Investigating the Associations between Parents' Faith Socialization Practices and Young Adults' Character Formation

Abstract

The present study—an interdisciplinary collaboration between a psychologist, philosopher, and theologian— investigates the relationship between young adults' self-reported character strengths and their engagement by their parents in religious socialization practices. We administered surveys to young adults (n = 343) that included self-report character measures (e.g. curiosity, gratitude, social responsibility) and parenting measures (e.g. perceived faith support from parents, parent open communication). OLS regression analyses indicated a statistically significant ($p < .05$) association between participants' self-reported character strengths and their parents' faith socialization practices for three of the tested character measures: social responsibility, purpose, and gratitude. There was no evidence of a significant relationship between parents' faith socialization practices and participants' curiosity, joy, collaboration, intellectual humility, perspective-taking, and social action. Our discussion draws on scholarship from psychology, philosophy, and theology to consider why parents' faith socialization practices may predict some character strengths in young adults but not others.

In 1972, only 5% of adults in the United States reported not having a religious affiliation. This group of Americans has risen steadily over the past 50 years such that 29% of Americans reported no religious affiliation in 2020 (Pew, 2022). This figure is even higher for teenagers in the United States, with 32% characterizing themselves as religiously unaffiliated (Ansberry, 2021). Davis and Graham (2023) refer to this trend as "the great dechurching." There are likely numerous contributors to this nearly six-fold increase in the proportion of religious "nones" in the United States that range from clergy sex scandals reducing trust in religious institutions to rising rates of interfaith marriage to increasing interest in spiritual (but not religious) pursuits (Ansberry, 2021; Grose, 2023; Hout & Fischer, 2014).

A number of public intellectuals from a range of ideological positions have expressed concern that the increasing number of Americans who do not engage in religious practices might be missing out on something valuable (Douthat, 2023; Grose, 2023; Kristof, 2023). Kristof, a political liberal, observes: "The loss of religious community has far-reaching implications. Congregations are a crucial part of America's social capital, providing companionship, food pantries and a pillar of community life. There's also some evidence that religious faith is associated with increased happiness and better physical and mental health." Likewise, Douthat, a political conservative, notes that participation in religious institutions offers "specific kinds of class mixing, intergenerational bonding, dating markets, cross-partisan solidarity, and really good music" that are nearly impossible to find elsewhere in American life.

Another public intellectual, Perry Bacon (2023), who characterizes himself as agnostic and one of the "nones," recently wrote that he has contemplated joining a church so that his children will reap the benefits of participating in a faith community and practices, despite his own skepticism about the existence of a higher power. This question of the value of participation

in religious practices is one of interest to scholars in fields ranging from psychology to theology to philosophy. Accordingly, the present study represents an interdisciplinary collaboration between scholars from these three distinct fields coming together to investigate and consider the proposition that participation in faith practices has a positive influence on young people's character development.

Our findings show that faith-socialization practices are related to three distinct character traits: social responsibility, purpose, and gratitude. We interpret this correlation through a theological, a psychological, and a philosophical perspective, integrating our findings with a philosophical account of habit and a theological view of religious practices. We argue that responsibility, purpose, and gratitude are central to religious practices and narratives. The strengthening of these character traits through faith-socialization rituals and activities indicates that young adults do not passively imitate their parents' behavior but are motivated by their understanding of, and felt connection to, the significance of the practices that their parents observe.

Character can be defined as the qualities that motivate and enable individuals to act in ways that benefit themselves and others (Berkowitz, 2011; Character Lab, 2023). In recent years, many character development researchers have parsed character into four domains—moral, performance, civic, and intellectual (Shields, 2011). Moral character strengths such as purpose and gratitude enable individuals to engage in ethical interpersonal relationships with others while performance character strengths such as grit and perseverance enable individuals to optimize their performance on a particular endeavor (Davidson & Lickon, 2007). Civic character strengths such as social responsibility and a commitment to collaboration enable individuals to fulfill their responsibilities to their communities, and intellectual character strengths such as intellectual

humility and curiosity are the qualities necessary for deep learning and intellectual engagement (Baehr, 2022).

Ever since Aristotle, the notion of character (*êthos*) is linked to the cultivation of habits that help individuals to excel in both the practical and intellectual domains of human activity. To lead a good life, for Aristotle, essentially means to develop *excellence* (*areté*) of character and use practical reason to direct one's life to a moral purpose, which he called flourishing or *eudaimonia*. Moral and intellectual excellence amounts to possessing virtue. To have virtues of character (such as generosity, courage, temperance, etc.) means to use them "at the right time, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end, and in the right way" (Aristotle 2014, 1106b). That is, virtues of character are manifested by feeling and acting in an appropriate way and in the proper context towards oneself and others.

As Kristjánsson (2015) remarks, the translation of Aristotle's notion of virtue into a psychological vocabulary is not without "infelicitous connotations," given that the corresponding notion of "trait" suggests the idea of something inherited (p. 84). Instead, virtues are acquired through upbringings and socialization, which includes the sedimentation of individual choices into a typical pattern of behavior. The underlying idea of Aristotelian-based theories of character is that individuals have different sets of abilities to determine who they are or want to be besides their bodily dispositions. On this view, moral development does not occur in isolation, as it requires the support of communal circles, ranging from the family to society at large.

While this model of character is adopted in education and pedagogy (Arthur *et al*. 2017), the relation between character education and religious practices deserves more attention. As the development of character is tied to habit and social behavior, a key concern for educators,

psychologists, philosophers, and theologians is whether and how religious practices help sustain and inform strengths of character.

When reflecting on character formation and faith socialization practices from a theological perspective, the concepts of accompaniment and discipleship can be informative. According to Roberto Goizueta (1995), accompaniment is a deeply relational concept that is not simply about being present to someone, but walking alongside another in an intimate way. Accompaniment brings individuals together in a relationship of mutuality. The companions offer support and guidance to each other. Goizueta emphasized that accompaniment is not a top-down relationship, but one marked by humility and shared responsibility. The goal of accompaniment is to journey together in a way that fosters spiritual and moral transformation and growth. Likewise, Joshua Snyder (2024) demonstrated that the ethics of accompaniment are grounded in the virtues of friendship, compassion, solidarity, and forbearance.

Through faith socialization practices, parents help their children to internalize the beliefs, values, and rituals of a particular religious tradition. These practices are not just about providing information, but offer opportunities for formation in a way of life. This relates to accompaniment as a way of walking with children by providing support and creating a space where they can encounter Divine Love through the care and support of a community of believers. Furthermore, discipleship is rooted in relationality. It is not a one-way relationship between teacher and student, but a communal relationship of spiritual growth. Discipleship entails a holistic, transformation of life that requires a deep commitment through a community of faith. Parental faith socialization practices introduce children to the life of discipleship.

Religious practices are laden with meaning and they are directed toward various goals and purposes. According to Gerrit Immink (2014), in addition to the social scientific significance

of religious practices, scholars should not lose sight of their theological significance. Participants in religious practices express, in a holistic way, their beliefs, convictions, spirituality, and lived faith. According to Immink, religious practices express values and concerns that are intrinsically religious. Those practices are inseparable from the theological claims that support them.

In this regard, a modest body of psychology research suggests that the strength of a young person's religious beliefs and their engagement in religious practices is associated with a number of different character strengths, and positive youth outcomes associated with strong character (e.g. Kim-Spoon et al., 2014; Smith & Denton, 2005). For example, researchers have found religiosity and religious attendance to be positively associated with positive character strengths such as empathy (Furrow et al., 2004) and purpose (Markstrom, 1999) as well as personality traits such as conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness (Yonker et al., 2012). Likewise, religiosity and engagement with a religious community is predictive of young people's engagement in community service (Furrow et al., 2004; Roehlkepartain et al., 2006).

Other researchers report that religious adolescents in the United States are less likely than nonreligious adolescents to smoke cigarettes, use drugs, drink alcohol in excess, report feeling depressed, engage in delinquent behavior, and attempt suicide (Kim-Spoon et al., 2014; King & Roeser, 2009; Sinha et al., 2007; Yonker, 2012). While the research on the positive effects of religiosity is less robust and consistent, researchers have reported moderate positive associations between religiosity and positive youth outcomes related to health (e.g. Jessor et al., 1998), academic achievement (e.g. Abar et al., 2009), civic engagement (Furrow et al., 2004), and character strengths (Kim-Spoon et al., 2014). For example, in a nationally representative sample of high school seniors, religious youth were more likely than nonreligious youth to exercise regularly and adhere to a healthy diet (Jessor et al., 1998; Wallace & Forman, 1998). Several

studies have found that, for youth and adolescents, regular participation in religious services is modestly associated with academic achievement in school (Abar et al., 2009; Milot & Luden, 2009; Regnerus & Elder, 2003).

