Undoing Gender? Evidence from Religious Switching Among Emerging Adults

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Abstract

Disaffiliation from organized religion is at an all time but how gender matters for disaffiliation has been virtually unstudied. We use four waves of the Survey of Adolescent Health to address whether there has been gender convergence in patterns of religious mobility during the transition to adulthood, looking at within-person change in religious affiliation. We find ample evidence of gender convergence in the numbers and characteristics of those who disaffiliate from organized religion over time. We find little evidence that disaffiliation from religion is in itself harmful to the life chances of either young women or young men when measured as college completion. But those who disaffiliate from religion are relatively disadvantaged compared to those who remain religiously affiliated. Finally, we examine religious switching surrounding marriage and again find more gender convergence than divergence – women and men were both *less* likely to have switched religious identification if they married between survey waves.

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The existing literature in the sociology of religion provides ample evidence that adult women in the United States are more religious than adult men in both their affiliation with organized religion and participation in religious practices (Roth and Kroll 2007; Stark 2002; Walter and Davie 1998). At the same time, disaffiliation from organized religion is at an all time high (Pew Research Center 2012; Hout and Fisher 2002) and those who say they are "spiritual but not religious" represent the fastest growing religious identification. Questions remain, however, both about *who* is disaffiliating from organized religion and how they got there; that is, the process leading people to change their religious orientation from their family of origin.

Two models of religious change could potentially be at play. One model sees continuity in gender-linked patterns of religious salience in which men are relatively less engaged in organized religion. In this model, men would disaffiliate from their childhood religious affiliation in far greater proportions than women because they developed weaker ties to any particular faith during adolescence. This would lead men to both increased secularism, and larger changes in religious preference in response to marriage (taking the affiliation of a spouse for whom religious identification is relatively more important). Women, more deeply invested in religion through socialization in the family of origin and the affective rewards of religious participation, would disaffiliate less and switch religious identification less in response to marriage. The second model hypothesizes gender convergence, in which disaffiliation from organized religion has increased over time because women have started to mimic male patterns of behavior in religious participation

as they have in education and labor market participation. As women face emerging adulthood on a more equal footing with men, they may become less identified with religious institutions, postponing the assumption of those social roles (motherhood in particular) that tie them to religious organizations, and viewing religious congruence as less important in a potential spouse or partner.

We use four waves of the Survey of Adolescent Health (Add Health) begun in 1994 to address these questions, looking at within-person change in religious affiliation over time. Are men more likely to disaffiliate from organized religion as they move from adolescence into adulthood? Do the lower levels of involvement reported by adolescent men mean they are more reactive to marriage, changing religious identification in response to a partner's affiliation more than women? Or are young men AND women less responsive to the appeal of organized religion, irrespective of their marital status? If so, what other factors might predict disaffiliation in young adulthood, and is there any evidence that this is detrimental to their well-being?

BACKGROUND

The scholarly literature on changes in religious affiliation reveals that early adulthood is a prime period for religious exploration and change, with many young adults moving from a strong religious orientation to a weaker or nonexistent one during their first years of independence from parental authority (Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007). The Pew Research Center (2012) claims most of the rapid growth in religiously unaffiliated Americans has come from generational replacement, with younger cohorts more likely to have disaffiliated from their childhood religion than older ones. Moreover, most of these

unaffiliated young people were raised in religious households, meaning they switched their religious identity from their family of origin. Yet most adult switches involve moves to closely related denominations rather than sharp breaks from one religious tradition to another (Hadaway and Marler 1993; Smith and Sikkink 2003), and some religions are better at keeping adherents through young adulthood than others. Mormons and conservative Protestants, for example, seem better able to motivate youth to stay in the church while mainline Protestants and Catholics have shown higher rates of disaffiliation from organized religion (Loveland, 2003; Sherkat, 2001). Finally, research on the antecedents of switching shows that specific life events, including parental divorce, residential moves, and partnering/marriage, can motivate changes in religious affiliation (Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens, 1995; Lawson and Bures, 2001; Petts, 2009). Many scholars believe the antecedents of disaffiliation among youth are basically negative, indicating a loss of social capital and embeddedness in adult institutions (Hoge and O'Connor, 2004), while the antecedents of shifts from one religious tradition to another conform more closely to shifts in residence or household composition that expose youth to new denominational cultures.

