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THE MEANING OF ADOLESCENT MEMBERSHIP BEHAVIOR:
A QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO ACTION RESEARCH
IN A RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION

A Dissertation Presented

By

RAYMOND L. MATUSIEWICZ

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

September 1993

School of Education

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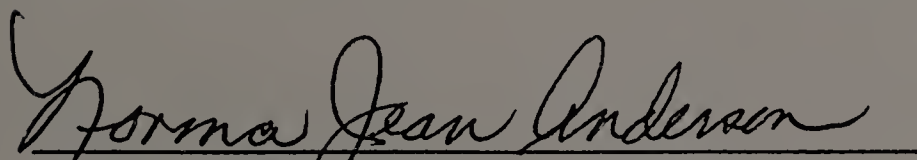
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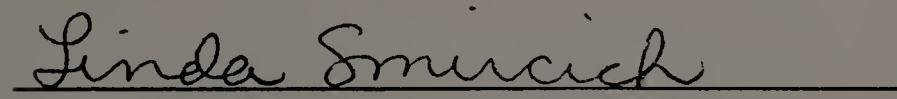
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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my parents, Barbara and Leonard Matusiewicz, whose love has supported me for so many years, to my wife, Judith Elizabeth, whose love and continuing forbearance made this effort possible, and to my daughter Jennifer, who provides the reason for it all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the church youth who gave so willingly and enthusiastically of their time in voicing the meaning of their religious experience with me. I hope that co-constructing reality proved as enlightening for them as it did for me. For their encouragement, support, and assistance, I am grateful to my committee members -- Don Carew, Norma Jean Anderson, and Linda Smircich.

I was also encouraged by friends and comrades who acted as part of my support group. To Travis Tatum, Karen Peret, Sandra Hobbs, and Barbara Gardner, I extend a heartfelt thank you.

ABSTRACT

THE MEANING OF ADOLESCENT MEMBERSHIP BEHAVIOR:

A QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO ACTION RESEARCH

IN A RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION

SEPTEMBER 1993

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A function of organized religion thought crucial to the maintenance of society is the passing of societal values to the young. Yet membership and participation in mainline religious organizations has been in decline since the 1960's, a fact attributed to teenage youth rejecting the institutional expression of religion.

The assumption that religious dropout behavior is a normal process of adolescent development has limited the focus of social science research. Missing in this account is the actor's subjective perspective. What is needed in order to understand the forces that govern membership behavior is an exploration of the concept structure that constitutes the psychological life space of the adolescent participant.

The purpose of this study was to examine the subjective meaning of church membership from the viewpoint of eight religiously active adolescents. As the first step in an action research process in organizational development, the study utilized the long ethnographic interview as a qualitative approach to problem solving by focusing on the organizational actor's inside perspective as the primary source of data. The interpretation of this data then served as the diagnostic stage of action research laying the ground work for future participatory planned change.

The data in this study supported survey research that showed religious interest is strong among adolescents. The findings suggest that among church youth, both a high level of religious belief and a high level of social relationship serve as positive reinforcers in maintaining church involvement. Parents modeling religious behavior who set their children on a religious path, yet allow them to choose their own level of religious involvement in adolescence, seem to promote a process of values clarification among church youth that results in a positive religious attitude and active participation. Moreover, church youth who see a lack of tangible results in religious behavior, feel invulnerable, or have little familial support in the

face of socio-economic demands for their time, are more likely to be persuaded by peer pressure than familial influence, and are more likely to disengage from religious practice.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Any faith group teeters just one generation from extinction... (Dudley & Laurent, 1988, p. 408).

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Membership and active participation in mainline Protestant churches has been in decline since the mid 1960s (Gallop, 1987; 1992). Efforts to explain the survey findings (Roozen, 1980) have generally supported the notion that the study of church member withdrawal from active participation is primarily the study of the teenage religious drop out. Indeed, the tendency of teenage youth to reject the institutional expression of religion has been labeled "adolescent heresy" (Ausubel, 1954, p. 271).

However, rarely in the literature has the meaning of religious membership behavior among church related adolescents been examined from the viewpoint of the actors themselves. While disengagement has been the focus of most quantitative research, the purpose of this study will be to utilize a qualitative approach to explore the full meaning of church membership from the inside perspective of an organizational actor who, for

the most part, has been overlooked by researchers -- the religiously active adolescent.

As the first step in an action research approach to organizational development, data generated by adolescent organizational actors will be interpreted and, by way of feedback, set the stage for the possibility at a later time of planned interventions leading to system change. To this end, several questions have yet to be answered. How do adolescents see their relationship to the church? Do church youth, whether active or inactive, feel they are nonetheless members of the church? Do feelings of belonging change at different times? Do church youth associate particular roles, norms and taboos with inclusion and membership?

An examination of the current literature on membership behavior among church youth can provide leaders of organized churches, religious educators, and parents seeking to understand the decline in church membership with an outsider's view of adolescent behavior, utilizing theories borrowed from developmental psychology to explain the teenage dropout phenomenon. However, few if any studies found in the quantitative literature have considered the question of why some church youth not only continue to participate in the church during adolescence, but indeed seem to

become more actively engaged in membership activities at this point in their lives.

This study will inform our understanding of adolescent religious participation by allowing church youth to speak for themselves, to interpret their own feelings, thoughts, and actions. Thus, while empirical studies to date have focused on disengagement, hearing the voices of active adolescent church members in this study will provide for a broader perspective of church membership grounded in concepts derived from the social reality of church youth.

The behavior of adolescent church members, both in the recent and historical past, has generally been viewed by outside observers with concern, if not alarm. Willits and Crider (1989) have noted the expectation that the learning experience of "church youth," ie., youngsters "...who have participated in institutionalized religious activities during their formative years and whose parents have served as positive role models for church attendance and interest" (p. 68), would be reflected not only in their beliefs but also in their adult attitudes and actions. Yet as these authors found in their study of church attendance and traditional religious beliefs in adolescence, church youth oftentimes rejected the "faith

of their fathers" choosing to follow "different beliefs or no particular religion whatsoever" (p. 68).

In fact, the very real concern of parents and religious leaders that the youthful generation will not come to cherish and make their own the values they themselves have found to be important is not of recent origin (Dudley and Dudley, 1986). For example, Kuhlen and Arnold (1944) noted that "Problems in the realm of values, philosophy of life, and religion have long been considered a major area of adjustment confronting adolescents. Marked changes in religious views are assumed to occur and many crucial problems to arise" (p. 291). As Weiting (1975) has observed:

A recurrent focus of social philosophy since Plato's Republic has been the threat to society posed by the possibility that the young might not adopt the essential wisdom and values of that society.... If a society is to continue its existence beyond one generation, the members must transmit what they consider to be necessary knowledge and values. The continuity of a social system by definition requires transmission between generations. (p. 137)

From a societal perspective, the threat to society poised by the possibility of a decline in church membership and participation among adolescents calls for explanation. Whether, on the one hand, one assumes the theoretical perspective of Marx, who argued that "religion is the opium of the people" (Marx, 1926, p. 16), or the alternative view of Durkheim (1947), who

contended religion was crucial to the maintenance of society and to the well-being of the individual, social theorists have argued that understanding the role of religiosity is central to understanding the individual's relationship to society.

Durkheim proposed that religion provides an overarching system of sacred beliefs and practices which binds together societal members as a cohesive whole. For instance, Durkheim held that religious norms provide the basis for social and moral order and are "essentially coterminous with social norms" (cited in Petersen, 1988, p. 362). From this perspective, by accepting religious norms, one is in effect accepting social norms and is thereby apt to feel a deepened sense of societal integration or belonging. Petersen (1988) maintains that in our society, this sense of integration is reinforced through participation in collective religious rituals.

Taking a slightly differing perspective, mass-society theory as developed by Kornhauser (1959) stresses the role of mediator played by organized religion. A contention implicit in this theme is that primary groups, such as the family, are no longer effective in providing a sense of control and belonging to individuals where alienation is engendered by the sheer massiveness of urban industrialized society.

Consequently, voluntary associations, such as organized religion, arise as intermediate groups to carry out the function once provided by primary groups. As Kornhauser has observed, "Meaningful and effective participation in the (mass) society requires a structure of groups intermediate between the family and the nation.... Participation in small but isolated groups such as the family is no substitute for participation in intermediate groups..." (1959, p. 93). Kornhauser argues that the intermediate group functions to provide the individual with "a firmer basis for self-relatedness, and...a distinctive self-image" so that he could "respect himself as an individual, experiencing himself as the bearer of his own power and as having the capacity to determine his life and to affect the lives of his fellows" (1959, pp. 109-110). Hong (1981) concludes that the three major faiths and some of the prominent cults that comprise the notable organized religions in this country, fit Kornhauser's definition of intermediate groups, and therefore might serve to provide active participants with a sense of control, purpose, and self-confidence.

Conceding Durkheim's contention that the practice of religion is crucial to the maintenance of society and to the well-being of the individual, one measure of society's success in transmitting necessary knowledge,

wisdom and values to the young would be the extant to which youth are found to be participating in or disengaging from organized religious groups.

In fact, a number of studies have shown that persons in their teens and early twenties have the lowest rates of church attendance of all age groupings (Hoge and Roozen, 1979). Although a recent audit (Gallup, 1987) showed that 7 in 10 U.S. adults (69 percent) say they are members of a church or synagogue, and 4 adults in every ten attended church or synagogue in a typical week in 1986, 67 percent of young people between 18-29 years reported they had not attended church.

Specifically, Hoge and Petrillo (1978) have noted that while every religious group invests significant time, energy and money attempting to socialize its young into its faith and institutions, in terms of church participation and attitudes among high school youth, the success rate in middle class American churches is quite low, with many children of active church members departing from religious involvement during high school. For example, taking Sunday school participation as an indicator, a 1975 Presbyterian study looking at the rate of dropouts from Sunday

School participation found a 60 percent drop in Sunday school enrollment from sixth to tenth grade (Presbyterian Committee, 1976).

Another indicator of the decline in participation is found in survey data of college students. Hastings and Hoge (1976) found that in a survey of Williams College students, only 36 percent had a positive attitude towards organized religion. Of those raised in Protestant homes, only 22 percent said Protestantism was their present religious preference, and of those reared in Catholic homes, 30 percent said that Catholicism was their preference.

While it may seem that youth from main line Protestant and Catholic homes often reject the faith of their parents, the problem of youth dropping out appears even more noticeable in fundamentalist religious homes where strict, conservative values exist (Dudley, 1978). Also, because adults and spiritual leaders from conservative denominations place a very high value on their particular modes of religious expression, the problem of rebellion among their young people is a critical concern as, "They believe that the happiness and usefulness of their young people in this life and their future salvation in a life to come are dependent upon having the youth accept their values" (Dudley, 1978, p. 389).

While studies have shown that not all adolescents from conservative homes rebel (Putney and Middleton, 1961; Johnstone, 1966), Bealer and Willets, (1967) discovered a wide variation in the religious experience of fundamentalist adolescents ranging from deep commitment to almost no religiosity. For the fundamentalist teenager, the best label they can apply is "hedging." While Zuck and Getz (1968) report that religious values were of significance to 88 percent of evangelical teens and of intense import to 42 percent, the authors found that one in ten expressed dissatisfaction with the various services and activities of the church, and one in five expressed discontentment with the adults in the church, especially with their failure to live up to the truths that they profess to believe.

Based on survey data of unchurched Americans, Roozen (1980) has concluded that at least in terms of declines in mainline Protestant churches since the mid 1960s, the "problem" facing them is "one of decreasing numbers of new members more than increasing attrition...", and that, "... to the extent that dropping out has increased over this time frame, it is a dropping out of young people before they become adult members" (p. 428). Thus it can be seen that from an organizational perspective, the objective phenomenon

reported as numbers of church related youth withdrawing from religious participation is a problem of considerable pragmatic concern not only to main line churches but also to fundamentalist religious groups.

However, since research on adolescent membership behavior in religious organizations has focused primarily on the religious drop out phenomenon, theoretical frameworks to account for membership behavior of teenagers in religious organizations has been borrowed for the most part from the traditional literature of adolescent developmental psychology. Focused on disengagement, perspectives framed in the context of a developmental model have included theories of emancipation (Dudley and Dudley, 1986; Havighurst, 1952), role experimentation (Erikson, 1968), conflict with authority figures (Smith, 1962), expressing anger (Narramore, 1980), parental values frustrating autonomy (Rogers, 1978), orientation towards spontaneity and change (Keeley, 1976), and styles of family decision making (Elder, 1963).

As a result, our understanding of adolescent membership behavior has been informed by a limited research methodology based on structured questionnaires and correlational studies aimed at examining the relationship between alienation from religion and selected theoretical variables. However, the

theoretical constructs derived from developmental theory fail to account for other findings (Zuck and Getz, 1968; Putney and Middleton, 1961; Marks, 1980) indicating that hostility to religion in this age group is not universal. The current literature fails to explain why many religious youth have remained active participants during the adolescent years. The meaning of such conflicting findings are left to the imagination of the researcher.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the full meaning of adolescent membership behavior in a religious organization from the actor's inside perspective. Hearing the voices of church youth may help us to understand how religiously active adolescents themselves view religious participation and disengagement.

The interpretation of this information will serve as the diagnostic stage of an action research approach to problem solving in a mainline protestant church and lay the groundwork for future participatory planned change. Preliminary efforts at gathering fundamental data obtained by focusing on the adolescent organizational actor may also serve as a starting point

in addressing the broader developmental problem facing mainline religious organizations in the United States: the decline in church membership and participation.

In viewing the adolescent as an organizational actor, an assumption underlying current research is that adolescence is a time when youth are confronted by adjustment problems in the realms of values, philosophy of life and religion resulting in marked changes in religious views. However, the adolescent perspective has gone unspoken, for researchers have yet to ask church youth to interpret their own thoughts, feelings and behavior. In order to provide a broader understanding of membership behavior grounded in concepts derived from their social reality, qualitative methods are required that allow church youth to speak for themselves. The long qualitative interview approach developed by McCracken (1988) is the methodology utilized in the current study to meet this objective.

Theoretical Rationale

A basic theoretical construct underlying most organization development activities is the action-research model -- defined by French and Bell as a "data-based, problem solving model that replicates the

steps involved in action research: data collection, feedback of data to the clients, and action planning based on the data" (1973, p. 69). In this view, action research is both an approach to problem solving, that is, a model or a paradigm, and a problem solving process - a series of activities and events.

Weisboard (1983) has identified the steps in this process as data collection (facts, opinion, etc.), diagnosis (denoting the "gaps" between "what is" and "what ought to be" as supported by the data), action (carrying out steps you predict will improve things), and evaluation (rediagnosis).

As an approach to organizational development, action research is no less than systematic problem identification and solution in which the main actors in the situation, the identifiers and solvers, are the same people. Havelock underscores the roll of the actors themselves by further defining action research as:

the collaboration of researcher and subject in the diagnosis and evaluation of problems existing in the practice setting.... It provides the cooperating system with scientific data about its own operation which may be used for self-evaluation (1969, p. 10).

Premised on the action research model, the present study will utilize a qualitative methodology as an approach to problem solving by focusing on the organizational actor. This point of view implies that

the client system members and the researcher will jointly define the problems to be addressed and identify the hypotheses relevant to the situation.

However, in viewing action research as a problem solving process, Weisbord (1983) warns that research scientists interested in organizational improvement often fail to pay sufficient attention to the first step in the action research paradigm leading to sound diagnosis: the gathering of data. To remedy this potential oversight, the focus of this qualitative study was on data collection, that is to say, the research effort was directed to gathering and assembling the clues and bits and pieces of information from which a diagnosis would be built.

The meaning of church membership from the perspective of active adolescent church members serves as the data in this study. Consequently, this qualitative study may be viewed as representing the first two steps in the action research process, data collection and diagnosis, setting the stage for the possibility of later participatory planning for organizational change.

Significance of the Study

By examining the subjective meaning of religious participation from the adolescent's perspective, this study enriches the existent literature on adolescent membership in religious organizations by providing a qualitative component to a body of research that with few exceptions (Rauff, 1979; Hale, 1977) consist mainly of correlational and descriptive studies of drop out behavior.

In addition, the utilization of the long ethnographic interview as an exploratory research strategy that allows religiously active church youth to provide "modes of conceptualization for describing and explaining" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 3) may lead to the generation of a substantive theory of adolescent membership behavior. As Glaser and Strauss have noted, grounding theory in the life world of the respondents "can help to forestall the opportunistic use of theories that have dubious fit and working capacity..." as often seen in highly empirical studies that "...conclude with a tacked-on explanation taken from a logically deduced theory" (1967, p. 4). In contrast, the qualitative methodology utilized in this study permits a working theory of adolescent membership

behavior to be generated from systematically obtained interview data rather than logically deduced from a priori assumptions.

As can be noted in a review of the literature, many of the quantitative studies in the area of adolescent membership behavior turn to the developmental models derived from Piaget (1932) to explain the observed decline in adolescent participation in religious organizations. While dominating the literature, these models fail to account for the number of research findings that depict church related adolescents as not in rebellion (Bealer, et al., 1964; Bengtson, 1982; Bandura, 1971), or that find youth conforming to jointly held parental religious ideology (Putney and Middleton, 1961). Likewise, the popular developmental based models do not account for Zuck and Getz's (1968) report that religious values were of significance to 88 percent of evangelical teens and of intense import to 42 percent, or for Strommen's (1974) extensive survey that identified 30 percent of Protestant youth as very committed. In this regard, by providing the unique perspective of a view from the inside, this study suggests not only a stance to be taken towards existing quantitative data, but can also provide the basis for substantive theory to predict and

explain adolescent participation in religious organizations, and thereby promote the goal of societal integration.

Finally, a practical application of this study lies in it providing an alternative perspective, that of the church youth themselves, to membership behavior that has been viewed as a "problem" by church leaders and parents. At the same time, being involved in the study itself offered a group of church related youth a possibility to "...co-construct a meaning system which validates... the religion previously internalized" (Potvin and Lee, 1982, p.131). As Havelock (1969) has suggested, by involving the church youth as collaborators with the researcher in the diagnosis and evaluation of problems in the organizational setting, the cooperating church community was provided with scientific data about its own operation which may be used for self evaluation.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that provides a backdrop for the design of this study is based on the theoretical rationale underlying the research methodology developed by Kurt Lewin (1948). To organize the direction and scope of his ongoing

research, Lewin undertook with Chein, Cook, and Harding (1948) to outline what they considered four varieties of action research: (1) diagnostic; (2) participant; (3) empirical, and (4) experimental. Two of the categories named in the descriptive scheme, diagnostic and participant, may prove helpful in framing the proposed study.

Chein et al (1948) recommended "diagnostic" as a variety of action research designed to lead to action. In this approach, the researcher would encounter an existing situation, diagnose the problem, and recommend remedial measures. These recommendations are not pre-tested, but are arrived at by, "an intuitive process on the basis of accumulated past experience and the present diagnosis" (Chein et al., 1948, p. 45). In this study, the "diagnosis" was derived from an analysis of the cultural categories, assumptions, and themes by which the organizational actors - adolescent church youth, see and experience the world. Marrow (1969) notes that Lewin was aware, however, that unless the proposed cures were "feasible, effective, and acceptable to the people involved" (p. 198), the action research design would be wasted.

In response to this concern, Lewin proposed a second variety, described as "participant" action research, which assumed that the members of the

effected group who were to help resolve the problem, "must be involved in the research process from the beginning" (Marrow, 1969. p. 198), and thereby fully realized the necessity of the remedial steps finally decided upon. It was further assumed that members "ego investment" would cause them to support the change program. Without such collaboration, notes Chein and his associates, recommendations for change tend, "to stimulate insecurity, aggression, and rationalization rather than motivated efforts to make changes" (1948, p. 46).

These observations are relevant to the study of adolescent religious behavior in that the approach utilized contains not only diagnostic but also aspects of participant research. Lewin noted that, in one sense, this type of an approach had limited applications, but would be useful in "disclosing particular and local facts" (cited in Marrow, 1969, p. 198) as examples for other groups, without providing general principles. In fact, Chein's group concluded that participant action research was "more a special kind of action technique than a special kind of research" (1948, p. 46). Accordingly, from this theoretical point of view, failing to provide generalizable principles might suggest a potential limitation of the proposed study.

Lewin himself, however, maintained a somewhat different perspective. In terms of understanding participatory action research and the social context of human behavior from the perspective of the actor, of particular importance for the purposes of this study are the Lewinian notion of lawfulness and the assumptions underlying his concept of life space.

Influenced by the theorizing of Ernst Cassirer, Lewin espoused the Galilean perspective on research, a viewpoint which assumed that all events are lawful, even though they occur only once. Lewin did not hold that the single event represents only a chance occurrence, nor that only the average of great numbers of historically given events possesses any significance. Instead, as Lewin (1936) succinctly put it, "Law and single occurrence enter into immediate relationship. (p. 8). Therefore, methodological techniques require the investigation of individual cases. Under the earlier Aristotelian perspective current in empirical science, an "individual case is not lawful, lawfulness exists only where there is regularity of occurrences" (Lewin, 1936. p. 10). In this view, the technique of proving the validity of a particular law of human behavior required the demonstration of the frequency of similar events,

disregarding individual differences, with behavior seen as determined by the past or future.

On the other hand taking the Galilean perspective, Lewin concluded behavior is determined not by the past or future, but that "...only relations between several facts can be the cause of events. Every event stands upon the totality of the contemporary situation" (1936, p. 10).

Thus Lewin based his research methodology on the premise that even if all the laws of psychology were known, a researcher could make a prediction about a person's behavior only if in addition to the laws, "the special nature of the particular situation were known" (1936, p. 12). Believing that researchers should seek the cause of events, not in the nature of a single isolated object, but rather in the nature of an object to its surrounding, Lewin concluded that "one can hope to understand the forces that govern behavior only if one includes in the representation the whole psychological situation." (Lewin, 1936, p. 12).

Lewin (1936) expressed this relationship by describing the situation mathematically in the equation $B = f(PE)$, where every psychological event (B), depends on the state of the person (P) and his/her environment (E). Lewin coined the term "psychological life space" to indicate the "totality of facts which determine the

behavior of an individual at a certain moment" (p. 216). He further noted that "the life space represents the totality of possible events, ... includes the person and the environment and ... can be represented by a finitely structured space" (Lewin, 1936, p. 216).

What makes Lewin's theoretical work significant in this regard is that social science researchers often disregard the actor's subjective perspective, and consider input and output as the primary object of study. Lewin of course recognized that in the scientific gathering of data, it is possible for a researcher to set up the observables themselves as the focal point of a theoretical system and then try to find the laws that may obtain between them, as is often done today with correlational studies.

On the other hand, Lewin believed one can also consider the observables as something that will give us information about cognitive constructs lying beyond them. As Heider (1959) puts it, "we can put the observer-object partition between observer and the directly observable, or between the directly observable and the construct" (p. 5).

For Lewin, the partition between observer and object was at the cognitive or psychological life space. His primary concern was with what went on in this cognitive life space, and that is where he

expected to find "nodal points" or relevant variables "that follow exact laws without exception (p. 5)." These so-called intervening variables were the focus for Lewin from the start, and input and output were relegated to a secondary role. Processes in the lifespace were the ultimate object of Lewinian observation. Lewin thus takes a "centralist position," and holds that "both behavior and description of the situation have to be referred to constructs belonging to the life space and used as indicators of the contents or processes of the life space." (Heider, 1959, p. 6).

Following Lewin, an assumption of this study was that psychological laws relate to cognitive constructs representing events derived from the dynamic factors of the concrete situation. Topologically, these laws refer to cognitive relationships between nodes or variables in the psychological life-space of the individual, the variables themselves representing constructs derived as part of the individual's meaning making process. In terms of this study therefore, it is important to realize, as Bougon has noted, that "...we never talk about the world -- social or physical -- only about our construction of it" (Bougon, 1983, p. 186).

Accordingly, in order to understand the full meaning of church membership from the actor's perspective, the territory explored in this study was the person's concept structure. As a way to begin the exploration of that structure, a qualitative methodology was utilized to generate initial conceptual categories, key terms, and assumptions while providing access to the actor's subjective meaning and an understanding of the adolescent's interpretation of behavior.

Another assumption, premised on the Gestalt perspective, also impacts on the methodology of the study. And that is, even if the laws relating cognitive variables in the life space were known, behavior could be predicted only if the special nature of the particular situation were also known, ie., the subjective meaning of the whole psychological situation to the individual. In other words, examining variables per se outside the context of the particular situation is pointless. What is required is a qualitative technique such as the long ethnographic interview that captures "how the respondent sees and experiences the world" (McCracken, 1988, p. 65). In this perspective, when cultural categories, assumptions, and their

relationships are viewed as objects of investigation, the long ethnographic interview becomes the research strategy of choice.

Definition of Terms

Significant terms and expressions used in this study are defined as follows:

1. Drop out -- refers to the voluntary relinquishment of role responsibilities. Dropping out is to become inactive in terms of expected group membership behavior. A drop out is in effect one who self-selects out of group membership. The term drop out is also be used to describe the apparent apostasy of college students, ie., those students who have self-described as totally forsaking their church of origin.
2. Church Youth -- refers to the children of members, and as such, are those who have been identified, to a greater or lesser degree, as attending church school on a more or less regular basis from nursery to 10th grade. Youth may be more broadly defined to include

post 10th graders, ie., up to and including college age young people who have apparently selected out of active membership, whether confirmed as nominal members or not.

3. Church -- refers to the corporate makeup of a particular organization whose members identify as a specific religious group who regularly worship together at a common place. That is, the reference is to the body of the current church membership, and not to a spiritual or apostolic, universal concept. Likewise, Congregational refers to the system of government and religious beliefs of a Protestant denomination in which each member church is self-governing.
4. Member -- an "active" church member is one who supports the church by weekly attendance at worship service, lends financial support, or by offering time, ie., as Sunday School teacher, choir member, or by serving on a board or committee. Baptized children of church members are considered part of the "church family" and are identified as individuals upon enrolling/attending church

school. Children may choose to formally join the church by being confirmed, usually in the 9th grade.

5. Perceived relationship -- implies a focus on the personal meaning that any participant in the organization holds to, in terms of thoughts, feelings, or attitudes related to membership in this local church.
6. Expressed attitude -- refers to support of norms, or held opinion relating to implicit or explicit understandings related to the perceived relationship of youth with the church.

Limitations of the Study

Implicit in a discussion of the underlying assumptions of qualitative versus quantitative research, is the notion derived from the positivistic theoretical perspective that qualitative methodology fails to provide generalizable principles. However, for the purposes of this study, which is derived both from the Galilean perspective on research espoused by Lewin and from the Gestalt perspective with roots in phenomenology, generalizability is not the issue. Instead, by asking the actor "why", thereby implying

cause or purpose, the perspective taken assumes a possibility of discovering qualitative meaning in the single case, a logic or lawfulness relating the personal constructs represented by the observed behavior, rather than viewing the single case as mere random activity, or entropy (as opposed to quantitative "what" questions, ie., "To what degree do youth participate..."; or, "What are the factors contributing to youth dropping out..."; or, "In what way or manner (how) do youth drop out..."). Rather than generalizability, from the qualitative perspective the issue is one of depth, and as a consequence, methodological techniques require the investigation of individual cases.

A second limitation of the study is that the data consists primarily of self-reported information, and therefore is limited in terms of verifiability. The information examined is the subjective perception or constructed reality of the church youth themselves, and as such is not necessarily be representative of the perceptions of other youth, family or church members.

A third limitation is that the church youth participating in the study are members of a specific, main line protestant congregation. Accordingly, the

beliefs, values, and norms derived in this cultural context may not be similar to those held in other religious-communities.

Finally, it is important to realize that in terms of the selection of respondents in this study, organizational actors were interviewed who considered themselves to be active church members. With a focus on member participation, qualitative techniques were considered the methodology of choice to explore the meaning of membership with religiously active church youth: young adults who were the baptized children of church members, had attended Sunday School, or who had joined the church through confirmation in the 9th grade. Other church youth who at some point had already disengaged from church activities, or were otherwise religiously inactive in terms of religious membership at the time of the study, were not included among the respondents. Accordingly, the application of qualitative techniques in a study of religiously disengaged church youth remains an opportunity for future research.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

As Bealer and Willets (1967) have pointed out, it is vital to recognize that the religious orientation of adolescents does not exist in a vacuum, but in a socially supporting milieu. Accordingly, one purpose of the literature review was to establish the historical and social context of the existent research, and help frame the world view of the youth included in this study. A second purpose in conducting a thorough review of the literature was to establish the domain the interview would explore, and to specify analytic categories and relationships that helped organize the data by way of suggesting a list of topics to aid in the construction of the interview questionnaire.