Three Perspectives on How Religious Beliefs May Influence Character

A Theological Perspective

Religion is the context wherein most people express, nurture, and live out their response in faith to ultimacy or the divine. According to Catherine Albanese (1981), religions tend to consist of four elements: creeds, codes, cultus, and community. Creeds are explanations about the meaning of human existence within the universe. Codes are guidelines that govern behavior. Both creeds and codes are often articulated through metanarratives that provide the meaning of human life and what constitutes its flourishing. Cultus, or rituals, are the ways in which religions act out the insights and understanding expressed in their creeds and codes. Rituals are symbolic practices that act out foundational beliefs in space and time. Lastly, community is the context in which individuals live out their shared creed, code, and cultus. Religion has the power to link people together and give them a sense of purpose and direction.

According to George Lindbeck (2009), religions are comprehensive interpretive schemes, usually embodied in myths or narratives and heavily ritualized. Religions offer an interpretive framework that shapes the life, actions, and thoughts of its adherents. As an interpretive community, religion offers a distinctive vision of the good and prescribes a set of meaningful practices that enable its achievement. This interpretive framework is not neutral but creates clear boundaries about what behavior is acceptable within its vision of reality.

Religions can provide comprehensive narratives, albeit limited in claims regarding universality, of what constitutes the good along with organizational practices that allow

participants to construct collective identity and participate in collective action at various levels. These narratives serve as a source of both individual and collective agency. Religious narratives can inspire trans-organizational solidarity and hopefulness to overcome injustice and oppression. For example, the reframing of the liberating Exodus event of the Israelites was a critical form of consciousness raising for enslaved African Americans and the Abolition Movement in the United States (Cohen, 2021).

Religious metanarratives, by definition, are communal narratives that inform the narratives and behavior of those operating within that interpretative framework. Religious visions of the good are social by nature, it is the religious community that determines the moral value of a given action. As such, religious communities propose certain practices that their adherents ought to participate in. According to Alasdair MacIntyre (1981), practices are coherent and complex forms of cooperative human activity directed towards the goods internal to that form of activity. The value and worth of a practice is determined by the communal narrative from which it derives. For example, some individuals might engage in direct community service as a way of bolstering their resume whereas others might see serving meals at a soup kitchen as a form of Christian discipleship and participation in the table fellowship inaugurated by the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Virtues are dispositions that sustain practices as the moral agent pursues the good.

Personal narratives can be either formed or deformed by the communal context within which we reside. This draws our attention to how social structures like religions shape our moral habits. Structures limit the reasonable possibilities for action that an agent has. They are structural precisely because they are not the result of intentions or personal failures, but the result of the context from which one can reasonably act. Religions can either promote virtuous

behavior or undermine moral development. Those living in environments of mutual respect, solidarity, and love will find it easier to actualize virtues, whereas those living in hostile environments might find it nearly impossible to realize such dispositions. In the face of negative structural influences, one can suffer from value blindness, an inability to recognize and act on behalf of certain values. Religions that promote self-interested behavior over the common good are more likely to replicate that behavior in their adherents. Not all self-interested behavior is problematic. The problem arises when a religion's concern for its own wellbeing adversely impacts the wellbeing of society and in so doing undermines the common good.

A Psychological Perspective

A small body of psychology research has explored associations between parents' faith socialization outcomes and positive youth outcomes. Religious or faith socialization refers to the processes by which an individual learns from parents, teachers, peers, and other influential figures about religious beliefs and values, and how to engage in religious rituals and practices (Bartkowski, 2007). Examples of such practices include worship, personal prayer, and community service.

A number of psychological frameworks position parents as a primary influence on young people's religiosity and religious practices. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory characterizes parents and family members a part of the proximal "microsystem" that influences children's religious development along with more distal "macrosystems" such as the national context in which a child lives, and the cultural values and ideologies present within that national context. Sociocultural theories of learning posit that parents and other adults within a community serve as knowledgeable mentors who guide young people in learning the religious beliefs, practices, and rituals relevant to their particular faith community (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky,

1978). Finally, relational developmental systems theory posits that young people are socialized into a faith tradition through their interactions with parents, peers, religious leaders, and other members of their faith community, and that these young people will simultaneously influence the faith community they are entering, even as they, too, are learning religious beliefs, practices, and ways of being from the members of that faith community (Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2019). Scholars drawing on each of these different frameworks to consider young people's religious socialization generally hypothesize that parents are the primary influence on their children's religious development, both through explicit socialization practices and through implicit modeling of these beliefs and practices (Hood et al., 2009).

Given that the present study reports on significant associations between parent faith socialization and three specific character strengths– social responsibility, purpose, and gratitude– it is also worthwhile to consider the extant scholarship on the development of these three character strengths, in particular, with the goal of considering potential (albeit speculative) explanations for these significant associations. Social responsibility refers to an individual's commitment to contribute to the greater good (Pancer et al., 2007). In their review of the development of social responsibility in children and adolescents, Wray-Lake and Syvertsen (2011) argue that feelings of social responsibility are rooted, in part, in young people's development of feelings of empathy and their understanding of justice. As children move into adolescence and develop more sophisticated cognitive skills, they grow more skilled at considering the perspectives of others, more compassionate for others' circumstances, and better able to recognize inequities within the communities in which they are members. Wray-Lake and Syvertsen add that the identity exploration that is a staple of adolescence also encourages young people in this developmental stage to more fully conceptualize themselves as members of

various communities, to whom they hold responsibilities. Cumulatively, these developmental shifts during adolescence related to empathy, justice, and identity contribute to adolescents' growing feelings of social responsibility. With regard to the association between social responsibility and parent faith socialization, one might speculate that young people's exposure to religious texts and lessons might encourage their development of empathy and investment in justice. Likewise, young people's participation (alongside their parents) in a faith community might strengthen their sense of identity as a member of a community and their beliefs about the responsibilities they hold within this community.

Another character strength, purpose, refers to an individual's goal of accomplishing something that is both meaningful to that individual but also consequential to a broader community (Damon, Menon & Bronk, 2003). Scholars note that a sense of purpose often develops later in the lifespan than many other character strengths, with relatively small numbers of adolescents and young adults characterizing themselves as feeling fully purposeful (Damon & Malin, 2020). One of the conditions that has been identified as a precursor to the development of purpose is when a young person exhibits "sparks of interest" in a particular subject area, hobby, or other activity, and is then encouraged by parents and other mentors to develop skills related to that interest (Benson, 2008). Children who cultivate these sparks of interest into a deeper, more sustained interest can further strengthen their feelings of purpose by learning about or reflecting on ways in which their deepening interest and skills can be useful in their community or the wider world (Bronk, 2012). A related contributor to young people's purpose development is the opportunity to interact with parents or other adult mentors who model applying their own interests or skills to problems in the world (Damon, 2008). In considering the association between parent faith socialization and purpose, one might speculate again that engagement in

religious learning and participation in a faith community might deepen young people's recognition of problems in the world that need addressing and also expose them to adult mentors who are invested in addressing these problems through service or other forms of philanthropy.

Finally, gratitude refers to a sense of appreciation for something (material or more intangible) that has been received from someone else (Hussong et al., 2018). Hussong and colleagues suggest that feelings of gratitude require an individual to *notice* something they have been given from someone else, *think* to themselves that someone has been generous enough to offer them this thing, *feel* grateful for what they have received, and *express* appreciation to this person. Hussong and other scholars suggest that children as young as six-years-old can consistently *notice* when they have received something from someone else and *express* gratitude for what they have received; however, the *thinking* skills necessary to recognize someone else is being generous and *feelings* of gratitude for this generosity tend to develop in early adolescence as young people hone order thinking skills such as perspective-taking and inference-making. This scholarship on the development of gratitude offers some potential clues about a possible association between parent faith socialization and young people's feelings of gratitude. Specifically, one might speculate that engagement in religious practices such as saying grace before meals might strengthen young people's ability to notice something that has been given to them and their family, feel grateful for what has been given, and express gratitude (in this case to a higher power) for such generosity. Likewise, there are well-known religious parables across a number of different faith traditions that seek to increase participants' noticing of generosity, feelings of gratitude for such generosity, and expression of gratitude for such generosity.