Research does support the notion that religious identification is protective of youth during the transition to adulthood, encouraging prosocial behavior like school involvement and discouraging damaging peer relations, delinquency, and substance abuse (Glanville, Sikkink, and Hernandez, 2008; Muller and Ellison, 2001; Smith, 2003; Waite and Lehrer, 2003). In fact, the greater risks of delinquency and school failure experienced by young men are often traced to their lower levels of religiosity and embeddedness in schools and churches. Viewing religious affiliation as a net positive influence in the lives of emerging adults makes the current trend of disaffiliation and disengagement with formal religious

institutions problematic for young adult well-being and conventional family formation (Wilcox, Cherlin, Uecker, and Messel, 2012).

Yet the association between religious affiliation and positive adolescent development may be masking other features of households that contribute both to low levels of religious involvement and poorer adolescent development, such as low levels of parental education and income, frequent residential moves, and low levels of parental supervision and family structure more generally (Darnell and Sherkat 1997; Keister 2008; McLanahan 2004). Moreover, the emphasis on religious participation as a protective factor during early adolescence may change as youth move towards adulthood and independence from their family of origin, particularly for women. By looking at change over time in religious identification as young women and men transition into the adult labor market and form families, we are better able to see how disaffiliation from a religious identity held in adolescence affects the well-being of youth later in adulthood. Perhaps disaffiliation from a religious identification still held by parents is less harmful than being raised by adults with few ties to organizations that provide assistance with childrearing.

Prior research also confirms gender differences in the salience of religious identity and the importance of the family of origin in the religious beliefs and affiliations of youth. Families are the primary conduits of religious belief and participation in contemporary societies, and parents frequently define both the religious context and amount of religious interaction that children receive. Nevertheless, by early adolescence there are clear gender differences in religious participation, with young women more likely to continue to attend services and profess religious beliefs consistent with their parents' (Smith and Denton 2002). Some scholars posit that contemporary religious practices are more appealing to

women than men because congregations often focus on child-rearing and moral instruction, which are the contemporary provenance of mothers in American culture. Others view the gendered nature of religious affiliation in adolescence as part of the greater social control exerted over young women than men, and the greater attention paid to their organizational settings and networks (Frank, Muller, Schiller et al. 2008; Gilligan 1982; Riegle-Crumb, Farkas, and Muller 2006). If young women are more attached to religious institutions than men past adolescence, this should be revealed not just by lower rates of disaffiliation as they move through the transition to adulthood, but also by lower rates of religious switching in response to marriage than men. On the other hand, if religious participation among adolescent women is more about social control, then the weakening of these controls as young women leave adolescence should result in levels of religious disaffiliation and switching in response to marriage that are similar to men's.

The picture is complicated further by denominational differences in the importance of gendered family roles and obligations in theological discourse and community practice. Conservative Protestant churches are more concerned with maintaining gender differentiation in the family and the primacy of women's reproductive roles than mainline Protestant and even Catholic churches (Fitzgerald and Glass, 2012). Some preach a theology of female subordination to male authority in the household and view the greater religious affiliation of women as caused by the improper "feminizing" of religion. This might result in stronger social control over young women than young women in CP families and religious communities, and less disaffiliation (and religious switching) throughout young adulthood among CP women than men compared to mainline denominations.

We test the idea that patterns of disaffiliation are structured by young men's lower

initial attachment to religious organizations in two ways – by looking at moves away from any religious identification and by looking at shifts to a different denomination around the time of marriage. Using both outcomes serves as a sensitivity check to the explanation that men's lower levels of religious commitment explain their disaffiliation from organized religion. If lack of commitment leads to greater disaffiliation, then it should also lead to greater willingness to change affiliation to a spouses' religious identification. We restrict our analyses to the largest religious groups in the U.S., differentiating conservative Protestants (CP) from mainline Protestant and Catholic adherents, because sample sizes in the Add Health surveys are insufficient for detecting changes in religious affiliation among smaller religious minorities (Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, etc.). We further restrict the sample to non-Blacks only, because of both highly segregated patterns of church attendance and very low rates of disaffiliation over time among African-Americans.