The review of the literature relevant to participation and religious disengagement among church related adolescents was divided into three sections. The first section provides an historical and cultural overview by reviewing national religious trends and related survey data over the past fifty years. The second section examines the conceptual frameworks utilized by researchers to account for religious

dropout and participatory behavior among adolescents. These theoretical perspectives were then utilized to organize a discussion of the research findings. The final section provides an analysis of the finding and description of the analytic categories derived from the literature review.

Historical Overview

The following section will provide an overview by examining national religious trends based on annual survey data (Gallup, 1985, 1987, 1992) in order to help put the research finding related to adolescent membership behavior into an historical and cultural perspective.

According to Gallup (1985), the unprecedented social changes that have occurred over the last 50 years in the United States have had a powerful influence on the religious life of Americans. The major events that have conditioned religious thought and belief include:

the Great Depression of the 1930's, World War II, the post-war economic recovery, the advent of television, the cold war and the concern over the internal threat of Communism, the Korean War, the Second Vatican Council, the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, urban riots, campus

unrest, Watergate and the resignation of President Richard Nixon, stagflation, environmental and ecological problems, the nuclear threat and finally, in the last few years, a growing mood of national optimism (Gallup, 1985, p. 4).

These events have resulted in perceivable swings in the religious life of Americans as measured in national survey data.

Since colonial times, Americans have displayed a vigorous religious tradition. This high level of religious involvement was evident in the 1930's, when the first national opinion polls taken at that time showed 7 in 10 Americans to be church members and about 4 in 10 attending church or synagogue in a typical week (Gallup, 1987).

In the 1940's, the roll of the church in wartime was a controversial issue and stirred up heated debate in American churches. While a 1942 Gallup survey found that 10 percent of Americans reported reading the Bible daily, 41 percent said they had not read the Bible in the previous 12 months (Gallup, 1985). But concern about the war caused increasing numbers of young adults to turn to the Bible, and "occasional" Bible reading registered an upswing in this age category. Church membership moved up slightly during the 1940's, and a 1947 survey showed more than 8 in 10 having attended religious services during a 12 month period (Gallup, 1985). Belief levels among Americans was very high. A

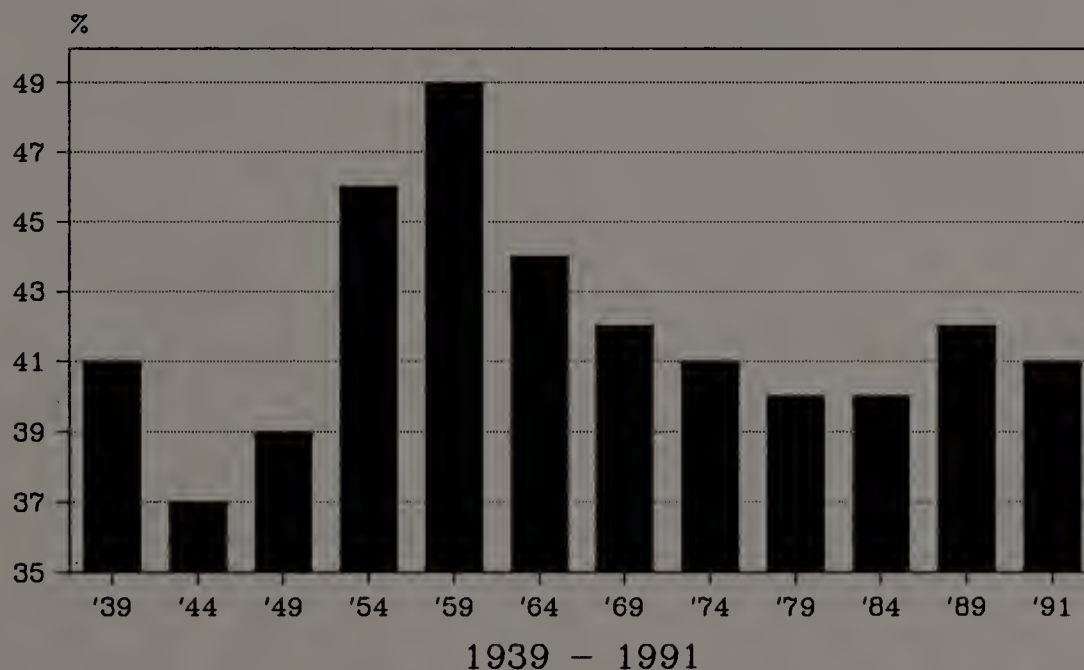
1947 Gallup survey of 11 nations showed 9 in 10 Americans saying they believed in God, the highest recorded for any nation, in sharp contrast to 2 out of 3 believers in France (Gallup, 1985).

Following the wave of post-World War II recovery marked by expanding business and industry, a surge in religious interest during the 1950's was characterized by increased church membership and attendance. During this period, religious leaders such as Billy Graham, Norman Vincent Peale and Fulton Sheen had wide followings, and as a consequence, church membership remained high during the decade of the 1950's. Three persons in 4 (75%) in 1952 said religion was very important in their lives, a figure that was to drop to 52 percent by 1978. In 1957, 7 in 10 (69%) said religion was increasing its influence on American life, compared to 14 percent who said its influence was waning. Gallup's findings showed by 1970 these figures were reversed (Gallup, 1985).

As shown in Figure 1 below, average weekly attendance at U.S. churches and synagogues, which had been charted by the Gallup Poll since 1939, reached high points in 1955 and 1958. From that point on, church attendance went into a swift decline. Overall national attendance dropped from 49 percent in 1958 to 42 percent in 1969, with the decline most pronounced

among young adults (21-29 years), down 15 points between these two dates. Attendance figures did not stabilize until the mid 1970's, and have remained surprisingly constant to the present time, not varying by more than one percentage point since 1972.

U.S. CHURCH ATTENDANCE % Attending in Average Week



Derived: Gallup Poll, 1992

Figure 1: Average weekly attendance at U.S. churches and synagogues from 1939 through 1991.

The decline in church attendance during the 1960's noted in Figure 1 above serves to underscore that the decade of the 1960's was a period of major change and upheavals -- from the emergence of the civil rights movement to the beginning of the women's liberation movement; the rise of the counter-culture and strong

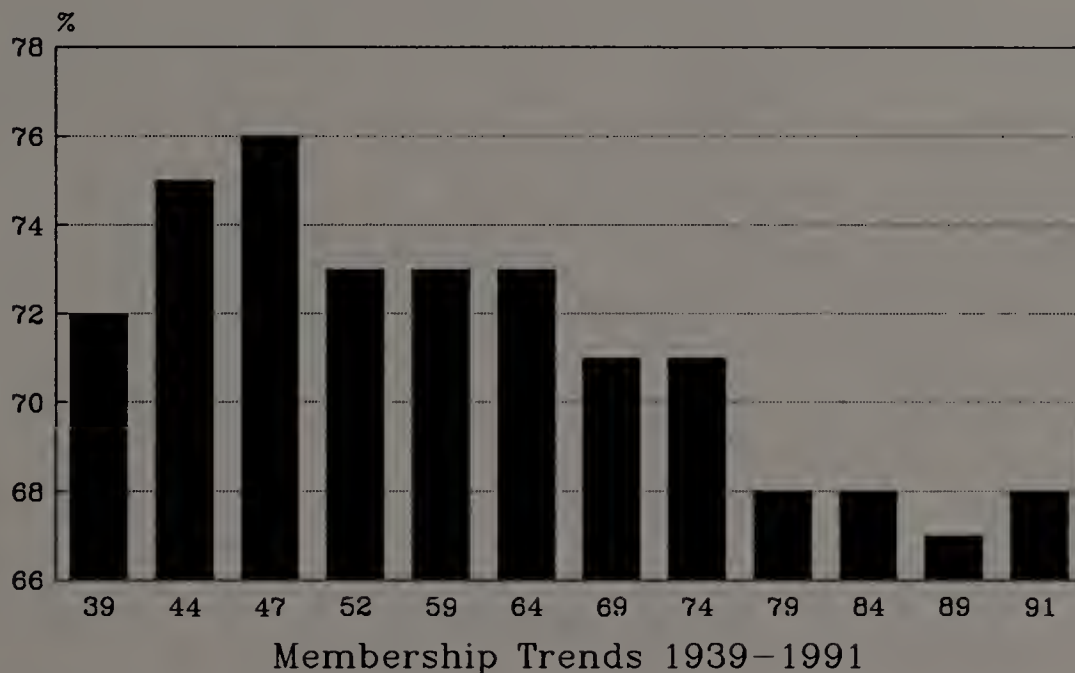
anti-establishment feelings and their effects were felt particularly on the part of young people. Marked change and upheaval were found in the church as well, with the clergy involved in anti-war protests, and the advent of radical theology, situation ethics, the new morality, and the beginning of charismatic and neo-Pentacostal movement within the Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant churches.

Churches in the 1960's were facing a crisis, with urbanization and the age of technology causing a growing number of people to question traditional doctrines. Church membership, particularly among Catholics, mainline Protestant and Jews, not suprisingly, showed a sharp decline, that finally leveled out only in the present decade. Figure 2 below, depicting the percentage of adults self-reporting as members of U.S. churches and synagogues, highlights the loss in membership nationally.

In 1962, 31 percent of Americans, as opposed to 14 percent in 1957, believed that religion was losing its influence on society. College students and younger adults in the 1962 survey however, were far more inclined than older adults to take a pessimistic view, with 53 percent saying religion was losing its influence on American society (Gallup, 1985).

Students felt that religion as a whole was failing to solve contemporary moral, social, and economic problems, and students associated religion with church going and church participation. Indicating

U.S. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP % Self Reported Members



Derived: Gallup Poll, 1992

Figure 2: Percentage of adults self-reporting as members of a church or synagogue from 1939 through 1991.

by survey response that, "Young people were losing interest in formal religion, finding it not relevant" (Gallup, 1985, p. 8), 67 percent of adults responding to a 1968 survey said religion was losing ground, five times the proportion that felt that way a decade earlier.

Church leaders, religious educators, and concerned parents noted these trends as a clear warning that churches "were not getting through to the current student generation and needed to make a sweeping reappraisal of their presentations" (Gallup, 1985, p. 8). It was during this period of reappraisal that significant research into the behavior of adolescent church members and young adults began to appear in the scientific literature.

Unfortunately, the activism of the 1960's gave way to the disillusionment and cynicism of the 1970's, in fact, survey data suggested that the early nineteen seventies marked one of the lowest points in national moral in history. Gallop Poll results at this time showed that, "Americans were growing more pessimistic about the economy, the prospects for peace in the world, the institutions of society, and the future facing themselves and their families" (Gallup, 1985, p. 8). The uneasy national mood fostered by the Vietnam war and the Watergate scandal had a strong carry-over effect upon the churches. National survey data indicated mainline Protestant churches suffered serious membership losses, declines in church attendance, as well as losses in the proportions identifying with a particular denomination. Conservative churches on the other hand, continued to experience growth, a

phenomenon which respondents attributed to fundamentalist churches having more clear cut answers on religious issues as well as greater efforts by members in evangelization (Gallup, 1985).

A Gallup survey conducted at the beginning of the 1970's (Gallup, 1985) showed 75 percent of Americans saying religion was losing its impact on society, with the reasons given that the church was outdated and not relevant, that morals were breaking down, and people were becoming more materialistic. It was not a good time for organized religion - almost 4 in 10 young Protestant and Catholic clergy (under 40 years old) in a 1971 survey said they seriously considered leaving religious life. However, while survey evidence showed that mainline religion had fallen on difficult days, the rise to political prominence of Jimmy Carter, a born-again Christian, focused attention on the evangelical movement in America. A 1976 Gallup Poll showed 34 percent of Americans saying they had been "born again," a percentage projecting to nearly 50 million Americans, 18 and older.

Through the 1980's, church attendance and church membership remained stable, and national survey statistics confirmed that the slide in religious involvement since the 1960's was leveling off. However, despite the flatness in the trend in the

national proportion who said they were church members, a comparison of membership figures supplied by denominations themselves showed a gain for evangelical churches but a fall-off among mainline churches, ranging from 3 to 15 percent. (Gallup, 1987). Despite the decline in membership among the mainline Protestant churches, by 1986 the number of Americans who said they believe religion is increasing its influence on American life, 48 percent, continued to represent the highest recorded level in three decades. In the 1986 Gallop Poll, most likely to say that religion's influence is growing were young adults (18-29 years old), persons with a college background, and evangelicals (Gallup, 1987).

Wielding the broadest of brush strokes, national survey data of religious trends in the United States from over half a century were utilized in this section to establish the cultural milieu defining the historical and social context of the literature, as well as to orient the reader in terms of the weight of research findings. The following section examines the theoretical frameworks utilized by researchers to account for religious dropout and participatory behavior among teenagers. The conceptual frameworks

are then used to organize a discussion of the numerous correlational and statistical studies found in the literature.

Theoretical Perspectives

With the decline in attendance and membership in mainline churches depicted in national survey data since the 1960's, a preponderance of the research on adolescent membership behavior in religious organizations has focused on the religious drop out phenomenon utilizing quantitative methodologies, as noted in the work of Dudley (1988; 1978), Potvin and Sloane (1985), Roozen (1980), and Weiting (1975), to name but a few. Within the remaining body of research which has generally focused on the broad correlates of religiosity in adolescence, several authors have addressed the specific issue of participation among church related adolescents, ie., Willits and Crider (1989), Cornwall (1987), Dudley and Dudley (1986), Hunsberger (1980), and O'Hara (1980). Authors taking the former perspective have utilized theoretical concepts borrowed from the traditional literature of adolescent developmental psychology to explain adolescent religious disengagement. On the other hand, writers focusing on religious participation among

church youth have noted the importance of socialization processes in acquiring a particular world view (Berger, 1967), and utilized social learning frameworks to explain the data. The following section will describe the theoretical framework of each perspective, and discuss the research findings they support.

Developmental Models

In general terms, theoretical frameworks based on a developmental model direct a focus upon hypothesized stages of human development and assert that each period in the life span is characterized by specialized developmental tasks which must be addressed by the individual. For the adolescent, these are seen as involving the establishment of emotional independence from parents and the achievement of a sense of separate personal identity (Willems and Crider, 1989). To distance themselves from parents and to assert their independence, adolescents are often believed to be rebelling against parental authority, while rejecting traditional values and behavior. However, the pervasiveness of such rebellion has been questioned by Bealer et. al. (1964), Bengtson (1982), and Bandura (1971). Peer influence, however, seems to become increasingly salient in the shift away from parental

control. As Potvin and Lee have noted, "Peers begin to construct among themselves world views, attitudes and meanings which may or may not be compatible with religious practices and meanings previously acquired (1982, p. 134).

Derived from this model, an assumption found in the literature examining adolescent church disengagement holds that with the emergence of adolescence, there comes a crisis of faith implying a change in traditional moral-religious precepts, wherein the adolescent reevaluates his childhood orientation (Zaenglein, Vener & Stewart, 1975). For example, Potvin and Lee state that it is generally recognized that "adolescents and youth everywhere experience a critical stage of coming to maturation with regard to religious commitments" (1984, p. 47). In fact Harms has stated, "the transformation of religious sentiment" is a "characteristic fact of adolescence" (1944, p. 69).

Given this developmental process, the maturing adolescent is thought to find it increasingly difficult to accept at face value the belief system of his parents and other significant adults. In this perspective, "the stresses of adolescence converge in the form of anxiety regarding personal and social

competence" (Zaenglein, Vener & Stewart, 1975, p. 51), leading to societal and personal dysfunction.

Thus, emphasis has been placed in this model upon deviant rather than normal or conforming processes. The underlying theoretical framework that supports such notions have been derived from Piaget's conceptualization of the stages and components of cognitive development.

Briefly, Piaget suggested that humans progress through stages of cognitive development consisting of a sensori-motor period (age 0-18 months) in which the pre-verbal child gains an awareness of self based on continuous motor experimentation (Engler, 1979). From the end of the sensorimotor period to about seven years of age, the preoperational child operates on the world with gradual symbol and language acquisition and attempts to solve problems in a practical and immediate mode. In the next stage of concrete operations, from age seven to about age 12, the child begins to think logically, but has not learned to think of objects symbolically in problem solving. By approximately age 12, in the stage of formal operations, the child is no longer tied to concrete objects but can cognitively symbolize an object and is able to solve an abstract problem (Engler, 1979).

Piaget also provided a theory of moral development that was later expanded upon by Kohlberg (1978). Piaget suggested that there are two major stages of understanding of what is right and wrong behavior. One ranges from ages three to ten (moral realism) in which moral laws are seen as rigid and inflexible. Behavior is seen as right or wrong with no middle ground. The second stage, from approximately age 10 on, Piaget named "morality of cooperation (cited in Mitchell, 1988, p. 3), and reflects the effect of socialization. In this stage of moral development, the individual sees that right and wrong are based on social agreements, and infractions are evaluated by intentions more than actual behavior (Mitchell, 1988).

Researchers have borrowed from Piaget's notion of youth passing through developmental stages in formulating their own theoretical approach to the problem of religious disengagement among church related adolescents. For example, Dudley & Dudley (1986) suggest emancipation theory as a framework to explain the tendency of adolescents to reject the values of the previous generation. This construct is premised on a major tenet of the developmental model which holds certain tasks are appropriate to each life stage.

Thus Havighurst (1952) suggests that a task of adolescence is gaining emotional independence from

parents and other adults, achieving assurance of economic independence, and searching for a separate and personal identity. Prolongation of adolescence required by extended education in a technological society creates tension and stress. Young people who are physically and sexually mature are still not ready for economic and social independence. Caught in an in-between-land, the teenager seeks some symbolic way to make a statement of independence. This emancipation may be seen as the rejection of parental values or those of other authority figures, such as the church.

Also utilizing a developmental stage perspective, Erikson (1963) wrote of a "psychosocial moratorium" a normal period of role experimentation when teens are relatively free from making adult commitments. In a similar vein, Smith (1962) observed that the conflict between youth and adult authority figures is relieved by the withdrawal of youth from adult institutions (e.g., the church) and by withdrawing, find the freedom to develop their own autonomy, norms, and ethical systems.

Likewise Narramore (1980) suggests that turning against the church is a way for teens to express anger towards their parents - a way to strike an effective blow in the struggle for emancipation, by attacking that which the parents value highly. Rogers (1978)

holds that parents pressing their own values onto their children frustrates the process of obtaining autonomy and may drive the youth to seek alternative values. The notion of adolescence as a stage of rebellion was also suggested by Keeley (1976) who found college freshman were oriented towards spontaneity, newness, and change, while their parents were oriented towards tradition, structure, and conformity. Similarly, Burke (1978) maintains authoritarian religion prolongs adolescent dependency and thus assures that the process of emancipation requires the youth to reject it.

The work of Potvin and Lee (1982) investigating religious development among adolescents also utilized a framework derived from Piaget's cognitive levels of development. These authors hypothesized that in early adolescence, religiousness is still largely a product of what Piaget calls relations of constraint, or authority. At this stage of development, "religious identification mainly characterized as identification with the religion of the parent will be strongly associated with parental religious commitment. Religious parents tend to see that their children go to religious services and get religious instruction" (Potvin & Lee, 1982, p. 52). At mid-adolescence, as the peer group becomes more salient, peers tend to co-construct among themselves attitudes and meanings which

may not be compatible with "the external manifestations and internal meaning previously acquired (Potvin & Lee, 1982, p. 52). At this stage, while religious practice is still expected to influence "internal" religion, the reverse process, newly acquired meaning affecting religious behavior, may be stronger.

At late adolescence, a new integration is expected to occur. Potvin and Lee maintain that the co-constructed social matrix will influence individual meanings, and the influence of religious practice, whether religious, a-religious, or anti-religious activities, upon "internal" religion is expected to be greater, although "having taken on a new dimension" (1982, p. 52).

Research Findings. Utilizing the developmental model as a theoretical framework, a number of authors have examined hypothetical construct variables in correlational studies in an attempt to infer the developmental processes involved in adolescent religious disengagement. Generally, these studies have focused either on one or the other of two age-graded domains -- that of the high school student or that of the college age youth. In the next segment, studies that have sought out the determinants of church participation among high school youth will be examined.

High School Domain. Typical of the quantitative research conducted among high school youth, Sloane and Potvin (1983) showed that among adolescents the relationship between age and religious practice is conditional upon religious denomination. Younger children are more likely to be high on religious practice than older adolescents among Baptists, Catholics, and mainline Protestants, but the reverse is true of adolescents with no formal religious affiliation or who identify with non-Christian groups.

In a follow-up study exploring the negative relationship between age and religious practice that exists among the major denominations, Potvin and Sloane (1985) examined whether parental religiosity and parental control have an effect on that decline. These writers found that at younger ages high parental control and high religious practice are associated with high religious experience but at later ages high parental control and high religious practice are associated with low religious experience. Confirming the transformation in religiousness that occurs at mid-adolescence, their data suggest that "even if the process of questioning the religion of one's childhood does not necessarily begin with the questioning of its belief system, there nonetheless occurs a questioning of external control" (Potvin and Sloane (1985), p. 12).

In a study of 390 high school student attending three Protestant youth conferences, Dudley and Laurant (1988) utilized the Youth Perceptual Inventory to measure alienation from religion and 17 other independent variables. Multiple regression showed that among church-related adolescents, only eight variables made a significant contribution to understanding alienation from religion. Alienation was found to be highly related to the quality of adolescents' relationship with and perceptions of sincerity of the pastor, perception of parental compliance with church standards, as well as to opportunities for church involvement, their own self-esteem, the influence of peer groups, the media, and belief in doctrines of the church. Relations with pastors and opportunity for church involvement were the strongest factors related to teenage attitudes toward religion.

In overview, researchers focusing in the domain of high school age youth have discussed four sets of factors hypothesized to influence the adolescent's church attitude and participation. These variables have been identified as: family factors, peer group factors, program factors, and belief factors (Hoge & Petrillo, 1978).

Hoge & Petrillo (1978) have noted that family factors include parent's religion, religious socialization in the family, and relationships with parents. Researchers have found that parent's religious values are a strong influence on a youth's church attitude (eg., Putney & Middleton, 1961; Strommen, 1963; Zuck & Getz, 1968). Putney and Middleton (1961), found that the impact of father's values is greater than the impact of mother's values, but Bengtson and Acock (1976) found no difference between the two. Putney and Middleton (1961) also found that children of mixed religious marriages have weaker religious commitments than those of single religious marriages. Other researchers have found that family tension interferes with transmission of parental religious values (McCready, 1972; Johnson, 1973). Thomas, Gecas, Weigert, and Rooney (1974) measured happiness of the parental marriage and found it to correlate positively with transmission of parental religious values to children. These authors also distinguished parental support and parental control, and found that parental support is clearly the more important variable in facilitating religiosity in children.

Research on American high school youth has demonstrated that adolescents form close knit peer

groups that influence their attitudes and behavior (Havighurst & Keating, 1971). Havighurst and Keating (1971) found that church activities are one option among several networks of social participation and leadership, and that most of the leaders of church group activities were not the same persons who led school activities.

In terms of belief factors, several variables have been found to be important. For example, research has found that religious interest or a felt need for religion varies from person to person, but is usually strong among adolescents (Strommen, 1963). Bealer and Willets (1967) found that the main focus of religious interest among youth tended to be on personal faith and on relationships with family and peers, with broader social, political, or theological questions seen as less pressing. With intellectual maturation, religious beliefs change. Havighurst and Keating (1971) found that the high school years are a period of "deconcretization" of religious ideas and the beginning of confrontation with cultural relativity.

In a study of the relative importance of specific predictor variables as determinants of church attendance and church youth group participation, Hoge and Petrillo (1978) examined family, peer group pressures, and program and leadership factors. These

authors found that the principal determinant for fostering adolescent church attendance was parents' church attendance, while the determinants for youth group participation were peer pressure and types of youth group leaders. An adolescents' overall attitude towards the church was found to be determined by past religious education, types of leaders and held religious beliefs. In fostering church commitment among adolescents, Hoge and Petrillo found personal relationships with parents, peers and church leadership to be foremost.

College Domain. Considering the domain of research focusing on college age youth, a number of correlational studies based on the developmental framework are also found in the literature. Generally, research involving college students has utilized factor analysis techniques in an effort to determine variables predicting the "falling from the faith" of apostates (eg., Brinkerhoff & Burke, 1980; Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977; Glock & Wuthnow, 1979; O'Hara, 1980; Roof & Hoge, 1980; Roozen, 1980). Apostasy, as typically defined in these studies, (Hunsberger, 1983) refers to individuals who report being raised in a religious denomination, but who later change their religious orientation to "none."

However, while a study showing that the percentage of students rejecting home religious traditions increased from 1948 to 1974 in surveys of Williams College men in 1948, 1967, and 1974, Hastings and Hoge (1976) found that the shifts were to more liberal and humanistic viewpoints. These writers found that church participation and positive attitudes towards the church both decreased from 1948 to 1974, but that orthodoxy of religious beliefs did not change after 1967. The percentage of students reporting a reaction at some time against parental beliefs rose from 57 percent in 1948 to 79 percent in 1974, and the median age of the reaction fell two years in that time. Hastings and Hoge conclude that the effect of college on students' religion has decreased, suggesting that, "the main period of formulation of religious views has shifted to an earlier age, more in high school than college" (1976, p. 237).

Similar findings are reported by Wuthnow and Mellinger (1978). These authors examined the data from two panel studies of approximately 2000 male students at Berkeley conducted between 1970 and 1973 for evidence on the nature and timing of religious defection. These authors found that among the 58 percent of freshman raised as Protestant or Roman Catholic (14 percent Jews), only 27 percent remained

Protestant or Catholic (5 percent Jews) by Fall of their freshman year. Another 7 percent defected from the ranks of Protestant and Catholic during the subsequent two and one half years.

However, analysis of this dramatic rate of defection showed that most students defected prior to their college years, or at least prior to Fall of the freshman year. The authors speculate that what has been taken as college effects may be due more to differences in family background and early socialization than to the college experience itself.

Further analysis of the data revealed that while non-religiosity increased slightly in college, the proportion of students identified as deeply religious did not decrease. Only the moderately religious category showed a significant decline.

In a follow-up survey two years after graduation, rather than a shift to conventional religion as the youth took on adult roles, the researchers found no net return among the defectors to the conventional Christian or Jewish beliefs in which the youth were raised. Whereas 68 percent had been raised Protestant or Catholic, only 20 percent remained so two years after graduation. Again, Wuthnow and Mellinger note that the greatest share of this defection occurred before college.

In other research within the college domain, Hunsberger (1983) reputed Caplovitz and Sherrow's (1977) claim that religious disengagement "represents a form of rebellion against parents and is symptomatic of familial strain and dissociation from parents" (1977, p. 6) as not supported in the research. In fact, Hunsberger (1983) has suggested that "poor parental relations" seem to be "more likely a result than a cause of apostasy" (p. 160).

In a study of students who reported turning away from their religious beliefs and the impact of family background, Hunsberger and Brown (1984) utilized a factor structure and multiple regression analysis to assess the results of a 15 page questionnaire completed by eight hundred and thirty-six psychology students on items relating to religious orientation and background. These authors found that an intellectual orientation and the emphasis placed on religion in the childhood home were the two factors which served as the best predictors of apostate / nonapostate status.

The preceding section has focused on a review of the research that for the most part has utilized quantitative methodologies and a developmental framework to investigate what has been identified as the religious drop out phenomenon among adolescents. The following section will examine research suggesting,

as Dudley and Laurent (1988) have observed, that hostility to religion in this age group is not universal.

Social Learning Model

Not all studies have supported the notion that adolescence is the time when teenagers can be expected to reject the institutional expression of religion. For example, Bealer and Willets (1967) evaluated what Glock and Stark (1965) called the ritualistic dimension of religiosity, surveying a sample of approximately 1300 High School students in 1961. These authors found that more than 85 percent indicated that they were members of a church or temple. More than 60 percent of the boys and almost 75 percent of the girls indicated that they attended religious services "regularly." These findings were similar to those of Remmers (1962) who examined information derived from the Purdue University Opinion Polls in 1957 and in 1962. In both surveys, 70 percent of the youth reported that they attended religious services once per week or more often, and 25 percent reported that they attended more than once per week.

In a similar vein, Zaenglein, Vener and Stewart (1975) surveyed the orthodox beliefs of adolescent boys

and girls between the ages of thirteen and seventeen living in the same community over a three year period (1970-1973), finding an overall increase in religiosity. These authors found that despite the general decline in orthodoxy with increasing age, occasional upsurging of specific beliefs occur between thirteen and seventeen, and large numbers of conversions or defections are not apparent at any specific age level. The researchers found that agreement with doctrinaire items increased over the three year period, reflecting a resurgence of spiritualism, paralleling similar findings in attitudinal and behavioral areas.

In response to such data, writers focusing on religious participation among church youth have noted the importance of socialization processes in co-constructing reality (Berger, 1967; Erickson, 1963). These and other writers have used social learning frameworks to explain the data.