While we are not aware of prior research that has explored these potential associations between parent faith socialization and these specific character strengths, there is valuable

empirical research on the role of parents in young people's religious socialization, descriptive research on the religious practices of families in the United States suggests that 54% of all U.S. families engage in some form of saying "grace" before or after family meals, and that 44% of adolescents in the United States report having conversed with their families about God, scripture, prayer, or religion on a weekly basis (Smith & Denton, 2005). There is also a small body of research that suggests the religiosity of adolescents' parents and family members is predictive of adolescents' own personal religiosity in terms of their involvement in a faith community, the importance they place on religion in their lives, and in the fervency of their religious beliefs (Kim-Spoon et al., 2014; Regnerus, 2003; Vaidyanathan, 2011). Other researchers have reported that this association between parents' religiosity and their children's religiosity is moderated by the quality of the parent-child relationship (Kim-Spoon et al., 2012). In other words, parents and children who have warmer, more communicative, and more nurturing relationships report a stronger link between parent and child religiosity. Additionally, there is evidence of a significant positive relationship between young people's secure attachment to their parents and their attachment to God (Cassibba et al., 2008; Granqvist et al., 2007; McDonald et al., 2005) as well as between young people's secure attachment to their parents and their feelings of spirituality (TenElshof & Furrow, 2000). In other words, young people who report having strong and secure bonds with their parents are, on average, likely to describe stronger religious and spiritual beliefs.

A qualitative study involving interviews with both parents and adolescents in religious Christian, Jewish, and Muslim families suggested that families engage in a number of different practices to support their children's religious development including praying together, attending religious services together, and enrolling children in religious education (Dollahite & Thatcher,

2008). More than three fourths of the parents and youth from all three of the faith communities represented in this study reported that one of the most effective forms of religious socialization was "youth-centered" conversations that focused on the young people's religious thoughts, musings, and questions rather than "parent-centered" conversations in which parents transmitted information about their religion to their children. Likewise, researchers have found that warm parent-child relationships (Hardy et al., 2011) and parent-child relationships marked by frequent interactions (Furrow et al., 2004) are supportive of young people's religious socialization.

Both the conceptual frameworks and empirical research described above offer valuable insights into the influence of parents' religious socialization practices on their children and adolescents' religious development. The same is true for the extant research described above on the role of religiosity in predicting positive youth outcomes. Yet, in their review of religious and spiritual development for the *Handbook of Child Psychology and Developmental Science,* King and Boyatzis (2015) note that "developmental scientists have given scant attention to parent-child communication about religion and spirituality." The present study seeks to contribute to research and scholarship in this area by investigating the relationship between young adults' self-reported character virtues and their engagement by their parents in religious socialization practices.

A Philosophical Perspective

An integral component of every socialization practice is habit. By and large, habits are repeated patterns of action occurring in similar circumstances. We normally speak of habit in relation to different classes of actions, including routines, rituals, and styles of behavior that fit existing social codes. Yet habit is not the same as a practice or a routine. In fact, habit represents the underlying disposition that structures the acquisition of a routine and adaptation to a social practice (Bernacer & Murillo 2014, Bernacer 2018). For instance, while the action of going to

church every Sunday counts as a routine, the integration of the experiential elements that inform the repetition of that action at perceptual, motor, and cognitive levels can be attributed to habit. In this respect, habit plays a key role in producing alignment between perception, memory, and volition, thereby facilitating the harmonization between individual and social behavior (Bennett *et al.* 2013).

From a philosophical viewpoint, it is worth stressing that habit is not a passive mechanism or reflex, but a dynamic and intelligent way of behaving. As Carlisle puts it, "habit is the living, dynamic embodiment of our intelligence and desire. Habit underlies the distinctive character of every being, but shared habits bring individuals together into communities – and therefore habit forms the basis of ethical and religious life" (Carlisle 2014, 3-4). The philosophical assumption here is that habit provides the basis for moral upbringing and collective social practices. This view lies at the core of a large part of the Western philosophical tradition from Aristotle to Dewey (Sparrow and Hutchinson 2013, Dunham and Romdenh-Romluc 2023). Given that habit is a relational construct involving the subject and the environment, a significant problem is posed by the relation between habit and external norms of conduct. It could be argued, for instance, that social norms of behavior (like going to Church or fasting) are passively followed by an individual since childhood without developing proper knowledge and awareness about those practices. This view is mostly associated to *habitus*, a notion introduced by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to account for the fact that social practices generated in a given context are not simply shared but rather constitute homogeneous social structures. Bourdieu refers to the production of a "common-sense world," which harmonizes agents' experiences in order to create a shared consensus on the meaning of the practices involved (Bourdieu 1990, 58). Bourdieu's argument is that shared forms of interaction among a given group or class generate

adaptive patterns of behavior that subsist among different subjects as a system of regulatory dispositions. To illustrate with an example, members of a social class who share similar conditions of upbringing, taste, and education would share an identical *habitus*, such as, for example, attending religious service once a week.

According to Bourdieu, a *habitus* is a scheme of perception and action that becomes so ingrained in the life of an agent to the point of becoming automatic and impersonal. As Bourdieu puts it, "it is because agents never know completely what they are doing that what they do has more sense than they know" (Bourdieu 1990, 69). In this way, habit is conceived as an embodied mechanism for the reproduction and maintenance of a given style of behavior.

While Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* has widely influenced post-structuralist thought, it has also been criticized for its lack of consideration of individual consciousness. Indeed, Bourdieu lacks an adequate conception of the nature and location of human agency (Farnell 2000, Crossley 2001, Throop & Murphy 2002). Importantly, the concept of *habitus* conflates habit and habituation. That is, for Bourdieu, habit serves as a mechanism for internalizing rules of conduct, as in getting used to doing something mindlessly. While mindless behavior is usually ascribed to habit, it is not obvious whether acting from habit is always mindless (see especially the McDowell-Dreyfus debate in Schear 2013). In fact, habit plays a key role in learning and adopting practices that expand or else facilitate self-awareness and self-expression. An illustration of this phenomenon is offered by religious rituals.

While the relation between rituals and power structures has not gone unnoticed by Bourdieu, the phenomenology of rituals (namely, the question of *how* rituals are adopted and integrated in the fabric of personal life) has received less attention. From a cognitive and functional viewpoint, rituals solve adaptive problems associated with the identification of group

members, commitment to in-group values, cooperation, and social cohesion (Watson-Jones & Legare 2016, Legare & Wen 2014). Research in cognitive sciences also suggests that habitual behavior, whether motor or cognitive, is partly built up through the action of neural circuits involved in the evaluation of contexts (Graybiel 2008, 361). The phenomenology of rituals provides further insights into the relation between rituals and perceptual habits. More specifically, rituals help to shape and structure the horizon of possibilities that is given in perception (Williams 2023). As Geniusas explains, a horizon serves as an "implicit system of references" (Geniusas 2012, 27), through which a particular object becomes thematic to us, as we perceive and recognize it in a context that includes other elements. This entails that objects of experience do not appear to us as anonymous things but rather as having subjective relevance. I do not perceive the book on my table as a solid object positioned a few inches away from my laptop, but as the copy of a novel that I studied for my English class, one that is embedded with personal memories, and that I can reach by stretching out my arm. From a phenomenological viewpoint, experiences are laden with affective qualities that reveal the practical salience of the horizon we inhabit.

It is at this level that the role of habit is best understood in relation to both perception and action. Habit provides an anticipation of the actions we are about to make, because it makes us attuned to the context in which the action is going to the place, including its perceived salience (Magrì, 2019). As the limits of the horizon become less conspicuous on a reflective level, habitual actions sharpen our familiarity with the environment, strengthening the perceived salience of the action that is carried out. For instance, the habit of writing in a journal in the morning or in the evening allows the mind to suspend momentarily its concerns for the present, and to achieve more clarity and awareness about recurrent thoughts. In this case, the habit of

keeping a journal is driven by our attachment to, and anticipation of, its perceived beneficial effect. Similarly, habitual actions performed in rituals and ceremonies involve an implicit or affective evaluation of how that experience shapes and maintains one's perception of social reality.