DATA AND METHODS

We use nationally representative data from The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), a school-based survey of adolescents in grades 7-12 during the 1994-95 school year. Adolescents attended 132 schools across 80 communities, with almost all students within each school (n≈90,000) completing in-school surveys in 1994. A nationally representative subsample of these adolescents was given more in-depth, in-home surveys in 1994 (n=20,745) and was surveyed again in 1996 (Wave 2; n=14,738), 2001-2002 (Wave 3; n=15,197), and 2007-2008 (Wave 4; n=15,701). At the time of the final wave, respondents were between ages 24 and 32. Add Health provides a longitudinal perspective on individuals' peer, family, and romantic relationships as well as their social

well-being, health status, and health-related behaviors. This dataset is well-suited for the purposes of this study because it offers data on respondents' religious affiliations from adolescence through their transitions to adulthood.

We restrict our sample to those respondents who completed all four survey waves and had valid values for the corresponding sample weight provided by Add Health (n=9,268). We also limit the sample to individuals with valid responses to the religious identification questions at each wave (n=9,007). These sample filters allow us to describe rates of religious switching or disaffiliation and marriage transitions from adolescence through early adulthood.

Because research suggests fundamental differences in the "denominational culture" (Steensland et al. 2000) of the Black Church, as well as differences in the role of CP religion in the lives of African Americans and its effects on their early adulthood outcomes (Glass and Jacobs 2005), we further restrict our sample to non-Hispanic White, Hispanic, and Asian Americans/Pacific Islander respondents, and exclude those who are missing on the race/ethnicity measure. Due to small cell-sizes, we also exclude American Indians and those respondents reporting another race/ethnicity (n=6221). Additionally, only a small number of respondents reported non-Christian religious affiliations (e.g., Jewish, Muslim, Hindu religious affiliations). We encounter small cell size issues when considering their religious switching and marriage rates by gender and risk oversimplifying these processes among this heterogeneous group. Thus, we limit our analyses to respondents who reported a mainline Christian, conservative Protestant, or no religious affiliation during at least one survey year (n=6,139). This sample size varies across tables that focus on particular types of religious identification or switching.

We use multiple imputation to handle missing data on the independent variables and use the survey command ("svy") in Stata 12.1 to incorporate the sample weight and better account for clustering within schools.

Religious Identification and Switching Variables

We draw from the work of Steensland et al. (2000) and Roof and McKinney (1987) in the construction of our religious affiliation categories. We define those respondents who identified their religion as Adventist, Assemblies of God, Baptist, Holiness, or Pentecostal as conservative Protestant (referred to as "CP" in tables). Because Add Health does not ask Baptist respondents what type of Baptist church they attend, one cannot distinguish between non-CP Baptist denominations and CP Baptist denominations. As a result, we follow the convention of other work on conservative Protestants that used Add Health and define Baptist adolescents as CP (Erickson and Phillips 2012; Regnerus 2005).

The following religious affiliations constitute our "mainline Christian" category (referred to as "ML" in tables): Catholic, Anabaptist, Anglican, Christian, Church of England, Congregational, Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian, Disciples of Christ, Evangelical Covenant Church, Friends, Just Christian, Church of Christ, Wesleyan, Reformed, United Church of Christ. Ancillary analyses in which we exclude Catholics from this category produce results that are very consistent with those shown (available upon request). Respondents who identified as "none," "atheist," or "agnostic" are referred to as "secular." Finally, a small number of mainline Christian and conservative Protestants switched to a non-Christian religion. These switches are examined in Tables 2 and 5. "Other religion" includes respondents who identified as Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Jehovah's Witness, Christian Science, Morman, and individuals who reported "other religion." We use

these measures of religious affiliation to track religious maintenance, switching, and disaffiliation by examining respondents' religious identification at each survey wave. For example, Table 2 tracks the religious switching and maintenance behavior among conservative Protestant and mainline Christian men and women between consecutive survey waves.

Dependent Variable: Bachelor's Degree Completion

We predict whether religious maintenance, switching, and disaffiliation affect one's odds of earning a four-year degree. A college education improves an individual's well-being, through better economic (Card 1999; Jaeger and Page 1996), civic engagement (Kingston, Hubbard, Lapp, Schroeder, and Wilson 2003), and health (Link and Phelan 1995) outcomes, to name a few. Research shows that individuals with a four-year college degree enjoy higher incomes and obtain jobs with higher occupational status relative to those who obtain lower levels of education (Day, Newburger, and U.S. Census Bureau 2002; Monk-Turner 1990). Moreover, research indicates that earning a bachelor's degree is more economically consequential today than ever before (Fischer and Hout 2006).