Social learning theory has been widely used in psychology, its main proponent being Albert Bandura. While recognizing the importance of reinforcement in learning, Bandura (1970) suggests that learning also takes place in the absence of direct reinforcement. Thus the theory emphasizes the role of observational learning and the modeling of behavior.

As defined by Gage and Berliner, social learning holds that through "observation of our social world, cognitive interpretation of that world, and through reinforcements or punishments of our responses, attitudes and behaviors are learned and are carried through into adulthood" (1979, p. 334). In this view, primary emphasis is placed on transmitting values by modeling and on parental actions that encourage children to model adult behavior. Since parents have early and abundant opportunity to model values and apply reinforcement techniques, as children mature, this theory suggests they would be likely to form value systems similar to those of their parents.

When applied to religion, the theory argues that religious attitudes and behaviors are learned, typically transmitted within families and specific religious groups. In this context, Roof and Hoge (1982) have pointed out that some religious groups are apparently able to elicit stronger church commitment in their members than others do. For example, evidence suggests that Roman Catholics attend church more frequently than do Protestants (Stark and Glock, 1968, while conservative Protestants attend more frequently and have higher rates of religious commitment than more liberal Protestants (Hunsberger, 1980).

Research Findings. Generally, researchers have found positive correlations between the transmission of religious values and the home environment and/or child rearing practices. For example, Hoge et al. (1982) found that transmission of religious values was strongest in families where the families had definite religious beliefs, agreed on them, and carried out conscious religious socialization in the home. Transmission was also strongest in families where parent-child overall disagreements were small.

Likewise, Johnson (1973) found that students who accepted their parents religious values perceived their families as happier and more accepting than did students who rejected these values. Nelson (1981) found that religiosity was highest in youth whose parents were religious and who were in harmony with one another. Thomas et al. (1974) found that where parents combined support (a positive affective relationship) with strictness, adolescents gave evidence of significantly greater commitment to traditional religiosity.

Most research on the transmission of religious values to youth has identified parents as the most important source of religious influence, even into adulthood. For example, Parker and Gaier (1980) reported that parents' level of religious participation

accounted for more than 60 percent of the variance in the religious beliefs and practices of their high school-aged children. Likewise, Hoge and Keeter (1976) also found that college teacher's religious beliefs and participation were best predicted by their parents' church attendance.

Other studies have shown that emotional closeness to parents increases an adolescents conformity to the parent's religion (Hoge & Keeter, 1976; Hunsberger, 1983). This effect is in keeping with the general observation that group cohesiveness is associated with conformity (Lott & Lott, 1961).

Hunsberger's extensive studies of apostasy (1980, 1983; Hunsberger & Brown, 1984), ie., those who report deserting the religious beliefs of their youth, have consistently shown that parent's religious beliefs and participation are the major predictors of university student's beliefs and participation, although students are more like their parents in participation than in belief. Hunsberger attributed this finding to modeling.

Although supported by social learning theory, there is less evidence of peer influence on adolescent religiousness. De Vaus (1983) found significantly more parent influence than peer influence on the beliefs of high school student, but peers influenced religious

practice almost as much as parents did. In a study by Hoge and Petrillo (1978) parent's religion and habits were the most important influence on measures of religiosity in a sample of high school students, but peer pressure was strongly related to participation in the church youth group. Peer influence on religious participation seems to become stronger in late adolescence (Madison & Vernon, 1983), and adulthood (O'Hara, 1980).

Cornwall (1987) found effects in adulthood of former relationships with religious peers in adolescence. However, it seems that similarity of religious beliefs is not critical in the choice of friends, except for members of very strict, conservative, or deviant religious groups (Bainbridge & Stark, 1981)

Summary. To review, the data relating to adolescent religious participation subsumed under a social learning model suggests adolescents seem prone to revise their religious beliefs, although parents religiousness is a stabilizing factor, especially if the youth belong to a faith with a strong group identity, and if they are emotionally close to the adolescent. Peers seem to affect participation inconsistently in young adolescents and more strongly

in older adolescents, but there is no evidence that peers affect each others beliefs.

Analysis of Research Findings

In examining the research literature, a striking observation is that the preponderance of the information was obtained through the use of quantitative methodologies derived from an objectivist view of reality in which "facts" and "data" are understood as objective entities, rather than social meanings attributed by social actors in interaction with others. In fact, not a single qualitative study of the meaning of adolescent religious behavior was found.

This observation suggests a methodological issue of some importance in terms of our understanding and interpretation of the data. For example, positing a multi-dimensional approach, Glock and Stark (1965) suggested a ritualistic dimension to religiosity. Other researchers constructed rating scales to access this variable (Remmers, 1962; Bealer and Willets 1967). Based on a statistical analysis of survey data, Bealer and Willets concluded that "in terms of attending ritualistic services,"..."American youth are not irreligious" (1967, p. 47). However, the

methodological point that is missed here is that the ritualistic dimension, while hypothetical, focuses on what people do rather than on the meaning of the actions to them. As a result, information derived from questionnaire data is of limited utility, for in itself, it says nothing about the reasons for participation. Some adolescents, after all, may go to church for "non-religious" reasons.

Finding in the literature review a nearly total reliance by researchers on the functionalist perspective and the use of quantitative methodologies such as paper and pencil tests, suggests additional methodological concerns of particular import in the study of religious behavior. Dittes (1969) noted that a persistent flaw in quantitative studies of religious belief and commitment is the bias of the measuring instruments towards a literal-fundamentalist interpretation of Protestant Christianity. This bias results from the way in which measuring instruments are typically constructed with a single statement to which the subject must respond with a true-false or agree-disagree a unidimensional format.

Asked, "What is your attitude to the Church?" the respondent in effect chooses items from opposite ends of a Thurston scale. According to Dittes, "...the church conceptualized as it is really meant to be is affirmed.

But the church, as it is manifested in ways that researchers and others assume to manifest these conceptions, is repudiated" (1969, p. 68).

Hunt has also observed that in constructing any scale of religiosity, the researcher has included, "implications and assumptions relating to hermeneutics, exegesis, teleology, eschatology, ontology, metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and metaethics, and many more theological and philosophical fields" (1972, p. 42). Hunt (1972) speculates that rarely would a quantitative researcher ask his respondents how they perceived his favorite item statements, or collaborate in depth with qualified theologians in editing statements about religion to provide a sample of the full range of theological and philosophical positions in his inventory.

According to French and Michael (1966) this weakness in construct validity of paper and pencil tests of religiosity results from the multiplicity of meaning which the respondent can attach to the same inventory item. This would represent a significant problem in struggling to understand survey results analyzed with high powered multi-variate techniques, whereas, as Dittes notes, in developing the survey instrument, "the researcher has typically exercised a simplistic bias, constructing a series of doctrinal

statements with the assumption that those who disagree with these statements are lacking in religious commitment" (1968, p. 68).

The concern described above relevant to the construct validity of research instruments and premised on the finding that quantitative approaches were used almost exclusively in the study of adolescent membership behavior, would be significantly remedied by the addition of a qualitative approach to studying the religiosity of adolescents. As proposed in this study, the use of the long interview technique would allow the youth themselves to explain the meaning of participation and drop out behavior grounded in their social reality.

A second observation to be voiced in examining the research literature on adolescent religious behavior is that the bulk of research was generated in the 1960's and 1970's in response to the apparent dramatic decline in the religious involvement of youth. Researchers were thus inclined by historical circumstances to focus on drop out behavior, and generally turned to the traditional literature of adolescent developmental psychology for a conceptual framework to explain the data.

Derived from the work of Piaget (1932), Erickson (1959), and Kohlberg (1978), theoretical frameworks to

account for adolescent membership behavior directed the research focus almost exclusively to issues of disengagement and apostasy, the foresaking of one's church. In addition, the problem highlighted by Glaser and Strauss related to "tacked-on explanation taken from a logically deduced theory" (1967, p. 4) to explain data or provide a broader sociological meaning appeared to be evident in the review of research articles.

Consequently, due to exclusive use by researchers of a quantitative methodology and their reliance on a deductive theoretical framework borrowed from another tradition, rather than the development of substantive theory grounded in the data of the adolescent religious experience, serious gaps exist in our understanding of adolescent membership behavior. These gaps are especially noticeable in the area of adolescent participation as an expression of religiosity, and in a broader sense, in the area of our understanding concerning the meaning of religious behavior from the actor's perspective.

Description of Analytic Categories

In describing the analytic categories culled from the research literature, the general intent will be to

"provide the concepts on which percept depend"

(McCracken, 1988, p. 31) and to aid in the construction of the interview questionnaire by generating analytical categories and specifying relationship to be used to organize the data.

A number of authors were found to have used the developmental model as a framework to examine correlational variables inferred in the processes involved in adolescent religious disengagement. These studies focused in either the domain of the high school student or that of the college age youth.

Correlates were found between age, denomination and gender suggesting a negative relationship between age and religiosity strongly influenced by a broader set of conceptual factors. Attitude and participation were found to be influenced by second order variables identified as -- family factors, peer group factors, program factors, and belief factors. The youth's self image, which in turn determines the quality of his or her relationship with family, peers, and church leaders, seems of paramount importance in determining an adolescent's overall attitude towards the church.

In terms of college age youth, the bulk of effects influencing a rejection of religiosity in young adulthood seems to occur prior to attending college, although for college age students as group, a trend

remains apparent for decreased church participation through the college years and beyond. The widely held notion that youth who have fallen away from the church will return soon after adopting the role responsibilities of adulthood, ie., the family life-cycle concept, seems to apply mainly to liberal protestant denominations, if there was high religiosity in the family home, with fewer Catholics re-joining the church in young adulthood, and fundamentalist youth generally remaining active participants irregardless of age.

Researchers adopting a social learning framework as a way of explaining the perceived religiosity of many adolescents throughout the teenage years also found a positive correlation between a positive home environment and emotional closeness with parents and the transmission of religious values as expressed in church participation. These studies have shown that adolescents are prone to revise their religious beliefs as they get older, but warm religious parents are a stabilizing factor. Peer interaction does not effect belief but does effect practice as the youth becomes older.

However, as was the case with the majority of the research considered from the perspective of the developmental model, the actual meaning of the observed

behavior from the actor's view point has yet to be determined and discussed in the social science literature. Remediating this situation was the goal of the qualitative research described in this study.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The following sections will discuss the underlying assumptions and rationale for the qualitative methodology that was used in this study. It will also identify the specific methods through which the long ethnographic interview technique (McCracken, 1988) was utilized to explore the full meaning of church membership from the viewpoint of the adolescent. The chapter will be divided into five sections.

The first section considers the rationale and assumptions underlying the qualitative approach to field research. The second section examines the applicability of qualitative research as an approach that can legitimately inform our understanding of religious organizations. The third section describes the long qualitative interview technique and outline the data gathering approach and procedures followed in this study. The last sections describe the steps involving entry into the organization, the setting and the selection of participants.

Rationale and Assumptions of a Qualitative Approach

The review of the literature has shown a predominantly functionalist perspective focusing on the phenomenon of drop out behavior among church youth, resulting in a large number of correlational studies that, for the most part, utilized theoretical variables derived from developmental models based on the work of Piaget to account for the observations. There is however, an alternative research model representing a view of social reality not reflected in numerical approaches that may better serve to inform our understanding of the meaning of adolescent membership behavior -- the qualitative methodology derived from the interpretive perspective.

The interpretive perspective takes a phenomenological approach to social analysis, and according to Burrell and Morgan (1979), seeks to understand the world as it is, understood at the level of subjective experience, within the frame of reference of the participant, as opposed to that of an outside observer. Social reality, in this view, "...is regarded as being little more than a network of assumptions and intersubjectively shared meanings" (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 30-31). Thus, from the context of the interpretive paradigm, Emerson (1983)

has suggested that the essential task of researchers is, "to be identifying and communicating the distinctive interpretations of reality that are made by members of the group under study" (p. 19).

Following Emerson, the specific focus of this study will be to discover the subjective meaning of adolescent membership behavior from the adolescent's perspective, as opposed to the description and interpretation of behavior as typically provided by outside observers. In this light, theoretical analysis will be grounded in the intersubjective reality of the youth themselves. Accordingly, it may be helpful at this point to examine the underlying assumptions of the qualitative methodology derived from the interpretive perspective.

Christians and Carey (1981) have noted that studies seeking to utilize qualitative methods have had to rigorously counter the prevailing trend in U.S. social science that views the aims of social science to be the same as those of the natural sciences. The struggle to establish qualitative research as a legitimate alternative to the quantitative-experimental approach may represent, as Husband and Foster (1987) suggest, a paradigm shift in social science research. In fact, Harre and Secord (1973) noted the need for such a paradigmatic shift, and referred to approaches

that use qualitative analyses of human behavior as the "new paradigm" (p. 8). Thus it may be argued that the assumptions of the qualitative approach, which "...represent an effort to uncover and record findings sensitive to the uniquely human dimensions of experience, such as personal identity and individual and social meaning" (Husband & Foster, 1987, p. 50), are quite dissimilar from those of the natural science paradigm.

Husband and Foster (1987) note that three basic thematic assumptions provide the humanistic roots and phenomenological foundation for qualitative studies, namely: an assumption of the interpretive, creative, and subjective nature of social reality; a commitment to uncovering the various layers of meaning in any personnel or social event; and a concern with understanding human action from the actor's own frame of reference. An additional assumption is that qualitative research entails attempting to know and observe people personally as they develop and use their own implicit definitions of the world.

Duffy (1987) also notes that the major goal of the qualitative method is to document and interpret as fully as possible the whole of what is being studied from the subject's frame of reference. In fact Leininger (1985) states that the focus of qualitative

research is, "...the world view: the values, meanings, beliefs, thoughts, feelings and general characteristics of the specific phenomena under investigation with no attempt being made to control or manipulate the events of the individuals being studied" (p. 2).

The assumptions underlying the qualitative perspective are viewed in stark contrast to the positivistic assumptions of the predominant quantitative research methodology that emphasizes, "the search for the facts and causes of human behavior through objective, observable and quantifiable data" (Duffy, 1987, p. 130). According to Stainbach and Stainbach (1984), assumptions underlying the functionalist perspective result in research subjects viewed as objects "reduced" to being passive/reactive organisms similar to basic matter in the "hard" sciences, while the researcher is viewed as an objective scientist whose main tasks are to manipulate the external environment and observe the effects on the subjects.

Furthermore, Duffy (1987) has noted that because they derive from entirely different perspectives regarding the study of human affairs, differing assumptions separate the quantitative from the qualitative view in a number of areas. In summary, these include assumptions effecting issues of

perspective (outsider/insider), reality (stable/dynamic), focus (particularistic/holistic), orientation (verification/discovery), data (objective/subjective), conditions (controlled/naturalistic), and results (reliable/valid).

Thus based on qualitative assumptions, Duffy contends that meaningful data is best provided by firsthand experience from an insider's perspective, rather than from an outsider's hypothetically detached, objective and unbiased view. The qualitative researcher assumes that reality is by nature changing or dynamic, and taking a holistic view, uses research procedures that are flexible, exploratory, and discovery oriented, rather than trying to verify or disprove predetermined hypotheses.

Believing it essential to understand the meaning that individuals attach to events, the qualitative researcher does not focus on objective data expressed as numbers apart from the feelings and thoughts of individuals, but rather assumes a focus on subjective data existing within the minds of individuals, which are typically expressed through language and collected in the context of their natural occurrence. Finally, while assumptions held by the quantitative researcher lead to a focus on the reliability of stable data and

the capability of replicating findings, the focus of the qualitative researcher is on validity, as the qualitative researcher seeks data representative of the full picture of the matter under investigation. Having reviewed some of the underlying assumptions of the qualitative perspective, and in light of the research question under study, the following section will examine the applicability of a qualitative research strategy within a religious context.

Applicability of Qualitative Research

In recent years, an argument has waged as to whether or not applied research and the scientific study of religion are compatible. According to Faase (1989), two traditions have argued that they are incompatible.

The first tradition sees incompatibility in the contradiction between the assumption of detached scientific objectivity on the one hand, and committed religious belief and practice on the other. In this view (Glock & Stark, 1965), all objectivist scientific inquiry is based on a deterministic model which disallows both divine intervention and human freedom.

The other tradition that holds religious practice and the social scientific study of religion as incompatible does so on the basis of what McIntyre (1964) termed conflicting "life-worlds". While not confining the study of religion to a search for causal factors in a deterministic model, the scientist's life-world is viewed as circumscribed by a contemporary model of rationality. Since the religious practitioner's life-world contains specific elements of non-rationality, MacIntyre holds that the two contexts are irreconcilable.

The other side of the argument disputes the incompatibility of the scientific study of religion and religious beliefs on epistemological grounds. Against the positivists who argue for a strictly deterministic model, Faase (1989) finds such a conception of science as not only antiquated but also as falling far short of even natural scientists' understanding of variability and openness in their theories of knowledge and forms of inquiry (Kuhn, 1970; Burhoe, 1974).

Further, arguing from a holistic perspective against the model of binding rationality, Faase holds that nothing needs to be bracketed in admitting religious phenomenon. For indeed, social science (Rokeach, 1973) has long examined values, attitudes, and beliefs and accepted them as independent variables.

While Fasse has noted that sources are not available that critically blend a theory of research with applications to religious organizations, some authors have suggested that the process of social science has applicability for religious research if certain criteria are met.

For example, O'dea (1965) has proposed that a minimum criteria would be first, the researcher's anthropology or image of the person as more than instrumental, manipulative or functionalist. Second, O'dea holds that the religious research must integrate the subject and the object. This would require a non-reductionist approach which, viewing the whole as more than the some of its parts, allows for the study of emergent characteristics. Third, O'dea holds that research would not consist of an a priori deterministic or deductive system but would develop its theory in the sense of an open-ended heuristic device. Research would be geared to two purposes - acquiring knowledge of social existence, and, as applied science, "...aiding religious institutions to understand their milieu" (1954, pp. 232-233).

In terms of the preceding discussion, using the long ethnographic interview as a research methodology to inform our understanding of the subjective meaning of membership behavior from the

perspective of church youth is an attempt to address the arguments raised by Fasse. From this perspective, choosing a methodological strategy for the study that meets O'dea's criteria for a non-reductionist and holistic qualitative approach represents an effort to demonstrate the legitimate application of social science research in a religious organization.

The Long Ethnographic Interview

In describing the long qualitative interview technique, the following section will provide a rationale for choosing the four-step model of inquiry developed by McCracken (1988). This section will also outline the data gathering strategy and procedures that were followed utilizing this approach.

The research goal of this study, to examine the subjective meaning of adolescent membership behavior in a religious organization from the actor's point of view, follows the phenomenological perspective Kurt Lewin expressed in the notion that even if the cognitive variables in the life space were understood, behavior can be predicted only if the subjective meaning of the whole psychological situation to the

individual were known. Accordingly, the long interview was selected as an instrument of inquiry because, as McCracken notes:

The method can take us into mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It can also take us into the lifeworld of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily experience. The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves (1988, p. 9).

Thus McCracken holds that the long ethnographic interview is the qualitative method of choice when the research goal is to discover, as in the case of the present study, how the actors see and experience the world. It is also the method of choice when the object of investigation is to understand the beliefs, cultural categories, shared meanings and assumptions that place the numbers obtained in quantitative studies into a meaningful social context.

An additional rationale for selecting McCracken's methodological model is that it acknowledges the fact that in North American society, teenage respondents lead hectic, privacy-centered lives, and even willing participants have limited time to give the investigator. The model addresses the factors of time scarcity and concern for privacy by adopting an efficient and unobtrusive format consisting of a "sharply focused, rapid, highly intensive interview

process" (1988, p. 7), calling for a four-step model of inquiry including the use of an open-ended questionnaire. The long interview approach offers the researcher a "stream-lined" instrument of inquiry that provides access to individuals and the "thick" data necessary for qualitative analysis without calling for participant observation or intimate, repeated or prolonged involvement in the actor's life.

Four-Step Model of Inquiry

The long interview approach described by McCracken is a four-step model of inquiry that includes: a literature review and a cultural review leading to the development of an open ended questionnaire, the interview process itself, and the analysis and presentation of data. The following overview will outline the data gathering strategy and procedures that were followed in utilizing this approach.

Literature Review

The first step in the process, a review of analytic categories, called for an exhaustive review of the literature. The purpose of the literature review

was to serve in the construction of the interview questionnaire by establishing the domain to be explored, specifying categories and relationships to organize the data, and by identifying larger factors that directed the flow of questioning. The literature review provided the researcher with a list of topics for which questions were prepared.

It should be noted that some qualitative researchers choose to ignore the existing literature as a source of preconceptions that prompt the researcher to "take for granted the very things that are supposed to be the object of research" (McCracken, 1988, p. 31). On the other hand, McCracken argues that researchers working in their own culture carry with them a large number of assumptions that can unwittingly direct the course of inquiry by limiting the range of what is observed and understood. The literature review manufactures a critical distance and provides a set of expectations the data can defy. McCracken notes that such counter-expectational data are not only readable, conspicuous and highly provocative data but also "signal the existence of unfulfilled theoretical assumptions" (1988, p. 31). In this view, a thorough literature review is not only a way to manufacture

distance, but also is a way to "let one's research project take issue with the theory of one's field" (1988, p. 31).

In terms of this study, a review of the literature examining adolescent membership behavior in religious organizations offered an opportunity to search out the conscious and unconscious assumptions of researchers in the field, for example, the assumption that adolescents are expected to rebel, and to determine how these assumptions forced the definition of problems and findings. Secondly, the review represented a first survey of the ground to be covered by establishing an inventory of categories and relationships investigated in the interview process.

Review of Cultural Categories

The second step in the four-step model of inquiry, a review of the cultural categories, was a critical step where the investigator began the process of "using the self as an instrument of inquiry" (McCracken, 1988, p. 33). The object of this step was to provide the researcher with a detailed appreciation of his personal experience with the research topic, calling for the closest examination of the experience.

To accomplish this task, the researcher inventoried and examined the assumptions and associations in his mind surrounding the topic, the object being to draw out of his own experience "the systematic properties of the topic separating the structural from the episodic and the cultural from the idiosyncratic" (1988, p. 33). For the purposes of this study, the writer first mentally reviewed and recounted his own personal experience being raised as a Roman Catholic in the 1950's. This was an attempt to retrospectively reconstruct and record the familial and personal circumstances surrounding his own "break" from the church, including with as much detail as possible the beliefs, values, feelings, assumptions and relationships associated with the event - which in fact marked the beginning of a life-long religious odyssey. Next, the process of reviewing in hindsight from a purely subjective perspective the writer's recollection of the religious practices, attitudes and beliefs of each member of his biological family was undertaken. An attempt was made to focus on a particular defining moment in the lives of each of his parents and five brothers and sisters. Events such as his father's experience of being "born again" when the writer was in high school, and later, his brother's seduction by the parish priest while serving as an alter boy, were

dramatic episodes markedly at variance with the writer's previous experience and social expectation. These occurrences not only threw the assumptions of daily living into bold relief, but also offered an exceptional opportunity to view cultural expectations that had been violated.

This process was repeated with the writer detailing his understanding of the place of religious participation in the daily life of his wife and daughter, until finally a complex tapestry was woven of strands consisting of the assumptions and relationships constituting his notion of religiosity. This effort made the writer more sensitive to how others conceived of the role of religion and the nature of the social processes that impact religious behavior over time.

Three purposes were served in preparing the cultural review. The first, making ready for questionnaire construction, was an opportunity to formulate questions by identifying cultural categories and relationships not found in the literature review.

The second purpose involved examining these categories and relationships in order to form mental templates with which to hunt for similarities in the interview data. In effect, the researcher served as an "instrument" in the collection and analysis of data,

using his experience and imagination to fashion a match for the patterns evidenced in the data.

The third purpose involved utilizing knowledge of the cultural categories and relationships as yet another means to establish a critical distance from the familiar expectations of deeply imbedded cultural assumptions.

Questionnaire Design

Completing the cultural and relationship inventory set the stage for the third step in the four-step model, constructing the questionnaire, and implementing the interview itself.

The process started by designing a set of biographical questions with which to begin the interview (See Appendix A). These questions not only defined the contextual reality of the actor's life space, but also served to set a tone for the interview and established the interviewer as a benign, accepting and curious individual willing to listen to anything the respondent had to say without the risk of an unsympathetic response (Rogers, 1945). The remaining questions in the long interview were designed to maintain an open-ended format providing the opportunity for exploratory, unstructured responses to each

question and allowing the actors to tell their own story. These opening or "grand tour" questions were phrased in a nondirective manner, encouraging actors to respond in their own terms without delimiting the scope or perspective of the response.

According to McCracken, the carefully crafted questionnaire served to ensure that the same ground was covered with each actor by preserving the conversational context of the long interview. In addition, the questionnaire allowed for the precise scheduling of prompts in order to manufacture distance. While ordering data and providing direction to the scope of the inquiry, the questionnaire was not intended to interfere with the "messiness" of the qualitative data, but provided a context within which it was possible to capture a sense of the cultural logic by which ideas go together in the cognitive life space of the individual.

Pilot Study

In order to ensure that the design protocol adequately addressed the topic area and that the questionnaire was of broad enough scope to provide sufficient data for thorough analysis, a brief pilot study was conducted by the researcher. Three of the

youth who responded immediately by phone to the first mailing were invited to participate as part of a pilot study to check the face validity of the questionnaire and to familiarize the writer with the interview protocol. All later interviews followed the format and procedures worked out in the pilot study.

As in the interviews that were to follow, the two females and one male who were interviewed in the pilot study were invited to meet with the writer on separate days at the church library immediately after school for an early afternoon appointment. The church library was chosen as a setting because it offered comfortable seating, electrical connections for the tape recorder, and relative freedom from noise or interruption. In addition, the setting assured propriety in that the interviews would be conducted in full view of the church secretary, who worked in a private office adjacent to the library, but behind a glass partitioned door.

While McCracken suggested two to three hours as the time span necessary to conduct an interview, it was discovered in the pilot study that once the biographical data sheet was completed, 60 to 120 minutes proved adequate for a thorough exploration of the areas covered by the questionnaire. In fact, none of interviews that followed the pilot study were less

than 60 minutes or more than 120 minutes in length. Tapes of the three interviews in the pilot study were not transcribed, but were reviewed in terms of content and utilized as a method of improving the writer's interview technique. Key words, categories and explicit assumptions were identified, and considered an additional source of data to formulate different or more precise questions for the later interviews. Following their interviews, the writer held a brief meeting with the three participants of the pilot study to discuss their impression of the experience, provide feedback and answer questions.

Interview Process

Once the interview itself was underway, responses were sustained unobtrusively by utilizing the features of everyday speech. For example, the raised eyebrow at the end of the respondent's utterance, was often used as a "floating prompt" to cue the respondent to return and expand on the remark (Churchill, 1973).

If however, categories identified in the literature review and cultural review did not emerge spontaneously, planned prompts were utilized in the interview to give the respondent "something to push off against." (McCracken, 1988, p. 36). Restricted to

terms the respondent had introduced, a planned prompt would take the form of a contrast prompt such as the question, "What is the difference between category Y and category Z?" Utilizing concepts culled from the literature and cultural review, planned prompts including "category" questions, exceptional incidents, and "auto-driving" techniques (Wax and Shapiro, 1956, Whyte, 1957), were used only as a last resort and placed in the interview at the end of a question category. Once the grand-tour questions and prompting strategies were set in place, the interviewer had in effect placed the actor within sight of the topic.

As each interview progressed, the actors were encouraged to respond freely, the goal being to generate enough testimony around key terms to provide sufficient data for analysis. The role of the researcher at this stage was critical, for as McCracken notes:

the interviewer must labor to identify key terms, minimize respondent distortion, choose the most promising avenues of inquiry, and listen for material that is indexed by respondent testimony but not made explicit in it (1988, p. 41).

The author found that in order to accomplish the above, after providing biographical data, actors required interview periods of up to two hours to insure sufficient unconstrained time to tell their own stories in their own terms.

Data Analysis

Having described in some detail how the processes by which the literature review, cultural review, and the interview itself served as sources of qualitative data in the study, the stage is now set for the discussion of data analysis. The fourth step of McCracken's model for inquiry provided a five stage prescription for data analysis. In light of the theoretical contention (Bougon, 1983) that people acquire knowledge of their social reality by utilizing cortical schemas to pattern their raw sensory experience, and then rely on further schemas to organize and retain that knowledge, one may conclude that people never talk about the "real" social or physical world, only their construction of it. In this view, the object of analysis is to discover the meaning implied by the cognitive categories, assumptions, and relationships which comprise what Kurt Lewin (1935) called the psychological life space of the individual, representing the actor's view of the world and in particular, the topic under study.

In beginning the analysis, the literature and cultural reviews provided the researcher with a "sense of what ought to be there, a sense of how the topic at issue is constituted in his own experience, and a

glancing sense of what took place in the interview itself (McCracken, 1988, p. 43). However, McCracken warns that the researcher must be prepared to reconstruct a view of the world from the actor's perspective bearing little resemblance to his own view or the one suggested by the literature.

