
RELIGIOUS DOUBT AND IDENTITY FORMATION: SALIENT PREDICTORS OF ADOLESCENT RELIGIOUS DOUBT

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Different ideological perspectives about religious doubt spawn controversy and confusion among some Christians. Typically misunderstood as unbelief, doubt is often characterized as dangerous if not outright prohibited by Scripture. As this study demonstrates, comprehending religious doubt through the lens of Marcia's ego identity statuses offers a more nuanced understanding of the cognitive phenomenon. Multiple regression analyses of survey data from 604 religious adolescents revealed identity moratorium, identity achievement, and doctrinal uncertainties are positive predictors of doubt while identity foreclosure, identity diffusion, and religious satisfaction are negative predictors. Implications from the findings relevant to Erikson and Batson's theories are discussed along with practical applications for those in the church community working with youth.

Over the past thirty years, a broad base of knowledge about religious doubt has accumulated. Yet, this phenomenon in human cognition remains a controversial and confusing topic among many Christians (Guinness, 1976; McLaren, 2003).

Some of the misunderstanding about religious doubt can be eliminated by taking into account the identity status of doubters and their unique experiences with identity formation. More specifically, Marcia's ego-identity statuses can function as an interpretative lens assisting interested persons in comprehending religious doubt and coping with it.

Unfortunately, the relationship between religious doubt and identity statuses has been understudied.

The following discussion exposes aspects of the controversy and confusion associated with doubt among Christians and presents a rationale for and outcomes from a multiple regression study with religious adolescents on the doubt-identity relationship.

A Controversial Phenomenon

Beck (1990) contended, "Doubt is an integral part of each person's belief system" (p. 327). Any contact with reality creates contact with doubtable ideas (Newbigin, 1995). However, some Christians perceive doubt as a significant threat functioning as a usurper or enemy of the faith and entailing risky, dangerous, and destructive thinking. Lucado (1989) described doubt as an obnoxious pest, a "nosey neighbor," which must be barred or prohibited from the mind and soul. Buchanan (2000) likened doubt as a cancer burning and mutating healthy beliefs, a carcinoma with an insatiable appetite consuming like quicksand and uncomforted by evidence. Moreover, Darmani (2002) considered doubt as a demonic weapon striking in the vulnerable moments of life and creating a disturbing restlessness within the human heart.

Other religious adherents embrace doubt. They regard it as a universal experience germinated from human finitude and a necessity for faith maturation and its transitional experiences (Fowler, 1996; Halfaer, 1972; Parks, 2000; Tillich, 1957). Instead of an adversarial role, some evangelicals view doubt as a valuable aspect of mental life encouraging authenticity with God. Geering (1997) argued doubt is not the rival of faith, but a foe of false beliefs. Webber (2002) identified a new generation within the church, 'the younger evangelicals,' and noted they expect theological and biblical thought to be "lively [and] controversial," because they are not afraid to "question, push, and challenge" (p. 168). Moreover,

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Jones (2001) profiled Christian post-moderns as persons who deconstruct the known by questioning everything, assuming nothing, and taking nothing for granted, habits which often lead them to be skeptical and cynical.

A Confusing Phenomenon

Along with being controversial, religious doubt is often confused with other mental processes (Beck, 1990). Unbelief is one of those phenomena. For instance, in John 20, Thomas was confronted with a report from his companions about their encounter with the resurrected Messiah (v. 25a). The common interpretation of his reaction is that he doubted. However, this disciple's declaration (v. 25b) and Christ's rebuke (v. 27c) reveal a different mindset (Schnackenburg, 1990). These verses paint Thomas in a struggle with unbelief prior to his famous confession of belief (vs. 28).

In John 20:25b, Didymus declared, "Unless I shall see in [Jesus'] hands ... I will not believe" (NAS). Two noteworthy facets are in the declaration. He demanded concrete evidence, to see and touch the nail marks and side wound, and he insisted belief would be contingent on this proof. Commenting on the latter, Kostenberger (2004) described Thomas' insistence as forceful and suggested the comment be translated as "I will 'certainly not' (*ou me*) believe" (p. 577).

In John 20:27c, Christ rebuked his disciple with the statement, *me ginou apistos alla pistos*. This exhortation unveils the Lord's perception of Thomas' state of mind. Some translate the rebuke, as "stop doubting and believe." However, Carson (1991) argued if *apistos* and *pistos* are taken adjectively, a literal rendering of the clause would be, "do not be unbelieving but believing," and if taken substantively, the clause could be, "do not be an unbeliever, but a believer" (p. 657).

Unbelief is a rejecting response, a resolute state of mind involving a definite "conviction of falsity regarding an issue" (Beck, 1990, p. 327). Doubt is a hesitant reaction, a temporary and divided state of mind created "by the collision of evidence with prior belief or one belief with another" (Allport, 1957, p. 100). For instance, in Matthew 28:17(TNIV), the apostle noted prior to Jesus heralding the Great Commission that those gathered on a Galilean mountainside who "saw him" and "worshipped him" also "doubted" (Reeves, 1998). The Greek term

translated *doubt* in this passage is *distazo*, to be uncertain or indecisive. The disciples were "in a state of uncertainty about what recent events meant and what might happen next" (Hagner, 1995, p. 885). So, even though unbelief and doubt are cognitive processes sprung "from the same psychological sources" (Allport, 1957, p. 100), they are distinctively different and separated by opposite levels of certainty.

