomination; or to no religion, that is, to disaffiliate entirely (Bromley 1988). While apostasy has been conceptualized as a multidimensional process, disaffiliation from one's community of origin and diminution of belief (Brinkerhoff and Mackie 1993), we focus on a single dimension: disaffiliation from religious community. Approximately 22 percent of our sample reports a religious affiliation different from the one in which they were raised. Of this 22 percent, nearly 4 percent reported that they are "none".

The primary dependent variable for this study is a dichotomous measure of whether the respondent reports a religious orientation that is different from the one in which they were raised (the reference is no change). We also stratify this measure by the respondent's childhood religious affiliation to reflect possible routes of religious mobility. The three possible outcomes for Catholics

are switching to a moderate Protestant denomination, to a conservative Protestant denomination, or to none. For each group of Protestants, we investigate the following switching options: switching to Catholicism, switching from a moderate to a conservative, or a conservative to a moderate Protestant denomination, switching from a conservative to another conservative, or moderate to another moderate Protestant denomination, or becoming a none. Respondents who changed from other miscellaneous religions are excluded from the analysis for parsimony and small cell size. The distribution of switchers among these categories is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Means of Variables Used in the Analyses (weighted)

| Variable | Entire Sample | Raised Catholic | Raised Moderate | Raised Conservative |
|---|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| No switch | 78.25 | 85.93 | 70.15 | 80.00 |
| Switch to: | | | | |
| Catholic | | - | 3.60 | 1.72 |
| Moderate Protestant | | 6.58 | 14.42 | 10.26 |
| Conservative Protestant | | 3.01 | 7.40 | 5.68 |
| None | | 4.48 | 4.43 | 2.34 |
| Parental divorce in childhood | 8.53 | 8.27 | 7.20 | 10.64 |
| Parental divorce in adulthood | 4.54 | 4.17 | 4.15 | 5.50 |
| Raised Catholic*Parental divorce in childhood | 2.80 | | | |
| Raised Catholic*Parental divorce in adulthood | 1.41 | | | |
| Divorced | 10.75 | 10.05 | 9.69 | 13.04 |
| Never married | 20.44 | 25.28 | 17.19 | 19.03 |
| Hispanic | 7.67 | 20.30 | 0.99 | 1.53 |
| African American | 11.66 | 2.76 | 6.15 | 29.79 |
| Under 40 | 48.43 | 54.80 | 42.58 | 48.69 |
| Male | 46.93 | 47.96 | 47.53 | 44.89 |
| Education | 12.45 | 12.35 | 13.11 | 11.70 |
| Income (log) | 8.91 | 8.92 | 9.06 | 8.70 |
| N | 11,372 | 3,461 | 4,129 | 3,782 |

The key independent variables for our analyses represent whether the respondent’s parents divorced. We use indicator variables to distinguish between respondents who experienced parental divorce in childhood, those who experienced parental divorce in adulthood, and, the reference group, those from intact families. Distinguishing between childhood and adulthood divorce is important theoretically because parental divorce in childhood represents a disruption of the child’s family and community and is expected to have a strong, positive impact on religious mobility. Parental divorce in adulthood is a proxy measure for poor parental marriage quality that was resolved by divorce only after the child reached adulthood. But parental divorce in adulthood may also reflect ‘staying together for the children’ and this would mean a more stable childhood community, so we expect parental divorce in adulthood to be positively associated with religious change but of weaker magnitude than parental divorce in childhood.

In our first analysis, we also include dichotomous measures for Catholics and conservative Protestants in order to contrast their likelihood of changing religious affiliation with that of the reference category, moderate Protestants. We hypothesize that parental divorce will be more associated with greater religious mobility for Catholics than Protestants because divorce is not sanctioned in the Catholic Church. The discontinuity between dogma and behavior may cause greater erosion to ties to religious communities for Catholics, hence the greater likelihood of a religious identity switch.