In following McCracken's approach, interviews were recorded on audio tape, and a verbatim transcript of the interview was generated by the author using an IBM personal computer. The Ethnograph computer software program was then utilized to facilitate data analysis by providing a simple method to code, sort and organize key terms, concepts and categories.

By this means, the first stage of analysis provided an original transcript and a set of coded observations created by treating each utterance in its own terms regardless of its relationship to the text. Doing so assured that the researcher in using himself as an instrument, was "securely located in the fine details of the interview" (McCracken, 1988, p. 35). The object of this stage of analysis was to try to treat the utterance as an "entranceway" leading to underlying assumptions and beliefs (Geertz, 1976). At this stage, conclusions of the literature and cultural review were used as templates in discovering the systematic properties of the interview data, and

provided glimpses of "assumptions and categories that are otherwise hidden from view" (McCracken, 1988, p. 49).

In the next stage, these observations were examined in situ and the Ethnograph program utilized to allow insertion of the meta-observations they inspired along side them in the transcript. At this stage of analysis, observations were considered first by themselves, second in terms of the transcript, and third in terms of the literature and cultural review.

In the third stage, interconnection of the second-level observations were again examined in terms of the literature and cultural review. With the focus of attention shifted from the transcript to the observations themselves, all the observations and related segments were copied into a new file, removing from consideration all parts of the transcript not giving rise to an observation, and leaving a much simpler record for third stage analysis. Using only this new file in the third stage analysis, another set of observations were tagged, coded and recorded in the file. At this point, the original transcript was consulted only to check ideas emerging as observations were compared.

The purpose of analysis in the fourth stage was the "determination of patterns of intertheme consistency and contradiction" (McCracken, 1988, p. 43). By subjecting the observations from previous levels to collective scrutiny in the fourth stage, an entirely new computer file was created and filled with the most general points emerging in the analysis, resulting in a package of limited themes.

In the final stage, a file was created that contained the fourth stage treatment from each interview. This is the time when the themes from each interview were brought together into theses, and cultural categories. No longer talking about individual lives, the focus now turned to general properties of thought and action within the group of adolescents under study. The perspective now was not that of the actor, but became that of the analyst talking in terms of the general and abstract properties of observations that were now expressed theoretical conclusions.

Research Setting

The setting for the study was a middle sized Congregational Church consisting of approximately 300 active members located in a suburban/academic community

of 11000 in Western Massachusetts. Due to the location of an ivy-league college in the town, little local industry, and its somewhat rural location, the population is made up for the most part of upper middle-class professional people, academicians, and retirees.

The church, which will be called 1st Church for the purpose of this study, is the largest of two Congregational Churches in town. Other denominations in the community include two Catholic, an Episcopal, a Methodist, and a Bahai congregation.

While membership and attendance at worship service has remained stable for the past several years, 1st Church overall experienced a 22% decline in attendance at weekly worship since 1966. In that year, average attendance was 198, but dropped steadily year by year, until stabilizing several years ago at about 140, where the average attendance remains today. Church leaders are unsure as to the reasons for the drop in weekly participation, but have considered reasons ranging from the possibility of a decrease in nominal Christianity, to the effect of local demographic factors, such as an influx of Catholic Hispanic residents. Church leaders including the pastor and deacons have expressed their personal

commitment to taking necessary steps to bring about increased participation in the congregation, but were unsure as to what action to take.

A major source of concern in the church was the Sunday School, serving approximately 50 children from nursery to eighth grade. Sunday School meets from 9:30 to 10:30 am, with church service for all adults and children at 11:00. However, although the church boasts a paid professional Sunday School Superintendent and assigns an associate pastor to the youth ministry, no teacher could be found for high school age youth, who instead were asked to staff the nursery and kindergarten classes. The once active youth groups were struggling to re-organize and attempting to develop lay leadership at the time of the study.

Entry into Church Community

To gain entry to a church community interested in exploring the issue of adolescent membership and participation in terms of an action research approach, the Youth Coordinator for the Western Area Council, United Church of Christ, was asked to provide the writer an introduction to ministers of area churches in Western Massachusetts. Consequently, the pastor of First Church, expressing an interest in supporting an

exploratory action research study, invited the writer to make a presentation describing the dissertation project to the governing Church Council. Approval to gain access to non-obstrusive data such as church membership lists, Sunday School enrollments, and Youth Group membership data was obtained at that time.

Selection of Participants

Following initial approval of the research project by church leadership, a list of potential respondents was created consisting of some sixty youth identified by means of a 1989-1990 church pictorial directory and 1991 membership list as the children of active members of 1st Church, attending high school, and between the ages of 14 and 19. Since all children of church members likewise are considered members by virtue of being part of the "church family," as a next step, twenty-five adolescent members from this list were identified as active participants.

This was accomplished by examining and cross-checking the Sunday School roles through 10th grade for any names appearing for two consecutive years over the past six years, as well as for names appearing two consecutive years on the membership lists of 1st Church Junior or Senior High Youth Groups. Only one member of

siblings was eligible for inclusion. For example, a 14 year old freshman would be included as an active participant if she or he had attended Sunday School the past two years, belonged to the Junior High Youth Group the previous year and was a member of the Senior High Youth Group this year.

Having compiled a list of potential informants, twenty-five adolescent members considered to be active participants were contacted by mailing them an open letter (Appendix D) with return postage that explained the nature of the research in general terms and invited their participation. Over the course of several weeks, ten teenagers contacted in this fashion returned a tear-off slip indicating their willingness to be interviewed. Three other youth who had contacted the writer immediately by phone upon receipt of the letter agreed to be part of the pilot study previously discussed in this chapter.

A follow up letter was sent to parents of those adolescents expressing an interest in the study in order to provide them with copies of the necessary consent forms. Next, the potential informants were phoned by the author to schedule an interview date and time. Two of the youth who were unable to be contacted by phone were dropped from the list at this time. The remaining eight church youth eventually interviewed

were seen on separate days during the upcoming weeks in keeping with the format and procedures outlined in the description of the pilot study.

Over the course of the several weeks that interviews were held, an attempt was made to "manufacture distance" by carefully scheduling interviews and requesting non-disclosure to others on the part of those interviewed. This was done to ensure that the respondents remained "perfect strangers" ie., unknown as research participants by the other respondents (McCracken, 1988, p. 37). Although the author had initially intended to manufacture additional distance by creating a contrast in the respondent pool, ie., by carefully selecting informants to provide differences on the basis of age, gender, and participation status, in point of fact, the group of respondents actually formed by means of the winnowing process described above. Interesting contrasts in characteristics, such as those observed in the final group of respondents described in Chapter 4, occurred naturally in the selection process, perhaps more by good fortune than by researcher design.

CHAPTER 4

THE INTERVIEW DATA: THE MEANING OF MEMBERSHIP

Introduction

This chapter will begin by presenting an overview of the socio-religious background of the participants. Encompassing demographic factors such as the age, gender, and academic class involvement of the youth, the first section will help frame the subjective perspective of the actors by defining the contemporary situation constituting their psychological lifespace.

Elucidating the life space of the adolescent is a necessary first step in understanding the meaning of behavior. This is because meaning is not found in the nature of a single isolated object, but in the nature of an object to its surroundings. As Kurt Lewin noted, "... only relationships between several facts can be the cause of events. Every event stands upon the totality of the contemporary situation" (1936, p. 10). Understanding comes only if one includes in the representation the whole psychological situation of the actor.

The second section of this chapter will present a view of the subjective meaning of church membership behavior from the perspective of the adolescent members

themselves. In doing so, this section will examine the cultural categories and subjectively shared meanings that are included in the adolescent's life space and define membership for these organizational actors.

Socio-Religious Background

In delineating their social history, the eight young men and woman who participated in this study provided demographic information that underscored the similarity of their white, middle class upbringing. All of the youth came from stable, financially well-to-do families and each reported planning not only to finish high school, but also to go on to college. Two of the youth, Karen and Charles, lived with their mothers in single parent households, their parents having divorced within the past five years. While Jen's parents had both been previously married, all the other respondents lived with both biological parents.

In addition, these youth reported sharing the common experience of being the children of church members. As such, they had been raised as "church youth," that is, each reported having attended church school on a more or less regular basis from nursery through high school in a mainline Protestant or Catholic church.

However, the young people in the study were a mixed group in terms of school, academic class, age and gender. Of the four males, the youngest was a 15 year old high school sophomore, two were 16 year old juniors, and the oldest was a 17 year old senior. Three of the four females were 16 year old high school juniors, and the youngest was a 15 year old sophomore. All but two of the youth attended the same community high school at the time of the study.

Both 15 year old sophomores attended parochial schools, the boy bussed to a large Catholic high school in a nearby city, and the girl car pooled to a small parochial high school in a nearby town. The young man, called Dan in this study, related that his parents sent him to the Catholic school in the city because they were not satisfied with the quality of education provided in the local high school. The young woman, who will be called Sheila in this study, disclosed that her mother was sending her to a parochial school because she wanted her daughter to receive the same religious training that she had received growing up.

The mix of young people serving as respondents provided an opportunity to contrast the images of social behavior that emerged as the youth provided information about their social relationships, family background and history of religious involvement. As

McCracken has pointed out, contrasts that occasion surprise by violating the researcher's expectations "manufacture distance" and point to the possibility of otherwise hidden cultural categories and assumptions (McCracken, 1988, p. 23).

One such surprising contrast became evident when the young people were asked to indicate the degree of their involvement in non-church related activities. It appeared to the writer that the response to this question demarcated the group of adolescents along gender lines, with the females describing themselves as far more involved in school social activities than did the males.

For example, the respondent called Jen in this study indicated that she currently served as the Class President, was a Peer Educator, a member of the Drama club, and a Student Advisor to the School Committee. Describing a similar social involvement at school, the young woman identified here as Karen served as Class Vice-President and member of the Student Council, was a Peer Educator, served on the Student Advisory Committee to the School Committee, was on the Yearbook Staff, and a member of the International Club. In like manner, Sheila described herself as active on the school newspaper, as working on the class Yearbook, and performing in Summer Theater. The respondent called

Barbara in this study likewise took Karate and Jukido, was a lifeguard at the community pool located at the school, taught swimming lessons, and was on the varsity basketball, soccer, and softball teams.

Overall, the young women in the group of respondents portrayed themselves as busily involved in dealing with the real world that constituted their social reality. In several instances in fact, the young women described active leadership roles in school related activities. How does this compare to the image of social behavior evoked by the responses of the young men?

In surprising contrast, the male respondents reported far less social engagement in their daily lives in non-church related activities. For instance, the young man called Travis in the study said he was not involved in any organized activity other than the church youth group. Dan played in the school band. The respondent identified as Charles volunteered with the Fire Department and served as a Peer Educator. Doug played on the soccer team, while serving as a Peer Educator and member of the Student Council. While all of the participants in the study described earning spending money doing odd jobs, yard work or baby sitting, none of the young men reported holding a regular part-time job, or engaging in any other

structured social activities to occupy their time outside of church related events.

In this example, surprise engendered in contrasting the responses of the young women to those of the men in terms of their involvement in social activities revealed the heretofore unsuspectedly relevant cultural category of gender. The subjective meaning of the social behavior implicit in the assumptions associated with gender will be discussed later in Chapter 5.

A closer look at the background of the participant's parents lent further support to the observation that these families were economically well off and quite similar in makeup. The fathers of the participants ranged in age from 43 to 62 years, while the mother's age ranged from 40 to 48 years. Karen's father and Sheila's mother were both raised as Catholic, while the other parents were of several mainline Protestant denominations, including Congregational, Methodist, and Episcopalian backgrounds. All of the parents worked out of the home, for the most part engaged in white-collar professional careers. Included in this occupational grouping were three teachers, an engineer, an electrician, a lawyer, office and personnel managers and sales representatives. Five of the fathers, and

four of the mothers had completed college or graduate level schooling. All of the parents were of Euro-American ethnic origin.

This section has provided an overview of the socio-religious background of the participants, and suggested the possibility of hidden assumptions implicit in the responses of the youth to the demographic questions. The next section will present a view of the meaning of church membership behavior from the perspective of the adolescent members themselves.

The Meaning of Church Membership Behavior

Researchers have noted (Bealer and Willets, 1966) that the most studied facet of adolescent religious behavior is religious practice, what Glock and Stark (1965) referred to as the "ritualistic" dimension of religious commitment. These authors defined the ritualistic dimension as "encompassing the specifically religious practices expected of religious adherents" (1965, pp. 20-21). Such activities often include worship, prayer, participation in special sacraments, fasting, and the like.

However, with a research focus on membership and church attendance, conclusions about adolescent religious behavior based on the findings of large scale

opinion samples often have been inconclusive, if not contradictory. Recall, for example, that Bealer and Willetts (1966) examined the 1961 Gallup Survey of 1300 students, in which 85% indicated that they were members of a church or temple, and more than 60% of the boys and 75% of the girls indicated that they attended religious services "regularly" (Gallup, 1961). These authors concluded that, if religious commitment is considered only in terms of frequency of participation, American youth are not irreligious.

What then, is one to make of numerous other quantitative studies reporting that persons in their teens have the lowest rates of church attendance of all age grouping (Hoge and Roozen, 1979)? And how, in light of the conclusion drawn above, can one explain the results of a recent Gallop Survey (Gallup, 1987) that indicated while 7 in 10 U.S. adults say they are members of a church or synagogue, 67% of the teens surveyed reported that they had not attended church in a typical week in 1986?

The answer lies in the realization that considering religious commitment only in terms of frequency of participation focuses on what adolescents do, rather than on the meaning of the activity to them. At face value, a report of religious attendance is of limited utility, for in itself it says nothing about

the reasons for participation. Likewise, a report of non-participation does little to inform our understanding of the youth's perception of their own religious commitment in the context of church membership.

In the following section, the subjective meaning of religious behavior will be examined from the inside perspective of the actors themselves. Providing an account of the adolescent's subjective perspective will broaden the research focus by asking church youth to interpret their thoughts, feelings and behavior and establish what these youth mean by religiousness.

The Meaning of Participation

As a first step, let us begin by examining the perspective of the respondents around the concept of participation itself. Recall that in completing the demographic survey, the youth were asked to describe their level of church involvement. All eight adolescents in the study described themselves as active participants when asked to rate themselves as active or non-active church members.

However, in terms of religiosity, only Karen, raised in both the Catholic and Protestant faiths, described herself as "very" religious, with all the

others choosing to describe themselves as "somewhat" religious on the self-rating question. Asked what being active and very religious meant to her, Karen replied:

Karen: My Dad said that, he always wanted us to go to a Catholic church. He said, "Well, I'll go with you guys if you go to a Catholic church," so my mom enrolled us in Sunday school, and we were going to Catholic churches, and then, he never went with us. My mom kept us in a Catholic church until we were old enough to understand, and so then she asked us if we wanted to try a Protestant church, and my brother and I said "sure," and so we switched churches, and over the years, wherever we lived, there's been different churches, we've switched back and forth.

Int: And how did you feel about that?

Karen: I was very confused about religion, all these years switching back and forth, and they both had different ways of believing. And I was just, "Oh my gosh, straighten me out! I don't know what to do!" So for a year, I didn't go to Sunday school or to church or anything, because I had a lot of thinking to do.

Int: So you took a year off?

Karen: I took a year off and did a lot of thinking. I even got to the point where I didn't know if I believed in God. And that was a big stage in my life, I was like, wait a minute here, are these people just preaching anything, or is there really a God? I mean, do I really pray to someone at night, or am I just, ..., you know? I wasn't sure. And so, during that time period, I realized that I do believe in God, and that He is a real person and stuff, and I realized that I do believe in religion, and I have a lot of faith and everything in this religion and not in the Catholic religion.

Int: What does being religious mean?

Karen Religious for me, for myself anyway, not for anyone else, but religious for myself is having a strong faith in God and a love for God.

Int: Faith in God?

Karen: Yeah, I feel really close to God. There's been situations when I feel like He's been there for me, like a lot of family deaths, friends who have died, I mean I feel he is going to take care of the people, I feel they are in heaven, so I feel really close to God. You know, I pray to God every night, not asking him for material things, but for my family's health and happiness. And my family has been healthy and happy, so I feel close (laughs). [1]

Karen defines her high degree of religiosity in terms of her hard won personal faith, and not merely by being religiously active. In fact, not participating for a year in church activities was indicative of the earnestness with which she struggled with issues of doubt and belief. Karen resolved her confusion of being raised in two faiths by finally evolving a perception of God as the benevolent protector of those she loved. In Karen's subjective view, non-participation at one time was as indicative of her religious involvement then, as being religiously active today is a measure of the strength of her personal faith.

Karen was not alone among these youth in describing a sense of active church commitment in terms other than participation. In fact, the regularity of

1. Author's note - "...," indicates a five second pause in the dialogue.

church attendance, in the view of the adolescent members, had little to do with their self perception as being more active or less active members.

For example, while all four male respondents described themselves as active participants, only two said they attended church on a weekly basis. While Travis attended church monthly, Charles said he did not attend worship service more often than several times a year. Of the four young women who described themselves as active participants, Jen also admitted attending worship service no more than several times a year.

The disparity between weekly church attendance as a measure of religious commitment and the view adolescents hold of themselves as active members was most often explained by them in terms of conflicting social demands and time constraints, rather than an issue of religiosity. For example, when Barbara was asked:

Int: As a Junior now, are you going to continue in church?

Barb: As much as possible.

Int: What would stop you?

Barb: Well, hey, starting in the fall I've got school, then I've got soccer after school, then I've got homework, and then dinner, and then karate. What would stop me? Well, I baby-sit too, for work. And work! I have to start getting work to save up for college and prepare for a job. That's what I think is going ..., the economy is

bad, and college, college is so expensive, that I think people are dropping out to work more. To earn money. That's what I think.

Int: Say you were to drop out to earn money, would it be fair to say you were still a religious person, or you would come back?

Barb: I think it would be UNFAIR for people to judge us as NOT.

Barbara perceives clearly that prioritizing her activities at this point in her life is a social and economic necessity. For others to evaluate her decisions as representing a lack of religiosity, she considers as both inaccurate and unfairly judgemental.

In the process of unfolding the subjective view of these young people, it became apparent that Barbara's perspective was typical of the viewpoint shared by many of the respondents. This perspective suggests that external assessments of adolescent religious participation, and particularly those that then equate non-participation with "dropping out," may not fairly represent what adolescents themselves believe about their religious commitment or their perception of church membership.

What then, we might ask, is the nature and organization of those beliefs and perceptions? How do the youth themselves interpret religious behavior in terms of the dynamics of church membership? The remaining section will seek to answer those questions by exploring the major themes and patterns that emerged

in the data and by so doing, inform our understanding of the cognitive processes through which the youth of the church view their world.

Family Influence on Religious Behavior

One such theme that emerged dealt with the youth's perception of their family's influence on their later religious attitude and behavior. The family stories told by each respondent were quite unique and reflective of their individual personalities. Yet, as the teenagers recalled the ways in which their religious attitude had been influenced as they grew up, these sons and daughters of church members described a common perception: that not only was the family influence strongly felt, but also that they had been compelled to attend church.

A Religious Path. In talking about their families' influence on later religious attitudes and behavior, the church youth in this study presented their perceptions of what it was like to be set on a religious path early in their lives. For the most part, the experience was seen by the teenagers as forced and not voluntary. As Charles explains:

Int: Thinking about religious behavior, what was it like growing up in your family?

Charles: Well, ahh, I was forced into church, ahh, like when I was in 2nd, 3d or 4th grade, like in there. And then, I wanted to come to church after that.

Int: So at first it felt like they forced you?

Charles: Until I did want to go. Then I wanted to go.

Compelled to attend church as a youngster, Charles came to see church attendance as desirable. By then wanting to come to church, force was no longer an issue for him.

Like Charles, Doug saw his early religious experience as other than a voluntary matter. Asked if he had been encouraged to attend religious activities, he replied:

Doug: My parents were the main persons who encouraged me, they used to drill me every Sunday morning, "Get up now, you're going to church." And even if I said, "Ohhh, I feel tired, I don't want to go," I had to go, that was it. And that's it. Now I'm happy they made me, cause I want to go now.

Doug believed that arguing in the face of family values about weekly church attendance was useless. But having been set on the religious path, he now not only perceives the early discipline regarding church attendance as positive, but also feels happy about the sense of religiosity his family instilled in him.

Travis shared a similar perception in terms of his family setting him on the road to active religious involvement. As he remembers:

Travis: When I was younger, I used to come to church quite a bit. I used to ..., my parents always used to say, "You have to get up now and go to church," I never, when I was real young, you know, missed. We always used to come every week.

Int: Sounds like younger, you felt quite a bit of pressure to come to church?

Travis: Yeah, it was more like, ahh, a weekly tradition, I guess. I came to church, my parents always came and stayed in the sanctuary and I went down to the Sunday school.

For Travis, the discipline of being set on a religious path by way of his family's weekly church attendance during these early years was perceived as less an issue of being forced than it was owing to the behavior modeled by significant family members. Asked about being forced to go to church, he frankly replied:

Travis: Yeah, they never. They never like forced me to go. They thought it was a good idea, but they never..., because my father was never forced. My mother was probably more than my father was, but my father - he went to church, but..., I don't know. My grandparents, they used to go. They were always staying up in church. My grandparents really forced us to go. Every Sunday, all day was just church and they were a little less lenient than my parents. But as I said, my father always went, and my father did go when he was a teenager. If his friends went to Catholic school, he would just go with them. He was going to church and figured that would be, ..., everyone had to just walk to places, and the Protestant church was kind of far out to walk, so he just went to the Catholic once in a while.

In this passage Travis accounts for his behavior in terms of the influence of the religious values modeled and passed down in his family by the grandparents and his father as well. Travis' explanation also suggests that his own religious attitude may have been influenced by the oral traditions expressing religious values told to him by his father.

Like the other boys, Dan also recounted that he was introduced to religious activities early in life, perceiving them as an aspect of family discipline. When asked what the religious experience was like for him as a child he responded:

Dan: When I was younger, it was just something that you did, you know, that your parents told you. Not like now, when it's something that I choose to do, instead of being forced to do. Not really forced, but that was what you did. Now, it's I want to.

Int: When you say you were forced to, what do you mean by that?

Dan: Well not really forced, but we went to church so I didn't really have any choice. I didn't say, "I don't want to go," but it wasn't a choice. But I wasn't really forced, I mean, if I really didn't want to go, I didn't have to. It's something we just did. Now I choose to, it's something they leave up to me. And I choose to now. Before, they were trying to get me closer, but I really didn't want to, but they weren't, it's hard to explain, they weren't forcing me, it was my choice. But they felt that I should, and helped me grow in the church.

Dan perceived that as a youngster, he had no option other than attending church, an activity reinforced and modeled by the family in response to their religious values. Growing older, he was able to view his family's early religious influence as helpful, while coming to perceive his own religious behavior as freely chosen and highly valued.

As for the young women in the study, several described how social role modeling of family expectations served as a powerful mechanism for setting them on the path of religious involvement. For instance, asked to talk about what it was like growing up in terms of religious behavior in her family, Jen explained:

Jen: Umm, well for Sunday school, we were given a little push, like, this is what it is. My parents would bring us and sign us up. My older brother and I both went. When he was going to Sunday school, he'd already started, and you know I'd say, "do you like it? - you know I want to go, I want to go!" He was three years older than I am so he went to his class and then would tell me what it was all about. There were some Sundays, you know, when I would get up, and I just would say, "You know Mommy, I don't wanta go to Sunday School." And she'd say, "Don't you like it?" "Well, yes, but I don't wanna go today." And then she'd say, "Come on, get up, go (laughs)," and that's, that's a little different than being.., I'd go to my class. I remember I .., cried once. I was four and I accidentally got put in with the five year olds (laughs), and I was scared and I just went to my brother's classroom, and I said, "Ohh, I gotta go see my brother right now." And I just sat in his class and just sitting next to him made me feel better.

While prompted by her parents to attend Sunday school, Jen seemed to be very much influenced by the social role behavior modeled by her older brother. She speaks not only of how she had been led onto a religious path by his positive attitude, but also of how she felt supported upon attending by his continuing presence.

Karen, raised initially in the Catholic church, described her situation this way when discussing how her understanding of family expectations mingled in her perception with feelings about church rules to shape her attitude and religious behavior:

Int: Thinking about religious behavior, what was it like for you growing up in your family?

Karen: Yeah, um, I mean, the religious aspect, it was, you know, kinda hard, because, ..., my Dad being Catholic.

Int: What do you mean?

Karen: Oh, well, you know, following the rules? We did all that, and we went through, you know, Lent and everything. We had to do and all that. But for my own sense, I didn't care too much for it. And I know my Mom and my family didn't either, but we did it anyways because we were Catholic.

Int: You mean you went because you were Catholic?

Karen: Um, I guess, I think I was more ..., being like everyone else. We all were very young, first, second, you know, third grade. We all were like, "Oh, we have to go to church." We all said that because we didn't understand, really, that much of it. We were learning in Sunday school, but we didn't understand that much, and you know, (laughs) we weren't interested.

Int: You mean you thought you had to go?

Karen: Oh yeah. And religion was important in my Mom's life and ummm, so I knew, you know, I just figured out we all have to go to church. But in a way I did like it. Whenever I came home from church I was happy.

Karen's early religious behavior, guided by her father's Catholic upbringing and supported by her mother's religious values, is remembered as a required but not necessarily positive experience. Yet Karen unquestionably participated in church because in her view, the behavior of the other Catholic children supported her family's values. Initially reluctant to accept her Catholic upbringing, she now speaks about her religious behavior in terms of supporting her mother's view and her awareness of the church as a place that made her happy.

Like Karen, Barbara's memories of the first steps on the religious path are associated with positive parental modeling framed by definite familial expectation. In response to a question about the influence of her family, she said:

Barbara: My Mom ..., my Mother brought me to Sunday School every ..., she brought ..., she made us go, but after awhile, you didn't have to make us. No, we just got up, got dressed, and were on our way, because there was a lot of fun with it.

Int: Thinking about religious behavior, what was it like for you growing up in your family?

Barbara: It wasn't that strict religiously. It was mostly, I don't know, it wasn't that religious. I mean we'd go to church and worship, and stuff like that, but it wasn't really, you know, that religious.

Int: So, how religious?

Barbara: Well, when you got in trouble, you know. They'll always tell you, "God's watching," or something like that. Well, hmm, my Mom really believes that, my Dad doesn't, ... really.

Int: How important was that to you?

Barbara: I don't think it really mattered, I either went or I didn't. It was just part of life, it didn't really, effect me any. It was, .., I just, went, .., you know, it was no question. I never had a choice, know what I mean?

Int: Say again?

Barbara: I didn't have a choice! But then again, I didn't rebel either, cause I liked going.

Int: But, your parents were the kind who would take you to church?

Barbara: My mother, yeah. My father, no. He had better things to do on Sunday. I think he does believe in God, you know, even though he doesn't go to church. I feel, think, he is a little bit religious in his own way. Like with other parents, you know, both of them go to church. And, with mine, it's just my Mom who goes to church.

Int: If she hadn't gone when you were younger, would you have gone?

Barbara: Probably not, yeah. My mother, you know, had more, ..., influence on me. Mothers always have more, ..., more of a say ..., in what you do!

While aware that her parents had very different levels of religious commitment, Barbara explains that her mother's influence was sufficient to set her on the path of religiosity. Barbara appeared to be aware that

her mother, by modeling religious behavior, exerted a strong enough control on her to maintain her involvement until Barbara came to like church and was willing to go for the fun of it.

Sheila, the other girl whose mother came from a Catholic background, also remembered being set on a religious path by being forced to go to church. As she talks about feeling dominated by her mother, Sheila appears very aware of the parental discipline she believes still controls her behavior. Sheila speaks about her true feelings around church attendance in response to a question about her family's influence on her church involvement:

Sheila: Ahh, I went here from the time I was born, until fourth grade about, and then I went to St. Bridget's in fifth grade, and, I attended church all the time. And, I, umm, don't really like church very much, it's boring (giggles). And it's like, the sermons are made for old people, and I don't understand them at times.

Int: Boring?

Sheila: Ya, it is. Well, I mean it's made for, the topics are for old people, and I don't care about half the things they talk about. So I mean - it's just, you have to go. My parents make me go. That's the only reason I, I go. Cause my mother tells me I have to go. She says I have to go and I have to like it. So I go.

Int: You have to go and you have to like it?

Sheila: Well, she says, "Act like you like it," cause she doesn't like going to church with me when I'm like, you know like, "I'd rather be in bed." So, I have to pretend that I like it. Even though I don't.

At this stage in her life, Sheila reveals that while she attends church regularly, she does so only under the compelling sway of her mother's domination. Her own hostile feelings are masked by her apparent compliance to her mother's wishes.