Doubt is also not equivalent to ambivalence, which is the simultaneous presence of two or more contradictory emotions (ambivalence, 2008; Beck, 1990). Ambivalence may associate with doubt, but it is an affective experience. Moreover, doubt is not skepticism, which refers to the tendency to dispute the truthfulness of certain knowledge claims (skepticism, 2008). Thomas would be better described as a skeptic who grappled with unbelief about God's redemptive plan as many believers have over the past two centuries (Buchanan, 2000; Kostenberger, 2004).

Psychological Research on Religious Doubt

Thirty years of psychological research on religious doubt has produced a vast and diverse knowledge base. Researchers have examined how doubt relates to various dimensions of the human experience such as cognitive functioning, family life, intrapersonal traits and habits (e.g., stress and mood levels), religious life, and interpersonal attitudes and habits. And, several instruments have been employed over the three decades to measure the dynamics of religious doubt such as the Quest Scale (Batson, 1976; Batson & Schoenrade, 1991), the Religious Doubt Scale (Altemeyer, 1988), the Uncertainty and Wondering Scales (Kooistra & Pargament, 1999), and the Multidimensional Quest Orientation Scale (Beck & Jessup, 2004).

Interestingly, patterns in the research findings and their effects can be generalized as appearing dichotomic. Both positive and unpleasant human experiences relate to doubt. Clarity of the dynamics of religious doubt has expanded, yet confusion still abounds; certain research outcomes conflict and at times contradict. As a result, this large body of research has helped to ameliorate many fears which Christians have about doubt while it has also corroborated some of their negative views. For instance, aspects of cognitive functioning positively associated with religious doubt include principled moral reasoning (Ji, 2004), non-rigid thinking (Leak et al., 1990), integrative complexity (ability to juggle

different perspectives and note their similarities) (Hunsberger, McKenzie, Pratt, & Pancer, 1993), and non-dogmatic thinking (Hunsberger, Alisat, Pancer, & Pratt, 1996). But, Watson, Morris, Hood, Miller, & Waddell (1999) reported doubt positively linked to pollyannaish thinking along with esoteric thinking, which includes belief in scientifically dubious occurrences (e.g., ghosts, flying saucers) and superstitions (e.g., lucky charms).

Family life experiences positively associated with doubt include problematic parenting habits such as harsh discipline, insincere religiosity, and low commitment to religion (among Protestants) (Kooistra & Pargament, 1999) along with minimal warmth and leniency (Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 2002). In regards to family functioning, doubt positively associates with disengagement or low cohesion (Hunsberger et al., 2002). Furthermore, a poor relationship with parents in general (Hunsberger et al., 1996) and specifically a conflictual relationship with Protestant mothers also positively link with religious doubt (Kooistra & Pargament, 1999).

Concerning intrapersonal traits and habits, religious doubters report experiencing more stress and life hassles (Hunsberger et al., 1996), higher levels of anxiety (Kojetin, McIntosh, Bridges, & Spilka, 1987), higher depression levels (Genia, 1996), less optimism, less social support, and low self-esteem for some Protestants (Hunsberger et al., 2002), disturbed identity functioning (Watson, Morris, Hood, Milliron, & Stutz, 1998), identity diffusion (Watson, Morris, & Hood, 1992), and higher bulimia and body dissatisfaction for female freshmen and sophomore collegians (Boyatzis & McConnell, 2006). However, some evidence reveals positive correlations between doubt and adaptive coping styles, self-directing and collaborative problem-solving approaches (Pargament et al., 1988), high levels of self-esteem (Leak et al., 1990), and humor creation (Saroglou, 2002).

As for religious life, doubt has been negatively correlated to intrinsic religiosity and religious interest (Watson et al., 1998; Watson et al., 1999), spiritual well-being (Klaassen & McDonald, 2002), Christian orthodoxy (Altemeyer, 1988), and fundamentalism (Hunsberger et al., 1996; Kirkpatrick, 1993). Doubt also is positively related to low rates of church attendance (Hunsberger et al., 2002), greater apostasy (Hunsberger et al., 1993), and the habit of consulting anti-religious information resources (Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 2001).

Yet, Reinhold (1997) demonstrated high doubt scores do not reflect an immature, blind rejection of religion, or rebellion against religious authorities. McIntosh, Ingelhart, and Pacini (1991) concluded doubters can have both a central and flexible belief system, and Graham (2001) identified persons embracing religious doubt and an intrinsic religiosity. Moreover, Beck, Baker, Robbins, and Dow (2001) reported tentativeness (a facet in the dynamics of doubt) as positively related to intrinsic religiosity, existential well-being, and spiritual well-being.

Lastly, some interpersonal attitudes and actions positively related to religious doubt are friendship love style and responsible sexual behavior (Leak, 1993), low prejudice in general, an unbiased posture toward communists and homosexuals (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Kirkpatrick, 1993), and racial openness (Sciarrar & Gushue, 2003). Yet, Watson et al. (1999) reported doubt positively related to distrust and intolerance.