While not all habitual actions generate a moral stance (think, for example, of so-called "bad habits" that have a negative impact on individual health and well-being), habit (as a disposition) appears extremely flexible and receptive to different values that may not be fully known or comprehended by the subject. However, precisely because habit does not override reflexivity and sensitivity to values, it represents an embodied form of orientation through which we conduct and express ourselves in the world. As Williams notes, "humans are not just passively shaped by rituals but can reflectively choose to engage in rituals in order to change how they see the world" (Williams 2023, 18). Internalizing a habit represents a way of calibrating and regulating one's behavior in the world, assigning a certain salience to the horizon that delimits our field of action. Not by chance, French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty speaks of habit as a way of inhabiting space that projects us towards the world (Merleau-Ponty 2012).

In this sense, habit formation is not to be reduced to habituation or desensitization. While habit regulates the strength and degree of conscious attention, it underpins degrees of awareness and understanding that are even more significant when it comes to socializing behavior. In this case, we hypothesize that religious activities and practices enable individuals to become attuned to and develop distinct character strengths.

The Present Study

The research question guiding the present study is the following: To what extent are young adult's self-reported character strengths associated with their parents' engagement in faith socialization practices? Given the existing research on a) the influence of young people's religiosity as a modest predictor of positive youth outcomes and b) the influence of parents' religiosity and participation on their children's religiosity, we hypothesize that young adults' reports of their parents' engagement in religious socialization will significantly and positively predict their scores on a number of self-reported character strengths, even after controlling for parental warmth and communication practices.

We explore the research question above using empirical data collected from undergraduate students at our university. The discussion of these data—and the relation between faith socialization and character formation— draws on philosophical, theological, and psychological viewpoints. From a philosophical perspective, faith socialization practices are not merely routine or passively transmitted rituals, but rather serve as spaces for the articulation, expression, and transmission of socio-cultural and moral content. Additionally, a theological perspective helps us to consider the ways in which the value of specific faith practices are co-constructed by the inherent value placed on them by the community in relation to its vision of the good as well as the meaning provided by the young adult who appropriates that practice into their repertoire of actions. Finally, a psychological perspective considers the ways in which the transmission of faith practices from parents to their children are influenced by the ecological and sociocultural contexts in which they are occurring.

Method

Participants

The participants in the present study are undergraduate students at a Catholic university located in a northeastern city in the United States (n = 343) who were enrolled in several

different introductory psychology courses. Two hundred and ninety-one participants identified as women, and 52 identified as men. In terms of their faith backgrounds, 151 students identified as Catholic, 55 identified as Protestant, 62 as atheist/agnostic, seven as Buddhist, six as Muslim, four as Jewish, four as Greek or Russian Orthodox, two as Hindu, one as a member of the Church of Latter Day Saints, and 44 as "something else" (spiritual, non-denominational Christian, etc.). Within this sample, the majority of participants (n = 218) identified as being between 19-23 years old. A number of participants (n = 124) as being 17-18 years old, and 1 participant identified as being 24-28 years old.

Data Collection

Data collection was approved by the authors' university IRB committee (IRB Case # 21.106.01). All participants completed an online survey during the 2020-21 academic year that was administered via the Qualtrics online platform. Upon logging into the Qualtrics platform, all students first viewed a consent screen that explained the purpose of the study, that the survey would take approximately 15 minutes to complete, that their professor would not see their responses, and that their names and any other unique identifying information would not be shared with researchers. Students who agreed to participate were then directed to the survey. Included on the survey completed by participating adolescents were a) self-report character measures; b) measures of their parents' socialization practices; and c) items that solicited participants' demographic information (e.g. religious background, race/ethnicity, gender, etc.). We describe each of these measures in greater detail below.

Measures

The survey completed by study participants included nine self-report **character measures** that were chosen by this study's authors to represent a mix of moral (purpose,

gratitude, joy), civic (social responsibility, commitment to collaboration, openness to multiple perspectives, civic engagement), and intellectual (intellectual humility, curiosity) character strengths, and that we hypothesized might be influenced by religious learning or participation in religious practices based on the authors' previous character development research utilizing these character measures. We did not include measures of performance character in the present study because we did not hypothesize a relationship between parent faith socialization and youth performance character.

Participants responded to all of the items that comprised these measures along a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1= not like me at all to 5= very much like me. Social responsibility was assessed as the mean of a 4-item scale adapted from Pancer et al.'s (2007) Youth Social Responsibility Scale, which assesses the extent to which young people believe they have an obligation to work for the betterment of their community. Participants reported their levels of agreement with statements such as: "It is important to me to help those who are less fortunate" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.78). Purpose was assessed as the mean of a 3-item scale adapted from Syvertsen et al.'s (2015) Purpose Scale, which assesses the extent to which individuals believe that they have broader life goals they are striving to obtain. Participants reported their levels of agreement with statements such as, "I believe I am going to make a difference in the world" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.73). Intellectual humility was assessed as the mean of a 4-item scale adapted from Porter et al.'s (in preparation) Intellectual Humility Scale, which assesses the extent to which individuals believe that they still have much to learn from and with others. Participants reported their levels of agreement with statements such as, "I feel that I can learn a lot from people" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.69). Joy was assessed as the mean of a 5-item scale adapted from Diener et al.'s (1984) Subjective Wellbeing Scale, which assesses the extent to

which individuals report feeling satisfied with the conditions of their life. Participants reported their levels of agreement with statements such as, "The conditions of my life are excellent" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.75). Gratitude was assessed as the mean of a 3-item measure adapted from Syvertsen et al.'s (2015) Gratitude Scale, which assesses the extent to which individuals feel thankful for the rewarding aspects of their lives. Participants reported their levels of agreement with statements such as, "I feel thankful for everyday things" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.68). Curiosity was assessed as the mean of a 5-item scale adapted from Park and Peterson's (2006) Values in Action Inventory (Curiosity subscale), which assesses the extent to which individuals express interest in people, places, and things in their lives. Participants reported their levels of agreement with statements such as, "I am interested in all kinds of things" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.81). Commitment to collaboration was assessed as the mean of a 3-item scale adapted from Syvertsen et al.'s (2015) Teamwork/Collaboration Scale, which assesses the extent to which individuals perceive themselves to be skilled at working productively with others. Participants reported their level of agreement with statements such as, "I am good at working together with other group members" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.74). Openness to multiple perspectives was assessed as the mean of a 5-item scale adapted from Davis's (1983) Multidimensional Empathy Scale, which assesses the extent to which individuals seek out new and different viewpoints on a particular issue or situation. Participants reported their level of agreement with statements such as, "I strive to see issues from many points of view" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.61). Finally, civic engagement was assessed as the mean of a 4-item scale adapted from Diemer's (2017) Critical Consciousness Scale (Critical Action Sub-Scale), which assesses the frequency of individual's participation in a number of different forms of civic participation. Participants reported their

frequency of participation in civic activities such as participating in a political party, contacting a political official, and joining a march or demonstration (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82).

The survey also included three parenting-related measures. First, perceived faith support from parents was adapted from Schwartz's (2006) scale of the same name, which assesses the extent to which participants characterize their parents as socializing them into a particular religious tradition. While Schwartz named her measure one of "perceived faith *support*," she makes it evident in her study reporting on this measure that she considers faith support to be a primary element of parent faith *socialization*. Participants reported their levels of agreement with statements such as "I read and talk about religious texts with one or more of my parents " (Cronbach's alpha = 0.84). This scale was originally developed by Schwartz and administered to a sample of 4,000 adolescents ages 14-18 (mean age 16.15 years old) attending a Christian youth convention, with whom it demonstrated strong internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.87). This scale was subsequently validated with a sample of 1390 primarily Christian adolescents and young adults from Indonesia, with whom it also demonstrated a strong internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.91). The present study administers this measure to a sample of adolescents and young adults attending a Catholic university in the United States. Importantly, while the version of this measure administered to youth in Indonesia queried participants separately about the faith support they received from their mother and their father, the version of the measure in the present study queried participants about specific types of faith support they received from "one or more of their parents."