Other independent variables include age, which has been dichotomized to represent those less than 40 and those 40 or older (the reference category). We expect to see one of two patterns: (1) that younger people may experience more switching because young adults tend to go through a stage of self-exploration in which they switch to other religions but often return to the fold (Roozen, 1980); or (2) less switching because they have had less exposure to switch compared to older persons. Dichotomous variables for race and ethnicity include measures for Hispanics (1=yes; 0=no) and African-Americans (1 = yes; 0 = no). Both of these groups are expected to be less likely to switch than the reference category, whites. Measures of the respondent's marital status distinguish between divorced and never married, with married or widowed as the reference category. Compared to married respondents, we expect both the never married and the divorced to be more likely to change their religious affiliation. Gender is an indicator variable coded 1 for males (females as reference). We expect that men will be less likely to switch than women, but more likely to disaffiliate entirely. We also control for two measures of socioeconomic status: education and income. Education is a continuous variable, as is the measure of logged income. These two measures are expected to be positively associated with religious switching. A summary of the independent variables is presented in Table 1.

Method: Our analysis consists of two steps. For the analysis of switching versus staying, we use logistic regression. The dependent variable in this analysis is dichotomous, so logistic regression is the appropriate statistical method. We present the results as exponentiated coefficients (odds ratios) that indicate the change in likelihood of switching represented by a one unit change in the variable. For the analysis of religious differentials in changing affiliation, we employ three multinomial logit models (Catholics, moderate Protestants, and conservative Protestants). The multinomial logit takes into consideration the non-ordered nature of the categorical dependent variables. The Catholic analysis differentiates between religious stayers, two groups of switchers (to moderate Protestant and to conservative Protestant), and apostates (none). The Protestant analyses differentiate between stayers, inter-denominational switchers, Protestant-Catholic switchers, and apostates. This model allows switching among liberal (or conservative) Protestant denominations, but distinguishes switches to more liberal (or conservative) denominations within the Protestant community. The reference category in each analysis is respondents who did not change their religious affiliation between childhood and the survey date. The odds (relative risk) ratios for these estimates represent the relative risk of choosing an outcome (type of religious mobility) over the reference category (staying the religion one was raised). The effects of divorce and religious identity of origin on switching are presented for each model, while the effects of the other socio-demographic variables on religious mobility will be summarized across all models at the end of the Results section.

RESULTS

The Impact of Parental Divorce on the Likelihood of Switching versus Staying

The results for the two models for the logistic regression of changing religious affiliation on parental divorce are summarized in Table 2. The first model examines the impact of parental divorce on the likelihood of switching. We then add the interaction between having experienced parental divorce and being raised Catholic.

As hypothesized, parental divorce increases the likelihood of changing religious identity. Looking at Model I in Table 2 we see that experiencing a parental divorce in childhood is a strong and significant predictor of changing religious affiliation, increasing the likelihood of switching by nearly 62%. This finding supports the hypothesis that parental divorce in childhood weakens religious ties through its disruption of both family and community. There is some evidence that parental divorce in adulthood also has a positive relationship with changes in religious affiliation,

Table 2
Odds Ratios for the Logistic Regression of Changing Religious Affiliation on Parental Divorce

| | Model I | Model II |
|---|----------------|-----------------|
| Parental divorce in childhood | 1.618** | 1.326** |
| Parental divorce in adulthood | 1.227 | 1.003 |
| Raised Catholic | 0.428** | 0.385** |
| Raised Conservative Protestant | 0.727** | 0.734** |
| Raised Catholic*Parental divorce in childhood | | 2.027** |
| Raised Catholic*Parental divorce in adulthood | | 2.104** |
| Divorced | 0.843* | 0.842* |
| Never married | 0.580** | 0.578** |
| Hispanic | 0.918 | 0.904 |
| African American | 0.723** | 0.730** |
| Under 40 | 0.902 | 0.904 |
| Male | 0.833** | 0.836** |
| Education | 1.113** | 1.112** |
| Income (log) | 1.048** | 1.048** |