Our measure of highest educational attainment is a dichotomous variable indicating whether respondents earned a four-year degree by Wave 4. The reference category includes high school completers who did not attend college and those who attempted college but did not earn a four-year degree. Among those who attended a postsecondary institution, only 14% of respondents reported earning a vocational/technical degree; the remaining respondents reported "some college" as their highest level of education attained. Unfortunately, due to the response categories in the Add Health survey, we cannot determine whether individuals who reported "some college" completed some college at a

two-year or a four-year college. In ancillary analyses, we estimated a multinomial logistic regression predicting no college degree, some college, and a four-year degree. The results from these analyses produce substantive conclusions identical to those presented.

Independent Variables

We use Wave 1 student reports of gender and report descriptive statistics for men and women separately in Tables 2, 3, and 5. In Table 4, we include gender as a control (men=0; women=1). Add Health asks respondents about their marital status at Waves 2, 3, and 4. Because only 28 respondents in our analytic sample got married between Waves 1 and 2, we focus on rates of marriage between Waves 2 and 3 and Waves 3 and 4.

The following Wave 1 characteristics are presented by religious switching behavior in Table 3 and included as controls in the logistic regression: respondent's reported ethnicity (Non-Hispanic white=reference; Hispanic; Asian/Pacific Islander); whether the respondent lived with both biological parents at Wave 1; whether at least one parent held a bachelor's degree; and parental income. We also measure whether respondents attended church at least 1 time per week; whether the respondent believed there was a high chance (more than a 50% chance) they would be married by age 25; residence in the South; and rural residence.

We compare respondents on three Wave 1 academic indicators: self-reported grade point average (GPA), academic disengagement, and educational expectations. Our measure of GPA was constructed by averaging students' self-reported grades during the Wave 1 academic school year across four academic subjects, including English, social studies, math, and science. For academic disengagement, we rely on the Johnson, Crosnoe, and Elder (2001) operationalization of academic disengagement from Add Health indicators. This

measure of disengagement is based on student responses to three questions in Wave 1, including how often the student had trouble turning in homework, how often the student skipped class, and how often the student had trouble paying attention in class in the past school year (alpha=.63). The measure ranges from 0-4, with high values indicating high levels of disengagement. Our measure of educational expectations is constructed from a survey question asking students to rate how much they wanted to attend college on a scale from 1 to 5. We construct a dummy variable with students reporting anything lower than "5" serving as the reference category (71% reported "5").

Analytic Plan

Our analyses first look at the movement of young men and women among broad religious categories (including no religious affiliation) over time to determine whether young men do in fact disaffiliate at higher rates than women, and whether any gender differences found are origin specific (coming from one particular religious category). Next, we investigate the antecedents and consequences of disaffiliation by gender, identifying (a) the sources of disadvantage at Time 1 between those who subsequently disaffiliate and those who remain in each major religious group, and (b) college completion rates for those who disaffiliate compared to those who maintain their religious identification. Finally, we isolate shifts in religious affiliation at each wave for those who did and did not marry between waves of observation, to detect men's and women's vulnerability to switching to achieve marital homogamy.

RESULTS

Table 1 reports the proportions of respondents by gender who report no religious

affiliation at each survey wave, as well as the proportion of respondents from CP or mainline affiliations who disaffiliate from religion between survey waves. The pattern reveals a slow but steady growth in disaffiliated respondents among both women and men in the churn of respondents moving into and out of the disaffiliated category over time. By Wave 4, 18 % of women and 23% of men report no religious affiliation with most of the growth in this category happening in the teens and early 20's. Rather than either strong gender convergence or divergence, the raw data show roughly equivalent numbers moving into and out of the disaffiliated category in both populations, yet the gender gap slowly accretes over time from 2 percent more unaffiliated men in adolescence to 5 percent more by the time sample members are in their late 20's.

Moving to origin specific analyses of switching, table 2 displays the changes over time in religious identification for those who start the time-series as either conservative or mainline Christians. Looking at the complete set of changes in religious affiliation reveals remarkable consistency across survey waves and both genders but large denomination differences. For those who begin the survey as conservative Protestants, rates of switching are high for women and men at around 30-40% in each subsequent survey wave. The movers are most likely to switch to mainline denominations, roughly 2 out of 3, rather than disaffiliate from organized religion. In contrast, those who begin the survey as mainline Protestants or Catholics switch significantly less between survey waves, with losses around 23-25% in each subsequent wave across genders, and are most likely to disaffiliate rather than convert to a theologically conservative denomination. Contrary to prior research, youth in CP denominations at wave 1 are more likely to switch religious affiliation than youth in mainline denominations at wave 1. Rather than strong churches retaining more

members through emerging adulthood, these conservative groups lose more adherents than they gain. Mainline denominations, however, contribute proportionately more of their adherents to the secular category over time than conservative Protestants.