Indeed, even among those church youth who characterized their families as democratic, parental authority was nonetheless experienced as pervasive. For example, Barbara's keen awareness of her parent's influence is evident in her response to the question:

Int: How much say did you have to do what you wanted to do?

Barbara: I think we had a choice. Because, you know, I think we were more democratic. On some things like, "set the table," or things like that, of course it's a different story. Or, "You're wearing this outfit," or something like that, you know you really don't have a choice. She used to pick out our outfits, and we used to hate them (very softly). I mean, we just did it, or you'd be in trouble.

Int: What about going to church?

Barbara: I think I would have. Because my parents feel strong about that, and they'd make me go. So I probably would have.

Barbara, having internalized her parent's religious values, believes that even if given a choice, she would have elected to go to church.

Travis, who likewise had characterized his family as democratic, held the perception that his family had never forced him to take a particular course of action.

Instead, he appeared to experience the influence of his family's religious values and attitude somewhat indirectly. When asked if his family was more or less democratic compared to other families, he replied:

Travis: Pretty much democratic, I guess. They were protective, but they didn't really say, "you have to do this, you have to do that." It's like a lot of people I notice, or some people, their parents are like, hmm, say for school or sports or something, "you play this, go play that!" It's always been my choice, whatever I want to do. They'll suggest you know, but they're not going to force me. They never forced me to do anything, so I really never had a reason to rebel against them. They would say basically like, "do whatever you want."

While aware of their viewpoint, Travis experienced a lack of familial pressure because of his family's non-directive attitude. Travis goes on to describe how his point of view was open to the influence of peers modeling religious behavior outside the family, and explains the situation this way when asked the question:

Int: Where you under pressure from school friends to attend or not attend church?

Travis: Not really, but, well, one of my friends, he's always, I mean it's like it's always been a sin if he misses the church. He's always been brought up to go to church true Catholic. He goes to church every week and that's, I mean I agree with that, and that's, ..., not really peer pressure, but you know I kinda thought of that as a good thing to do. More active, I mean, than when you go to church only once in a while.

Experiencing little to push or rebel against in the family, Travis instead describes one parameter circumscribing his religious life being modeled by the behavior of a friend whom, as we have seen, held religious values similar to those related in the oral traditions passed down by his father.

Summary. To this point, we have considered certain elements in a theme dealing with the youth's perception of their family's influence on their religious attitude and behavior. In doing so, we heard the respondent's explain how their families set them squarely on a religious path early in life. As we have learned, early church involvement as characterized by the youth was accomplished by families instilling a sense of discipline, by active social role modeling, and by communicating family values through oral history. Family influence was perceived by the youth to be strongly compelling concerning religious matters. In fact, many of the youth appeared to be aware that in terms of religious involvement, they as children had been forced to attend church.

At this point, let us examine a second theme emerging from the data. We will begin by listening to

the youth explain their religiosity in terms of becoming aware of themselves as the locus of control in religious matters.

Perception of Freedom of Choice

A perspective repeatedly voiced among the respondents was an appreciation that their current religious attitude was owed to being able, at some point, to exercise freedom of choice in determining the degree and scope of their religious activity. The freedom to choose whether to be religiously active or not was also characterized as representing a transfer of control from the family to themselves. Consequently, several of the youth not only described the ability to decide on their own as a highly valued experience but also as a factor that effected their religious attitude and behavior in a positive direction.

For instance, Doug spoke about his awareness of the situation this way in response to the question of family influence:

Int: Do you mean your family was strict?

Doug: Umm, yeah. I guess you could say they were strict to things that they thought were important. If they didn't think it was important, they wouldn't bother me at all.

Int: What about church, did they think that was important?

Doug: At first they thought it was very important, that's why they put me through, you know, "You're going to church today." Then once they think I'm old enough to make my own decisions they just said, "Are you coming to church today?" If I said, "No," they didn't say anything. If I said, "Yes," they said, "Well, get ready then."

Int: So they started you out.

Doug: They started me out, but they didn't force me to keep going, I mean, I'm glad.

Int: Do you think not forcing you made a difference in the way you feel about the church today?

Doug: Exactly, yes, very much. Cause if they'd forced me, "you're going to like this," or, "you're going to like that," you're going to say you do, just to make them happy, but you're really not going to.

Doug appeared to be aware that as a youngster he had been compelled to attend church with his family. However, at the age where he was thought old enough to make his own decisions, he was allowed to freely choose whether to be an active participant or not. As a result, he describes his attitude about the church today as positive.

As we have seen, Charles also spoke of his religious experience in terms of feeling compelled initially to attend church. However, when finally perceiving that he was able to choose a course of action on his own, he likewise became open to the

possibility of viewing religious involvement as a positive experience. Charles explained his situation this way when asked:

Int: What made the difference, why did you start wanting to go?

Charles: Ahh, well, I was forced into church and, ahh, it was hard. I didn't go too much, I just didn't. I'm just too lazy to get out of bed in the morning. Then I didn't have the time to go to church. So then you get mad when you have to. Then one Sunday I was tired and just didn't want to go - stayed home. I could do that.

Int: So then what happened?

Charles: Then, I wanted to go. It wasn't bad or anything, you know, we made crafts and stuff, especially at Christmas and Easter, you do a lot of fun and neat things, so that kinda made it worth ..., getting out of punishment for not, not going.

Int: So that's why you started going?

Charles: Yeah, well, like maybe the realization that it's not that bad, kind of thing. Ahh, kinda, you can make decisions for yourself at a point, you don't have to be told everything to do, and you kinda realize, that, you know, church is something that is good for you, that will hopefully have a positive effect on you when you grow up.

Int: So you kind of stayed back and rebelled when you had to go to church?

Charles: I think that's what it was back when I didn't want to go to church, I think that's what it was. But now, you know, I can make up my own mind, I can decide, yeah, I want to go to church, and I like it.

Int: That's why you participate?

Charles: Something like that. You realize that it's not like a job requirement, when you have to. It's an option. And generally that option's

better if you take advantage of it, and use it. Kind of like, like a privilege, being able to go to church.

Charles appeared to be aware that when he was forced to attend church, he was inclined to resist and hang back. But when given the option to decide on his own whether to go or not, he came to see the religious experience more as a positive opportunity.

In like manner, Travis described his feelings and attitude this way when discussing why he is active in the church today:

Travis: I just seem to like it better now because I can choose to come. I used to, my parents always used to, "you have to get up now and go to church." Now I can come whenever I feel like it, you know, and being able to, it's more of an "own choice" type thing. I come because I like to, when before, you know I had to.

The ability to choose whether to come to church or not, brought about a significant change in Travis's attitude about religious activity. Now, he talks about church attendance in terms of being a positive experience.

The concept of freedom of choice was also characterized by another youth as significant in bringing about a positive change in his attitude towards religion. Doug spoke frankly when asked:

Int: Thinking about religious behavior, what was it like for you growing up in your family?

Doug: They started me out, but they didn't force me to keep going. They didn't really drill, like, "you're going to believe in God," or you're going

to do this or you're going to do that. Like around God and religion, they wanted me to go to church, they wanted me to enjoy it, but they didn't make me. I mean, they made me go sometimes, but they didn't make me believe, or listen to what the minister had to say. That was my choice, and I like that, and I'm glad they made me come to church, now that I understand some things about God and things like that. Another thing, I think if your going to come to church you have to want to come to church really. I mean I know the other kids sometimes don't want to come, but I think you should come because you want to come, you shouldn't hafta be.

Int: So choice is important?

Doug: Yeah, everybody should have their own decision, if they want to come they come, in terms of older kids. I know that with younger kids, its different, but older kids I think it's up to them, and if they want to come, they should come.

Aware of his family's early encouragement to participate in religious activities, Doug nonetheless perceived that their attitude provided him freedom of choice to determine his own religious beliefs. Fully appreciating his ability to make the decision, Doug freely chooses to come to church.

Similarly, Dan presented the perception that being provided the opportunity to choose his own level of engagement with the church diffused the issue of adolescent rebellion, as he related in response to the question:

Int: So you choose to be active?

Dan: Well, I think church is something you should want to do, you know, you shouldn't have to do it because someone says this is right and this is what you should do. And I see it gradually

changing in the Catholic Church because of my school experience. But I can definitely agree with the Protestant way saying it's something good and something you should do but you don't have to.

Int: Sounds like that's pretty important, being able to choose to do something?

Dan: Yeah, yeah, it's like I said before, rebellion. I don't know, if I, if my parents had, you know, said "You have to go!" I might have said, "Well, I don't want to," just to disagree. But they said, "We want you to go," so I said, "Well, they're not making me," and I might as well do it and make them happy. And hopefully enhance my life.

With force not at issue, Dan was able to appreciate the value of church attendance on it's own merit. He then explains how he was able to define his own reasons for being an active member.

In Jen's case, freedom of choice was characterized as a concept that defined not only her self-concept, but also her outlook on the world in general, and her relationship to the church in particular. As Jen relates:

Jen: I, I don't want to be like a sheep in the herd that looks like everybody else (laughs), you know. I don't wanna follow, I've never been a follower. Like, if there's a fashion statement, and everybody doing it and I don't like it, I'm not gonna do it.

Int: And how does that tie to the church?

Jen: Your own, ..., your own indiv., like if everyone, say, "Oh, I'm going to contribute this and that." So am I then, so am I. And you don't know how much everyone's going to contribute, so that keeping it secret, it's totally up to you, and your totally independent around it.

Int: So being able to be a contributing member of the church is like being independent?

Jen: Right! Like being your own self. Right, cause my parents said, if you want to join the church, you can join it. If you don't want to, you decide what you want to do, and we'll stand behind you whatever you want to do.

Int: So one of the things about being in a church is being your own self?

Jen: Exactly, yes. Yes, definitely, that's exactly what I mean. And, umm, choices, making your own choices. How much do I want to contribute to the church, how much can I afford to.

In presenting her perception, Jen explains clearly that freedom of choice is a concept central to her understanding of the value of religious participation. Although characterizing her original attitude towards religion as negative as a result of a bad experience with Sunday school, Jen's supportive family, in providing her freedom of choice, allowed her to determine in her own time what her relationship to the church was going to be in the future, as the following exchange reveals:

Int: What was it like for you at that time?

Jen: Well, umm, I went to the church a couple of times during that time when I didn't want to go to Sunday school anymore, and I just sat with my parents. And I thought, if anyone says anything to me (laughs) about going to Sunday school, then I'm not even gonna come to church and sit with my parents because that just wasn't something I wanted to do.

Int: I'm getting the sense that having the freedom of choice is important to you.

Jen: Definitely, yeah. And I, ..., so I think they should give a choice to the children. I think definitely If they want to go - OK, but not forced to go and sit, I don't think a lot of them would want to go and sit in church.

Int: It's really important?

Jen: Ahh, ..., I think giving choices, definitely, because I know some ..., some kids whose parents may make them get confirmed, and they make them go to a certain church. That will make them just all the more not want to - especially adolescents because we, if someone wants to make us do something (laughs), we, ..., we won't. I think my mother learned that with my brother and I, that if you force them, they're gonna do whatever they want, they're gonna rebel.

Int: And if they'd forced you?

Jen: I think now if they had said you have to go to this church, I would, ..., I definitely would have put up a fight. I definitely would've said, "well, let me make my own decisions, let, ..., why don't you let me choose what I want to choose?" And if they said, "You choose this church," I may not have.

Int: So what happened?

Jen: I got, I had a really good relationship with my mentor who built up things. Ahhh, we talked about what had happened with me in Sunday school, and I just got a look at the church from more of a grown up perspective. And just, everything just sort of fell into place, like I just knew this was where I wanted to be. Because my parents did not, ..., make me get confirmed. They said, "You, you choose the path you want to follow," and I really, I just knew, this is where I belonged.

For Jen, the experience of being allowed to come to her own decision about participation was viewed by her as completely congruent with her self-concept, and allowed her to be open and receptive to a positive perspective regarding the church.

Likewise, the concept of freedom of choice was described by Karen as no less critical in establishing her religious attitude and perspective about church involvement than it was for Jen, as is seen in Karen's response to the question:

Int: As you get older, are you going to stay active in the church?

Karen: I'm sure of it. I mean, I don't think anything is going to change the way it is now.

Int: How are you going to raise your own children?

Karen: Well, I hope, I think I'm going to be like my mom was letting me make choices. I'm going to encourage religion because I think it is important, and I think that my children would find that it is important. But, umm, you know, depending on the time in their lives and if they question things or go through things, um, I'm going to give them their freedom to choose.

Although believing in the value of a religious upbringing that reflected her own experience, Karen also appears to hold the perspective that freedom of choice is an important element in the raising of children.

In overview, we have listened to the church youth describe how they were firmly set by their parents on a religious path. In addition, we heard respondents give an account of how they were allowed, at a point along the way, freedom of choice about religious behavior. The freedom to choose whether or not to be an active member was thought in retrospect to be a significant occurrence, a turning point at which time many of them

came to place a high value on active religious involvement. Whether the church youth eventually choose to be religiously active or not, it seemed that the adolescents were aware of themselves growing older, and that this stage in their lives marked a transition from the world of childhood to that of adult. At this point we will further examine transition as a third theme emerging from the data.

A Time of Transition

In telling their stories, many of the church youth characterized this time in their lives as one of transition and change. For some, change was made manifest in their questioning of religious beliefs and values. Others described the transition as one of shifting perspective and altered relationships. An account of how the teenagers themselves experienced this time in their lives is considered in the following section.

The church youth interviewed in the study appeared to be aware that as time passed, ongoing changes in their lives shaped their perception of the church, and modified their relationship to it. In the context of membership, some of the young people described their relationship to the church in terms of their changing

needs, changing religious values, and changing membership status. Others spoke of feeling caught between child and adult worlds, and characterized their relationship as that of being in limbo, their sense of marginality reflecting the push and pull of changing role expectations associated with growing up.

For teenagers experiencing the transition from youth to young adulthood, a perception of marginal membership status was described as being less an issue of religiosity, and more a matter of the degree to which their relationship with the church met or failed to satisfy their psycho-social needs at this juncture in their lives.

Changing Religious Values. Sheila recalls a turning point that marked the transition period in her life as occurring in the 8th grade, when an older girl who came to live in her home caused her to reconsider the Catholic religious values of her childhood. Sheila described the experience this way in response to a question about personal faith:

Int: Do you have personal faith?

Sheila: Yeah. I believe in God.

Int: How long have you had personal faith:

Sheila: I think I started developing it in eighth grade. When I started like understanding what God was. His rules, and understanding that everything the Catholic Church said wasn't true.

Int: Did something happen in the eighth grade that started this process?

Sheila: Well, a lot of things happened in eighth grade. I started growing up and maturing, and our exchange student was here. She was a Lutheran, but she believed very much in God. The girl before her was atheist, so it made a big difference. She was very into God, she believed in God, and she prayed all the time and that kind of stuff. I was with her all the time. I consider her to be one of my closest, closest friends. If she were living here now, I think she'd be like a best friend. She was very, very special. She helped me grow up in a lot of ways. She helped me understand that the Catholic church wasn't right about everything. Just, ..., I did a lot of maturing in eighth grade.

Int: So personal faith is important to you?

Sheila: It's important. If you don't have personal faith, you don't have any faith at all.

Maturing into a young adult, Sheila experienced difficulty holding on to the values of her Catholic upbringing, her sense of marginality in terms of membership in the Catholic Church heightened by the relationship with the Lutheran exchange student. In responding to a strong interpersonal need at this point in her life, Sheila's close relationship with the student fostered the questioning of Catholic doctrine while strengthening her belief in God.

Like Sheila, Doug also described how he experienced a time of transition in terms of changes in his religious values as he grew older that modified his

relationship to the church. Doug spoke about his changing perceptions in response to the question:

Int: What's the difference between the feelings you might have now and those you might have held in the past?

Doug: I guess I always believed in God, and that's basically the key for me. I mean I ask him favors and I read Luke, and stuff like that, and I understand Jesus. I don't know, I guess I just like God a lot.

Int: These feelings, have they changed as you've gotten older?

Doug: I think so because I didn't start really praying until the eighth grade. Seventh or eighth grade. Before that, He didn't matter to me. I always thought He was there through church and stuff like that, but I never took it home with me.

Int: You're faith has gotten stronger? How come?

Doug: Yeah, it's true. I guess I wasn't, back then I wasn't, ..., it didn't much matter to me. I was little, I didn't think about it, you know. Just, ..., once you get older you understand, actually listen to what people are saying, to you, and I guess from that it just started. Now I think I hafta pray every night, and I hafta come to church every week if I can. I think it's very important that I should. Now that I'm a member, it's more important for me to come than it was.

Doug seemed to be aware that as he grew older, his personal faith likewise grew, matching a felt need to maintain a closer relationship with the church. In this case, Doug explained how the changes in his perception of religious values that occurred during the transition from childhood served to validate and reinforce his earlier religious training.

Member's Changing Needs. In Karen's view, the changing needs of young church members become manifest at an early age. Premised on her own experience, she seemed aware that these needs vary, can be confusing, and oftentimes are at odds with the role expectations of membership status. For instance, asked how she felt about children leaving the morning service to go to Sunday school, she responded:

Karen: I think it's great that the younger kids have Sunday School. I remember, you know, being that young, and I could understand parts of the reverend's message in the sermon, but I never understood the whole thing. When they went down for Sunday school, you know, they got to understand, I mean they got to learn a Bible story, and the people in the Bible, and they got to learn in a way that they could learn.

Int: And the older kids?

Karen Well, for some of them, when they're in sixth and seventh grade, they are old enough and could stay in church. They're old enough and mature enough and they can understand what is going on, and they can respect it. They can, you know, they can have a feel for the sermon, and like it, and not be turned away by it.

Int: So you feel they should stay in church?

Karen: Well, they're still young. And I remember being that age. I could understand the sermons in church and all that, but I was still kinda, you know, a kid. I was young, and I thought it was good to have Sunday school at that age because you can still be young, you know, and like growing up, you know that your not getting pushed into something that's too much for you.

While recognizing that some adolescents were ready by the sixth grade to join as members along side adults in the church, Karen recalls at that age not yet being ready to meet adult role expectations until some time later. She seemed grateful as a young teenager not to be pushed into taking on adult responsibilities.

The period of transition was no less difficult for Barbara, who unlike Karen, seemed uncomfortable in the role of church school student during adolescence.

Regarding the time spent in Sunday school, she recalls:

Barbara: And as for me, I know that from like 5th grade, 5th grade on I didn't learn anything. Maybe in the 7th and 8th grade, I don't know, I don't know if we really learned anything - but there were some other grades when we didn't do anything, anything all year!

Int: You didn't get much out of it?

Barbara: Well no, I think, even after, like junior high and stuff, I don't think, you know, there's like -nothing. It's just space, you know, either you really don't want to sit there the whole time, or you get used to it. I think I'm used to it.

Clearly, Barbara's needs as a young member of the church were not being met by attending Sunday school at this time in her life. That she felt other aspects of the church impacted on her marginality to bring her closer into membership becomes clear in the following exchange:

Int: What is it about the church that is important to you, that's positive, or keeps you coming back?

Barbara: I think youth group helps. I mean the kids who go to youth group, usually, are the kids who join the church. So if you get more kids to go to youth group, you'll get more kids to join the church. I think youth group TIES TOGETHER, junior and senior high, with the little kids in Sunday school. I think that's the gap.

Int: A gap? You think there's a gap? What's that about?

Barbara: Well, I think that helps, you know? I think, in a youth group, you have fun, and you know, get through adolescence. The junior high shyness. and the puberty part, and everything, I think it helps get through that.

Int: Besides youth group, do you think that the Church meets your needs as a person?

Barbara: Yeah, I think it does more than what I, ..., it has more to offer than what I need at the moment, but I'm sure in the future I'll need a lot more too.

Int: What kind of things do you think the church might be able to give you to meet your needs?

Barbara: Support, ..., encouragement.

Int: What about spiritual stuff?

Barbara: Yeah, but I haven't really experienced any of that yet, so,

As a Sunday school student whose changing needs were not being met at this stage of her life, Barbara was nonetheless able to meet them through other aspects of church involvement. The youth group not only provided her a means of maintaining a positive relationship with the church, but also provided the possibility of bridging the transitional gap to allow her future spiritual needs to be met as an adult member.

Jen was another respondent whose perception of the church and her relationship to it changed with her changing needs as she got older. Jen described her perspective this way when asked:

Int: Do you see it differently now then when you were younger?

Jen: Oh definitely. Hmmm, because when I was younger I definitely did not feel a bond with God or anything. I mean, I believed in God and from what I learned I tried to gather up what I learned. But I never really had a bond or even a bond with the church.

Int: How is it for you now?

Jen: I feel a need for God, definitely. Yeah, ..., cause your mind is growing and your body is growing and your changing and um, maybe ..., maybe, ..., some kids and their parents relationship, because their parents might have forced them to get confirmed or to join a church, that they still have hostilities.

Int: So at this point in your life you feel a need for God?

Jen: Oh yeah. I think teenagers, I think they're the strongest age group with a need for God. And people will say that when you're older you'll feel more of a need. But I think now because teenagers are going through this stage in their life where, like maybe their parents won't understand them, or they don't have friends, or teachers. No one understands them, and they feel so alone. But if God, I think if you have God, and maybe your parents, you'll feel like you and your parents have a bond also. Like God helps you have bonds with other people, I think.

In this account Jen tells us how her religious perceptions changed as she became a teenager and realized first hand the loneliness of adolescence. Her feelings of marginality are clearly expressed as she

describes the sense of isolation from social supports she believes is typically experienced by teenagers. Jen characterizes her increased need of religiosity as a potential bridge to supportive relationships.

Changing Membership Status. In terms of membership status, several of the adolescent youth commented on how both their perception of the church and their relationship to it changed as they got older. For others, a change in status was noticed when they formally joined the church through the process of confirmation.

For instance, Travis described his experience this way when asked:

Int: What was it like for you before as compared to now?

Travis: Well, actually I didn't mind going to Sunday school. Especially as a younger person, we were active, doing something, you know, always playing games, or something like that, doing projects, so I actually didn't mind going. Especially as a younger person, but towards, maybe like seventh grade, that's when you start, you're caught in between actually.

Int: How do you mean?

Travis: Well, ..., you're like not old enough to be a member, and yet you feel, ..., too old to be in the Sunday school with a lot of the younger kids. About that time, you just get, ahh, you get less support.

Having outgrown the role of student, Travis appears aware of the pressure of roll expectations causing him to feel like an outsider. His perception of being a marginal person with unmet needs wasn't altered until he was old enough to take the step of changing his membership status. He talks about this situation when asked the question:

Int: How did you connect with the church?

Travis: Hmm, by, it seems that confirmation, I mostly connected, like, ..., I don't know. Hhmm, it just seems like you're somebody in the church and it feels like it is a place to go now, instead of a place for being taken care of when your parents are in church.

In: So you're kinda part of the church on your own at that point?

Travis: Yeah. More independence, and ahhh, ..., could be my needs could be heard and stuff, I guess, ..., not a backdrop, like children should be seen and not heard, so I could actually say something if I wanted to.

Int: I get the sense you feel a difference, being treated more as an adult after confirmation?

Travis: Yeah. It seems, not so much after confirmation, but just as you got older in the church. Down in Sunday school, you're still seen as a kid. When I got older, when you went in the sanctuary, you were part of the people it seemed like, ..., you were more, getting more mature.

It appears that from Travis' viewpoint, confirmation was less a right of passage and more a ticket of admission to the company of adult members.

Having aged out of his Sunday school role, he was feeling quite ready to meet adult role expectations and participate as a member.

While Barbara experienced changes during this time of transition in terms of her religious needs, she also recognized how changes in her membership status effected her perception of the church and her relationship to it. Barbara described her experience of becoming a member this way in response to the question:

Int: How would you describe your view of what it's like to be a member of the church, compared to what it was like before?

Barbara: I don't think there is that much of a difference, but I think that when you do become a member, it helps you physically and mentally join the church. There's more unity. Like when, . . . , I remember one time when they said, "All members stand," and me and my sister stood up, and I was a kid, and she said, "Sit down, sit down." Now, I can stand during Baptisms you know, when they ask members to stand. It feels more united, more one than separate. You're part of something, like part of a team.

Int: So you feel comfortable as a member of the church?

Barbara: Yeah, I feel real comfortable. And like last week, there was a meeting after church, and the moderator mentioned cause I was there and now there was a quorum, I felt a joy, a happiness, cause we were all together now. You know actually I felt part of something, just like the children who go to church, you know?

As recounted earlier, Barbara characterized her Sunday school experience as a transitional time when her relationship to the church failed to satisfy her needs, an empty space she spoke of as a gap between child and adulthood. As her membership status changed, Barbara explained how she likewise experienced a change in her feelings and attitude towards the church. No longer a marginal person, she now felt included and one with the membership, her feeling of isolation ended.

In summary, the preceding section has led us to consider aspects of a theme involving the youth of the church growing older and entering a period of transition. The youth recounted a perception of ongoing changes in their lives that shaped their perception of the church, and modified their relationship to it. In the context of membership, the youth described their relationship to the church in terms of their changing needs, religious values, and membership status. For those teenagers experiencing the transition from youth to young adulthood, the perception of marginal membership was described as less an issue of religiosity, and more a matter of the degree to which their relationship with the church served to satisfy their needs at this juncture in their lives.

At this point we will move on to consider a fourth theme emerging from the data in order to further explicate the meaning of membership behavior. In this section we will examine how the respondent's themselves comprehend the reasons they actively participate in religious activities.

Active Religious Involvement

Many church youth who thought of themselves as religiously active recalled being allowed to choose whether or not to participate in religious activities following an initial period during which they felt compelled to attend church. Nonetheless, in explaining their religiosity, the respondents recounted other conditions and circumstances that appeared either to motivate or to reinforce their religious behavior. These included interpersonal contact, maintaining peer group bonds, friendship, an opportunity for fun, and viewing the church as a sanctuary or safe haven. Other youth reported going to church provided a sense of belonging, viewed the church as a family, and their involvement as a positive experience.

Interpersonal Contact. While none of the participants knew the identities of those taking part in the research, and were what McCracken (McCracken, 1988) would call "perfect strangers" to one another, both Dan and Sheila described feeling especially isolated from their peers (1988, p. 37). For them, the opportunity for interpersonal contact provided by church activities was felt to offer a remedy for social isolation. As Dan recounts:

Int: Thinking about your closest friends, are you more with your friends from school or with your friends from church?

Dan: In this particular church, I only have one or two people of my age, but I have different people, different ages who I know, I can talk with or say "Hi, how are you doing". I guess I'm more close to like Pilgrim Fellowship (ie., the Senior High Youth Group). Going to school in one town and living in another it's kind of tough cause you'll see some people every day and then you'll go home and since I don't have a license I can't go and visit them or anything like that, so, you know, I can't get back and forth. But with Pilgrim Fellowship always there, I don't have to go way out of my way to be with friends.

Although lacking transportation and unable to connect with friends from school, Dan explains his perception of how attending church expands his relational world to include inter-generational ties helping to ameliorate the feeling of isolation. He speaks here of how the church youth group serves to fulfill his need for interpersonal contact by providing

a common meeting ground to be with his friends. While frankly hostile to religion, Sheila nonetheless also subscribed to the view that going to church offered a solution to the problem of social isolation engendered by her living in one town and going to school in another. When asked how she felt about going to church, she had this to say:

Sheila: I don't know, I have to go, and I really don't like going, but sometimes I don't mind it cause I get to talk to my friends afterwards. My friends from the school last year, St. Bridget's, I get to see them when I go to church. So that's cool, it's something to go to church for. To see some friends that I only get to see sometimes. It's a reason to go, I mean, I used to like going to church, but I just don't anymore.

For both of these teenagers, the absence of opportunities in their daily lives for social intercourse with peers was remedied by their involvement with church related activities. Such secular involvement highlighted the adolescent's felt need to maintain relationships as a potent motivator for their church involvement.

Maintaining Peer Group Bonds. Several youth commented on the importance of having an opportunity to strengthen the relationship with their friends as a reason to be religiously active. Charles described his situation this way in response to the question:

Int: So why is going to church not a problem for you?

Charles: Because, ahh, like I said, a lot of my friends kept up. People who went to the confirmation class together, we've been to Sunday School together. Doug lives right across the street from me, so we've known each other for the longest time. Ahhh, we all go, we all know each other, and we all can have fun together. we don't have to stick with our parents at church. We can go to church and then meet up with one of our friends, and talk after church, make plans, and things like that.

Int: Thinking about your closest friends, are you more with friends from school or with friends from church?

Charles: Well, ..., they're from church groups, like well Doug, ..., we all go to the same school, so it's, you know, different. It's tough to say, but I think they're mostly from church.

Int: From Church? How come?