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01

Note: The reference category is moderate Protestants. For Model I, the -2 log likelihood was -5635.01 with 12 degrees of freedom. Model II has a -2 log likelihood of -5623.23 with 14 degrees of freedom. Both models are based on 11,372 observations.

although the size of this effect is small and not significant. As expected, moderate Protestants (the reference group) are the most likely to change their religious affiliation, Conservative Protestants are 27.3% less likely to switch, and Catholics – at 57.2% less than moderate Protestants – are the least likely to switch.

Model II includes interactions between the measures of parental divorce and being raised Catholic. These interactions demonstrate that having been raised Catholic and having experienced parental divorce in childhood significantly increase the likelihood that an individual will change religious affiliation. However, the net effect of this interaction relative to moderate Protestants whose parents did not divorce, is actually a slight *decrease* in the likelihood of changing religious affiliation (evidenced by the parameter estimates). Interactions between parental divorce and switching for conservative Protestants (not shown) revealed no significant differences between the two Protestant groups.

Looking at Model II, we find that the relationships between the additional independent variables and changing religious affiliation are consistent with our theoretical framework concerning community boundaries and roots. Both divorced (OR=0.842) and never married (OR=0.578) respondents are significantly less likely than married respondents to have changed religious affiliation since childhood. African American (OR=0.730) and Hispanic (OR=0.904) respondents are less likely experience change than white, although the result is not significant for Hispanics. Younger respondents are less likely to have changed their religious affiliation, although not significantly so. Men are nearly 20% less likely than women to have changed religious affiliation. Both education (OR=1.112) and income (OR=1.048) are positively and significantly associated with having changed one’s religious affiliation since childhood.

Parental Divorce and Religious Differentials in the Type of Switching

We now examine not just whether a switch occurred, but also the starting point and destination for the change in religious identity. This step of the analysis makes it possible to examine whether the effects of parental divorce on religious mobility differ between Catholics, moderate Protestants and conservative Protestants. Table 3 presents the results of the three multinomial logistic regression models of changing religious orientation on parental divorce by religion of origin and includes indicators of significant differences across switching destinations. In each model, respondents who changed religious identity, either through switching or apostasy, are compared to those who did not (the reference group).

Catholics: Among Catholics, we find that parental divorce in childhood has a strong, significant effect on the likelihood of switching religious affiliation. Catholics whose parents divorced in childhood are 1.7 times more likely to switch to a moderate Protestant denomination than they are to remain Catholic; 2.6 times more likely to switch to a conservative Protestant denomination; and 2.2 times as likely to apostatize. A greater likelihood of switching for Catholics compared to Protestants also obtains in the case of parental divorce in adulthood. Parental divorce in adulthood more than doubles the risk of switching to either a conservative Protestant denomination (OR=2.166) or apostatizing (OR=2.035), although the effect of parental divorce in adulthood on switching to a moderate Protestant denomination is negligible (OR=1.084). The results for later life parental divorce suggest that a poor quality parental marriage leads to a weakening of the religious socialization process.

Moderate Protestants: Parental divorce in childhood doubles the likelihood that a moderate Protestant will switch to Catholicism, suggesting a search for a stronger religious community, and perhaps also a rejection of divorce. In addition, we find a strong, significant effect of parental divorce in childhood on apostasy for moderate Protestants (OR=2.207), suggesting a rejection of religion altogether. Parental divorce in adulthood appears only weakly associated with switching in general, and is not significant.

Conservative Protestants: Parental divorce in childhood for conservative Protestants is significantly associated with an increased likelihood of either switching to a moderate Protestant denomination (OR=1.478) or apostatizing (OR=2.629). The finding that parental divorce in childhood more than doubles the likelihood that a conservative Protestant will apostatize signals a rejection of both family and religious community. Parental divorce in adulthood is also strongly associated with apostasy (OR=2.386) and switching to another conservative Protestant denomination (OR=1.405). However, parental divorce in adulthood among conservative Protestants does not appear to incline them to cross the ideological border to Catholicism.