Religious Doubt and Identity Status Intersection

The aforementioned studies reveal a portion of the breadth and unique state of the knowledge base on religious doubt, but a few concerns become apparent. First, there is sparse information about the relationship between doubt and Marcia's ego identity statuses. From the extant studies, only two fairly consistent associations have emerged, a small negative one between religious doubt and foreclosure and a small positive one between doubt and moratorium (Fulton, 1997; Hunsberger et al., 2001; Klaassen & McDonald, 2002).

Second, there are few explanations for the conflicting results in the literature on doubt. Krause and Wulff (2004) implicated researcher oversight as one reason. They argued investigators frequently fail to take into account that doubt affects persons differently and demonstrated how the roles that adult doubters occupy in certain social settings impact the effects of doubt on them. Unfortunately, adolescent identity status experiences are also overlooked. Most of the samples in the studies noted in the above review comprise of youth (Hunsberger et al., 2001). So, their particular ego development experiences would be an important factor to consider when interpreting the conflicting results.

Why are these paucities outstanding? Halfaer (1972), in his famous study of the psychology of religious doubt, declared doubt as "one of man's

fates—a human condition—one of the ways a foundering quest for identity is expressed” (p. 308). He is intimating that a unique intersection exists between doubt and identity status; the former construed as an implicit and inextricable aspect of the latter. Furthermore, Marcia’s (1966) expansion of Eriksonian theory, the interview methodology revealing “identity thinking and decision making,” implicates doubt dynamics woven within the fabric of the identity formation process. This becomes evident through closer examination of the two criteria, exploration and commitment, needed for the emergence of the various identity structures.

First, exploration, present in the moratorium and achievement statuses, centers on persons “laboring and suffering” through existential questions such as where did they come from, who are they now, and what is in their future (Muuss, 1996, p. 60). Specifically, youth endeavor to become knowledgeable; they garner pertinent information and evaluate its merits. In these efforts, they are examining their current beliefs, questioning parental positions, and searching for attractive alternatives through the clarification and reformulation of their beliefs (Hummel & Roseli, 1983). Such exploratory labor creates numerous options, stirs up the unknown, and generates uncertainty and indecisiveness, core aspects of doubt. Moreover, since a fairly regular divided state of mind prevails in exploration, exploring persons need patience and “non-arbitrary or flexible thinking” to cope with the ambiguity (Hummel & Roseli, 1983).

Commitment, the second criteria present within the foreclosure and achievement statuses, entails individuals deciding upon and attaching to an identity issue or element within a domain (e.g., religious, career, etc.). Committing persons develop a well-defined and stable decision and pledge an allegiance to the choice (Muuss, 1996). Archer (1993) noted the commitment criteria is evident when youth identify with role models who share their similar choices, anticipate how their decisions will operate in the future, and resist being swayed to change their choices.

However, commitment is not a static criterion within the formation process. Although teenagers in achievement wholeheartedly embrace and are loyal to their decisions, they are also likely to change some features of or the entire choice due to new information or dissatisfaction with a choice (Stephen, Fraser, & Marcia, 1992). The term “status regression” was invented by Marcia to indicate that persons may move back and forth among the statuses. For

instance, an adolescent in achievement could return to moratorium by re-entering an exploration phase and then come back to achievement. Yet, achieved youth navigate through subsequent identity upheavals or status changes more constructively than they did prior to the first committing decision (Muuss, 1996).

Clearly, the likelihood of “recursive movement” exposes doubt dynamics within the commitment criteria. If adolescents tweak aspects of their committing decisions, there is uncertainty in their thoughts. Doubt is potentially prodding thought organization, a resolving of “disequilibria” by pushing some ideas toward more certainty, belief or unbelief (Beck, 1990; Guinness, 1976; Piaget, 1975). If youth drop and re-direct some of their choices, again there is doubt in their mind. And this uncertainty could be functioning as an impetus to an identity upheaval or status change (Stephen et al., 1992). So, it is reasonable to expect a positive empirical association between the two constructs.

Therefore, recognition of persons’ identity status would provide a broader context or a “wider lens” to comprehend their varied experiences with religious doubt. This interpretative lens should be useful in addressing the misunderstanding of doubt. Specifically, it could assist mental health researchers in bringing more clarity concerning the conflicting results and help Christians answer questions regarding how adaptive doubt can be in a faith pilgrimage.

The intent of the present study was to expand current knowledge of the doubt-identity status relationship, specifically to ascertain what combination of identity statuses and religiosity constructs would be predictive of religious doubt for religious adolescents. Furthermore, another objective was to discover any variations in the independent variables among the males and females and among younger and older adolescents in the sample, since there is some evidence in the research literature of sex (Donahue, 1985; Miller & Hoffman, 1995) and age differences (Bourdeau & George, 1997; Tamminen, 1994; Vianello, 1991) in religiosity.

The mature identity statuses, moratorium and achievement, were expected to be salient positive predictors of religious doubt, because both contain the exploratory criteria and the commitment criteria in achievement is regarded as reflective and self-chosen (Muuss, 1996). Identity diffusion and foreclosure were anticipated to be negative predictors since they lack the exploratory criteria and the commitment criteria in foreclosure is regarded as immature, introjected and

unreflective (Muuss, 1996). Furthermore, religious maturity and doctrinal uncertainties, religious life variables, were hypothesized to be positive predictors. This follows Batson's (1976) theory that posits religious doubt as a spiritually mature action that entails questioning doctrinal tenets. Finally, due to past research findings, intrinsic religious motive and religious satisfaction were expected to be negative predictors while extrinsic religious motive was anticipated to be a positive predictor of doubt (Beck et al., 2001; Kirkpatrick, 1993).