Charles: Only that, friends from church, you know, would be participating in the same things I would be participating in, like youth group. You could talk about youth group things, you know, planning a dance for instance. You could talk about things, ahhh, that other people wouldn't know about, cause they didn't go to church.

Charles seems aware that church activities offer not only an opportunity to be with friends while escaping from parental overview, but also a chance to share experiences and to further cement relationships with trusted acquaintances. Charles tells how a sense of in-group solidarity develops from planning activities, holding insider information, and discussing events unknown to religious outsiders.

Jen was another youth who talked about her religious involvement in terms of the importance of maintaining close ties with peers. She described her perception this way when asked why she actively participated in church youth programs:

Jen: I think, I think it's important. I think that younger kids need to be separated from older people sometimes. Just like older people sometimes need time from younger people. Adults will go out to get a rest from their kids and hire a baby-sitter. I think that certain age groups have things in common, and I think that the younger kids need a chance to get together and share the things that they have in common.

Int: Why is that?

Jen: Because people who are involved in groups like that, they get good feeling about themselves because everyone says that's good. And besides going to church with everyone else, I think it's important to have something in common with the smaller group. Just like, I have my family, but sharing the same things with them the whole time doesn't give you a variety. Sharing the same likes and dislikes and spending time together, you sort of need air besides that, and I think being with your friends in youth group gives you that.

Jen appreciated the importance of generational bonding, of establishing boundaries between children and adults, and recognized the positive benefits of associating with friends who shared the same world view. That these activities occurred under the mantle of church sponsorship tended to legitimize the behavior as proper and good, thus building the self esteem of the participants.

In addition to being opportunity for interpersonal contact, Sheila appeared to be aware of how the pressure to maintain peer group bonds supported her active religious involvement. Sheila was quite frank in relating her experience this way when asked about peer pressure:

Sheila: Going to church, everyone wants me to go to church! It's so annoying. "Go to church Sheila, I have to tell you something." Not because they want me to go to church for God, it's so that they can see me afterwards. All, most of my friends go to church, so like, it's a big deal. My best friend is very, very active in her youth group. My friends in town are very active and my friends from St. Bridget's are very active. Even if it's because their parents make them go to church, they still go to church. If I weren't to go to church, it would be kinda like I was a freak or something.

Apparently Sheila was willing to bear the weight of attending religious services that she plainly abhorred rather than face the risk of being socially ostracized by her circle of friends. In her case, manifest behavior was supported more by peer pressure than by an underlying structure of shared religious values.

Sanctuary and Safe Haven. Several of the respondents spoke of their active religious involvement in terms of viewing the church as a safe haven or sanctuary for themselves. For instance, Dan described his experience this way in discussing his relationship with the church:

Dan: Ahhh, up to now? It's been a place I've gone to every week, and a place to worship. It's a place I've learned about God, and about Jesus, His son. Now, it's a place to go and offer thanks to God. A place to go and let loose, relax, and forget about my troubles.

Int: Let loose and relax?

Dan: Yeah, like, you know, not worry. To offer my prayer of anything that bothers me to God, and hope that He can take care of it. So I don't worry here, as much as I should anyway.

Int: Sounds like a good place for you. What do you mean about a place you don't have to worry?

Dan: Yeah, it's a place I don't have to, ..., doesn't hafta total, "You have to do this," and, "You have to do that."

Int: Do you mean like in a family?

Dan: Yeah. Or like school, you have to do certain things at certain times and follow all rules. Not at church.

Int: So to you the church is like, ...,?

Dan My home away from home. Someplace I can go and talk, you know, if I can't necessarily say something out loud, I can pray to God, and that will make me feel better. My home away from home, someplace I can go if I don't want to do something at home, or I don't want my parents to find out about. Not that I did something bad, just something that's personal to me, I can say in church. Pray in church. It's easier that way.

In this account Dan reveals that his perception of the church entails a feeling of safety and security that perhaps even exceeds that experienced in his own home. He feels he is his own individual self and experiences a sense of personal freedom in church,

which seems to offer him the possibility of both emotional catharsis and non-judgemental acceptance of his behavior.

Barbara was another youth who characterized her religious involvement in terms of seeing the church as a safe haven. She spoke of her experience this way when asked:

Int: How do feel about being an active member now compared to when you were younger?

Barbara: I think now that I'm growing older and going through a lot of changes - graduating, going to college, getting a license for a car, all of these things, I need some time to relax and enjoy. I need religion, more than when I was little and care-free and really didn't have to worry about anything. Now I go, like I need it, cause of more worry and more stress from school and everything. That's why I go. I think I need it.

Int: What about stress at church? Some churches have a lot of rules, like no dancing, no lipstick. How do you feel about that?

Barbara: I feel that's acting more like your parents. It shouldn't be that. A church should be a place where you can escape your parents, and you can find yourself. But also have some discipline and structure, but not as much as your parents. It's a place where you can get away, hopefully. I mean they're still there, but not as much as an authority, know what I mean, as in your own house.

Barbara seems to recognize that turning to religion offers her the possibility of sanctuary in terms of finding relief from the stresses of adolescence. To her the church represents a protected haven or resting place - at least a step down from the

authoritative structure of her family and mid-way to the freedom and increasing responsibility of adult hood.

A Sense of Belonging. In discussing their reasons for religious involvement, several of the respondents characterized their feeling in terms of seeking to achieve a sense of belonging through active membership. Doug described his feelings this way when asked:

Int: Thinking back on it, why is it important to you to be a member of the church?

Doug: Just to be, ..., just to be down with the older people, and to make it like, you are a member of this church, and you get to vote, and everybody just equal with everyone now. And you're, you have your own thoughts and feelings about everything, but your still equal to everyone down there. You get to say whatever you want to say.

Int: So you're not a kid anymore?

Doug: Yeah, yeah, well I'm still a kid, but in terms of church I think I'm an adult.

Int: That's why you wanted to be a member?

Doug: Yes. As I was going to Sunday School, I was like -my goal is to become a member. And that's why I really wanted to drive to get through that. Now that I am, it's great.

Int: What would be a metaphor for you for the church?

Doug: Church is like home. It's where I want to be. It's fun. It just, everything that it has to offer, this is a place where I want to be.

Joining the church seems to have provided Doug

with a opportunity to establish his sense of identity as a young and independent adult. Being fully accepted into the democratic company of adult members satisfied both his need to assert his independence while also satisfying his need to be recognized as an equal and welcomed participant in adult membership activities.

Travis was another respondent who described how the feeling of belonging was an important aspect of his being an active member in the church. Asked what it was like for him joining the church and becoming an active member, he answered:

Travis: It felt kinda good. You had the people, the older people that, ahh, you always knew or, not older people but I mean, people you always looked up to, when you had to go down to Sunday School, and now you could actually stay up and it was a big thing. To stay there and you could actually be part of things that took place during church, stuff like that, voting member, ..., express your views.

Here Travis describes the pleasure he experienced in being included as a participant in activities that up until then had been reserved for adults. No longer excluded from the company of older members, he seemed delighted to now be able to fully take part in their activities.

A Place to Have Fun. Like Doug, several respondents explained their active involvement with the church in terms of having fun. For these young adults, the notion of "having fun" was subject to varied interpretations. For instance, Travis went on to express his feelings this way when asked:

Int: If you could sum up, what would be the reasons that you would be involved at this point in your life with the church:

Travis: Ahhh, it is fun, you get to meet friends and new people. You get to see familiar faces, say "Hi!" talk to someone you haven't seen for awhile, see how they're doing. Ahh, it is my belief that it will lead you in a good direction in life. And hopefully, if I move out, I will want to become active in the church wherever I live.

Travis holds the perspective that maintaining and building relationships as an active church member offers an opportunity to have fun. Consequently, he not only values his religious involvement and the sense of direction it provides him at this time in his life, but also suggests he would like to continue these activities wherever he is living later on in life.

Karen was another respondent who defined fun in terms of the opportunity for meeting new people. Karen characterized her perception this way when asked why she participated in youth group:

Karen: I think they're fun and a great way to get together, to meet new people. Even though I know everybody, but I mean, for those people who have just moved, like in the 7th, 8th, and 9th grades,

or from other churches, it's good cause we get them too. I mean, just to get together with friends and stuff, you know, but that's not even a bad thing either.

In this passage Karen seems to think of church activity as a fun filled opportunity for meeting new people and renewing her relationship with old friends. In her perspective the church youth group provides an opportunity as well for new people coming into town to join in fellowship with her friends at church.

Another respondent who characterized meeting people as fun and a reason for being religiously active was Doug. When asked why this was important to him, he explained:

Doug: I've made a lot of friends like, through the church I guess, I would never have met people like Mr. Smith, and now he's a good buddy. There's a lot of people I probably wouldn't ever have seen if I hadn't been coming to church, like Mr. Jones (who was 92 years old), older people like that. You can meet younger people outside of church, at games and sports you see a lot of people, but the older people you don't see unless they're in church.

Int: Is that important to you?

Doug: Yes, I think it is. It's just, another perspective, another perspective on how church was and how it is now, and it's just great to see them in church and talk to them and it's fun.

Doug not only sees church involvement as an opportunity for making friends, but also as a way of crossing generational lines to build relationships with older church members. By this means he seems to enjoy

being able to establish a sense of continuity with the past for himself, one that also serves to inform Doug's understanding of his current church membership.

Charles also described his relationship to the church in terms of having fun. When asked why he was actively involved, he described his situation this way, being careful to make his definition of having fun clear:

Int: You say your actively involved in the church now, how come?

Charles: Ahh, well now it's hard. I don't go too much, I just don't, I'm too lazy to get out of bed in the morning. But that's OK. I do make the effort, as much as I can to go, ahmm, especially during the Fall and Winter, when I've got school anyway, and the routine. I'll get up and then I'll go to church, every Sunday, and youth group at night, and usually, that'll be just one more thing.

Int: Why do you think you do that, church in the morning, youth group at night - that's practically your whole day isn't it?

Charles: Well, because, youth group is different than church. Youth group is mainly all fun. Church and worship - I'm not saying their boring, but you don't laugh and play games during worship.

Int: So youth group, as part of the church, is the fun part for you?

Charles: "A" fun part of the church, not "the." I think of activities I get to do, like working on the CROP Walk, I'm having fun working on that.

Int: So fun can mean activities for you?

Charles: Well, like what I said, if you go to church and participate in church, then you'll know when the fun things are gonna be, the retreats, and dinners, and that sort of thing. Whereas, if you don't go to church, you don't know about it, you can't participate, you don't know when they are gonna be.

While not a regular church attender, Charles seems to enjoy the laughter and games he associates with attending youth group. However, Charles also characterizes working on church sponsored community betterment projects as fun. He appears to hold the view that being an active church member provides him the opportunity to select from a range of activities to enjoy denied to less involved members. Dan, as we have heard, attending school in another town, was primarily motivated to be involved in religious activities for interpersonal reasons. However, he also appeared to be aware that having fun played a part in his becoming an active participant. Dan spoke about his experience in these terms when asked:

Int: Why did you choose to participate in church programs?

Dan: It was a way to start getting into the church a bit more. It was a fun thing to do on a Sunday night than sitting around doing homework. Just kinda basically it was a way to have fun and get back into the church since I didn't really come a lot during the 6th, 7th, and 8th Sunday School era, and I wanted to try to get back into the church.

For Dan, attending religious activities was an enjoyable experience that offered escape from the drudgery of homework. And in addition to having fun, for him to become involved in the youth group program provided re-entry into the fellowship of his peers.

For several of the girls, having fun in church had to do with their perception of Sunday School. Sheila described her experience this way when asked:

Int: Why do you like coming to this church:

Sheila: I always liked coming here, it was fun. I didn't have to sit and listen to the sermons. I got to go down to Sunday School, so it was fun. No, I didn't mind going to church here, and I got to bring my dolls, show them off and do all that kind of fun stuff. So I didn't mind going here, it was kinda fun, and than we got doughnuts afterwards (laughs), so it was cool.

Sheila found positive reinforcement for attending church in her enjoyment of Sunday School activities. Although maintaining a hostile attitude towards religious involvement at this point in her life, she was able to recall her earlier experience with the church as an enjoyable and fun filled time.

Karen also described her religious activities as fun in terms of her experience with Sunday School. When asked why she joined the church, she explained her point of view in these terms:

Int: Why did you join the church?

Karen: I liked to teach. It's fun cause you just see your kids grow, as they worship, and be able to do things with their hands, and have fun at the same time. I like teaching, yeah. And the kids like me, so, I don't like not being there.

Int: Is having fun important?

Karen: If the kids aren't having fun while they are learning, than they are not going to want to learn.

Int: Was that important for you in Sunday School?

Karen: Yeah, I had fun when I was going. We did a lot of projects that dealt with the sermon, and the daily message, and like, a lot of hands on activities. I liked the Sunday School teachers. They were roll models for me, and I liked them because, they made you feel good about yourself.

Describing Sunday School as a fun filled experience, Karen was able to identify her Sunday School teachers as positive role models that she chooses to emulate today. In defining fun as working with children, Karen seemd to find a sense of fulfillment in her religious involvement.

Dan is another youth who characterized his active religious involvement as motivated by an opportunity to have fun. Asked what was important about church for him, he responded:

Dan: I'd say the worship service, you know, meeting every Sunday. Something that you want to do, not something that you have to do. And youth group, something that you want to do.

Int: Why do you want to do that?

Dan: Well, it's fun. Not sit home and watch TV, go be with friends. Do fun things, learn about God.

Int: What's more important, worship service, or other aspects of the church, like youth group?

Dan: It might even be more important because you could pray by yourself, it wouldn't be the same, but you could have a worship service by yourself, but without the other activities you wouldn't have the social part of it.

Dan appears to hold the point of view that the social interaction provided by active church involvement is at least as of much importance to him as worship. For Dan, fun filled activities in a religious context while being with friends helps to round out the meaning of church membership.

The Church as Idealized Family. The young respondents oftentimes characterized their relationship to the church in idealized terms. Focusing on relationships, the youth described their membership in terms of belonging to a warm and caring family. For example, Charles spoke of his feelings this way when asked:

Int: As a member, how would you describe this church, how do you think about it?

Charles: Kind of, kind of like, ahh, a family type thing, really. Ahh, you know everybody else in the church, and, ..., you're not afraid to say "HI" to everybody else in the church, you now, off on the street, and stuff.

Int: What makes it feel like a family?

Charles: Everybody is nice to you all the time. You don't have any problems, ..., no big arguments with any body in church.

Knowing other members while being recognized and greeted in turn helped define church membership for Charles. Holding an idealized view of interpersonal relations in the church, Charles related his perception of membership as though describing an extended family whose members relate warmly to one another without disagreement or argument.

Doug also characterized his relationship to the church in terms of belonging to an accepting family. He described his feelings this way when asked what it was like for him to be an active member:

Doug: Well, I've been with this church for, ..., since I was old enough to come to church. I mean, my parents brought me to church and this is like home to me. You know, I've been to other churches, and I didn't enjoy the other churches as much. I mean I really don't like coming to church unless it's our minister doing it. Church is like home to me, it's where I want to be, it's fun.

In this passage, Doug discloses his deep feeling for the church which he describes as being like a second home for him. In terms of religious involvement, the stability and continuity Doug seems to require become even clearer in the following passage. Speaking as a person whose parents had recently become

divorced, Doug went on to say this about his perception of what it was like to be a member of this church:

Doug: Well, it's like, something like a family.

Int: How like a family?

Doug: Well, like squabbles. I guess there was conflict in terms of the pastor, you know. That's what I got, but I don't really know if there was or not. I can imagine there would be conflicts just like a family would have, little quarrels and stuff like that, but they should be able to work it out. I mean, everyone's here for, ..., they don't have to be here if they don't want to be here, which is a LOT different from family. It's like, you're in the family and that's your family so you've gotta make it good. You're here and that's like your family. Everyone wants to be in church so they want it to work.

Int: And that's how you feel about it?

Doug: Yes, well they should definitely work it out. I mean If they really want to be here, they really want the church to work, than they have to talk to each other, and get it out of the way, and get on with it.

Doug's idealized view of the church as a family whose members are committed to communicating with one another and to working out any difficulties is evident here. Doug holds the perspective that active church membership implies members have freely chosen to affiliate and accordingly should struggle to resolve differences and then get on with their lives together.

Among the young women, Jen was another respondent who spoke of the church in terms of family. In

describing her relationship to the church, Jen characterized her experience this way in response to the question:

Int: How would you describe what the church is like for you?

Jen: I'd say like a big family. Like a big, close family that gets along. Cause I don't even know if some families get along, as everyone does so well in this church.

Int: So it was a place you could like, belong to?

Jen: Right! Exactly! Just something, besides going to school, just having some other place where people, ..., like even seeing someone from church that I don't know very well, they'll say, "Hi Jen, how are you?" That's something that, ..., that's something to think about too.

Int: You feel people in church get along?

Jen: Most of them. I remember that there was a rumor going around when we were little in Sunday School that some of the older people in church didn't want the younger people in church. And I remember saying, "whooo, this is ...," I just couldn't believe it. I thought, "How could this be - how could, ..., how could that be?"

As did Charles and Doug, Jen describes her view of the church as a warm and accepting family where members are caring and get along with one another. Her belief in this portrayal of relationships among church members was so strong that she recalled doubting her own ears when overhearing talk suggesting children were not welcomed by some members in the church.

Sheila was another respondent who thought of her relationship to the church in terms of an extended

family. She described her experience in these terms when asked what she thought about relationships in the church:

Sheila: Well, at St. Bridget's it's very, very family. Family and very, very close knit. Oh, everybody, everybody is related to everybody else in that church. And everybody remembers when my brother and sister were, ..., you know, tiny babies. Remember when, ..., my sister was adopted, I mean baptized. So I mean, it's very close knit, so that's one good thing about St. Bridget's, because the Catholic Church doesn't have that very much anymore.

Int: How do you feel about that?

Sheila: It should be a family. It should be like a family.

Int: In what way's is St. Bridget's like a family to you?

Sheila: Ahhh, everybody is willing to help everybody else. If you need help, all you have to do is ask someone. And everybody KNOWS everybody else. Cause it's kinda small. So that, in that way, it's like a family. And everybody knows what's going on with everybody else (giggles). So, in that way, that's important in a church.

Int: You didn't mind people knowing all about you?

Sheila: No, not really, especially at St Bridget's, because they're all like grandmotherly. They're all like, "Oh, come over here and try this Sheila, come over here and try this," and I'm like, "Oh no, it's quite alright. That's OK, I don't like cabbage soup. Thanks, but no." They're all so nice and everything, I feel so bad when I have to say no because I don't like what they're trying to feed me. But, everybody is very nice. I mean, I don't really know about this Congregational Church so, ..., I mean St Bridget's was like a family, and here, ..., everybody knows my mother, but I'm sure they would all be nice here too.

Sheila likewise perceived the church to be like a warm close knit family whose members could be relied on for help. In her view, church members were people who acted as if they were related by blood or marriage, and who took extra care to be supporting to one another. In this account, she seemed willing to consider the possibility that in joining another church, she would be treated by the members in a similar fashion.

Likewise of Catholic background, Karen was another respondent who spoke of the church as a warm, accepting family and described her perception of membership in terms of the quality of relationships. After speaking about trying out several different churches of various faiths, Karen characterized her view of church membership in these terms when asked:

Int: How do you feel now about membership in this church ?

Karen: I feel so as a person here, I love it and everyone.

Int: You feel like a person in this Congregational church?

Karen: Yeah, it's a family and I feel like, ..., I love going to church!

Int: What makes the church like a family?

Karen: Everyone is just so kind and willing to help you out with everything. They really, I mean when I first came here, like no one knew me or anything and I'd come and everyone would be so happy and always there to greet you, and just everything. I mean people were smiling and just the way they come up to talk to you and get to know you and just, it's great. And then once you know everyone

it's just, I mean, I haven't seen anyone who are enemies in the church. Everyone seems to like each other.

Int: So one of the reasons you like being involved in church is the way people relate?

Karen: Umm, yeah. I don't know what church, I mean I don't know what it would be like if you were by yourself if you went someplace, you know, like if I was in the church, whatever, by myself, you know, one person listening to some, I mean, I would still love it just as much, but it's great to have all these people who care about you, believing in the same thing, and all being together, and they're all getting together, you know, you know (laughs) it's great, like a family.

For Karen, discovering positive, warm, and caring relationships seemed to have much to do with her understanding of the experience of church membership. For her the church was like a family in that members shared the same values, recognized and cared about her as a person, and remained together as a unit to worship.

Having presented her perception of the church as being like a warm and supporting family, she went on to say this when asked about membership:

Int: What was it like to becoming a member?

Karen: Oh, confirmation was so exciting, umm I was just about to bring that up. It was, I can't, I mean, I was smiling through the whole thing. I mean, we were down, kneeling down, and the minister was in front of me, you know, confirming me. I was just, I had this huge smile on my face, I don't think I've ever smiled so hard. It was so exciting, it really was. I just, I felt like, you know, I'm moving on and now I am really, you know, a part, I'm a member. I'm a part of this big family. I felt important, and I felt, you know, I was just so excited (laughs).

To Karen, coming from a single parent household, confirmation was experienced as a joyful celebration and rite of passage. No longer considered a child, she felt as if she had moved on to become part of the warm and accepting company of adult church members.

A Positive Place or Experience. Another aspect of active religious involvement seemed to involve the respondents perceiving the church to be a positive place, and participation a positive experience. For example, the church was characterized as a positive place by Charles, who talked about his perception this way when asked:

Int: What do you think it was that started you wanting to go to church yourself?

Charles: Well, maybe it was the realization that church, that ..., it's not that bad, kind of thing. You can make decisions for yourself at a point, you don't have to be told everything to do, and you kinda realize that you know church is something that's good for you, that will hopefully have a positive effect on you when you grow up.

Int: How could that be good for you? In what way?

Charles: Ahh, well, you can, you know, they can give you better ideas, things to do. Instead of turning to drugs, you can participate in, say, committee work, or something like that. And that would give you something to do that would be beneficial.

Charles appeared to understand that he would derive positive results in his life by participating in church activities. In this case, he spoke of the

church as a place that could provide options to benefit him that would otherwise be unavailable to an adolescent youth.

Along with her sense of responsibility as a Sunday School teacher, Barbara also spoke about her participation in church activities as representing a positive experience in her life. When asked why she took part in church activities, she had this to say:

Barbara: Well I go because I, I teach, you know, I like, I make my parents drive me to church!

Int: Why? How come?

Barbara: Well, Mom's not home or doing something and she can't go, so it's "Dad, take me to church!" Because, I have, I have a responsibility to teach Sunday School. And, I like going! I made, I made a commitment, and I'm going to keep it.

Int: A commitment?

Barbara: Yeah, right. I think it's fun to teach. I like teaching, yeah. And the kids like me, so, ..., I don't like not being there.

Int: So, what keeps you coming now is your sense of responsibility?

Barbara: That, and, ..., something to DO. You know it's something to do and talk with people and stuff like that, you know. I don't WANT to sit around on my butt, and watch TV. Or stay around the house, you know? So GO somewhere, go somewhere and talk to people.

Int: So it's something to do?

Barbara: Yeah. And, it's a place to go, you know, it's not like being on the street. It's a place to go on Sunday, like you have youth group, instead of doing your homework.

Barbara's view of the church as a positive place is derived in part from her enjoyment in teaching Sunday School. Going to church and participating with friends in church activities is seen as a positive experience and a rewarding alternative to staying at home on the weekend.

Barbara went on to describe her feelings about participating in church activities. Asked if she were more religious now or in the past, she had this to say:

Barbara: That all depends. Sometimes I feel religious, sometimes I don't. When I go to church, I feel better.

Int: You go to church to feel better?

Barbara: Most of the time, I just go. And not even knowing I'm feeling bad, I'm just feeling my normal self. And then when I go, actually feel like I've released all the bad things, and I feel a lot better, after I go to church. It's a little bit of a healing thing, do you know what I mean? When you do things, you know? Even though you aren't healing, AFTER going to church, you feel a lot better.

Although Barbara speaks of feeling better after being at church, in her view she does not go to church seeking this benefit. Nor does she necessarily view her participation as a religious experience. While not motivating her participation, she nonetheless experiences a positive healing effect by taking part in religious activities, and feels better as a result.

In overview, we have examined in this section how church youth describe their perception of the

conditions and circumstances supporting their active religious involvement. For some of the respondents, relational ties seemed paramount in serving to either motivate or reinforce their active religious participation. Relational elements that emerged as the youth presented their perceptions included the opportunity for interpersonal contact, the maintenance of peer group bonds, experiencing a sense of belonging, and their viewing the church as an idealized family. Other respondents described their religious involvement in terms of viewing the church as a safe haven or sanctuary, as a place to have fun, or as a setting providing them the opportunity to benefit from a positive experience.

Religious Disengagement

In this final section we will examine a theme emerging from the data that offers to provide insight into another aspect of adolescent membership behavior. While in no way a substitute for the inside perspective of teenage organizational actors who have in fact already severed active ties with the church, this section will explore the respondent's understanding of

why their peers, likewise youth having been raised in the church, seemingly disengage from religious activity in adolescence.

In presenting their perceptions, several of the church youth described how dropping out as an option was felt to be either a consequence of failing to find meaning in religious activity or because of changing religious values. Endowed with a feeling of invulnerability, other respondents spoke of religious disengagement as the result of experiencing no felt need for religion in their young lives.

While gender differences were suggested as playing a part in accounting for drop out behavior, other youth viewed withdrawal from religious activity as a consequence of their peers having to hold down a job to earn money. Similarly, several respondents explained drop out behavior as the result of conflicting demands on a teenager's time.

In addition, other church youth held the perception that their peers dropping out of religious participation resulted from a lack of family support and peer pressure. In contrast, several adolescents explained how it appeared to them that rebellion leading to disengagement was associated with feeling forced to come to church. In a similar vein, one youth spoke of his own experience of feeling intimidated,

while still other adolescents explained how their involvement with the church had been viewed as a negative experience. To inform our understanding of how religious disengagement is understood from the perspective of religiously active youth, dropout behavior will be examined in closer detail in the remainder of this chapter.

Lack of Meaningfulness or Tangible Results. When asked to relate his perception of why some church youth seemed to drop out of church or become religiously inactive in adolescence, Dan had this to say:

Dan: My opinion is that people don't go to church because there's a lot of things that they don't understand. And it's not always explained to them in a way that they can relate to, so they can say, "I'm learning something, this is worthwhile. It helps me so I will want to go." It's more, "This is boring. This is not helping me any. If I'm just falling asleep, why do it?"

Int: Well, you said earlier you found the worship service boring and the sermons you couldn't understand. Why did you keep coming? What made a difference for you?

Dan: That was my parent's influence. They said, "It's something we want you to do. It's good, you may not understand it now, (which I didn't) but you will understand it later (which I do)."

Int: And now you keep coming. How come?

Dan: Because I feel it helps me in my life, it enhances my life. It is something that is good, a positive influence.

Int: It's your choice and it's positive?

Dan: Right. I think maybe with kids who don't go, they dropped out, ..., well maybe I wanted to, but I didn't and I stuck with it, and now I'm seeing the rewards. Whereas, maybe if they came back now they could too, but they don't. Because, they remember their past experience with it, and they didn't have a good experience. So now they're saying, "I don't want to go."

In this exchange, Dan appears to be aware that unless church was experienced as a worthwhile and rewarding activity, adolescents would not attend unless compelled to by their parents. In his case, parental influence fostered attendance until Dan was able to appreciate that church was life enhancing and his time there well spent.

Dan continued to explain his feelings about active involvement and disengagement in these terms when questioned further:

Int: When you have kids of your own, how are you going to raise them?

Dan: Same way as my parents, you know, tell them that church is good, something that you should do. You don't have to, but something that my wife and I want you to do. So it's all up to them. But I hope to have an influence on them, whether they go or not.

Int: So initially, much as in your own life, you would take your kids to church?

Dan: Right.

Int: And at some point, they would make a decision?

Dan: Right, right. But I wouldn't necessarily be upset if they didn't join the church because, you know, it's their choice. If they don't want to, you can't make them. Church is not something that

you have to do, even after you have learned all you can learn, you know, it's just something you should choose to do.

Dan appears convinced of the value of religious participation, but understands that in the long run children can not really be forced to join. He appears to believe that it is OK to drop out if it is a matter of informed choice, and realizes that parent's can only do so much to influence the values and behavior of their children.

Another youth talked about his perception of why teenagers seemingly drop out of religious activities in terms very similar to Dan's. Charles described his point of view this way when asked:

Int: Why do you think kids drop out of the church?

Charles: I think because they're not getting, not getting tangible results. They're not seeing, what they're doing. Ahhh, I think that perhaps, later on, like after college, after they've gotten married and settled down, they realize that actually church is something that is good, that they'd probably rejoin.

Int: What do you mean by tangible results?