These dominant processes of change over time (moving from CP to mainline and mainline to secular during emerging adulthood) show evidence of gender convergence both in *rates* of disaffiliation across survey waves and destination *statuses* (new religious identification versus no religious identification). At no point are men disaffiliating faster than women as would have been predicted by a gendered model of religious change. If gender cannot help differentiate those who change religious identification during emerging adulthood from those who do not, what background characteristics do?

Using religious identification at the final wave of measurement, Table 3 displays mean differences in the sociodemographic backgrounds of women and men who disaffiliate from religion compared to those of each gender who remain in their origin religion and never switch. The first panel shows results for women, but the patterns are again similar across gender. Among both those originally identifying with conservative Protestant and mainline Christian denominations, those who subsequently disaffiliate from religion are relatively disadvantaged; they are less likely to have college educated parents, live with both biological parents, and aspire to college themselves. They report less engagement in school and lower secondary school GPA's. Within each broad religious category, those who disaffiliate irrespective of gender tend to be those already less involved in their religious community. Nevertheless, the final panel shows that the addition of youth from religious households into the secular or disaffiliated category over time improves the collective status of that category, including more adherents with college educated parents, higher

GPA's themselves and college aspirations for themselves.

This table generally shows gender convergence in the background characteristics and aspirations of the young women and men who disaffiliate from religion over time, unlike the findings from earlier research (Sandomirsky and Wilson, 1990). While the rate of disaffiliation seems slightly more rapid for young men than young women, the social sources of disaffiliation are remarkably similar across women and men. As earlier studies have found, those who disaffiliate tend to be materially and socially disadvantaged.

In Table 4, we assess whether disaffiliating from organized religion in young adulthood is associated with more negative developmental outcomes, using college degree completion as our measure. Table 4 reports the odds ratios from a weighted logistic regression predicting bachelor's degree completion (vs. less than a bachelor's degree) by Wave 4. Because the origin pool of unaffiliated youth was materially and socially disadvantaged compared to youth from mainstream denominations or conservative Protestants, and youth who subsequently disaffiliated from their childhood religion were also disadvantaged compared to others in their religious group, we show results with and without measures of material and social disadvantage (parental education, family structure, high school GPA, etc.). We tested for any possible gender differences in the associations between religious switching, material and social disadvantage and college completion but found none, so only total sample analyses are displayed in table 4. This also supports gender convergence, revealing that both the antecedents and consequences of religious disaffiliation appear to be shared by women and men.

The first column of Table 4 shows that the relative odds of completing college are actually lowest for those who affiliate with conservative Protestantism, not those who have

disaffiliated from organized religion, or were raised in a religiously unaffiliated household. Odds-ratios of less than 1 in this table indicate lower odds of completing college than mainline Christian youth who never switched (the reference category). The lowest odds-ratio in this column occurs for secular youth who switch to conservative Protestantism by wave 4. They have 94% lower odds of completing college than mainline youth who never switch religious identification. But all categories of conservative Protestants have lower odds of finishing college than consistently mainline affiliated youth, and moving to a CP denomination always lowers the odds of completing college relative to the origin religious category. Secular respondents at Wave 1 show consistently lower odds of completing college than mainline respondents as well, even if they switch to a religious affiliation by Wave 4. But disaffiliating from religion to become secular by Wave 4 does not affect college completion among mainline adherents or those originally conservative Protestant in identification. Yet all estimates in column 1 are potentially biased by the exclusion of other sources of disadvantage that might be correlated with religious identification.

Column 2 adds measures of material and social disadvantage to see how the initial odds of completing college among the disaffiliated change once these potential sources of bias are removed. This model shows essentially no association between disaffiliating from either CP or mainline religious groups in emerging adulthood and the odds of college completion. Clearly, disaffiliation from organized religion does not affect this crucial measure of well-being for either women or men. However, column 2 shows a continuing negative effect of conservative Protestant affiliation at Wave 1, as well as switching to CP from a secular origin, on college degree completion. These effects net of social and material disadvantage in adolescence suggest the theological culture in CP denominations has an

independent negative impact on college plans and college completion among emerging adults, similar to what others have found (Darnell and Sherkat, 1997) .