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Adolescents in the Midwest from local church and community youth groups, a detention center, and a college freshman course were recruited for this study and rewarded with raffled prizes or extra credit for their voluntary participation. They completed a questionnaire requesting demographic information and containing measures assessing their identity status and religious life. Parental consent was obtained from those under age 18.

The 604 youths (59% female, 41% male) who participated averaged 16.8 years of age; forty-four percent were in early and middle adolescence (ages 11-16), and fifty-six percent were in late adolescence (ages 17-20). Moreover, there were more late adolescent females in the sample; an almost 2-1 ratio exists among the older adolescents (64% female, 36% male) and an almost 1-1 ratio among the younger youth (52% female, 48% male).

The vast majority of the participants were Euro-Americans (93%). They indicated that religion on a personal level was very important to them (82% of the sample), being Protestant (79%), and their family religious affiliation as Protestant (77%). There were no age or sex differences within these demographic features.

Last, over half of the participants (64%) were attending a religious-based school. Interestingly, more older and female adolescents were in attendance at a religious centered institution with eighty-two percent of older versus thirty-six percent of the younger teens and sixty-nine percent of females versus fifty-eight percent of the males.

Measures

Identity status. Participants' identity status was measured using the Extended Objective Measure of

Ego Identity Status, a 24-item instrument, developed by Adams, Shea, and Fitch (1979). Respondents' scores for each of the four statuses—diffusion (alpha = .73), foreclosure (alpha = .86), moratorium (alpha = .77), and achievement (alpha = .89)—can be calculated along with their current operative status ascertained via a designated protocol (Adams, 1999; Adams, & Montemayor, 1987).

Religious doubt. Religious doubt was assessed using two different instruments, the Quest Scale (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991) and the Religious Doubt Scale (Altemeyer, 1988). The former is a 12-item measure (alpha = .82) appraising participants' quest motive, an inquisitive posture or orientation known as a willingness to face the unknown and unfriendly in life, grapple with complexity, and seek truth (Pargament, 1992).

In this study, the Quest Scale was designated the dependent variable because Batson assumed three germane values comprise the quest motive, a triad which encompasses pertinent doubting attitudes and behavior. First, life is complex. This perspective refers to mature religious individuals encountering existential questions in an open and honest manner, refusing to divorce self from unpleasant experiences, and resisting the attraction to trite, superficial, and dogmatic answers (Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993; Graham, 2001). Second, doubts are not threatening. Mature religionists understand doubt emerges from the vibrant interchange between their experience and belief structure. So, they learn to self-reflect and positively embrace their religious questions and doubt (Beck et al., 2001). Third, change is important. The mature religious person is willing and open to review his or her beliefs and make appropriate and careful alterations (Batson et al., 1993; Graham, 2001). Furthermore, the construct measured in the Quest Scale was regarded as religious doubting-quest.

The Religious Doubt Scale is a 10-item instrument (alpha = .84) marking the degree that respondents have specific intellectual and experienced-based doubts about traditional religious beliefs. Altemeyer (1988) conceptualized religious doubt as hesitation about various religious commitments, a perspective commensurate with the previously mentioned definitions. In this study, the construct measured by the Religious Doubt Scale was referred to as religious doubting-beliefs or doctrinal uncertainties.

Religious intrinsic and extrinsic motive. Religious intrinsic and extrinsic motives were assessed with

the Religious Orientation Scale–Revised (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989). The 14-item instrument, a revision of Allport and Ross' (1967) original scale, measures the degree that participants are religiously motivated by internal and external factors. The former motive ($\alpha = .83$) indicates one living out his/her religion, an internalized posture, while the latter ($\alpha = .65$) reveals one using his/her religion, a utilitarian orientation.

Religious maturity. Religious maturity was measured with the Spiritual Maturity Index (Ellison, 1984). The 30-item instrument ($\alpha = .92$) indicates the progress of respondents in religious development according to certain attitudes and behaviors within evangelical Christian theology (Bassett et al., 1991).

Religious satisfaction. Religious satisfaction was assessed by means of the Religious Well-Being Scale, one of the two scales in the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1991). The 10-item instrument ($\alpha = .94$) identifies the current level of religious contentment of the participants, marking how satisfied they are in their present relationship with God (Bufford, Paloutzian, & Ellison, 1991).

Each of the aforementioned measures has ample psychometric properties. Other reliability information and validity data have been noted in the resources listed above.

RESULTS

Adams' (1999) protocol was used to indicate the current operative identity status of participants. For the full sample, the obtained frequencies were 34% of the adolescents in identity diffusion, 14% in foreclosure, 41% in moratorium, and 5% in achievement. These results were predominately similar for age and sex groups. The few variations include a higher diffusion frequency (40%) for younger adolescents than older (34%), higher moratorium (45% versus 40%) and achieved (8% versus 5%) frequency for older adolescents than younger, and more females (45%) in moratorium than males (40%).