Socio-demographic Status and Religious Mobility: In our religion-specific models of switching (Table 3), we find that socio-demographic measures performed as hypothesized, supporting the overall framework of community ties and ideological boundaries. We discuss these findings in the context of the results presented in our base analysis (Table 2) noting significant differences between respondents who switch religious affiliations and those who apostate.

While our primary focus is on parental divorce, the respondent's divorce is strongly associated with switching, but its effect varies by religion of origin and destination. While divorced respondents were less likely to switch in general, we see that this relationship holds only for switching *among* religious affiliations. Divorce increases the likelihood of apostasy, leading to an increased likelihood of switching from Catholic to None, moderate Protestant to None, and conservative Protestant to None (although the latter is not significant). Apparently, for some divorced adults, the ties to religious ideology and community become so frayed that divorce may overwhelm the need or desire to remain in the community. Compared to the married respondents, the never-married in

Table 3. Odds Ratios for the Multinomial Logistic Regression of Changing Religious Affiliation on Parental Divorce by Religion of Origin

| | Catholic To: ¹ | | | Moderate Protestant To: ² | | | Conservative Protestant To: ³ | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|--|--------------|-------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| | Moderate Protestant (1) | Cons. Protestant (2) | None (3) | Catholic (1) | Moderate Protestant (2) | Cons. Protestant (3) | None (4) | Catholic (1) | Moderate Protestant (2) | Cons. Protestant (3) | None (4) |
| Parental divorce in childhood | 1.676* | 2.623** | 2.180** | 2.004* | 0.902† | 1.526 | 2.207*** | 1.331 | 1.478* | 1.150 | 2.629*** |
| Parental divorce in adulthood | 1.084 | 2.166* | 2.035* | 1.416 | 1.188 | 1.145 | 1.217 | 0.373 | 0.581 | 1.405* | 2.386**† |
| Divorced | 0.676 | 0.829 | 2.411***† | 0.452* | 0.533** | 0.703 | 1.321†** | 0.834 | 1.005 | 0.854 | 1.598 |
| Never married | 0.522** | 0.536* | 1.334† | 0.203** | 0.426** | 0.341** | 0.978†** | 0.754 | 0.407** | 0.401** | 1.402*# |
| Hispanic | 0.528** | 1.824*† | 0.654* | 2.567 | 0.078 | 0.724 | 0.726 | 6.927** | 0.958† | 0.103† | 0.511† |
| African American | 1.162 | 7.094***† | 0.473* | 0.627 | 0.354** | 1.910***† | 0.515# | 0.573 | 0.373** | 1.180† | 0.478*** |
| Under 40 | 1.381** | 2.167** | 1.865** | 1.002 | 0.565***† | 0.850* | 1.291†# | 0.782 | 0.677** | 1.064* | 1.093 |
| Male | 0.949 | 1.367 | 1.579**† | 0.582* | 0.542** | 0.817* | 1.571***† | 0.512* | 0.653** | 0.695* | 1.601**† |
| Education | 1.063* | 0.988 | 1.274***† | 1.035 | 1.185***† | 0.977* | 1.194***# | 1.172** | 1.213** | 0.995† | 1.079* |
| Income | 0.944 | 0.989 | 0.942 | 1.289** | 1.166** | 1.097*† | 1.047† | 1.056 | 1.030 | 0.979 | 1.039 |

For non-switchers as the reference group: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01. For contrast between (1) and (2)-(4): † p < 0.05.

For contrast between (2) and (3), (4): † p < 0.05. For contrast between (3) and (4): # p < 0.05.

