

E-Appendix H Readings

A Theory of Involvement

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The preceding analysis has aimed at the elaboration and evaluation of previous speculations and empirical research on the subject of religious involvement. These have been tested in the light of the present data on Episcopal parishioners' religious behavior. In this endeavor, we have sought to ferret out the persistent correlates of religious involvement. While some of the prior findings and expectations have been generally confirmed, some have found little support, and others have been contradicted.

Such an eclectic approach has generated two problems which require some resolution if the analysis is to progress further. One problem is methodological. Since sex, age, family, and socioeconomic status each have an independent effect on involvement, these effects should be controlled as the analysis continues. However, controlling for all of them simultaneously would have the consequence, given the size of the sample, of reducing the number of cases in each cell of future tables to statistically unstable sizes. Some way must be found, therefore, to introduce the necessary controls in a more simplified, but still effective form, enabling the analysis to proceed meaningfully but with a minimum of confusion.

The second problem is of theoretical import: Some recognition of the significant relationships between several independent variables and church involvement has been achieved. The question now arises as to whether these may be ordered within some more general proposition concerning the nature of involvement. Why should being female, older, familyless, and lower class more readily predispose parishioners to church involvement than the opposites of these characteristics?

An Index of Predisposition to Involvement

In the interest of resolving both problems, a composite index was constructed which simultaneously reflected all four of the characteristics found to have independent effects on involvement. The procedure followed was a relatively simple one. Each parishioner was assigned a score commensurate with his possession of

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those attributes which were associated with involvement. On the basis of sex, women received a score of 2 and men a score of 0. To this was added a score based on age: 2 for parishioners over fifty years of age, 1 for those between thirty and fifty, and 0 for those under thirty. This combined score was further modified by a score for family status: parishioners who were both childless and spouseless received an additional 2; 1 was given to those with either a spouse or child, and 0 to those having both a spouse and a child. Finally, a score based on socioeconomic status was added: a score of 2 was given to all parishioners low (0 or 1) on the index of social class, 1 for those scored 2 or 3 on class, and 0 for those designated as highest (4) on class. (A more detailed discussion of the predisposition index is presented in Appendix B. [not included in this reading].)

Scores on the composite predisposition index ranged from 0 to 8. In terms of the scoring procedure, parishioners scored 0 on the index would be *young, upper-status men with complete families*. Those scored 8 would be *lower status, elderly women with neither spouse nor children*. The higher the score, the more the number of attributes possessed by the parishioner which are predisposing to high involvement. As it turns out, no one in the sample was scored at the lowest end (0), but some parishioners were scored at each of the other levels of predisposition to involvement.

The scoring of individual parishioners, it is to be recognized, did not take into account their actual involvement in the church. For example, all women were scored 2 on the basis of sex regardless of whether or not they were deeply involved in the church. All men received 0, even deeply involved men. In each instance, scoring was based on the overall relationship between a given attribute (such as sex) and involvement.

Observations from earlier chapters suggest that the combination of these attributes has a cumulative effect on involvement. For example, sex and social class were seen to affect church involvement jointly. Similarly, missing both family components was reflected in a greater involvement than missing only one. The construction of the composite predisposition index is based on the assumption that a combination of all the attributes should produce an even stronger effect on parishioners' involvement. Parishioners scored 8 on the predisposition index should be the most involved, those scored 1 should be the least involved. Furthermore, involvement should increase steadily with the number of predisposing attributes which parishioners possess. Table 35 tests this basic assumption and strongly supports it.

TABLE 35
Church Involvement Increases with Increasing Predisposition Scores

	<i>Index of Predisposition to Involvement</i>							
	<i>Low</i>							<i>High</i>
	<i>1^a</i>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Mean involvement scores on C.I.I.	.23	.31	.36	.45	.51	.60	.62	.72
	(23)	(155)	(205)	(312)	(246)	(136)	(91)	(33)

^a Recall that no parishioner was scored 0 on the index.

Parishioners scored lowest on the predisposition index show a mean involvement score of .23. With each successive rise in predisposition score, there is a corresponding increase in mean involvement. Where it was discovered earlier that one might speak of a person being predisposed to church involvement by virtue of sex, social class, age, or family status, it is now evident parishioners may be classified as more or less predisposed in terms of the number of predisposing attributes they possess. The effects of the several factors are clearly additive.