Table 5 addresses the secondary question of whether marriage is associated with religious switching, especially for men. Table 5 shows the proportion of men and women who maintained their religious affiliation, switched to a different denomination or religion, or disaffiliated from religion entirely for those who did and did not marry between waves. Individuals who married in a previous wave but did not remarry in the following wave are censored. Since little evidence exists of men disproportionately disaffiliating from religion overall, we expect to find little evidence of their greater sensitivity to marriage here.

Among women, those who married are slightly less likely to switch at each wave irrespective of their origin religious group, but none of the differences are statistically significant. Among men, those who married also generally appear less likely to switch, and one difference is actually statistically significant (that between young conservative Protestant men who marry by Wave 3 and those CP men who do not). At no wave did we observe marrying men switch their religious identification more during that period than men who did not marry.

Again we see a pattern of gender convergence – neither young women nor young men appear to change their religious identification much upon marriage, though marriages crossing these faith lines (CP, mainline Protestant, Catholic, secular) have rapidly increased across the latter half of the 20th century (Lehrer, 1998). Rather, marriage in emerging adulthood seems to cement one's religious affiliation relative to peers who remain single over the same time period. Our analysis is not definitive here, of course. We have no information on partner's religion in the Add Health data, so cannot discern which

marriages are interfaith and which switches produce religious homogamy among spouses. Nor can we be certain that any switch occurred because of marriage rather than vice versa; some switches, particularly into conservative Protestantism, might encourage more rapid marriage given that faith's association with earlier marriage (Fitzgerald and Glass, 2012).

DISCUSSION

We began this analysis by asking whether the rapid growth in religiously unaffiliated Americans is diminishing the differences between women and men in religious participation, or maintaining a gendered process in which young men increasingly disaffiliate from their religious origins over time while young women maintain their religious identity in organizations and practices they find meaningful. Using the Add Health data and observing religious switches across four waves, we find ample evidence of gender convergence in the numbers and characteristics of those who disaffiliate from organized religion over time. We find little evidence that disaffiliation from organized religion is in itself harmful to the life chances of either young women or young men when measured as college completion. But the disadvantaged background characteristics of those with a secular family of origin and those who disaffiliate from religion mostly do harm college completion rates.

While prior cohorts of young women and men showed more gender divergence, the Add Health birth cohorts from the 1980's show similar rates of switching and similar destination statuses following a change in religious identification. Both young women and men show higher rates of switching from conservative Protestant denominations than mainline Christian denominations across the transition to adulthood, but the destination statuses differ across religious groups. While those raised in CP and mainline

denominations both disaffiliate from organized religion over time, relatively more mainline adherents disaffiliate than CP adherents. CP adherents at each wave are more likely to choose mainline denominations over disaffiliation (21% to 8% from wave 3 to 4 among CP women, for example, and 23% to 10% among CP men), while fewer mainline adherents move to CP denominations than disaffiliate when they switch (8% to 11% from wave 3 to 4 among mainline women, and 9% to 13% among mainline men).

Turning to the characteristics of those who disaffiliate from organized religion, both young women and men who move from CP affiliation to secular status by wave 4 show clear disadvantages compared to those who remain CP across the time series. They are less likely to have a college-educated parent, to have lived with both parents in childhood, to have come from the South, and to attend church regularly, while reporting lower grades. Those disaffiliating from mainline backgrounds share the tendency to come from disrupted families with lower levels of church attendance, but report less engagement in school rather than consistently lower grades or parents with lower levels of education. The class dimension of switching seems absent among mainline disaffiliators and the attitudinal components stronger. In fact, this group of mainline disaffiliators seems disengaged from social institutions more generally, with low expectations for marriage, low participation in organized religion, and low engagement in school.

While disaffiliation is linked to social disadvantage, analyses of its independent association with college completion shows that becoming "secular" has little direct impact on educational attainment. In fact, becoming secular has a net positive coefficient on the odds of a CP origin young adult finishing college. Rather than a dangerous trend, the effects of religious disaffiliation may depend on the origin religious identification – producing

stronger commitment to education among those leaving conservative Protestantism while having little to no impact on those leaving mainline faiths.