Because of the robust body of research that reports the quality of parent-child relationships influences the associations between parent socialization and dozens of youth outcomes (Mahoney & Boyatzis, 2019) including faith formation (e.g. Hull, 2015; Kim-Spoon et

al., 2012), we included in this study two measures of the quality of parent-child relationships. Parents' emotional responsiveness to their children was assessed as the mean of the 3-item emotional responsiveness measure adapted from the Parent-Child Relationship Inventory (Robinson, 1995). Participants reported their levels of agreement with statements such as "Growing up, my parent gave me comfort when I was upset" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.93). Also, parents' engagement in open communication with their children was assessed as the mean of the 4-item Open Communication measure also adapted from the Parent-Child Relationship Inventory (Barnes & Olson, 1985). Participants reported their levels of agreement with statements such as, "Growing up, it was easy to discuss my true feelings with my parent" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.72). On both of these measures of parent-child relationship quality, participants responded to the items on these measures for each of their parent/caregivers, and the mean scores on these responses were then included in this study's OLS regression analyses.

Finally, the survey also included several items that requested demographic information from participants including race/ethnicity, gender, age, religious identification, etc. For the survey item requesting information about participants' gender, students could choose to identify as male, female, or non-binary. For the survey item requesting information about participants' religious identity, students could select a range of options that included Protestant, Catholic, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, atheist/agnostic, and 'something else.'

Data Analysis

To investigate the relationship between participating young adults' self-reported character strengths and their parents' faith socialization practices, we fit a series of single-level ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models in which students' reports of their parents' faith socialization practices represented the independent variable, and students' self-reported character

strengths represented the dependent variable. For each of these main effects models, we sought to control for the effects of general parenting quality by including covariates for parents' emotional responsiveness and open communication style. For both of these measures of parenting quality, students evaluated all of their parents/caregivers individually, and then we took the mean score of these ratings. We also included students' gender as a covariate because of a robust body of research indicating that female adolescents and young adults report both higher feelings of religiosity (Barry & Nelson, 2014; Ryberg, et al., 2018) and higher scores on character measures (e.g. Malin et al., 2017; Gil, 2024; Rashid et al., 2013) than their male peers.

Results

The results of the analyses investigating the relationship between participating young adults' self-reported character strengths and their parents' faith socialization practices are reported in Tables 1 and 2 below. Specifically, Table 1 shares the descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) for students' scores on each of the nine self-reported character measures as well as these young people's reports of their parents' parenting practices on three parenting measures (faith support, open communication, emotional responsiveness). Table 2 reports on the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models investigating the association between participants' character strengths and their family's faith socialization practices, while controlling for participants' gender and their reports of their parents' general parenting practices.

As can be seen in Table 2, the OLS regression models for three of the character measures indicate a statistically significant association between participants' self-reported character strengths and descriptions of their parents' faith socialization practices. Specifically, parents' faith support is a significant predictor of participants' feelings of social responsibility ($p = .008$) and marginally significant predictor of their feelings of purpose ($p = .04$) and gratitude ($p = .05$).

In other words, participants who reported their parents engaging in higher levels of religious/faith socialization also characterized themselves as possessing, on average, higher levels of these character strengths. Specifically, a one-unit increase in parents' faith socialization practices was associated with a 0.06 unit increase in participants' feelings of social responsibility, a 0.08 unit increase in their feelings of purpose, and a 0.05 unit increase in their feelings of gratitude.

In contrast, there were not significant associations between parent faith socialization and participants' self-reports of their curiosity, joy, collaboration, intellectual humility, openness to multiple perspectives, and engagement in social action. In other words, participants' descriptions of their parents' faith socialization practices were not, on average, related to their scores on these six character strengths. We consider the implications of these findings in the Discussion below from our respective scholarly lenses.

Discussion

The present study found that, in a sample of young adult college students, their reports of their parents' faith socialization practices were predictive of their feelings of social responsibility, purpose, and gratitude, but not a number of other character strengths (e.g. curiosity, collaboration, perspective-taking, civic engagement, intellectual humility, and joy). As we explained in the Introduction, this study represents a collaboration between scholars from psychology, theology, and philosophy because we believe our respective fields offer distinctive insights into this study's research question and results.

Faith Socialization Practices & Personal Narratives

Human beings are essentially narrative-producing beings. We create and inhabit meaningful worlds. But there can be a tendency to overemphasize individuality to the exclusion of other values such as relationality and interdependency. This perspective is problematic in that

it is a highly individualized conception of the human person that does not take into consideration the social basis of human life and the interdependence of human beings. Our narratives are always constructed and embedded within the communal narratives within which we reside. As we try to define ourselves, we co-construct our own reality, our own interpretations of how the world works within a communal context, and end up with a set of foundational beliefs. Our associations help to form our identity as well as the meaning we posit on certain events. One's social relationships, including religious involvement, provide the context for mutual flourishing and moral development.

A theological lens suggests that the distinctive contributions of faith socialization practices to character formation are that religion provides a foundational story giving meaning and purpose to life, it emphasizes moral behavior and responsibility to the greater community, and it operates out a theological appreciation of human existence that cultivates gratitude. Young adult faith is often exploratory. Through the influence of parental faith socialization practices, young adults develop a more intense awareness of what they are committed to and what they believe.

In terms of meaning and purpose, most religions view the world and their relationship with it teleologically. Religious practices are laden with meaning and they are directed toward various goals and purposes. The summum bonum, or highest good, is to come to know and love the Divine. Similarly, many religious adherents find purpose in the pursuit of human flourishing lived out in communal pursuit of the common good. The common good is not simply a collection of individual goods, but rather, the sum total of social conditions necessary for humans to attain their fulfillment. As such, faith socialization practices direct adherents to a sense of meaning and

purpose to life that is constituted by union with the Divine and leads them to seek out communal happiness.

Additionally, this study suggests that faith socialization practices led young adults to a greater sense of social responsibility. Religious adherents often feel a sense of moral obligation to assist the other in attaining their well-being. The fundamental form of human association is not the social contract governed by neutral laws and justice understood as non-interference. Rather, social responsibility requires responsive and accountable action that is directed toward the good of the other. Faith socialization practices might lead to the realization that the other possesses intrinsic value and worth leading to social interactions between personal agents who are members of moral communities.

Religious institutions can be central to framing social responsibility because they are rooted in preexisting narratives that stress the importance of care for others. Collective action frames highlight unjust social conditions, help to determine who is responsible for injustice, define grievances and define specific action to generate social change. For example, if we look at the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, we can see have the South Christian Leadership Conference emerged from historically black churches. Those leaders uplifted the freedom and justice frames that were preached within Black churches and applied them to the struggle for human rights.

Lastly, many religious traditions manifest a profound sense of gratitude. The human-Divine relationship is not rooted in necessity but rather in freedom. The Divine freely communicates Itself to humanity and in response humans are free to accept or reject this offer of relationship. There is an innate connection between gratitude and faith. Faith is a fundamental attitude of the human person in their relationship toward all other existences. Faith as trust is a

disposition that qualifies all of our actions toward those we encounter. If one trusts in the goodness of created reality it leads to gratitude and the recognition of the good in one's life. Likewise, gratitude acknowledges the goodness is gratuitous. Goodness is freely and lovingly given to creation by the Divine. Faith socialization practices aid in the cultivation of gratitude by drawing adherents' attention to the goodness of creation.

Habits & Habituation

A philosophical lens suggests that the associations between faith socialization and several character strengths may be due to the ways in which faith socialization practices contribute to the development of habits and, ultimately, enable the expression and consolidation of character traits.

As we have shown, faith socialization practices depend on positive associations between individual and social behavior. Developing faith socialization habits means forming an expectation about the future that is firmly anchored in the experience of participating in an existing community with its own tradition and moral values. Thus, the orientation towards the future is less about expected rewards for good behavior than about reconfiguring one's sense of belonging to a group, sharing its tradition and values. While our survey shows that faith socialization practices do not correlate with the development of civic engagement, we suggest that the communal experience of faith socialization practices is a world-constituting experience; that is, an experience that reshapes the boundaries of existing social spaces. Taking part in faith socialization practices allows individuals to be involved in the form of life that is part of one's culture and society. We use the concept of form of life as theorized by Jaeggi (2018), namely as a collective formation that rests on socially shared practices demarcated by a certain expectation of cooperation. Unlike institutional settings and established cultural formations, a form of life is

a cluster or *ensemble* of social practices that are shaped by those who act within them, even though they pre-exist individuals. Similarly, faith socialization practices allow individuals to be part and parcel of a collective dimension that sets certain moral expectations about their behavior. Furthermore, faith socialization practices are taken up in the context of embodied and shared activities that strengthen responsiveness to others, especially gratitude.