With few exceptions, the same pattern emerges when the sub-indices of involvement are considered. Minor fluctuations will be noted in regard to ritual involvement, but the overall relationship is still clear. And predisposition scores provide a powerful predictor of parishioners' organizational and intellectual involvement in their church (see Table 36).

The findings of Tables 35 and 36 provide assurance that the predisposition index will satisfy the need for simultaneously controlling for the several attributes as the analysis proceeds. The problem now is to understand why the several attributes, individually and in concert, have the observed effect on parishioners' church involvement.

TABLE 36
Ritual, Organizational, and Intellectual Involvement
All Increase with Increasing Predisposition Scores

	<i>Index of Predisposition to Involvement</i>							
	<i>Low</i>							<i>High</i>
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Mean Scores on:							
Ritual involvement	.43 (30)	.60 (185)	.60 (258)	.64 (380)	.67 (300)	.71 (185)	.79 (107)	.77 (48)
Organizational involvement	.24 (23)	.32 (160)	.34 (219)	.50 (333)	.54 (262)	.66 (153)	.66 (95)	.71 (36)
Intellectual involvement	.13 (31)	.17 (178)	.24 (242)	.27 (363)	.38 (284)	.41 (177)	.49 (100)	.60 (46)

The Situational Bases of Involvement

At this point, it is important to remember the earlier distinction between factors facilitating and motivating involvement. Facilitating factors, it will be recalled,

refer to the degree to which the parishioner's objective situation allows his involvement; motivating factors bear on his desire to be involved.

It is quite conceivable that the relationships discovered thus far are merely examples of the former—differences in opportunities for involvement generated by parishioners' social circumstances. Involvement, at least as it has been measured here, requires an investment of the parishioner's time—time to attend worship services, to participate in organizational meetings, and to read religious literature and periodicals. Such free time, quite possibly, is more readily available to women, to older persons, and to people without family ties, contrasted with men, the young, and those who are bound up in the responsibilities of family life.

A man's occupation generally commands the better part of his day and perhaps invades his leisure as well. While the woman's daily commitments may be no less demanding, they are, at any rate, normally more flexible. In understanding the effect of family status, the responsibilities of caring for children may often preclude participation in church activities. Regarding age differences, young people are more likely to be preoccupied with the multifarious activities vaguely included in the process of "shaping a future"; older people, on the other hand, have arrived at their "futures," many have retired, and they are generally afforded a greater leisure.

If the concept of leisure is modified to consider those requirements imposed by cultural mores regarding life-styles, social status differentials may also be understood as exemplifying a set of facilitating factors. While the upper-status parishioners may be freed from the mundane drudgeries of life, they are expected to participate in a broader spectrum of secular activities—service, civic, and social. Those with lower social status, on the other hand, may actually be barred from some of these activities, and certainly such participation is not expected of them. Leisure time, so modified, would appear to represent a scarcer commodity for the upper class than for those whose class status places no such demands for secular participation.

The effect of facilitating factors, of course, is cumulative—that is, demands on free time increase with the number of "time-consuming" attributes a person possesses. Hence, while women may have more free time than men, childless women have more than mothers. Taking this into account strengthens the contention that existential differences in opportunities for church involvement contribute to explaining the results reported in Tables 35 and 36. However, this is clearly not the whole explanation.

The nature of the involvement indices themselves precludes this possibility. The indices measure not only how active people are in the church; they also reflect the proportion of a parishioner's total energies which is devoted to it. In particular, the measures of organizational and intellectual involvement, it will be recalled, are indicators of involvement as well as activity. Moreover, intellectual involvement is not a function of available time as much as it reflects the saliency of religion for the individual. If the amount of available time stood alone in differentiating involvement, the relationship between scores on the predisposition index and intellectual involvement should not have appeared.

The explanation in terms of facilitating factors, while making common sense, is not sufficient to incorporate all the various relationships which exist. Hence, while the facilitating effects of these attributes may determine much of one's church involvement, it seems likely that there may be some other dynamic operating with regard to the relationships. But what is that dynamic? What theoretical reconciliation is possible among such diverse attributes?