Charles: Well, like you go to church and you worship and you pray, and say, you see, you meet friends after church, like for fun and stuff. And depending how active you are, you have your committees or youth group or stuff like that. But you don't actually, don't actually see something that, say that you practically build, you wouldn't build it like a car, by going to church. But what you're doing when your going to church, by paying the offering, is that you're helping other people, especially people, in many cases, cause the church will help give them food, money, and shelter, and

like that. And if you don't see that, then they might get discouraged and think, "What is the point? I'm not doing anything." Something like that.

Int: How come you are able to have this perspective, but other kids wouldn't? What made a difference?

Charles: I've always read the paper and watched the news. Ahh, when you do stuff like that, you can read about droughts in other parts of the world that are causing thousands of people to starve, and you realize that, well yeah, if I give money to the church, you're going to help out. That's sort of what the Heifer Project is all about, you know.

Int: So service projects are important?

Charles: Yeah, for me it would be like impacting on the world.

Charles seems to be aware that the spiritual and relational aspects of religious activity are viewed by some as intangible or impractical. For those youth lacking a broader knowledge of the church's humanitarian function, church involvement may come to be regarded as pointless, causing them to disengage from religious involvement until later in life.

The reason teenagers drop out of religious activity was likewise attributed by another youth to the lack of meaningfulness of religion in their lives. Karen talked about her perception of religious disengagement this way when asked:

Int: Do you feel that the church has met your needs as a young girl?

Karen: Yeah, I suppose so. You know, being a teenager is a hard period in life and hmmm, well

so isn't every other, you know, age. But hmmm, I think that's why, I think that's why people drop out as being a teenager.

Int: Why?

Karen: They have, they feel like, I think a lot of people don't even.... I mean, they believe in God, but they don't see any reason, they just think that church is just a place where they get bored for an hour wasting their time. Their social lives are too busy, they stay out at parties, you know, they're too tired to get up for church. So church isn't, ..., God may be important to them, but church necessarily isn't. It's just a place where you can go to hear someone preach about God. But they just, I think a lot of teenagers feel that, you know, they can pray to God or whatever on their own time - they don't need a church. And there are, their activities, you know, keep them so busy that church doesn't fit into their schedule.

Karen seems to be aware that, while adolescents may feel that God is important in their lives, they can pray on their own time without needing a church. That is why, she explains, teens often do not feel a need to go to church, which they see as boring and a waste of time. Given their social calendars and busy schedules, religious activities do not give them enough return on their investment of time and energy.

Changing Religious Values. Asked how she felt these issues applied to her own life, Karen went on to explain that dropping out of church was a response to confusion in her life around changing religious values. Karen described her situation this way when discussing these changes:

Int: As we were coming in, you said your Dad was Catholic and your Mom was Protestant. How was that for you?

Karen: Well, wherever we've lived, it's been a different church. Over the years we've switched back and forth, and then finally, when we moved back here, I was enrolled at St. Joseph's, and then I told my Mom and we were talking about it. That's when I came to the pastor here. I was really confused about religion, all these years switching back and forth, and they both had different ways of believing. I didn't know what to do. So for a year I didn't go to Sunday School or Church or anything because I had a lot of thinking to do.

Int: Sounds like your mother let you have some freedom in making decisions about yourself.

Karen: Yeah. She thinks it's important, and that's why she didn't mind when I took a year off, from church, cause she knew how confused I was, and she felt really bad because she didn't, you know, mean to make me confused. But actually, it wasn't her fault, it was no one's fault. It was actually good because I got to see both churches and both religions.

Int: What kinds of things were you confused about?

Karen: Well, the beliefs, and, umm, just the basic, like, in the past of both religions, the priest at the Catholic church saying one thing, and then I'd hear at Protestant churches saying something else. They were probably the same stories, but they were altered, and I just, I was just not sure what I wanted or what anything was.

Int: So you took a year off?

Karen: I took a year off and I did a lot of thinking. Like I said, I got to the point where I didn't know if I believed in God. And then I came to the pastor here and talked to him and that's how it all happened.

The dynamic of worshiping in two faiths had left Karen in a state of unhappy confusion regarding her religious beliefs that she resolved by dropping out of religious activity for a year. Finally, after much thought and soul searching, this period of disengagement was resolved by her choosing to join and become an active member in a Protestant church.

Karen additionally had this to say about teenagers dropping out as a consequence of changing values:

Karen: Well, on the other hand, a lot of them are confused. I have a friend right now who's not going to church, the Catholic church. The family's going there, but, she doesn't know if she believes in God. So people go through different stages in their lives when they question God. Those are basically the two or three major reasons people stop going to church: Because they don't have time for it (or they're too lazy) or, you know, they don't see a need for it, they don't see a need for going, or they're questioning religion. While realizing that some church youth drop out

due to time constraints, or failure to see a need for religion in their lives, Karen appears to be aware that teenagers who go to church may in fact be quite confused and in turmoil over shifting beliefs and values. And yet, she suggests that others who disengage may similarly be going through a stage where religious questions are being sorted out.

Sheila, the another young woman from a Catholic background, also spoke of being entangled in a web of

shifting belief and changing religious values. When asked why she was no longer interested in being active in church, Sheila had this to say:

Sheila: My mother said it's because I don't feel that I need God right now. And that may be it, I don't know, sometimes I'm so confused about it. I don't know, she may be right.

Int: Is that true? You said "may" be it when you talk about feeling a need for God?

Sheila: Well, I mean, I, I, I don't know. I used to feel close to God and stuff and I just don't anymore.

Int: When did you start feeling differently?

Sheila: Well in the eighth grade, I liked God, and I still like God. I believe in God, and I pray and all that kind of stuff. I was different then.

Int: How come it got to be different for you?

Sheila: I don't know, I felt like, close to God. I, I like said my rosary every night. And then we had an exchange student at that point. So I think that might have had something to do with it. She was very, very close to God, and she showed me what it was and stuff, so I don't know. And then I kinda stopped liking it, and I started realizing that I didn't like a lot of the things that the Catholic church says. So, it just sort of lost it's interest to me, because I don't agree with it.

Int: What sort of things don't you agree with?

Sheila: Umm, most everything. I don't believe that the Catholic Church has the right to say what I should do and shouldn't do in my private life. I don't believe that the Catholic Church has the right to say, that because a woman has an abortion, she's not forgiven by God. That's none of their business, it's between her and God. They have no right to tell me what to do. It's my life and my decision. They can guide me, but they can't condemn me because I don't, ..., it's because I choose to do something that I'm not

supposed to. So, I mean, I just think they're a bunch of old fogeys who don't know what they're talking about.

Int: It sounds like the church intrudes in your life in ways you don't like?

Sheila: Well, I mean it was pounded into me since I was in fifth grade: you're not allowed to kiss boys; you're not allowed to let boys kiss you; you don't do this, you don't do that; you don't smoke; you go to church every Sunday; you take communion this way; you do it this way, and you don't talk during church; you don't put your feet on the kneeler. I mean, it's a bunch of rules. I mean church isn't supposed to be rules. It's silly. If they believe that, let them believe it.

Compelled to attend church by her Catholic parents, Sheila nonetheless speaks as if she was quite at odds with the beliefs and teachings of the Catholic Church. No longer feeling close to God, and believing that the church attempts to intrude into the personal aspects of her life, she would certainly have dropped out but for parental pressure.

Asked what it would take for her to become actively involved in church again, Sheila described her situation this way:

Sheila: Back again? No, no, I mean, I HAVE to go now. But, if I were to start going by myself, I would go because I wanted to. Not to be with my friends, but because I wanted to.

Int: For religious or spiritual reasons?

Sheila: Oh no. If I was going to church, I would go because I wanted to go, for whatever reasons I wanted to go. Like spiritual kinds of reasons, and it may happen yet. I mean a lot of people that I've talked to say, "Oh, I didn't like church for

a time and then I just went back." So, I mean, I just may be going through a stage. I don't know, it's totally possible.

Int: But now you don't really want to go?

Sheila: Well, I suppose your supposed to go to church because God wants you to go. I mean God gave us everything, so you should give some time back to Him. You can do it on your own just as well as in church. So if you don't feel comfortable in church, I don't think that you should have to go.

Int: It sounds important for you to make up you're own mind about it?

Sheila: Yes. I like making up my own mind about everything. When I go to college, my parents will have no say in whether I go to church or not. So, I'll make my decision then, probably.

Denied freedom of choice, Sheila now struggles with her beliefs but has yet to make up her own mind about whether she would be religiously active if not compelled by her parents. Since she believes that she can relate to God without going to church, she looks forward to college as the time when she will finally have the opportunity to choose and make a faith decision on her own.

No Felt Need for Religion. Sheila went on to say this when asked more directly to talk about why she thought kids drop out of religious activity:

Int: Considering all the things we've talked about, why do you think kids stop going to church?

Sheila: I think it's because they don't feel that they need God. They haven't had an experience where they feel close to God. If their parents don't make them go, or haven't exposed them to it,

of course they're not going to go. A lot of kids aren't actively churchy. It's just because it's not part of our society. Church is not cool to a lot of people. A lot of kids just don't want to waste their time. If they're out late on a Saturday night, and have to get up early on Sunday morning to go to church, it's easier just to stay in bed.

Int: How are you going to raise your own kids?

Sheila: I'll raise my kids in church. I don't know what church. I'll raise them with the values I've grown up with. I'll make them go to church. I know it's nasty. I may give them a choice once they reach fifteen, but I will make them go to church. Then they'll be able to make an informed decision.

Int: Did you ever reach the point with your parents where they said, "OK, now it's your decision whether you go or not?"

Sheila: No. I have to go. I've told my parents I don't like it. I've made my displeasure clear. They still make me go. They're like, "Once you turn eighteen, then you can make your decision."

In this exchange Sheila expresses her belief that children growing up in our society need to be introduced to religious values, or they simply will not be religiously active. However, Sheila also maintains that church youth who do not feel close to God or who have not experienced a need for God will drop out unless compelled by parents.

Immortality. Another respondent explained why she felt little need for church in terms of her sense of immortality. When asked about her religious behavior, Jen described her situation this way:

Jen: It's that, right now, I feel nothing can happen to me. I am like, you know, I am like in this little bubble. Nothing can happen, so I don't need God. That's what a lot of people think. I'm in like, nothing's going to happen to me. I'm not going to get sick, nothing bad is going to happen. So why do you need God if nothing bad is going to happen to you?

Int: So you feel nothing bad can happen?

Jen: Well, I know that something bad can happen to me because I've seen so many movies and stuff. I've seen kids at school get hurt and stuff, and heard things, so I know something bad can happen to me. I pray and I believe in God, but I don't know that I feel I need Him desperately right now. I believe in Him, but it's not like I need to go to church. I don't feel that I need to go to church, whereas, I may feel that I need to go to church next year. Something terrible might happen, and I might feel that I can't handle it unless I have God. I understand that may happen to me, but right now nothing terrible has happened, so I don't feel that I have to go to church.

In this passage Jen recounts her belief that at this point in her life, nothing bad can happen and no harm can befall her. Consequently, she says she has no need for God and likewise no need to go to church. While not denying that the situation may change in the future, for the time being she has no reason to bother with God.

Gender Differences. Barbara appeared to be aware of the effect that gender plays in church involvement. She had this to say in response to the question when asked about prioritizing her activities:

Int: So you had to give things up if you wanted to go to church, and other kids don't want to do that?

Barbara: Mostly guys.

Int: How come? What's the difference between girls and guys?

Barbara: Macho. Big macho men don't go to church, or things like that. If guys go, it's cause their parents go to church.

Here Barbara explains how gender plays a part in religious behavior, by pointing out that males gave a very low priority to religious activity. It was her opinion in fact, that the boys she knew to be religiously active only went because of their parents.

Needing to Earn Money. An apparent lack of religious involvement was characterized by another youth in terms of having to work and to be earning money taking precedence over religious activity. Travis presented his perception this way when asked about religious activity:

Int: What do you think now about people going to church?

Travis: I still think we should go, but I don't feel it's a sin that I don't go. I think it's no big thing. Nowadays, everything revolves around, this really gets into it, the money. See in my case, I've got to work, and a lot of times I can't make it. And in fact, awhile ago, businesses weren't even running on Sunday. Now, it seems it's not even recognized, you know. And I don't know, it seems

like money has taken over the family. People just want to do business rather than getting back to the religious roots, and such.

Int: So money is more important?

Travis: Depends. Right now, I'm not working forty hours a week. For a lot of people, the problem is you do work the forty hours a week, and you want those two days to relax and such. My parents were always working, and they liked the two days off. They don't worry about going to church, say if they want to go away for the weekend. They'll do that, ..., that's the way it is nowadays.

Travis clearly holds that having to earn a living dictates how non-work time is spent for many people, including his parents. Travis contends that social norms no longer tend to support religious behavior, and that family values have shifted under economic pressures to favor secular ends.

Conflicting Demands. When asked more directly later on to explain why he thought adolescents dropped out of church, Travis had this to say:

Travis: Something else better to do. If your out late Saturday night, you don't want to get up to go to church. Time-wise, I kinda like the Catholic way, I mean, it's 45 minutes. You go at 9 o'clock, and you leave a lot of the rest of the day. Say with us in this church, we go up to 11 o'clock, then with fellowship, say 12:30, it doesn't leave you time to do stuff. If you get out earlier, it seems like you have more time to do stuff.

In this passage Travis gives religious behavior a low priority in terms of other secular activities, and seems to little value the relational aspects of going

to church. Karen expressed a viewpoint similar to Travis' when talking about the reasons church youth dropped out. She had this to say when asked:

Int: Why do you think some kids aren't active in church?

Karen: I think that they're at a time in their life when, ummm, they have so much going on that church doesn't fit into their schedule, or they just, they're so always thinking about boy's (or girls), or umm, their social lives, they're always thinking about that. They don't really have time for it.

Int: Well, like look at your own social life, it seems your pretty busy and involved too?

Karen: Well, I'm involved, I'm real active in everything, and, umm, I don't know, I always find time for church though. I like being active in church. I have church friends and also friends in school, and like, all the church people too. I mean I'm involved with them and socially aware, and I talk to them, and such.

Like Travis, Karen seemed to think that teenagers had little time for religious activities in their crowded schedules. However, Karen seemed to be more aware of the relational aspects of religious involvement, and saw going to church as an opportunity to be actively engaged with friends.

Peer Pressure. Peer pressure was recognized by some of the respondents as a potent force effecting their religious attitude and behavior. Having explained to the writer that he was going to college in

the fall, Travis went on to talk about his situation this way when asked if he expected to remain religiously active:

Travis: Yeah, in a way I've thought about that. I guess what would stop me from going to church when I go to college is peer pressure. If I'm hanging around with a group of people who aren't going to do that, I don't want to stand out in the crowd. I'm not going to church and be thought of as a nerd or something.

Anxious in a new situation to fit in with his college friends, Travis has already decided that he will bow to peer pressure and forego religious involvement rather than stand out in a crowd. Doug was another youth who talked about religious disengagement in terms of peer pressure. When asked to describe his experience with friends from Sunday School who over the years seemed to have dropped out of active religious involvement, he had this to say:

Int: Why do you think those kids stopped coming to church? Once they've started the same road you've started, with Sunday School, why would they drop out?

Doug: I think it has a lot to do with school, who they become friends with, what their friends are, what they make other kids become. I mean, if you want to be an individual, than you can do whatever you want. But I see some kids, they just get in a group, and they go along for the ride, and then just drop out of the things they've started. Like they just stop coming to Sunday School, church, but it doesn't have to be that way.

Int: So it's being an individual?

Doug: I think so - who keeps going with the church. I think of people who just, I have a couple of examples but I won't name names, but they became

friends with these guys with girls and that was it. Forget church. I don't think either of them go to church anymore.

Int: Why don't they come to church?

Doug: Because the life they're living, not, ..., not just come to church, but the way the things that they're doing, I think that they're going to get burned out. Their grades are plummeting, and they're not going to be able to, their high school education may be, then they'll have to come back, turn to something. Church is a good place to turn.

Doug seemed to be aware that the choice of associates can greatly influence an adolescent, and that friends exert considerable pressure in terms of shaping attitude and behavior. Given the freedom to choose when old enough to make the decision by their parents, Doug feels some church youth may be swayed by their school friends away from religious values and activities, rather than making a decision in his or her own best interest as an individual.

Dan was another respondent who described peer pressure as one of the reasons he had observed his friends from Sunday School turn from active religious involvement. Dan described his experience this way when asked a question about peer pressure:

Int: I wondered as you were growing up if you felt pressure from your friends in terms of being a person who goes to church?

Dan: A lot of times my friends didn't go to church, so they, you know, they weren't really supportive or anything. They didn't go and I'd try to have them go, but they, you know, they didn't want to

get up, or they were sick, or you know, they didn't usually want to go, and I went with my family or I didn't go.

Here Dan talks about peer pressure in a passive sense whereby his friends provided little support in terms of his participation in religious activities. Consequently, Dan was left with only his family to model and encourage his religious behavior.

Lack of Family Support. A lack of family support of their religious participation was recognized by the youth as a significant concern as they grew up in the church. For instance, in speaking about the effects of peer pressure, Barbara seemed to feel that the absence of family support contributed to the problem in no small way. She had this to say when asked:

Int: Why do you think kids stop coming to church?

Barbara: I think it's other kids influence. And the parents. The parents don't go, then they're not going to church.

Int: What do you mean, is it parents or peers that have the most to do with kids dropping out?

Barbara: Their parents, and their peers a little bit. But I don't believe peers have too much to do with it. It's mostly their parents, and busyness.

Int: So, did other friends influence you?

Barbara: Yeah, well, it all depends on the person you are. I think the people, who start out when they are little, and their parents, who make them go to church, those families you can see who have been going to church since they've been little, and they're growing up, and they're going to keep

on going. Nothings going to stop them anyways. Like take R.V., he used to come to church, but his parents never come to church, so he just stopped going. It's mostly the parents doing, I think.

Int: You mean earlier on, because if your mother stopped coming to church...,?

Barbara: It's mostly earlier on. Like in 3d, 4th, 5th and 6th grade, if the parents are going to start dropping out, the kids are going to start dropping out. And in the 7th, 8th, and 9th grades, it's really up to you. But it's in those middle grades, where it's like "either/or" where your sorta separated from your parents arm, or wing, it's something like that.

Barbara seemed to understand that in the earlier years, families influenced church going to a greater degree than later on, and their active participation was a necessary condition in establishing a religious orientation with active participation in their children. By the middle grades and high school, Barbara suggests that the youth may be ready to decide for themselves, and peer pressure comes to play a more direct role.

Barbara later on had this to say as she continued to talk about the influence of peers:

Int: How come you don't think peers have much to do with it?

Barbara: Well wait a minute, let me go back to that. I think PARTIES, parties and friend activities like going to the mall on Saturday, THAT, that might have something to do with it. Sleepover, or something like that, might have something to do with it. Then you don't go to church. Sleepover Saturday night, and you don't go to church in the morning, you stay over at your friend's house. I know that for the last couple of years, when I wanted to go to church, then I

couldn't sleep over. There's been a lot of those things. I've cancelled a lot of sleepovers at my girl friend's houses this past year because of my teaching responsibilities.

In this passage Barbara seems to recognize that the social involvement of adolescents with their friends can often constitute a conflict in priorities. She suggests that unless a youth has an overriding sense of responsibility in regard to choosing a religious activity, for instance teaching Sunday School, peer pressure would likely result in the selection of another option.

Rebellion. The reason why church youth dropped out of active religious participation was characterized by another of the church youth in terms of rebellion. Sheila discussed her perception this way when asked:

Int: OK, so why do you think rebellion plays a part in kids leaving the church?

Sheila: I think it's true in a lot of ways. My friends want me to go. It used to be my parents wanted me to go, so of course I didn't want to go. Now I don't want to go just cause I don't want to go. It is, I mean for a lot of the kids, that's the only way that they can rebel without getting into, like serious problems. Like if you don't want to get involved in all that "bad" stuff. The church is a good way to rebel.

Sheila suggests here that for a young person struggling in opposition to parental controls or peer

pressure, rebelling over religious expectations is a relatively safe route to follow, without the risk of getting into serious trouble.

Likewise, another respondent talked about his opposition to religious expectations in terms very similar Sheila. Charles described his situation this way when asked:

Int: I've heard you say that some kids stop going to church because they are rebelling against parental authority, but I'm wondering how come that doesn't seem to be the case with you?

Charles: I think that's what it was back when I didn't want to go to church, I think that's what it was. But now, you know, I can make up my own mind, I can decide, yeah, I want to go to church, and I like it.

Int: When do you think it might have been?

Charles: Ahhh, probably from about second or third grade up until now. Still, some things, ahhh, I detest Mom's music and she detests mine. We argue about it all the time.

It seems that from Charles' point of view, an early period of rebellion over parental religious expectations was resolved by him being allowed to freely choose to participate or not. As consequence of making that decision, his values were clarified, and he now appears to enjoy religious activity.

Jen was another respondent who described how being allowed free choice in religious matters served to maintain her valued sense of independence while nullifying rebellion as a response in opposition to her

parents religious expectations. She had this to say when asked in what way rebellion effected her religiosity:

Int: Are you the kind of person who would have rebelled if forced to go to church earlier?

Jen: Hmmm, I don't know. I think I would have gone and I would have not probably have rebelled when I was in Sunday School. But I think now if they said you have to go to this church, I would, ..., I definitely would've put up a fight. I definitely would have said, "well, let me just make my own decisions. Let, ..., why don't you let me choose what I want to choose," And if they said you choose this church, I may, ..., I may not have.

Jen explains that if her parents had not allowed her the freedom to express her religiosity on her own terms, she may well have made an issue of the matter and vigorously opposed their plans, even to the point of refusing to join her parent's church.

Another respondent spoke about rebellion in similar terms to Travis and Charles. Doug explained his point of view this way when asked:

Int: What do you think about the idea of rebellion as a reason kids drop out of the church?

Doug: That could very well be the reason. I guess that goes along with what I was trying to say. That when they get in a group they rebel on their parents and what their parents say, they don't listen to anymore. They're old enough to make their own decisions. I don't see it that way. I see church as a personal thing, that if you want to come, you come, and if you don't you don't. There's a lot of people who don't which, you know, should. I think it's important.

Doug seems to be yet another youth who recognizes that rebellion was a likely oppositional response to parental demands regarding religious expectations. However, in listening to Doug recount his experience, we hear once again that allowing a teenager to make his own decision about religious matters resulted in him taking an affirmative position regarding religious activity.

Forced to Come. Doug continued to speak frankly about his perception of the reasons teenagers disengaged from religious activity. When asked directly why he thought young people dropped out of the church, Doug had this to say:

Doug: A lot of people become like inactive, I think don't really want to be there. People who don't come to church often, they, maybe like once a month, or once every couple of months, don't really want to be there. I know a couple of people my age who only come if there parents absolutely drag them. And they just don't want to. They're sitting there, but they don't want to be there.

Int: Why do you think they don't want to be there?

Doug: I don't think it's ..., just, they think they don't want to be religious, or they don't want to be there. They just want to be like cool, and like, "I don't want to be going to church," something like that, or "It's stupid." I mean just come to church, it's fun. Enjoy it!

Int: What do you mean?

Doug: I think if you're going to come to church, you have to want to come to church really. If you're a member, I mean I know the other kids

sometimes don't want to come, but I think you should come because you want to come. You shouldn't hafta be.

Int: So choice is important?

Doug: Yes. Everyone should have their own decision, if they want to come, they come, in terms of older, I know the younger kids it's a difference but, older kids I think if they want to come they should come.

Int: How do you feel about people who don't come?

Doug: I have, ..., another ..., I guess, sorta qualm, I guess, with people who don't really come except for certain reasons. Like you see that certain kids are, they don't come, they never used to come to Sunday School except like once a month, or something like that. And they never come, and then to be a member, they come. And once they're a member, they stop coming. I don't like that. I mean if you want to become a member, you're going to be coming to church. I mean, that's only logical. Why would you become a member if you're not going to come? I know a couple of people like that.

Doug appears to be aware that oftentimes peers are really not interested or motivated to engage in religious activity, but do so under parental pressure. Accordingly, Doug explains they are likely to drop out if provided the opportunity to decide for themselves. He also speaks of knowing others who, not having had a history of active involvement, yet go through the motions at confirmation time just to satisfy the formal requirements of membership, are most likely to disengage from religious involvement after confirmation.

Karen was another youth who talked about her perception of why church youth she had known dropped out in terms of their being forced to be religiously active. She described her viewpoint this way when asked:

Int: Your active, but why do you think other kids you've known in church don't have anything to do with the church now?

Karen: Maybe because some people were ready to join before, and they weren't. OK, maybe they feel like, "Only when you want me to join, I have to. I get the opportunity to join ONLY when you want me to." Because like, I just heard about this little girl, I'll use this for an example, they only let her do something when they wanted her to, and that's the way she put it.

Int: Is that it?

Karen: Yeah, it's like, you have to be at the right time in your life, and the right stage. For some people it's perfect timing. I think it was perfect timing for me, because I knew, I was in the right state of mind, I had the right need for it at that time. But I think that only when someone else wants you to do something, you're not always going to do it.

Int: So you'd resist?

Karen: Right, right. I know one of the kids my age who did not want to join the church and I know the person was forced, was forced to go through Sunday School, and to go through everything else. But they were dropped off. The parents didn't even go to church with them. they dropped them off at the door and said, "Go." And so the person went alone, and if you go through something alone like that, you're less likely to join, because you want to feel welcomed, and you want to feel surrounded by people, share a warmth, and who are kind to you, and you feel close to. I don't think this person felt that way, and now never comes at all.

Int: Do you mean you're less likely to join if you feel forced?

Karen: Yeah, I mean I know a lot of my friends in the Catholic Church, umm, are like, you know their parents want them to go, and I see that in that way they are being forced. I don't think that any of them would have the choice of choosing their own religion. Their parents probably would say like, "What??" you know, "We brought you up Catholic," you know, "You're Catholic!" And, umm, so I feel bad for them in a way, and they don't really want to go church. They're not interested in it.

Int: Not interested?

Karen: Right, yeah. I think a lot of people take years off because they're not interested at all, and, umm, sometimes they have to find out for themselves, you know, what church and religion mean in their lives. For me, it took me a year. Some people it takes four years, five years, maybe twenty years from now someone could realize how important religion is in their lives, and start going to church. And I think a lot of, particularly students, you know, our age, teenagers, don't go to church for that reason.

Karen explains that in her experience, many youth are compelled to attend church who truly are not interested in being there at this point in their lives. Feeling that teenagers are often not yet ready to make a commitment, she understands why they would disengage from religious activity for a time. Additionally she holds the opinion that youth who feel they are forced to attend church are very likely to dropout, especially if their parents are not sufficiently involved themselves to model religious behavior.

Intimidation. In exploring the issue with active teenagers of why church youth drop out, Jen's story was both unique and informative, as she was a person who had dropped out for at least a year, and only recently returned to active religious involvement. When asked why she had dropped out of church activities in the seventh grade, she had this to say:

Jen: In seventh grade we had to sign these contracts, about our behavior and, we were given these plastic eggs, and if we misbehaved, we'd have to give a plastic egg, and when we ran out, we were kicked out of the class, if we weren't behaving. And I never misbehaved in class (nervous giggle), but I forgot the contract when I came, and, ..., the teacher, I remember, looked right at me, cause they said, "Jen doesn't have her contract." All the kids were saying it, cause they had to bring in theirs. And he said, "she doesn't bring in her contract next time she comes, she's not going to show her pretty little face in this classroom again."

Int: The teacher said that?

Jen: Yeah. So I just, ..., I said, "I'm not going back to this class, because I was intimidated by that."

Int: I don't think of you as a person who would be a troublemaker in class. Were you a wild sort of kid?

Jen: (Laughs) I never caused any problems. I was, I was kinda shy, you know, but I fully participated in class, I was a good, ..., kid, and I didn't think they were going to, ..., I couldn't ever stay, or be a part, after that.

Int: Wow, that's incredible. So it sounds like with those kinds of feeling you didn't want to go back?

Jen: Yeah. So that, that really intimidated me, and it just held me back at the time.

Int: How come you came back after that?

Jen: I, I felt so comfortable with the church, and no one else ever gave me any problems. And I'd grown up here, and I wasn't going to leave for that small thing, but that, that stayed with me for a long time, ..., I, I still have scars from just thinking about it, just, you know, church people aren't supposed to say things like that, ..., no. I just, ..., I did not like that at all.

While many of the respondents described their years in Sunday School in positive terms and thought of their time spent there as more or less worthwhile, Jen's experience was traumatic. Later on, she was able to view herself as an unfortunate victim subjected to the atypical behavior of her classroom teacher, and continued to believe that church people usually did not act that way. Although she dropped out of religious activity for a time, Jen was able in the end to rejoin the church she had grown up in.