The high percentages of youth in diffusion and moratorium appear consistent with findings from other studies with samples that were exclusively early or late adolescents. Meilman (1979) indicated 68% of the 12-year-olds in his sample were diffused while Foster and LaForce (1999) reported 53% of college freshmen in their sample were in moratorium. Furthermore, the identity status frequencies in the sample of this study also reveal that 46% of the youth

were exploring or had explored while 19% operated in a mature or immature commitment criteria.

From the Religious Doubts Scale (Altemeyer, 1988), respondents indicated three main doubts or reasons for their doubts. These include doubting if "religion makes people better" ($n = 418$; $M = 1.65$) and if they had "developed their own ideas about religion" ($n = 400$; $M = 1.44$). Participants also doubted because they felt "rebellious or resentment over being told how to behave and what to believe" ($n = 388$; $M = 1.53$). But, in general the amount of doubt expressed by respondents was relatively small, a finding similar to other studies (Hunsberger et al., 2002). The averages of the triad ranged from "a little bit" (a value of 1) to a "mild" amount of doubt (a value of 2) on a scale of 0 to 5.

Pearson correlations, means, and standard deviations among the four identity statuses and six religious life constructs are presented in Table 1. Concerning the religious doubt measures, a few outstanding results emerged. First, three of the four expected relationships of religious doubting-quest (QRO) and religious doubting-beliefs (RDS) with the identity status scales occurred; the only exception was the positive association with diffusion. Second, the small positive correlation between QRO and RDS indicates sufficient common ground between the constructs, but enough distinction preventing them from being considered redundant (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). Third, the negative associations that QRO and RDS have with religious maturity (SMI) were not anticipated, but the inverse relationships with religious satisfaction (RWB) and intrinsic motive (IRO) were. However, the r -values are small as consistently noted in other studies (Kirkpatrick, 1993; Watson et al., 1998; Wong-McDonald, 1999).

An evaluation of the assumptions for multivariate regression procedures was conducted. Missing data and outliers among the ten variables were identified and eliminated using listwise deletion for the former and the author's reported score range for the latter. No multicollinearity occurred among the measure variables. And, three skewed distributions (RWB-negative, IRO-negative, and RDS-positive) were transformed to improve normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. Unfortunately, there was no advantage in these efforts. But, the large sample size in this study helps to reduce the effects of non-normality (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996).

Table 2 presents the results of the standard multiple regression analyses examining the influence of

TABLE 1*Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations of Religious and Identity Status Variables*

	RWB	IRO	ERO	SMI	RDS	QRO	DIF	FOR	MOR	ACH
RWB	—									
IRO	.59**									
ERO	-.28**	-.45**								
SMI	.59**	.45**	-.18**							
RDS	-.35**	-.24**	.12**	-.42**						
QRO	-.19**	-.15**	ns	-.11**		.31**				
DIF	-.29**	-.32**	.16**	-.36**	.22**	.09*				
FOR	-.10*	ns	.19**	-.17**	ns	-.15**	.19**			
MOR	-.30**	-.25**	.18**	-.40**	.31**	.24**	.42**	.24**		
ACH	ns	ns	.12**	.15**	ns	.13**	ns	ns	ns	—
Means	52.9	31.2	16.5	133.8	10.9	54.5	17.4	17.1	16.4	22.9
SD	7.7	6.7	4.7	18.4	8.6	13.8	4.1	5.0	4.9	5.1

Note: $n = 600$; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. RWB = Religious Well-Being Scale; IRO = Intrinsic Religious Orientation subscale; ERO = Extrinsic Religious Orientation subscale; SMI = Spiritual Maturity Index; RDS = Religious Doubts Scale; QRO = Quest Scale / religious doubting-quest; DIF = diffused identity subscale; FOR = foreclosed identity subscale; MOR = moratorium identity subscale; and ACH = achieved identity subscale.

TABLE 2*Standard Multiple Regression Analyses for the Influence of Identity Status and Religious Variables on Religious Doubting-Quest*

Group	Variable	B	SE B	β	p-value
Full Sample ($n = 525$)					
	RDS	+.39	.08	+.23	.00
	MOR	+.63	.13	+.23	.00
	SMI	+.03	.04	+.04	.46
	ACH	+.42	.12	+.14	.00
	RWB	-.13	.10	-.08	.18
	ERO	-.02	.13	-.01	.85
	IRO	-.07	.11	-.04	.52
	DIF	-.15	.15	-.05	.32
	FOR	-.54	.12	-.19	.00

Note: RDS = Religious Doubts Scale; MOR = moratorium identity status subscale; SMI = Spiritual Maturity Scale; ACH = achieved identity status subscale; RWB = Religious Well-Being; ERO = extrinsic religious orientation; IRO = intrinsic religious orientation; DIF = diffused identity status subscale; and FOR = foreclosed identity status subscale.