Societal Values and Involvement

The beginning of an answer has already appeared. Chapter 4 closed with the observation of a similarity in the effects of family status and social class on church involvement. In both instances, the church appeared to serve as an alternative source of gratification for parishioners who were missing something in their secular lives. The church was characterized as a family surrogate for the familyless and as a source of status for those denied it in the secular community. Church involvement was seen as a response to deprivations experienced by parishioners.

In a sense, each of the attributes associated with church involvement represents a departure from the implicit and explicit ideals of American society. First, with regard to sex, there appears little doubt that our society remains, even to this day, a male-dominated one. Despite the extensive inroads into the social, political, and occupational structures gained by women since the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, equality of the sexes can scarcely be called a reality even today. Women still fight for equal employment opportunities, are denied serious consideration for many professions, and are still shackled by traditional images concerning the role of the "decent" woman in society. Especially with regard to those functions which are most highly valued by the society, judged by the responsibility and respect involved, it is the service of males which is called for in nearly all instances. Child-rearing is perhaps the single exception to this generalization, inasmuch as it is considered a crucial function for the survival and growth of the society. Few if any males, however, exhibit any desire to have child-rearing made their responsibility. On the other hand, many women aspire to positions and occupations now dominated by men.

With respect to age, the flood of adolescent entertainers and the few, conspicuous elder statesmen appear to be exceptions to a general value placed on responsible youth in America. And while even adolescents are expected to grow into mature young adults, the elderly are especially devalued by the norms of contemporary American society. Witness the increasing concern with geriatrics as an effort to prevent old people from becoming a burden on society. While the call for employment of senior citizens may frequently stress the economic value of this important resource, it seldom fails to mention the importance of restoring a sense of meaning to the lives of the elderly. The list of such examples might be continued at length without altering the conclusion that the young, rather than the old, are closer to the mainstream of American values.

The stature of the family as a sacred institution in American society has

already been discussed in Chapter 2. Deviations from the normative family pattern evoke feelings of sympathy or rebuke. While the deviant may be pitied for his deprivation in this regard, there is also the implicit feeling that an important norm has been violated, and the deviant is regarded as something of a threat to society. A partial break with the formative pattern seems less critical than a total break. Even if one has no children, it is somehow better to be married than to be single. The most highly valued situation, however, is to have both a spouse and children.

Finally, Americans value, in deeds if not always in words, material wealth and high social status. The theme of upward mobility underlies the American dream. It is central to much of our educational system. Certainly, while few are able to achieve high status and wealth, such are the goals to which most Americans aspire.

It would appear then that those characteristics which are most closely associated with more intense church involvement are, at the same time, least valued by the general society. The data, of course, describe only Episcopalian parishioners. Nonetheless, it seems likely that the same variables would influence church involvement in other denominations as well, although perhaps to different degrees.

It does not necessarily follow that these variables would have the same cumulative effect on influencing church membership per se. As seen in the preceding chapter, the lower and working classes are less likely to provide church members than are the middle and upper classes. Similarly, we suspect that persons deprived of complete families are less likely to be church members than those who are not deprived in this way. The fact that the church and the family are so closely connected is probably a bar to membership on the part of those without families. The church, of course, is only one institution which can help alleviate social deprivation. Lower status and familyless people may turn to other institutions for relief more readily than they turn to the church. The important point is that among people who are attracted to membership, the church wins a greater commitment from those whose attributes are less highly esteemed by the general society.

As far as the data examined thus far in the analysis apply, there should be little doubt that those characteristics which are devalued by the secular society and by the church, are positively related to high church involvement—this is a matter of fact. More interesting is the question of why this should be true. Is there some reason to expect that other devalued characteristics would have the same effect, or is the devalued nature of these particular attributes simply a matter of chance? It has already been suggested that the answer to this puzzle may lie in the gratifications derived from participation in the larger society.

Talcott Parsons laid the groundwork for such an explanation when he chose to approach the broad problem of stratification in terms of moral evaluation.