While the standard notion of *habitus* considers collective ceremonies and rituals as staging performances that train thought and feeling in order to instill an implicit pedagogy, faith socialization practices draw attention to actions done in concert with one another because of their transformative impact on an individual's ethos or conduct. This suggests not only that the agents taking part in these practices understand the meaning of their rituals and habitual behavior but also that they jointly create a lived space for the enactment of their values. From this point of view, faith socialization practices can be regarded as participatory sense-making interactions that generate meaning rather than passively reproducing or imitating it (Gallagher 2009).

Faith Practices & Ecological Systems

Finally, considering this study's results through a psychological lens suggests that perhaps engagement in faith socialization practices may contribute to a young person's reflectiveness about their own role in a broader macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) . We offer this supposition because the present study found participants' faith socialization practices to be predictive of their feelings of social responsibility, gratitude, and purpose. All three of these character strengths might be characterized as involving such reflectiveness. Specifically, social responsibility can be characterized as the extent to which one believes they have an obligation to work for the betterment of their community (Pancer et al., 2007). Purpose refers to the extent to which an individual possesses broader life goals they are striving to obtain, and gratitude refers

to feelings of thankfulness for the rewarding aspects of one's life (Syvertsen et al., 2015). Importantly, all three of these character strengths draw on higher order thinking skills such as perspective-taking and inference-making that typically start developing in adolescence or late adulthood (Damon & Malin, 2020; Hussong et al., 2018; Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011. Specifically, social responsibility draws on an individual's ability to feel empathy for others, their understanding of systemic forms of injustice, and their sense of themself as a member of a community with responsibilities to that community (Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011). Purpose develops, in part, from a young person's opportunity to see parents or other adult mentors model applying their own interests and skills to problems in the world (Damon, 2008), and then reflecting on which skills that young person possesses, and which problems in the world those skills might be well-suited to address (Damon & Malin, 2020). Finally, gratitude requires an individual to possess the thinking skills necessary to recognize someone else's generosity in a particular situation and to be able to articulate their appreciation of that generosity (Hussong et al., 2018). In short, all of these character strengths involve an individual engaging in reflection upon how their individual circumstances interact with more distal macrosystems such as their local and global communities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In considering the associations reported in the present study between parents' faith socialization and their children's feelings of social responsibility, purpose, and gratitude, it seems notable that engagement in faith practices such as exposure to religious parables, participation in faith-based service or volunteerism, and the practice of giving thanks for blessings in one's life all encourage young people to consider the experiences and perspectives of others, think deeply about their own role within a community, and take note of opportunities and experiences for which they should be grateful. In other words, one might speculate that parents who introduce and engage their children in faith practices are

both encouraging their children to be reflective about their role in a broader ecological context and also helping their children develop capacities such as empathy and perspective-taking that are essential to the development of character strengths such as social responsibility, purpose, and gratitude.

In contrast, it is notable that the present study did not identify significant associations between faith socialization practices and young adults' actual engagement with others. In other words, young adults' reports of their engagement with their parents in faith socialization practices did not predict their self-reported ability to consider others' perspectives, collaborate with others, or engage in civic activities. While of course one must interpret the results of a single study with caution, one might infer that perhaps faith practices exert a more direct influence upon a young person's reflections about their role in the world than upon their actions within the world. Though, of course, especially because the participants in the present study are all young adults, it is also very possible that reflection is a precursor to action (Freire, 1970), and that the higher levels of reflectiveness associated with participation in faith practices will subsequently predict these young adults' actions and interactions with the wider world as they move further into adulthood. Future research efforts would do well to consider this possibility via a longitudinal research design.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the present study. First, the analyses utilized in the present study cannot identify causal relationships between faith socialization practices and young adults' character strengths. Although there would be challenges to establishing an experimental design involving parents' faith socialization practices, perhaps future research efforts can identify opportunities—through either research design or analytic strategy—to make causal

claims. A different limitation of the present study is that our quantitative measure of parent faith socialization asks participants to describe religious practices that their parents engage them in or model for them, but does *not* query participants about whether they find these socialization practices to be beneficial or harmful to their own development. Future qualitative research into young adults' perceptions of their parents' faith socialization practices could more appropriately take up this important question.

Another point related to measurement is that the dearth of existing measures focused on parent faith socialization led us in the present study to utilize a short, 20-year-old measure (i.e. Schwartz, 2006). We are hopeful that increased interest in religious development and socialization in the coming years will lead to the development and validation of new measures in these areas. Finally, another measurement-related validity threat is that the survey items related to open parent communication and parent emotional responsiveness were posed to participants in the past tense while the survey items related to parent faith support were posed to participants in the present tense. It's possible then that the participants were responding to these different parenting measures with different time frames in mind.

We should also note that the participants in the present study were all young adults enrolled in an elite Catholic university in the United States. Accordingly, we must be cautious about generalizing this study's findings to the broader population of college-going and non-college-going young adults in the United States, much less the wider world. Along similar lines, we should acknowledge that several of the measures utilized in the present study were previously validated with youth or adolescent samples, and we should be cautious about assuming that such measures will maintain their validity with a sample of young adults.

Implications

We began this study by citing several different public intellectuals who hold distinctive ideological stances but who are united in their concern about the diminishing number of families in the United States who engage together in faith practices or are members of a faith community. We believe this study offers support for these concerns by identifying significant associations between parents' faith socialization practices and their children's character formation.

Recall that one of those public intellectuals, Perry Bacon, who identifies as both agnostic and unaffiliated with any specific religious group, described his consideration of joining a church so that his children could enjoy the benefits of participating in this community. The dilemma, however, is that, as we laid out in the preceding pages, the power and influence of faith socialization practices such as churchgoing and prayer are likely generated by the act of family members and community members engaging in these rituals collectively and sincerely, and, in so doing, imbuing these rituals with meaning and significance. That is to say that the ability of parent faith socialization practices to support young people's character formation is likely less about the physical motions of the practices themselves and more about the earnest investment with which young people witness and experience their family members and community members engaging in these practices. Accordingly, for faith socialization practices to nurture the character development of young people, their parents must genuinely feel a sense of connection and investment in the faith communities to which they and their children belong.

References

Abar, B., Carter, K. L., & Winsler, A. (2009). The effects of maternal parenting style and religious commitment on self-regulation, academic achievement, and risk behavior among African-American parochial college students. *Journal of Adolescence*, *32*(2), 259-273.

Albanese, C. (1981). *America: Religions and religion.* Wadsworth.

Ansberry, C. (2021 October 25). Young People Say Disconnect Keeps Them From Church. *Wall Street Journal*.

Aristotle (2014). *Nicomachean Ethics*, edited by Roger Crisp. Cambridge: Cambride University Press.

Arthur, J., Kristjánsson, K., Harrison, T., Sanderse, W., and Wright, D. (2017). *Teaching character and virtue in school*. London-New York: Routledge.

Baehr, J. (2022). *Deep in thought: A practical guide to teaching for intellectual virtues*. Harvard Education Press.

Bacon, P. (2023 August 21). I left the church—and now long for a 'church for the nones.' *Washington Post.*

Barry, C. M., & Nelson, L. J. (2005). The role of religion in the transition to adulthood for young emerging adults. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, *34*(3), 245-255.

Barnes, H., & Olson, D. (1982). Parent-adolescent communication scale. In D.H. Olson et al., *Family inventories: Inventories used in a national survey of families across the family life cycle* (pp. 33-48). St. Paul: Family Social Science, University of Minnesota.

Bartkowski, J. P. (2007). Religious socialization among American youth: How faith shapes parents, children, and adolescents. *The Sage handbook of the sociology of religion*, 511-525.

Bernacer, J. (2018) An integrative understanding of habit to explore its neural correlates, *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 25 (7-8), pp. 112-134.

Bernacer, J. and Murillo, J. I. (2014) The Aristotelian conception of habit and its contribution to human neuroscience, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 8: 883, pp. 1-10. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2014.00883

Bennett, T., Dodsworth, F., Noble, G., Poovey, M., & Watkins, M. (2013). Habit and habituation: Governance and the social. *Body & Society*, *19*(2-3), 3-29.