Table 2 continued next page

TABLE 2 (continued)
Standard Multiple Regression Analyses for the Influence of Identity Status and Religious Variables on Religious Doubting-Quest

Group	Variable	B	SE B	β	p-value
Late Adolescence (<i>n</i> = 337)					
	RDS	+.47	.10	+.27	.00
	MOR	+.72	.17	+.25	.00
	SMI	+.03	.05	+.04	.57
	ACH	+.33	.16	+.11	.04
	RWB	-.30	.13	-.17	.02
	ERO	+.11	.16	+.04	.51
	IRO	+.15	.15	+.08	.30
	DIF	-.28	.19	-.08	.15
	FOR	-.56	.15	-.19	.00
Early & Middle Adolescence (<i>n</i> = 188)					
	RDS	+.31	.12	+.20	.01
	MOR	+.41	.23	+.14	.08
	SMI	+.03	.08	+.04	.67
	ACH	+.59	.21	+.20	.00
	RWB	+.05	.17	+.03	.75
	ERO	-.09	.25	-.03	.71
	IRO	-.41	.22	-.16	.06
	DIF	-.03	.26	-.01	.91
	FOR	-.49	.19	-.18	.01
Females (<i>n</i> = 320)					
	RDS	+.35	.10	+.20	.00
	MOR	+.87	.16	+.32	.00
	SMI	+.04	.05	+.05	.47
	ACH	+.60	.15	+.21	.00
	RWB	-.07	.14	-.04	.60
	ERO	-.01	.16	-.00	.95
	IRO	-.20	.15	-.10	.17
	DIF	-.57	.19	-.17	.00
	FOR	-.56	.14	-.21	.00
Males (<i>n</i> = 203)					
	RDS	+.48	.12	+.31	.00
	MOR	+.23	.23	+.08	.33
	SMI	+.04	.08	+.05	.63
	ACH	+.19	.22	+.06	.40
	RWB	-.19	.15	-.11	.20
	ERO	-.04	.23	-.01	.85
	IRO	+.08	.19	+.04	.66
	DIF	+.49	.26	+.15	.06
	FOR	-.52	.20	-.18	.01

Note: RDS = Religious Doubts Scale; MOR = moratorium identity status subscale; SMI = Spiritual Maturity Scale; ACH = achieved identity status subscale; RWB = Religious Well-Being; ERO = extrinsic religious orientation; IRO = intrinsic religious orientation; DIF = diffused identity status subscale; and FOR = foreclosed identity status subscale.

identity status and religiosity constructs on religious doubting-quest. For the full sample, multiple identity status predictors emerged. This result implicates the exploratory (+MOR) and commitment (+ACH) criteria as significant contributors to the prediction of religious doubt.

One age-related combinatory difference occurred. Older and younger adolescents' religious doubt is related to the exploratory (+MOR) and the commitment criteria (+ACH). But, religious satisfaction (-RWB) operates as a negative predictor for older not younger teens.

Last, there seems to be some sex-related combinatory differences. Religious doubt of female teens is related to both criteria in identity formation along with foreclosure (-FOR) and diffusion (-DIF) as negative predictors. No identity status positively contributed to religious doubt for the males in this sample; only foreclosure was a negative predictor.

DISCUSSION

Allport (1957) argued mature religionists can function "wholeheartedly" in the absence of certainty and their religious sentiment is honed in the "workshop of doubt" (pp. 72-73). However, within the Christian church many still bristle at the notion of religious doubt being beneficial to the faith (Darmani, 2002; Taylor, 1992) even though a growing number of Christians embrace a postmodern epistemology and doubt has become more accepted in popular culture (Jones, 2001; Keller, 2006; Webber, 2002).

This study notably expands the knowledge base of the relationship between adolescent religious doubt and identity statuses corroborating some of the existing evidence. It also sets up identity statuses as a useful interpretative lens to better understand youths' religious doubt, suggesting alternative explanations for conflicting results in the research literature. In addition, the findings prod some within the church toward a more positive view of doubt and its place within faith.

Exploration and Religious Doubt

As expected, identity moratorium and achievement surfaced as positive predictors of religious doubting-quest (QRO). Exploration is the common criteria in both statuses. These findings suggest doubt is associated with a motivating identity consciousness compelling persons to explore (Muuss, 1996). Exploratory activities disturb youths' comfort-

able childhood reality forcing them to grapple with numerous options, many different shades of ideas, and uncertainty, the heart of doubt (Muuss, 1999). However, exploration also allows adolescents to be informed about viable choices, eventually reducing some of the cognitive dissonance and ambiguity (Hummel & Roseli, 1983).

If a genuine and vibrant identity cannot emerge without exploration and doubt is linked to this criteria, then doubt of any kind (religious, political, etc.) appears to be related to healthy psychological development (Muuss, 1996). Doubt seems to be a vital component in the development of adolescent ideology along with belief and unbelief.

On a practical level, exploring youth who religiously doubt will need "elbow room" from their immediate adult caregivers in the church including parents and youth group and Bible study leaders (Rumke, 1952). This "space" should include sufficient autonomy mixed with unabashed, wise adult guidance that gently prods adolescents in an adaptive and God-honoring direction. Helpful adult assistance could involve affirming youth who doubt, identifying the kind of uncertainty along with pinpointing its severity level, and exploring any irrational thinking or inaccurate theology (Parrott, 2000).