This model allows switching among Liberal (or Conservative) Protestant denominations, but distinguishes switches to more liberal (or conservative) denominations within the Protestant community.

¹ The Catholic model is based on 3,461 observations. The -2 log likelihood was -1800.42 with 30 degrees of freedom.

² The Moderate Protestant model is based on 4,129 observations. The -2 log likelihood was -3808.50 with 40 degrees of freedom.

³ The Conservative Protestant model is based on 3,782 observations. The -2 log likelihood was -2611.72 with 40 degrees of freedom.

general are less likely to change religious identity. But for those raised as Catholics or conservative Protestants, the never-married are more likely to choose apostasy if they decide to change.

Hispanics are less inclined (than whites) to switch religious identity, but should they change, then Catholics may switch to conservative Protestants (OR=1.824) and conservative Protestants will become Catholic (OR = 6.927). We find that, while African-Americans are the least likely to switch overall, they are significantly more likely to move from Catholicism, a moderate Protestant denomination, or a conservative Protestant denomination to another conservative Protestant denomination (OR = 7.094, 1.910, and 1.180, respectively). These ethnic groups often have strong family ties, and lower residential mobility (and religious communities are often geographic neighborhoods). When these individuals do become religiously mobile, the border crossed is to one that encourages strong, if not rigid, family and ideological ties.

The effect of age reflects both the societal trend toward more liberal religious identity and free choice, as well as a simultaneous growth of fundamentalist groups. While overall there is no evidence of an age difference in switching (insignificant in Table 2), different patterns become evident when examining the religions of origin and destination. Those under 40 raised as Catholic are more likely have switched to any of the outcomes, including a conservative Protestant denomination, than are older respondents. Younger moderate Protestants are less likely to change to another moderate Protestant denomination (OR = 0.565), and somewhat more likely to apostatize (OR = 1.291) than to stay the same religion compared to those over 40 years of age. Conservative Protestants under 40 are somewhat less likely to switch to a moderate Protestant denomination, and slightly more likely to switch among conservative ones. What remains unknown from these results is whether the age effect is a period effect, that is, the behavior exhibited at a certain age group, versus a cohort effect, that is, a behavioral pattern exhibited owing to a birth cohort's place in history.

Men are far more likely to reject religious identity completely, regardless of the childhood religion, but less likely to change to another religion compared to women. Since joining another religious group requires the formation and maintenance of new social ties, it is consistent that women are more likely to switch to another denomination.

While both income and education were associated with an increased likelihood of general switching, we find that the effects of these measures also vary between religious contexts. Higher income is associated with greater switching only from moderate Protestant groups to any destination. Education decreases the likelihood of switching to (or between) conservative Protestant denominations. Higher education is associated with a greater likelihood of switching from Catholicism to moderate Protestant or to None, from moderate Protestant to another moderate Protestant denomination or to None, and from a conservative Protestant denomination to either Catholic, moderate Protestant, and negligibly to apostasy. Higher education can indicate changes in social networks and these changes may lead to a change in religious community.

DISCUSSION

Our analysis finds a strong and consistent association between switching religious affiliation for both Protestants and Catholics and parental divorce. Further, the impact of divorce is more noticeable for Catholics than it is for Protestants. Accordingly, both of our hypotheses are supported. Switching may represent turning to a less rigid religious alternative, particularly for those who are from disrupted families. The strong and consistent effects of having experienced parental divorce in childhood on the likelihood of religious disaffiliation (apostasy) for all groups offers support the religious socialization hypothesis. These findings are consistent with the previous literature that emphasizes a close relationship between family characteristics and apostasy. For others who switch to Catholicism or a conservative Protestant denomination following family disruption, the attraction may be greater religious and community structure. Socialization requires integration into a community but divorce disintegrates some or all of those community ties, hence the switch to another religious community, or complete exit.