Finally, we examined one traditional source of religious switching in young adulthood, marriage, as a second test of expected gender differences in religious salience. Again, we see more evidence of gender convergence than divergence – women and men were both *less* likely to have switched religious identification if they married between survey waves. Rather than encourage switching to achieve religious homogamy across partners, marriage seemed to cement initial religious identifications among both men and women who marry in their 20's.

Given our lack of detailed information on the timing of events between survey waves (particularly the timing of the religious switch vis a vis getting married and completing college), our results are necessarily limited. Perhaps completing college encourages religious disaffiliation, though work by Uecker and colleagues (2007) suggests less disaffiliation among those in college relative to those not attending school. Perhaps those who marry at younger ages are more religiously committed than those who marry at later ages (and are not observed in this time series yet), producing lower rates of switching during the period in which the marriage occurred among both women and men. Despite these limitations, the overall pattern of results is not consistent with a model of continued gender divergence in religious identification and participation. Rather, they portray a dynamic process of religious switching in young adulthood that produces more disaffiliated young women and men over time, with young men only slowly outpacing women in their rate of disaffiliation in this recent cohort.

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Table 1. Growth in Secular Identification from Adolescence to Early Adulthood by Gender

	Secular $_{W1}$	*Secular* $_{W2}$	*Secular* $_{W3}$	*Secular* $_{W4}$	*Ever Secular*
	Ages 12-19	Ages 13-20	Ages 18-25	Ages 24-32	Ages 12-32
Women (n=3240)	0.12	0.13 (.05)	0.19 (.09)	0.20 (.08)	0.34
Men (n=2818)	0.14	0.14 (.05)	0.23 (.11)	0.24 (.08)	0.38

Note: Proportions of conservative Protestant and mainline Christian respondents who disaffiliated between waves are shown in parentheses.

Table 2. Religious Switching from Adolescence to Early Adulthood

	Women	Men
W2_W3		
Among Wave 2 CPs	N=765	N=630
Stayed CP	0.65	0.58
CP to Mainline	0.24	0.27
CP to Secular	0.11	0.13
CP to Other Religion	0.01	0.01
Among Wave 2 MLs	N=1853	N=1628
Stayed Mainline	0.77	0.73
Mainline to CP	0.09	0.07
Mainline to Secular	0.13	0.17
Mainline to Other Religion	0.02	0.02
W3_W4		
Among Wave 3 CPs	N=707	N=525
Stayed CP	0.68	0.65
CP to Mainline	0.21	0.23
CP to Secular	0.08	0.10
CP to Other Religion	0.03	0.02
Among Wave 3 MLs	N=1890	N=1600
Stayed Mainline	0.76	0.73
Mainline to CP	0.08	0.09
Mainline to Secular	0.11	0.13
Mainline to Other Religion	0.05	0.05
N	2931	2492

* $p<.05$

Table 3. Wave 1 Characteristics of CP and Mainline Adolescents Who Retain Religious ID or Disaffiliate

Women

Wave 1 Variables	Always CP		CP to Secular	Always ML		ML to Secular	Secular W1	Secular at W4
Parent has 4 year Degree	0.35	*	0.23	0.42		0.42	0.34	0.38
Both biological parents	0.62	**	0.44	0.72	***	0.58	0.52	0.55
Attends church ≥ 1x/week	0.62	***	0.39	0.48	***	0.22	0.00	0.21
Wants to attend college	0.68		0.64	0.79		0.79	0.63	0.74
≥ 50% chance will be married by 25	0.56		0.45	0.53	***	0.41	0.41	0.42
Academic Disengagement	0.85		0.79	0.80	***	1.03	1.09	0.98
Self-Reported W1 GPA	2.94	**	2.77	3.08		3.01	2.78	2.97
Rural	0.27		0.22	0.17		0.17	0.17	0.15
South	0.73	*	0.46	0.22	*	0.16	0.17	0.18
N	355		191	1130		509	410	617