Benson, P. L. (2008). *Sparks: How parents can ignite the hidden strengths of teenagers*. John Wiley & Sons.

Berkowitz, M. (2011). Moral and character education. In *APA educational psychology handbook, vol. 2: Individual differences and cultural and contextual factors* (Karen Harris et al., eds.). Washington DC: American Psychological Association.

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Polity.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design.* Harvard University Press.

Bronk, K. C. (2012). A grounded theory of the development of noble youth purpose. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *27*(1), 78-109.

Carlisle, C. (2014). *On habit*. Routledge.

Cassibba, R., Granqvist, P., Costantini, A., & Gatto, S. (2008). Attachment and God representations among lay Catholics, priests, and religious: a matched comparison study based on the Adult Attachment Interview. *Developmental psychology*, *44*(6), 1753.

Character Lab (2023). How do you define character? www.characterlab.org.

Cohen, J. L. (2021). *Excavating exodus: Biblical typology and racial solidarity in African American Literature*. Liverpool University Press.

Crossley, N. (2001) *The Social Body. Habit, Identity and Desire*, London: Sage Publications.

Damon, W. (2008). *The path to purpose: Helping our children find their calling in life*. Simon and Schuster.

Damon, W., & Malin, H. (2020). The development of purpose. *The Oxford handbook of moral development: An interdisciplinary perspective*, 110.

Damon, W., Menon, J., & Bronk, K. C. (2019). The development of purpose during adolescence. In *Beyond the self* (pp. 119-128). Routledge.

Davidson, M., Lickona, T., & Khmelkov, V. (2007). Smart and good schools. *Education Week*, *66*(2), 24-30.

Davis, J., Graham, M., & Burge, R. P. (2023). *The Great Dechurching: Who's Leaving, Why Are They Going, and What Will It Take to Bring Them Back?*. Zondervan.

Davis, M. H. (1983). The effects of dispositional empathy on emotional reactions and helping: A multidimensional approach. *Journal of personality*, *51*(2), 167-184.

De Jaegher, H., and Di Paolo, E. (2007) Participatory Sense-Making: An enactive approach to social cognition. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 6, 485-507.

Desmond, S. A., Ulmer, J. T., & Bader, C. D. (2013). Religion, self control, and substance use. *Deviant Behavior*, *34*(5), 384-406.

Diemer, M. A., Rapa, L. J., Park, C. J., & Perry, J. C. (2017). Development and validation of the critical consciousness scale. *Youth & Society*, *49*(4), 461-483.

Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Psychological bulletin*, *95*(3), 542.

Dollahite, D. C., & Thatcher, J. Y. (2008). Talking about religion: How highly religious youth and parents discuss their faith. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *23*(5), 611-641.

Douthat, R. (2023 September 1). Where should agnostics go on Sundays? *New York Times.*

Dunham, J., & Romdenh-Romluc, K. (Eds.). (2023). *Habit and the History of Philosophy*. Routledge.

Farnell, B. (2000). Getting out of the habitus: An alternative model of dynamically embodied social action. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, *6*(3), 397-418.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* Continuum.

Furrow, J. L., King, P. E., & White, K. (2004). Religion and positive youth development: Identity, meaning, and prosocial concerns. *Applied developmental science*, *8*(1), 17-26.

Gallagher, S. 2009. Two problems of intersubjectivity. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 16 (6-8): 289-308

Geniusas, S. (2012). *The origins of the horizon in Husserl's phenomenology* (Vol. 67). Springer Science & Business Media.

Goizueta, Roberto. (1995). Caminemos Con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment. Maryknoll: Orbis Press.

Graybiel, A. M. (2008). Habits, rituals, and the evaluative brain. *Annual Review of Neuroscience, 31*(1), 359–387. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.neuro.29.051605.112851

Granqvist, P., Ljungdahl, C., & Dickie, J. R. (2007). God is nowhere, God is now here: Attachment activation, security of attachment, and God's perceived closeness among 5–7-year-old children from religious and non-religious homes. *Attachment & human development*, *9*(1), 55-71.

Grose, J. (2023 November 25). Americans under 30 don't trust religion—or anything else. *New York Times.*

Hardy, S. A., White, J. A., Zhang, Z., & Ruchty, J. (2011). Parenting and the socialization of religiousness and spirituality. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, *3*(3), 217.
Hood Jr, R. W., Hill, P. C., & Spilka, B. (2009). *The psychology of religion: An empirical approach*. Guilford Press.

Hout, M., & Fischer, C. S. (2014). Explaining why more Americans have no religious preference: Political backlash and generational succession, 1987-2012. *Sociological Science*, *1*, 423-447.

Hussong, A. M., Coffman, J. L., & Halberstadt, A. G. (2021). Parenting and the development of children's gratitude. *Child Development Perspectives*, *15*(4), 235-241.

Hussong, A. M., Langley, H. A., Coffman, J. L., Halberstadt, A. G., & Costanzo, P. R. (2018). Parent socialization of children's gratitude. In J. Tudge, & L. Freitas (Eds.), Developing gratitude (pp. 199–219). Cambridge University Press.

Immink, Gerrit. (2014). Theological analysis of religious practices, *International Journal of Practical Theology* 18(1), 127-138.

Jaeggi, R., (2018). *On the Critique of Forms of Life*, trans. C. Cronin. Harvard University Press.

Jessor, R., Turbin, M. S., & Costa, F. M. (1998). Protective factors in adolescent health behavior. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *75*(3), 788.

Kim-Spoon, J., Farley, J. P., Holmes, C., Longo, G. S., & McCullough, M. E. (2014). Processes linking parents' and adolescents' religiousness and adolescent substance use: Monitoring and self-control. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, *43*, 745-756.

Kim-Spoon, J., Longo, G. S., & McCullough, M. E. (2012). Parent-adolescent relationship quality as a moderator for the influences of parents' religiousness on adolescents' religiousness and adjustment. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, *41*(12), 1576-1587.

King, P. E., & Roeser, R. W. (2009). Religion and spirituality in adolescent development. *Handbook of adolescent psychology*, *1*.

King, P. E., & Boyatzis, C. J. (2015). Religious and spiritual development. *Handbook of child psychology and developmental science: Socioemotional processes*, *3*, 975-1021.

Kristjánsson, K. (2015). *Aristotelian Character Education.* London-New York: Routledge.

Kristof, N. (2023 August 23). America is losing religious faith. *New York Times.*

Legare, C. H., & Wen, N. (2014). The effects of ritual on the development of social group cognition. International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development, 2(66), 9-12

Lerner, R. M., Dowling, E. M., & Anderson, P. M. (2019). Positive youth development: Thriving as the basis of personhood and civil society. In *Beyond the self* (pp. 172-180). Routledge.

Lindbeck, G. (1984). *The nature of doctrine: Religion and theology in a postliberal age.* Westminster.

Lyotard, J.F. (1984). *The Postmodern condition: A report on Knowledge*. University of Minnesota Press.

MacIntrye, A. (1981). *After virtue: A study of moral theory.* University of Notre Dame Press.

Magrì, E. (2019). Situating attention and habit in the landscape of affordances. *Rivista Internazionale di Filosofia e Psicologia, 10*(2), 120-136. https://doi.org/10.4453/rifp.2019.0011

Malin, H., Liauw, I., and Damon, W. (2017). ***Purpose and character development in early adolescence*** Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 46(6), 1200-1215. DOI 10.1007/s10964-017-0642-3

Markstrom, C. A. (1999). Religious involvement and adolescent psychosocial development. *Journal of Adolescence*, *22*(2), 205-221.

McDonald, A., Beck, R., Allison, S., & Norswortby, L. (2005). Attachment to God and parents: Testing the correspondence vs. compensation hypotheses. *Journal of Psychology & Christianity*, *24*(1).

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2012). *Phenomenology of perception.* Routledge.

Milot, A. S., & Ludden, A. B. (2009). The effects of religion and gender on well-being, substance use, and academic engagement among rural adolescents. Youth and Society, 40, 403-425.

Moran, D. (2005). *Edmund Husserl: founder of phenomenology*. Polity.

Pancer, S. M., Pratt, M., Hunsberger, B., & Alisat, S. (2007). Community and political involvement in adolescence: What distinguishes the activists from the uninvolved?. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *35*(6), 741-759.

Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2006). Moral competence and character strengths among adolescents: The development and validation of the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth. *Journal of adolescence*, *29*(6), 891-909.

Pew Research Center (2022 September 13). Modeling the future of religion in America. www.pewresearch.org

Rashid, T., Anjum, A., Lennox, C., Quinlan, D., Niemiec, R. M., Mayerson, D., & Kazemi, F. (2013). Assessment of character strengths in children and adolescents. In *Research, applications,*

and interventions for children and adolescents: A positive psychology perspective (pp. 81-115). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.

Regnerus, M. D., & Elder, G. H. (2003). Staying on track in school: Religious influences in high-and low-risk settings. *Journal for the scientific study of religion*, *42*(4), 633-649.

Robinson, C. C., Mandleco, B. L., Olsen, S. F., & Hart, C. H. (1995). Authoritative, Authoritarian and Permissive Parenting Practices: Development of a new measure. Psychological Reports, 77, 819-830. doi:10.2466/pr0.1995.77.3.819

Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. Oxford university press.

Roehlkepartain, E. C., Benson, P. L., King, P. E., & Wagener, L. M. (2006). Spiritual development in childhood and adolescence: Moving to the scientific mainstream. *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence*, 1-15.

Schear, J. (2013). *Mind, reason, and being-in-the-world: The McDowelll–Dreyfus debate.* Routledge.

Schwartz, K. D. (2006). Transformations in Parentand Friend Faith Support Predicting Adolescents' Religious Faith. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, *16*(4), 311-326.

Shields, D. L. (2011). Character as the aim of education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *92*(8), 48-53.

Sinha, J. W., Cnaan, R. A., & Gelles, R. J. (2007). Adolescent risk behaviors and religion: Findings from a national study. *Journal of adolescence*, *30*(2), 231-249.

Smith, C., & Denton, M. (2005). The faith of the next generation. *Seattle Pacific University*, *19*.

Snyder, Joshua. (2024). Ethical accompaniment and end-of-life care. *Christian Bioethics: Non-Ecumenical Studies in Medical Morality*, 30, 189-199.

Sparrow, T. & Hutchinson, A. (2013). (ed. by) *A History of habit. From Aristotle to Bourdieu*. Lexington Books.

Suwartno, C., Suhendra, J., Soeherman, S., & Mamahit, A. (2019). Validity and reliability analysis of the support of faith scale. *Indonesian Journal of Indigenous Psychology, 6*(2).

Syvertsen, A., Wray-Lake, L., & Metzger, A. (2015). *Youth civic and character measures toolkit.* Search Institute.

TenElshof, J. K., & Furrow, J. L. (2000). The role of secure attachment in predicting spiritual maturity of students at a conservative seminary. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, *28*(2), 99-108.

Throop, C. J., & Murphy, K. M. (2002). Bourdieu and phenomenology: A critical assessment. *Anthropological theory*, *2*(2), 185-207.

Vaidyanathan, B. (2011). Religious resources or differential returns? Early religious socialization and declining attendance in emerging adulthood. *Journal for the scientific study of religion*, *50*(2), 366-387.

Vera Gil, S. The Influence of Gender on Academic Performance and Psychological Resilience, and the Relationship Between Both: Understanding the Differences Through Gender Stereotypes. *Trends in Psychol.* (2024). https://doi.org/10.1007/s43076-024-00370-7

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (Vol. 86). Harvard University Press.

Wallace Jr, J. M., & Forman, T. A. (1998). Religion's role in promoting health and reducing risk among American youth. *Health Education & Behavior*, *25*(6), 721-741.

Watson-Jones, R. E., & Legare, C. H. (2016). The social functions of group rituals. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 25*(1), 42-46. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721415618486

Williams, J. I. (2023). Embodied world construction: a phenomenology of ritual. *Religious Studies,* 60:1, 1-20.

Wray-Lake, L., & Syvertsen, A. K. (2011). The developmental roots of social responsibility in childhood and adolescence. *New directions for child and adolescent development*, *2011*(134), 11-25.

Yonker, J. E., Schnabelrauch, C. A., & DeHaan, L. G. (2012). The relationship between spirituality and religiosity on psychological outcomes in adolescents and emerging adults: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of adolescence*, *35*(2), 299-314.

Zahavi, D. (2018). *Phenomenology: the basics*. Routledge.

Table 1. Summary statistics (Mean, Standard Deviation) for young adult's self-reported character outcomes

	N	Mean Score (SD)
Self-Reported Character Measures (5-point scale)		
Social Responsibility	356	4.64 (0.49)
Purpose	355	3.97 (0.79)
Intellectual Humility	355	4.11 (0.56)
Joy	355	3.55 (0.92)
Gratitude	354	4.45 (0.61)
Curiosity	355	4.12 (0.69)
Collaboration	356	4.49 (0.48)
Openness to Multiple Perspectives	353	3.96 (0.54)
Civic Engagement	353	1.75 (0.68)
Parenting Measures (5-Point Scale)		
Parent Communication	339	3.77 (0.86)
Parent Emotional Responsiveness	337	4.02 (0.77)
Parent Faith Support	340	2.72 (1.16)

Source: Authors' own work

Table 2. Ordinary Least Squares Regression Models for the influence of parent faith support on young adults' self-reported character outcomes

Model	Outcome Variable	N	Variables	B	SE	T	P
1	Social Responsibility	330	Intercept	4.69	0.16	29.50	<.0001
			Parent Faith Support	0.06	0.02	2.69	.008
			Parent Communicate	-0.06	0.05	-1.15	0.25
			Parent Emotion Response	0.12	0.06	2.01	0.05
			Gender	-0.38	0.07	-5.48	<.0001
2	Purpose	329	Intercept	3.30	0.26	12.62	<.0001
			Parent Faith Support	0.08	0.04	2.04	.04
			Parent Communicate	0.14	0.09	1.66	0.09
			Parent Emotion Response	0.06	0.10	0.65	0.52
			Gender	-0.27	0.11	-2.37	.02
3	Intellectual Humility	329	Intercept	3.74	0.20	19.14	<.0001
			Parent Faith Support	0.02	0.03	0.74	.46
			Parent Communicate	-0.04	0.06	-0.55	.58
			Parent Emotion Response	0.17	0.07	2.28	.02
			Gender	-0.17	0.08	-2.00	0.05
4	Joy	329	Intercept	1.35	0.28	4.86	<.0001
			Parent Faith Support	0.03	0.04	0.88	.38
			Parent Communicate	0.17	0.09	1.88	.06
			Parent Emotion Response	0.42	0.10	4.07	<.0001
			Gender	-0.17	0.12	-1.43	.15
5	Gratitude	329	Intercept	4.11	0.20	20.84	<.0001
			Parent Faith Support	0.05	0.03	1.91	.05
			Parent Communicate	-0.02	0.07	-0.31	.75
			Parent Emotion Response	0.14	0.07	1.88	.06

			Gender	-0.22	0.09	-2.51	.01
6	Curiosity	329	Intercept	4.15	0.23	17.74	<.0001
			Parent Faith Support	0.004	0.03	0.14	.89
			Parent Communicate	-0.13	0.08	-1.62	.11
			Parent Emotion Response	0.15	0.09	1.70	0.09
			Gender	-0.11	0.10	-1.04	.30
7	Collaboration	329	Intercept	1.35	0.28	4.86	<.0001
			Parent Faith Support	0.03	0.04	0.88	.38
			Parent Communicate	0.17	0.09	1.88	.06
			Parent Emotion Response	0.42	0.10	4.07	<.0001
			Gender	-0.17	0.12	-1.43	0.15
8	Openness to Multiple Perspectives	327	Intercept	3.94	0.19	20.91	<.0001
			Parent Faith Support	0.03	0.03	1.19	.23
			Parent Communicate	-0.09	0.06	-1.47	.14
			Parent Emotion Response	0.10	0.07	1.48	.14
			Gender	-0.10	0.08	-1.23	.22
9	Civic Engagement	329	Intercept	2.31	0.24	9.66	<.0001
			Parent Faith Support	0.01	0.03	0.42	.67
			Parent Communicate	-0.07	0.08	-0.83	.41
			Parent Emotion Response	-0.03	0.09	-0.39	.70
			Gender	-0.18	0.10	-1.71	.09

Source: Authors' own work