We also find that the effects of later-life parental divorce vary by the religion of origin. While moderate Protestants exhibit no significant impact on switching, Catholics who experience parental divorce in adulthood are significantly more likely to become either conservative Protestants or apostates, while conservative Protestants tend to reject any religion entirely. Staying together 'for the children' may create some stability, but the family strain in the more structured denominations suggests a greater disjoint that is resolved by apostasy.

The salience of community ties and marital status is also evident in the respondent's marital state. The finding that the divorced are less likely to switch in general, and yet also more likely to apostatize in specific religions of orientation means that as a divorced person to enter into another community, and may need to stay in a community for social support. At the same time, others experience divorce as a cutting of ties, and hence they leave religious community. Divorced conservative Protestants diverge from this pattern. This difference may reflect the close ties between family and religion fostered among conservative Protestant denominations. Thus, while parental divorce may represent a decrease in family contact and a disruption of the religious community in which one was raised, individual divorce may create a need for stronger family and religious ties. As seen by Sherkat and Ellison (1991) in studying African-American religious mobility, contact with family members reduces the likelihood of apostasy.

Taken together, the results for the family structure variables are consistent with previous research that suggests familial context is an important consideration for studies of both religious switching and apostasy (particularly for Catholics). These findings underscore the importance of family and community in the development and maintenance of religious ties.

CONCLUSION

Parental divorce creates a disequilibrium in the family system: one way of creating balance is to cross community boundaries and seek a new geographic, social, ideological community. Indeed, the evidence presented in this article identifies children of divorce as being more likely to experience religious mobility either by switching to a different religion or by opting out of religion entirely. This finding holds for Protestants and Catholics, although it is stronger for those raised Catholic or in conservative Protestant denominations. But the impact of parental divorce for those raised Catholics or conservative Protestants is not necessarily a search for surrogate family; rather, the strongest reaction was apostasy.

In using the community context to explain religious mobility, we argue that divorce filters through one's religious upbringing and community and precipitates an adjustment to community affiliation. The finding that conservative Protestants and Catholics are both less likely to switch overall and yet more likely to switch following divorce underscores our theory. The ability to reconcile the divorce experience (and the physical and social distance that family disruption often causes) within a religious community culture is challenged, hence the high propensity to apostatize.

Snow and Machalek (1984) argued that the process of changing religious identity could be better understood through the theories of social interaction rather than seeing it as aberrant or deviant behavior. Our findings support this perspective in that they suggest a change in religious identity may be a response to one's social experiences. While a switch in religion is not necessarily "good" or "bad", it does denote potential discontinuity with parents and one's community. The family is the core unit of a community, the most central social structure for an individual, and the conduit between the individual and community. When the family breaks up, links to community are also broken. Religious affiliation is related to community-connectedness (Cornwall 1987), and divorced families are frequently geographically unstable, so divorce may indirectly affect the likelihood of switching to nothing because of uprootedness. Indeed, Sherkat and Wilson (1995) suggest that geographic mobility increases apostasy by decreasing social ties and normative constraints.

Like Sandomirsky and Wilson (1990), we conclude that family structure is important in

establishing a general religious commitment, but that denominational roots are also salient determinants of switching. We also suggest that family stability may be instrumental to both learning religious roles and developing a lasting commitment to community. Although the process of religious training and orientation in the parental home is highly significant for transmitting religious identity (Hayes and Pittelkow 1993), the results in this paper demonstrate the importance of childhood family structure as well. Recently it has been observed that due to the long-term high rate of divorce, the distinctive patterns for later life outcomes for children of divorce are converging with those from intact families (Wolfinger, 1999). Rather than children of divorce becoming like children of intact families of former days, however, it is likely that the pervasiveness of divorce and its consequences will lead to an even stronger pattern in society of the 'open market' for religious choice over choosing parental traditions. Thus, because both family and religion are subject to forces in the overall society and economy, future research would do well to consider the link between socio-demographic context and social psychological dynamics.

NOTES

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