Furthermore, these findings underscore the importance of differentiating religious doubt and unbelief. Church mentors whose counsel does not distinguish these terms may trigger psychosocial or spiritual disaster. For instance, adults' accidental or intentional equation of doubt as pathological unbelief could derail the exploratory efforts of the adolescents under their care. This unfortunate oversight may push some youth toward foreclosure to avoid appearing "ungodly," or prod others toward diffusion for rebellious reasons. On the other hand, an equally disastrous outcome would also exist if adults blithely mistook unbelief as harmless doubt minimizing the importance of essential doctrines and youths' faith subtly eroded over time.

The positive doubt-identity moratorium relationship is consistent with the findings from Fulton (1997), Hunsberger et al. (2001), and Klaassen and McDonald (2002) along with psychosocial theory. Erikson described moratorium as an "as if" season of life meaning youth can try on beliefs and roles without commitment to them and without responsibility for any errors (Muuss, 1999). Moreover, adolescents are open to the unconventional and even engage in "adaptive regression," a short-term departure from

reality. However, adolescents in moratorium experience significant personal discomfort and high anxiety (Muuss, 1996). Their new world does not look as familiar to them or as appealing which is similar to the experience of religious doubters (Hunsberger et al., 1996; Kojetin et al., 1987). Genia (1996) suggested that "persons who question and challenge traditional [religious] beliefs may relinquish spiritual and emotional satisfaction during their religious journey" (p. 53).

Possibly, identity moratorium in general, like religious doubting in specific, inherently generates a troubling psychological discomfort (i.e., stress, anxiety, and depression). So, these particular side effects could be regarded as normative aspects of the maturity process. Maybe the "disturbing restlessness" mentioned by Darmani (2002) is to be an expected outcome and allowed as a necessary ingredient in the religious journey of adolescents, although carefully monitored by adult caregivers in the church.

Furthermore, the "adaptive regression" tendency of youth in moratorium could explain in part the positive association between pollyannaish and esoteric thinking and doubt and between intolerance and distrust and doubt (Watson et al., 1999). Participants in the study might have been trying on socially unacceptable ideas and attitudes never considered or embraced in their childhood or adolescence.

Commitment and Religious Doubt

Identity achievement as a positive predictor among female, late, and early adolescents is noteworthy. This finding is a contrast to previous research. Fulton (1997) along with Klaassen and McDonald (2002) reported achievement as unrelated to religious doubting-quest and Hunsberger et al. (2001) stated there was no significant relationship between achievement and religious doubting-beliefs. Yet, a substantial sample size differential exists between these studies and the present study, the latter being two to three times larger.

The doubt-achievement link highlights the commitment criteria being related to doubt. This means that adolescents can engage in the process of investing, attaching, and pledging an allegiance to a belief system and doubt at the same time. If doubt can co-exist with committing proclivities, then it could also be a potential prod for thought development and operate as a positive and beneficial tool in a journey toward robust faith (Geering, 1997). This challenges

the common misperception of doubt as only a belief destroyer (Buchanan, 2000).

Practically speaking, once again, some adult caregivers in the church will need a more balanced perspective on religious doubt enabling them to respond to the doctrinal uncertainty, questions, and hesitations of religious youth as opportunities for discussion, exploration, and growth, not only as threats needing to be silenced. Moreover, unbelief should be perceived as the more threatening cognitive phenomenon to the faith of adolescents than doubt (de Vries, 1987; Guinness, 1976). Unbelieving views, such as stubborn disregard for God's explicit imperatives (e.g., love your neighbor, abstain from sexual immorality), in the ideology of young persons are an affront to God (1 John 5:10), ones commonly rebuked by Christ throughout the Gospels (Matthew 17:17; John 10: 25) and frequently prohibited in the New Testament epistles (Hebrews 3:12).

Furthermore, the commitment criteria positively associated with doubt draws attention to the complexity of identity construction. Muuss (1999) indicated the experience is an active ongoing process, not something inert or permanent. For instance, commitments to various ideologies within a person's identity do not emerge in a synchronized manner (Muuss, 1996). One can attach to a religious ideology while deciding on a political one. And just because a youth has attached to and pledged an allegiance to an ideology does not mean it remains the same. Central and non-core aspects of an ideology will be challenged by new information and some will morph in minor and major ways similar to what Fowler (1996) noted in faith transitions. So, even within achievement it is apparent and plausible that doubt dynamics are important and inextricable dimensions.

Foreclosure and Religious Doubt

Identity foreclosure as a consistent negative predictor of religious doubting-quest supports our expectations and previous research (Klaassen & McDonald, 2002) and corroborates theory. Batson et al. (1993) argued mature religious doubters tackle existential questions with openness and are not drawn to trite and dogmatic religious answers. In contrast, foreclosers have opted out of a personalized exploration period and introjected values, goals, and convictions from another source (Adams, 1999). Their thinking has been profiled as rigid and close-minded, which indicates an avoidance of ambiguity

and cognitive dissonance (Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992), and explains why foreclosed persons only consult belief confirming sources of information, not rival resources when engaging in the doubt resolution process (Hunsberger et al., 2001).

However, foreclosed persons often appear like achievers possessing similar attributes such as experiencing low anxiety levels, being socially well-behaved, and maintaining high attendance rates to religious meetings (Markstrom-Adams, Hofstra, & Dougher, 1994; Muuss, 1996). Yet, the commitment dimension in foreclosure is distinctly different from the one in achievement. The former is a default to another's belief system instead of a self-chosen ideology (DeHaan & Schulenberg, 1997; Dudley, 1999). Also, foreclosed persons appear to be more authoritarian than achievers (Muuss, 1996).