Stratification *in its valuational aspect* then is the ranking of units in a social system in accordance with the standards of the common value system.¹

Specific judgments of evaluation are not applied to the system unit as such—except in a limiting case—but to particular properties of that unit—always by comparison with

others in the system. These properties may be classificatory, in the sense of characterizing the unit independently of its relations to other objects in a system as in the case of sex, age or specific abilities, or they may be relational, characterizing the way in which it is related to other entities as in the case of membership in a kinship unit.²

The attributes which a society values most it is also more likely to reward. Such rewards appear in different forms: money, power, status, attention, a sense of belonging, and so forth. People who lack the valued attributes are, to some extent, deprived of the concomitant rewards. The church, then, becomes an alternative source of rewards for those who cannot fully enjoy the fruits of secular society. Parishioners who feel outside the mainstream of society by virtue of being familyless find a surrogate family in the church. Elderly parishioners who may feel cast out of the youth-oriented secular society find acceptance within the church. Lower class parishioners are taught that secular status is ultimately irrelevant. Women who are denied serious consideration for the responsible positions in secular society find they can be very important to the life of the church. In sum, the church offers a refuge for those who are denied access to valued achievements and rewards in everyday American life.

This *Comfort Hypothesis* would help explain the observed effects of sex, age, family status, and social class on church involvement. Parishioners whose life situations most deprive them of satisfaction and fulfillment in the secular society turn to the church for comfort and substitute rewards. This is most clearly seen in the case of the two extreme types on the predisposition index. On the one hand, the upper class young father is the darling of our society. His life situation represents much that is considered ideal. He is afforded access to valued achievements and, in turn, is granted greater rewards. As Tables 35 and 36 show, he is hardly involved in the church at all. At the other extreme, the older lower class spinster enjoys little that would be considered ideal in terms of predominant secular values. Her inability to participate fully and meaningfully in the secular society results in a far greater involvement in church life.

However correct this interpretation may be, it does not encompass the behavior of all parishioners. There remains a minority of members whose social attributes would presumably predispose them away from the church but who are nevertheless highly involved in it. At the other extreme, there are those who have all the characteristics associated with deep involvement, but who are relative apostates. And at every point between these extremes are instances in which the various attributes do not have the expected effects.

These seeming disconfirmations might be accommodated within the general theory in a number of ways. It is possible that the effects of some of these attributes are conditioned by other aspects of the parishioner's total life situation. For example, among women who report holding office in secular organizations, social class does not affect church involvement. While the lack of education and income would normally be felt as a deprivation, the feeling of devaluation is evidently alleviated through the acquisition of status by other means. The church is one but not the only source of comfort for the socially deprived.

Furthermore, no claim is made that the attributes examined in this study are the only factors determining a person's subjective status within the society. Many people are deprived of secular rewards by virtue of their race. National origins prevent others from fully participating in American social life. Similarly, certain bizarre physical deformities deprive people of participation to a greater extent than would be warranted by their physical limitations. There are theoretical grounds for expecting that these forms of deprivation would affect the extent of church involvement, although the present data do not permit an empirical test of the expectation.

If it were possible to exhaust the indicators of social deprivation, it is still unlikely that a complete understanding of church involvement would be forthcoming. The phenomenon is clearly more complex than that. Nevertheless, it should be evident that the *Comfort Hypothesis* provides one important avenue toward the explanation of religious differences.

Summary and Conclusions

This short chapter has represented an attempt to synthesize what had been observed earlier and to establish a more general theoretical framework for understanding religious involvement. The result has been the discovery of a very strong cumulative relationship between the possession of four attributes and extensive participation in church life. Parishioners whose life situations most deprive them of prestige and gratification in the secular society are the most involved in the church. The church, then, was characterized as an alternative source of rewards for the socially deprived.

This interpretation would seem to be in harmony with the observations of contemporary critics of the church. However, before considering that issue, as well as the more general question of this study's implications for the church's role in society, it seems wise to examine the church's effectiveness in challenging its parishioners. If the church is found to perform both a comforting and challenging role, the implications will be different than if we learn that it serves a comforting function only. Whether parishioners are challenged by their commitment to adopt values promulgated by the church is the subject of Part Two of the book.

Notes

1. Talcott Parsons, "A Revised Analytical Approach to the Theory of Social Stratification," in *Essays in Sociological Theory* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1954), p. 388. (Emphasis in the original.) An earlier statement of this position may be found in Parsons' 1940 essay: *An Analytical Approach to the Theory of Social Stratification*, reprinted in the same volume.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 389.