Men

Wave 1 Variables	Always CP		CP to Secular	Always ML		ML to Secular	Secular W1	Secular at W4
Parent has 4 year Degree	0.28	**	0.12	0.46		0.40	0.30	0.37
Both biological parents	0.68	*	0.56	0.69	*	0.61	0.48	0.59
Attends church ≥ 1x/week	0.64		0.27	0.45	***	0.26	0.00	0.20
Wants to attend college	0.63		0.65	0.76	*	0.70	0.56	0.67
≥ 50% chance will be married by 25	0.51	***	0.43	0.49	**	0.39	0.37	0.39
Academic Disengagement	1.02	*	1.21	0.98	***	1.10	1.27	1.11
Self-Reported W1 GPA	2.76	*	2.66	2.87	**	2.77	2.61	2.76
Rural	0.25		0.22	0.20		0.16	0.18	0.18
South	0.77	***	0.42	0.25	*	0.22	0.24	0.25
N	260		153	936		524	394	637

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

Table 4. Odds Ratios from Logistic Regression Estimating the Impact of Religious Switching on Bachelor's Degree Completion

	Model 1			Model 2		
Religious ID (ref: Stayed Mainline)						
Conservative Protestant Wave 1						
Stayed CP	0.456	(0.05)	***	0.495	(0.069)	***
Switched to ML	0.541	(0.081)	***	0.595	(0.103)	**
Switched to Secular	0.406	0.096	***	0.423	(0.114)	**
Switched to Other Religion	0.369	(0.165)	*	0.651	(0.413)	
Mainline Christian Wave 1						
Switched to CP	0.626	(0.109)	**	0.709	(0.166)	
Switched to Secular	1.029	(0.124)		1.044	(0.156)	
Switched to Other Religion	1.003	(0.22)		0.808	(0.209)	
Secular Wave 1						
Stayed Secular	0.668	(0.10)	**	0.919	(0.166)	
Switched to Mainline	0.651	(0.144)		0.921	(0.24)	
Switched to CP	0.06	(0.038)	***	0.109	(0.064)	***
Switched to Other Religion	0.244	(0.104)	***	0.504	(0.255)	
Wave 4 Age	0.94	(0.021)	**	1.072	(0.031)	*
Wave 1 Characteristics						
Race/ethnicity (ref: Non-Hispanic White)						
Hispanic				0.862	(0.164)	
Asian				1.044	(0.187)	
Parent has Bachelor's Degree				2.597	(0.255)	***
Parental Income (in thousands)				1.007	(0.002)	***
Both Biological Parents				1.425	(0.143)	***
Wants to Attend College				2.181	(0.256)	***
High Chance Will Marry by Age 25				1.009	(0.089)	
Attends Church ≥ Once per Week				1.395	(0.135)	***
Wave 1 High School Grade Point Average (GPA)				4.036	(0.308)	***
Academic Disengagement				1.077	(0.077)	
Rural Residence				0.848	(0.097)	
Residence in South				0.885	(0.09)	
Constant	4.622	(2.988)	*	0.000	(0.000)	***
Observations=5,407						

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Table 5. Does Marriage Increase Rates of Switching Among Conservative and Mainline Protestants?

	Women		Men	
	Got Married	Unmarried	Got Married	Unmarried
W2_W3				
Among Wave 2 CPs (Censored: 28)	N=234	N=508	N=134	N=491
Stayed CP	0.69	0.63	0.70 [a]	.56
CP to Mainline	0.20	0.25	0.23	.28
CP to Secular	0.10	0.11	0.07	0.15
CP to Other Religion	0.01	0.005	0.001	.02
Among Wave 2 MLs (Censored: 10)	N=334	N=1513	N=173	N=1451
Stayed Mainline	0.74	0.77	0.71	0.74
Mainline to CP	0.16	0.07	0.11	0.07
Mainline to Secular	0.09	0.14	0.14	0.17
Mainline to Other Religion	0.001	0.02	0.007	0.02
W3_W4				
Among Wave 3 CPs (Censored: 369)	N=241	N=214	N=205	N=203
Stayed CP	0.65	0.62	0.69	0.61
CP to Mainline	0.24	0.25	0.22	0.24
CP to Secular	0.09	0.11	0.08	0.12
CP to Other Religion	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.04
Among Wave 3 MLs (Censored: 562)	N=714	N=808	N=538	N=868
Stayed Mainline	0.78	0.75	0.75	0.74
Mainline to CP	0.08	0.06	0.13	0.05
Mainline to Secular	0.11	0.13	0.09	0.17
Mainline to Other Religion	0.03	0.05	0.04	0.05
N	2931		2492	

[a] Relationship between switching and marital status is statistically significant within gender ($p<.05$).

[b] Relationship between switching and marital status is statistically significantly different by gender ($p<.05$).