Most importantly, foreclosure as a consistent negative predictor of doubt is another reminder of the importance of exploration in the development of religious ideology. On a pragmatic level, adult caregivers in the church need to challenge this identity status because of its deceptive appearance of religious maturity and its potential for incipient fanaticism. Periodic requests for "whys" behind particular religious beliefs along with a respectful resistance to "pat answers" may help adolescents move beyond a superficial and rigid comprehension of doctrine (Parrott, 2000).

Diffusion and Religious Doubt

In contrast to previous research, identity diffusion also emerged as a negative predictor of religious doubting for female adolescents. Hunsberger et al. (2001) reported diffusion as positively correlated with religious doubting-beliefs and Fulton (1997) and Klaassen and McDonald (2002) noted this status as unrelated to religious doubting-quest. How can these different results be explained? Muuss (1999) noted, "identity diffusion can encompass a variety of different behavioral patterns, from an aimless drifting, to a manipulative selfishness, to a morbid self-preoccupation" (p. 264). So, research findings with this particular status are often inconsistent.

Possibly, diffused persons who doubt are more at risk for problematic religious outcomes than religious doubters in the other identity statuses because of the absence of the exploratory and commitment criteria. Hunsberger et al. (2001) noted diffused persons do not consult any resources of information,

confirming or threatening, when resolving their religious doubts.

For a real world application, since diffused religious adolescents who attend youth group will most likely grapple with their doubts in silence, more initiative from caregivers in the church will be required. Creative ways of drawing out their thoughts and feelings will be necessary (e.g., experiential activities such as hiking, camping, rope course work).

Why such concern? Unmonitored diffused adolescents who doubt may have more apostate seeds sown in their hearts than others in the youth group (Hunsberger et al., 1993). This could become more problematic if the diffused teenagers are from a disengaged family system and whose parents exhibit low commitment and insincerity towards religion (Hunsberger et al., 1996; Hunsberger et al., 2002).

Religious Life Variables and Religious Doubt

As for the religious life independent variables, two of the five expectations were supported. Doctrinal uncertainty (RDS) as a consistent positive predictor for religious doubt-quest (QRO) makes sense theoretically; a person will need some specific doubts in order to be motivated to doubt (Batson et al., 1993).

Religious satisfaction (RWB) as a negative predictor of religious doubt is an expectation supported in the literature (Klaassen & McDonald, 2002). Yet, it is important to note that in this study RWB also negatively link to moratorium, a status considered a mature psychosocial state and a required prerequisite for achievement (Fulton, 1997; Muuss, 1996).

So, how problematic is religious dissatisfaction for doubting adolescents? Does it indicate doubters' religious development is impeded? If so, is it an immediate adverse effect or is there a time-delayed effect? Possibly, doubters' identity status is an important piece of the answer. For instance, religious dissatisfaction could be normative for doubting youth in identity moratorium, situational for teens in achievement, and have no effect on those in foreclosure. However, the low level of RWB could be an immediate impediment to religious development for doubting youth in diffusion.

Interestingly, religious extrinsic motive (ERO), religious maturity (SMI), and religious intrinsic motive (IRO) were non-significant predictors of religious doubt. Possibly, non-significance for ERO resulted from the choice to operationalize it in a global manner instead of separating the construct into its two subscales (Kirkpatrick, 1993). Moreover,

non-significance for SMI and IRO could be due to the majority of participants (75%) in this study living in diffusion or moratorium, identity states unwilling to adhere to or pledge an allegiance to religious dogma.

Limitations and Future Research

Results of this study need to be considered in light of certain limitations. Because of the correlational nature of the research questions, no cause-effect conclusions about the variables of interest can be made. Generalizations of the findings are limited to the features of the sample. Moreover, the predictability of one main independent variable, Religious Doubt Scale, is limited due to non-normality and its heteroscedasticity not being rectified through transformational procedures. But, Tabachnick & Fidell (1996) stated, the "larger the sample size (evident in this study) the smaller the effect non-normality is likely to have" (p. 71).

These limitations notwithstanding, religious doubt must remain an important research topic. More areas need to be investigated (Krause & Wulff, 2004). Future research studies should explore more on the longitudinal tendencies in religious doubting as related to identity statuses and how certain doubters (possibly distinguished by sex) function with both a central and flexible belief system. At risk persons in identity diffusion and their doubt experiences need attention. Moreover, the experiences of different ethnic and religious groups with this cognitive phenomenon sensitive to their identity statuses need investigation.

CONCLUSION

Since contact with reality means contact with doubttable ideas, doubt is inevitable (Newbiggin, 1995). It is woven into the very fabric of human cognition. Unfortunately, different ideological perspectives about religious doubting spawn controversy and confusion within the Christian church. Sloppy biblical interpretation and mixed psychological research outcomes contribute as well.

However, doubt has an adaptive, purposeful side, and one way to understand that dimension is to take into account the identity status of religious persons who doubt. This study demonstrated a positive association between doubt and the two vital criteria of identity formation. These findings implicate doubt as a contributing variable in the psychosocial maturity process and prod many Christians to begin to shed their "pathological only" bent in interpreting doubt.

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