Negative Experience. However, other respondents were not as fortunate to share Jen's balanced perspective. For them going to church continued to be viewed as a negative experience. For instance, Sheila had this to say about her perception of religious involvement:

Int: You said you don't like going to St Bridget's now. Would you go to another church?

Sheila: Maybe. I really don't know. I've started going to youth group down at the Methodist Church with some of my friends. And that's, that's fun. And when I go to Boston, my friend Gail, she's a

Congregationalist, I think, and I don't mind going to church with her. It's the Catholic Church that's so boring. You can't say certain words, like you can't say, like "sex." I mean that's like practically a sin. So, like I don't need this.

Int: I was just wondering if was St. Bridget's you felt that way about after going there for four years, or are you like frustrated with religion altogether?

Sheila: Well, I don't know. Right now I'm just kinda like, ..., well I went to a church camp over the summer. I loved it there, it was very peaceful. But I was like, with church, we had church like twice a day, and it was like, United Church of Christ. So it was like Congregational, and things like that. So I was like, even there I was like, "God let it be over, let it be over. It's not religion itself I think, it's just some types of it.

Int: Types?

Sheila: Like the sermon! (giggles nervously) Most sermons are so..., boring. I don't, I don't know, I just feel they're boring.

Int: And the Methodist youth group was fun?

Sheila: Ya, it is, it is. They do, ..., different activities, some fun stuff. I think that is one of the things that is bad about the Catholic Church, they don't DO anything!

Int: It sounds like they wouldn't like what our youth group is doing tonight - 16 boys and girls are going camping in the woods.

Sheila: Uh uh. Nope, nope, no, no, no, no, no, no, NO! That wouldn't be looked, that would not be, ..., that would not be a nice thing to do. Geez! They think, automatically, everybody in there, you put boy and girl together and WOW, here comes the BABY! They don't think, you know, we could control ourselves at all, so they think they have to pound rules into our brains.

Int: I get the sense that the thing you really don't like is worship, Sunday worship, that it's boring.

Sheila: Yeah, I felt REALLY like that, very much. And it's too early in the morning, too.

In this passage Sheila apparently feels the church is not meeting her needs at this point in her life, and is quite bored with the moral teachings, beliefs, and value system of the Catholic Church which she sees as holding little meaning for her beyond representing external rules and strictures that she does not accept. These negative feeling seem to have generalized beyond her immediate situation and have now come to dominate her point of view. Karen, the other respondent raised in the Catholic faith, described her perception of the church in terms very similar to those of Jen. She spoke frankly when asked:

Int: How would you describe your view of what it was like going to the Catholic Church:

Karen: It wasn't a good, ..., a good experience for me.

Int: How come?

Karen: Umm, the Catholic religion, there are so many rules, and just, it seemed like it was more, not a law, but it seemed that everything, ..., there was a rule for everything. And I just felt like, I was like, kinda like a prisoner in a way. I wasn't really a person, and I felt like there was a catch to everything that I did. Having to do with God or anything there was something, if you did something right, there was always something wrong to go along with it.

Int: Oh. What does "a catch" mean?

Karen: It just means, like umm, if you did something, or believed in something, if you did something right, there was always a sin or something else on the opposite side. And so there was too many things, I just didn't feel like a person.

Int: You feel like a person in the Congregational church?

Karen: Yeah, it's a family, and I feel like, like a person and now I love going to church.

Int: What makes you feel like a person?

Karen: There's no right or wrong in what you believe in. Everyone has their own opinions and no one's shot down about them. You're not pushed away, as opposed to the Catholic religion, where you believed in that, and you would not be heard of not believing in it. I mean, people don't see as that's strict, but since I've been exposed to both religions, I see it now, and that's how it was, and that's how I felt. Here it's like, you can be a free person, and you can believe in what you want to believe in, and it's just so loving and everything that I just love it. (laughter). I've never liked church or anything as much as I do now. I really haven't.

Recalling that Karen had dropped out of religious involvement for a year after leaving the Catholic Church, here she describes the episode in her life in terms of feeling much like a prisoner who had been emancipated. Compared to her membership experience with the Catholic Church, she now speaks of feeling free in joining a Congregational church to be her own person in practicing her faith, while being able to maintain an independent point of view and enjoy freedom of expression.

Summary. In this final section examining the meaning of membership behavior, we have heard church youth talk about the reasons teenagers who, like them, grew up in the church, yet appear to disengage from active participation. In presenting their perceptions, several teenagers described how dropping out was felt to be either a consequence of their peers failing to find meaning in religious activity or because of changing religious values. Endowed with a feeling of immortality, other respondents spoke of religious disengagement as the result of experiencing no felt need for religion in their young lives.

While gender differences were suggested as playing a part in accounting for drop out behavior, other youth viewed the withdrawal from religious activity of once active youth as a consequence of having to hold down a job to earn money, and as the result of conflicting demands on their time.

In addition, other church youth held the perception that dropping out of religious participation resulted from a lack of family support and peer pressure. In contrast, several adolescents explained how it appeared to them that rebellion leading to disengagement was associated with feeling forced to come to church, with feeling intimidated, or with viewing the church as a negative experience.

Throughout this chapter we have heard church youth talk about the meaning of membership in a Protestant church from the actor's inside perspective. In the next chapter, we will summarize the findings and discuss the data in referance to the social science literature, as well as from a theoretical perspective. The last chapter will also include a discussion of the data in terms of action research in a religious organization, and close with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter will begin by summarizing the major themes and patterns emerging from a study of the meaning of religious membership behavior from the perspective of active adolescent members of a protestant church. In the second section, an account of the beliefs, concepts, and explicit assumptions relating to membership behavior which comprise the world view and unique perspective of each of the individual actors will be presented.

A third section will comprise a discussion of the data in terms of research findings in the quantitative literature. A fourth section will consider an interesting aspect in the findings of this study in terms of a theoretical perspective. The last section will entail a consideration of interventions in the assessment phase of an action research approach to organizational change in the host church, and conclude with a discussion of implications for future research.

Summary of the Meaning of Membership Behavior

In the course of this study, the voices of religiously active church youth were heard render an account of their perception of membership in a Congregational church. By closely examining how these eight young men and women understood and explained their religious behavior, the meaning of active participation was explored from the inside perspective of the organizational actor.

The Major Themes

Delving into the major themes and patterns that emerged from the data served to inform our understanding of the cognitive processes through which the youth of the church view their world. The major themes included the role of the family in setting the respondents on a religious path, the youth's perception as they grew older of being given, at a certain point in their lives, freedom to choose to engage in religious activities or not, their experience of mid-adolescence as a time of transition, and finally the concepts associated with their active involvement or religious disengagement.

In examining the themes emerging from the data, the respondents described how, as children of church members, they had been firmly set on a religious path. Early church involvement as characterized by the young people was accomplished by families instilling a sense of discipline, by social role modeling, and by communicating religious values through oral history.

As experienced by the youth, family influence regarding religious matters was perceived to be strongly compelling. In fact, many respondents characterized their early religious involvement in terms of being forced as children to attend church.

Whether they viewed their family upbringing as democratic or not, the young people who considered themselves to be religiously active reported that, at some point along the way, they were given freedom of choice about religious behavior. In retrospect, being given the opportunity to choose whether or not to be an active member was recalled as a significant occurrence, and a time when many of the youth came to place a high value on active religious involvement.

As their stories unfolded, the youth's account led to consideration of a theme involving the experience of young church people growing older and entering a period of transition in mid-adolescence. The youth recounted a perception of ongoing changes in their lives that

shaped their point of view regarding the church, and modified their relationship to it.

In the context of membership, the youth described their relationship to the church at this time in terms of their changing needs, changing religious values, and changing membership status. For teenagers experiencing a transition from youth to young adulthood, a perception of marginal membership status at this time was characterized less an issue of religiosity, and more a matter of the degree to which their relationship with the church served to satisfy their psycho-social needs at this juncture in their lives.

Other respondents described this period as being caught between the worlds of childhood and adulthood, with feelings of marginality reflecting the push and pull of role expectations encountered in growing up within the church. The period of transition marked a turning point in the lives of the young church members, who explained how responding to social pressures and changing needs resulted in their either withdrawing from the church or engaging more fully in religious activities as participating members.

For some of the respondents who characterized their religious involvement in positive terms, relational ties seemed paramount in serving to either motivate or reinforce their active religious

participation. Relational elements that emerged as the youth presented their perceptions included the opportunity for interpersonal contact, the maintenance of peer group bonds, experiencing a sense of belonging, and their view of the church as an idealized family. Other respondents described their religious involvement in terms of viewing the church as a safe haven or sanctuary, as a place to have fun, or as a setting providing them the opportunity to benefit from a positive life experience.

However, for other young church members, the time of transition in adolescence marked a turning away from active religious involvement and signaled the youth's seeming disengagement from religious activity. In describing their experience, several of the teenagers told how dropping out was felt to be either a consequence of their failing to find meaning in religious activity or because of changing religious values.

Other church youth endowed with a feeling of invulnerability spoke of religious disengagement in terms of not experiencing much need for religion at this time in their lives. Still other respondents viewed withdrawal from religious activity as a consequence of having to hold down a job, or

characterized drop out behavior as the result of conflicting demands on their time.

In addition to the above, several church youth held the perception that dropping out of religious participation resulted from a lack of family support and peer pressure. In contrast, it appeared to other respondents that rebellion leading to disengagement was associated with feeling forced to come to church, with coming to view their involvement as a negative experience, or in the case of one respondent, as a consequence of feeling intimidated in Sunday School.

The previous section has presented a brief overview of the constructs associated with the major themes emerging from the data as the teenage respondents explained the meaning of their religious behavior. The following section will consider the beliefs, cultural categories, and explicit assumptions comprising the subjective meaning of membership behavior from the unique perspective of each of the adolescent church members.

The Respondent's World View

In obtaining the qualitative data for this study by means of the long ethnographic interview, the author was provided a matchless opportunity to enter the world

of the adolescent church member. Although the church youth were recognized by adult members as a group of "typical teenagers," each of the eight young people interviewed came to be known to the author as a unique individual who provided a singular perspective on the meaning of membership unobtainable by the use of quantitative statistical techniques.

The viewpoints of the young people encompassed many differing interpretations of religiosity and membership. In providing a synthesis of the subjective perspective held by each of the church youth, the following section encapsulates an aspect of the life space of each respondent, and supplies a context within which to examine the meaning of religious behavior from the standpoint of the actor.

Charles' Worldview

In Charles' perspective, the church was thought of as a haven or sanctuary, a politically neutral place any member had the right to go to, offering support to people with differing points of view. Religious feelings at this time did not hold much relevance for Charles, although he thought they might be important to him someday. For now, Charles considered the church a

place to go to be with friends outside of school and an opportunity to meet people.

Charles thought the church provided a valued opportunity to take on adult role responsibilities, a place where he could make a contribution to the real world while practicing leadership and organizational skills. Charles thought of church membership as being part of an accepting family, without social barriers of any kind amongst members.

Being a church member provided Charles both prestige and a sense of direction in life. By framing his moral or ethical perspective, church values became equated with his personal values, which he realized with satisfaction were also shared by other members.

Charles viewed being religiously active as a requirement in order to be part of the communication network in the church. Being tied into the church network opened up opportunities for personal involvement and active participation in community service, which were desirable options of considerable importance to him. Charles felt bound to the church in terms of involvement and relationship, and would feel out of touch and left out if not actively involved.

Travis' Worldview

Travis, on the other hand, grew to be less interested in the church as he became older, especially in terms of the time spent in Sunday School. As a younger student, Travis had felt comfortable in an age appropriate role, but by the 7th grade had begun feeling trapped between the demands of child and adult membership roles. Feeling frustrated by his marginal membership status, Travis consequently dropped out of active membership. However, it was during the period of transition in mid-adolescence that the church youth group came to serve him as a bridge between Sunday School and adult membership, and in effect, recruited him as an active member.

Travis felt he could not enjoy the full benefits of membership until the time he confirmed and formally joined the church. Confirmation was viewed by him both as a rite of passage crossing over to an adult role from an uncomfortable adolescent role, and as a ticket of admission to the world of adult membership and its benefits.

Nonetheless, Travis became active again less for spiritual reasons than out of curiosity about the inner or political workings of the church. As a senior, Travis planned to go to business college in the Fall.

Yet unlike a "business," Travis thought the church should be people oriented and that members should come to church with the intention of helping others, leaving materialistic and worldly views outside. But lacking a spiritual or relational connection himself, Travis found few reasons to go to church, and many reasons not to attend.

Doug's Worldview

In contrast to Travis, Doug was raised in the church and thought of it as his home. He thought Sunday School was unlike regular school in that he had fun while learning. Doug felt he had always belonged to the church. Therefore, being confirmed was not seen as a rite of passage, but rather as another fun filled membership experience. He expected no change in the way people treated him after confirmation, other than that he now could freely associate with the older members, and not just the children.

For Doug, the importance of being a member was in being accepted as an adult, with adult perks and benefits. In addition, Doug maintained a positive relationship with the minister, which paralleled and helped define his feeling of relationship to the church. This feeling was augmented by his family, for

Doug thought his father modeled religious behavior almost as much as did the minister. Doug thought of church as being like a family in terms of holding to positive values, but better than a family in that people freely chose to be together. Consequently, he thought people should want to, rather than have to, make it work.

Although immersed in church culture since early childhood, a sense of religiosity did not impact him greatly until the 7th or 8th grade, at a time he became more spiritual with the beginning of a personal faith. Doug experienced this transformation as a natural occurrence, part of growing older, but specific to the Junior High years, a time he thought young members could be lost to the church for want of a sense of belonging and as a consequence of pressure from peers owning different values.

Doug thought that the exercise of freely choosing to become an active member was of key importance to him. Doug joined and was active in the church because he wanted to be there, and was not effected by peer pressure because he saw his church involvement as a personal choice of great benefit to him in meeting his need for a sense of belonging.

Dan's Worldview

Like Charles, Dan also viewed the church as a safe haven and home-like place, free from the rules and regimentation he found in parochial school. While compelled in the beginning by his family to go to church for religious reasons - to learn spiritual values and to worship, he now freely chose to go for his own personal reasons and to give thanks.

Dan thought going to church was fun, a chance to be with friends and to become involved in social activities. Growing up, he thought of Sunday School as a social time, not a learning time, which in one sense was a disappointment for him. As far as Dan was concerned, learning about religion happened at the Catholic school he attended.

Dan viewed the minister as a benign authority figure, whose role was that of teacher, and not that of friend. Dan felt he had a closer relationship with his youth group leaders, who he experienced as real people. In fact, he relied on the youth group to serve as a social bridge between his town friends and himself, as he attended school in a distant city. Dan considered his church friends a self-selected group who had a sense of positive values not shared by Catholic school friends.

In Dan's view, being active in church offered an opportunity for personal growth and self-improvement. Dan thought his fundamental relationship to the church was based on religious education, with a focus on the intellect rather than its spiritual aspects. The latter he held secondary to factual learning.

In fact, Dan professed that spiritual reasons were not why youth went to church at his age. Dan thought that the worship service, especially the sermon, was basically boring to young people. Learning, however, had a positive value for him, so that Sunday School took on a special importance. In Dan's perspective, church was less a setting, but rather more like something good to do, separate from spiritual beliefs. Religion was something he wanted to understand, not feel, acquit himself, or relate to. Dan had yet to recognize that there might be a spiritual or relational component beyond the cognitive knowledge that he sought at this point in his life.

Jen's Worldview

In marked contrast, Jen viewed the church as mainly a positive place in terms of caring and acceptance, a warm and supportive extension of family relationships. Despite a traumatic experience in 7th

grade Sunday School, she perceived the negative conduct on the part of some adults in church as an aberration out of keeping with her high expectations for the behavior of church members.

For Jen, joining the church established her own self identity, and freely choosing to become a member was highly significant for her. In fact, to be able to freely choose was of such importance to her that in retrospect, she conceded that being forced by her parents to attend Sunday School would have driven her from the church. In Jen's world view, becoming a church member was tantamount to expanding the relationship bonds of a supporting family, and in this case, being supported meant letting her find her own way by making her own decisions.

A relationship with the minister was important to her, but no more so than other church relationships. Jen saw the minister as a possible support in her life because he was part of a network of relationships that included all church members. As a church member, Jen wanted and expected a personal encounter not only with the minister but also with her Sunday School teachers and youth group leaders, as such interaction made religion more real to her.

For Jen, personal sharing led to relationship building based on communication and the sharing of views, a concept which was at the heart of her interest in joining the church. In her view, respect for differences was the hallmark of a relationship, with each person freely choosing and sharing his or her own perspective.

To that end, she believed that the church was like a supportive extended family, with its relationships extending out to include God. She believed that individuals derived strength from their relationships within the church, just as those relationships in turn were strengthened through their inherent link with God.

Since Jen viewed relationships as freely chosen bonds, one person forced to do something by another would cause the relationship to break. In Jen's view, lack of choice creates hostility. On the other hand, by talking and sharing points of view, relationships in families may even be extended through the church to God.

Thus for Jen, membership in the church was no less than an extension of family values and family relationships, based on respect for individuals, as shown by allowing each individual member freedom of choice. In Jen's view, teenagers were likely to drop out if made to join the church before they were ready,

since doing something only because someone else wanted them to would tend to break the relationship and lead to adolescent rebellion.

Sheila's Worldview

Interestingly, Sheila's rebellious attitude seemed to give testimony to the philosophy Jen expounded regarding religious membership behavior. Forced by her mother to attend church and follow the teaching of the Catholic faith against her will, Sheila voiced a negative attitude that bordered on open defiance.

As a young person, Sheila recalled the fun she had in Sunday School as a positive reason to attend church. But now, seeing her friends at church remained the only reason to go, and barely sufficed at that. Sheila maintained that she, like other teenagers, thought of herself as immortal, that nothing bad could happen to her, and accordingly felt she had no need of God.

Sheila remembered that a transition period in her life occurred in the 7th and 8th grade, a time when her religious sentiments began to change. Once feeling close to God, an encounter with an older foreign exchange student taught her another perspective by which to view the Catholic church's teaching.

Consequently, she came to see the tenets of the Catholic faith as merely a set of irrelevant and constricting rules and admonitions.

At this time in her life, Sheila was not sure if her hostility extended beyond the Catholic church to include spiritual or religious matters in general. In any event, Sheila felt sure that being forced to comply with her mother's religious expectations ruined what she otherwise might have thought of as a positive spiritual experience.

Sheila characterized membership in the church as close-minded and rule bound, as opposed to helpful and supportive. She viewed as paradoxical the difference between her view of "the church," and the people in the church. Finally concluding they were one and the same, she nonetheless thought that churches were not needed to do what people should do on their own.

In terms of rebelliousness around religion, Sheila felt totally controlled by her mother. Thinking of herself as being "too good," to quit despite wanting to, Sheila would not go against what her parents asked or expected of her.

Sheila felt that her current needs were not being met by the church, yet abided with it mostly because of her mother's influence. Sheila believed that she needed to appear to be good and obedient, for fear of

parental punishment, ie., the withdrawal of privileges. On the other hand, Sheila realized that proclaiming a negative church attitude was an easy way for her to rebel against parental authority without risking the serious consequences that might befall her getting involved with sex or drugs.

In addition, Sheila felt a major reason she followed the Catholic faith was due to peer pressure. That is, all of her relationships with friends were either church based or oriented. Sheila understood that her need to maintain relationships, even in an organizational structure she abhorred, was the key to explaining her religious behavior.

Karen's Worldview

Like Sheila, Karen thought that teenagers dropped out because the church did not meet their needs, was not relevant in their lives, and conflicted with too many other activities for their time. But unlike Sheila, who thought herself invulnerable and as having no need for God, Karen thought that many adolescents had a personal relationship with God, and for that reason did not feel a need for the formal trappings of a church. However, she herself thought of the church

as a warm and supportive family, and freely chose from among other options to join in active membership.

Disengaging from religious activity for a year while in spiritual crisis, Karen was aware that the church was there and available to her if she chose to become involved again. Although her mother followed the teaching of the Catholic faith, by allowing her daughter to freely choose whether to participate or not took rebellion off the table as an issue between them.

Even though she herself felt a personal relationship with God, Karen came to realize that organized religion met a need in her life. She thought that seeing an other, positive side of people in church caused social relationships to seem more fulfilling, and being with supportive peers from the church met her need for affiliation. Karen chose to be active in church because social relationships, caring for others and the feeling of belonging, were important to her.

Perhaps because she missed her father growing up in a single parent household, Karen looked to God to replace the loss. Accordingly, she thought of her relationship to God as closer than her relationship to other members in the church.

For Karen, becoming a member was like joining a large, close knit, and affectionate extended family, with the minister viewed as the central father figure.

In her mind, the minister's role as father figure was to tie the church family together, accomplished by his having a personal relationship with each church member.

In terms of membership, Karen felt that personal ties to individual members based on caring and helping were more meaningful than ties to the formal church structure. For Karen the church was a place where people showed their positive side, a kind of idealized family where conflict was minimized and problems could always be worked out.

Barbara's Worldview

As for Barbara, church was a place to be with friends as much as it was a place to worship. She felt connected to the church through relationships and friendship ties to older members. While seeing herself on a spiritual path marked by religious symbols of membership like baptism and confirmation, at this point in her life church was not a place to go to have her personal or spiritual needs met. However, she was aware that church membership offered the possibility of other resources being available to her later in life.

For Barbara, relationships in church were based on mutual support in times of need, something like an insurance policy, with little to do with spiritual or

religious influences. Barbara thought having relationships with others reason enough to be involved in the church. In her view, the church was a place where people came together with differing perspectives, but shared a common faith and set of beliefs, to find a place for themselves, much as do players on an athletic team.

In the main, religion was not the reason Barbara went to church. Instead, being a church member meant being involved in helping others or in teaching. For now, church membership was important to her because it allowed the possibility of relating to the adult world by taking on adult role and status as a Sunday School teacher.

As a Sunday School teacher, Barbara thought that having fun in church was a positive reinforcement for learning, and a way for her to have a positive relationship with the children. Fun meant doing projects or activities that were based on the weekly sermon, a hands-on way for children to learn rather than becoming bored listening to a preacher.

In this regard, Barbara viewed the minister as a symbolic, hierarchial father figure, and herself as the daughter. In a teaching role, the minister was thought of as a source of information from on high, having the responsibility of breaking "the Word" down for easy

consumption by the teachers. Her function in turn was to impart this knowledge to the children. Barbara saw her role as no less important than the minister's, due to her positive influence on children who would one day become the adult members of the church.

Barbara was aware that for children growing up in the church, the 7th through 9th grades represented a difficult time of transition. She thought that unless the adolescents were purposely engaged by the church during this period, they would suffer the consequence of being left in a religious vacuum and more than likely drop out of membership.

Barbara saw the church youth group as a vehicle to accomplish bridging a gap between the adolescents and older church members. Barbara believed that the church was there for people, a place where everyone could find a specific role and fit in, and that only personal issues kept people from taking part. For instance, Barbara felt that being involved in the youth group helped her to change her poor self-image by building self-esteem and confidence, the very issues that would have held her back during the transition period. Joining the church and participating in the youth group gave Barbara a sense of belonging in something greater, like being a player on a baseball team, much like the

feelings she remembered as a child in Sunday School before entering the 6th-9th grade transition phase.

Following a summary of the major themes and patterns that emerged from the data, the preceding section presented an account of the meaning of membership behavior from the unique perspective of each of the individual actors in terms of the beliefs, concepts, and assumptions comprising their world view. In the next section, the data derived in this study will be discussed in terms of research findings in the quantitative literature.

Discussion of the Research Findings

The data in this study are in some ways consistent with the work of previous researchers examining factors hypothesized to influence the religious attitude and participation of adolescent youth. Closer examination of such work may prove fruitful in providing a broader context in which to consider the dynamics of adolescent membership behavior illuminated in this study. The findings in turn may serve to provide added dimensions of meaning and depth to existent data in the quantitative literature.

Generally, four sets of factors have been hypothesized to influence the religious practice of church youth. Namely these are: family factors, peer group factors, program factors and belief factors (Hoge and Petrillo, 1978).

Family Factors

There seems little disagreement among researchers that the parent's religious values are a strong influence on the adolescent's religious attitude (Newcomb and Svehla, 1937; Putney and Meddleten, 1961; Strommen, 1963; Zuck and Getz, 1868; Johnson, 1973). Hoge and Petrillo's (1978) study of the determinants of participation and attitude among high school youth found that the main determinant of church attendance was parental religiosity, especially parent's church attendance.

In contrast, these authors also found that socio-economic factors and type of school attended (public or private) had little effect on adolescent religious participation. Likewise, years of formal religious training had little effect, cognitive development had no effect, and characteristics of religious training programs or religious knowledge had little effect. Of further note, most survey studies have found that the

impact of the father's religious values is greater than the impact of the mother's values, but some studies found no difference between the two (Putney and Meddleten, 1961; Bengston and Acock, 1976).

Clearly, the current study supports Hoge and Perillo's research finding that the parent's religious values are a strong influence on their children's religious attitude in terms of active participation. By way of a social learning model (Bandura, 1971), which places emphasis on transmitting values by modeling and on parental actions that encourage children to follow adult behavior, the parents of these respondents took a very pro-active stance with their young children regarding religious behavior.

That is to say, for most of the respondents, family discipline was quite evident early on as parents fostered weekly church attendance. In fact many of the youth felt compelled as children to attend church with their parents. For others, regular church going was simply taken for granted as something the family did together on Sunday.

The findings in this study did not support the notion that the father's religious values were more impactful than the mother's in shaping the child's religious behavior. Instead, what seemed important among the church youth in effecting religious practice

in adolescence was the presence of a "significant other" in the child's life who clearly modeled positive religious attitude and behavior.

That is not to say that the father's role was unimportant. Indeed, one boy's positive and surprisingly eclectic religious attitude seemed to have been influenced and legitimized by the oral history passed from father to son. Another youth felt that his father modeled religious behavior for him no less than did the minister.

However, the religious participation of other youth in the study was found to be influenced just as heavily by the attitude and behavior of grandparents, by their mothers, and in the case of one young woman, by her older brother. For instance, one youth who thought her father, "had better things to do...", than attend church, described her mother as the person most influencing her religious practice. The impact a significant other's viewpoint can have with an adolescent was further witnessed in the story of the summer exchange student who came to live with the family of a respondent. In this case, the Lutheran girl's fervent spirituality profoundly shaped and influenced the young girl's later religiosity. Previously dominated by her mother's Catholicism, the

youth recalled the advent of her growing relationship with the older girl as the source of her spiritual transformation.

Other researchers (Havens, 1964; Putney and Meddleton, 1961) utilizing survey data have found that while some parents may try to transmit spiritual values to children, some also choose to let their children work out religious matters on their own without adult interference. In addition, their findings also suggest that parents who may disagree between themselves on religious matters have less influence on their children's religious attitude and behavior.

Researchers have also noted that children of mixed-religious marriages have weaker religious commitment than those of single-religious marriages (Havens, 1964).

The parents referenced in previous studies (Putney and Meddleten, 1961) who strongly influenced their children's religious behavior seemed to do so simply by modeling their own behavior rather than through a conscience effort to socialize the child. However, the parents of the church youth in this study were clearly intent, especially when their children were younger, to get them off on the right footing by introducing them to religious rituals early in life and insisting on religious participation.

It was only when the children were older and quite firmly established on a religious path, that the youth were encouraged by their parents to decide on their own whether or not to continue their religious practice. On the whole, the respondents appreciated that their parents had made this effort, seemingly aware that otherwise they would not be enjoying today the positive benefits ensuing from their active church membership.

Additionally, Putney and Meddleton's (1961) finding that parents who disagree between themselves on religious matters had less influence on their children's religious practice was not borne out in this study. Instead, the data seemed to suggest that religious conflict between parents implied that at least one or perhaps both parents held strongly to religious convictions. As a consequence, the child's religious practice was likely to be influenced more in one spiritual direction than another, in contrast to the religious practice of a child whose parents held no religious convictions at all. In fact, several of the church youth responded that they were aware how one parent's religious views, usually the mother's, was dominant in their family.

Likewise, the results of a previous survey finding that children of mixed-religious marriages have weaker religious commitment than those of single-religious

marriages (Havens, 1964), was not supported by the data in this study. An example is the case of the young women who experienced the perplexity of growing up with parents of both Catholic and Protestant faiths. While having to struggle with spiritual issues and being mightily confused for a time, she nonetheless was eventually able to work out a religious perspective that met her own spiritual needs, and consequently remains highly committed today.

Similarly, additional light may be shed on the survey findings by considering the case of the young man participating in the study whose family belonged to a Protestant church while he attended a Catholic parochial high school. By being able to experientially compare and contrast the teaching of both faiths, the youth consequently became better able to appreciate the nuances of his Protestant upbringing, and even more committed to the "faith of his fathers." Relying on the Catholic church for religious training, this young man returned to his parent's Protestant church for spiritual and social support.

Additionally, there is the paradoxical case of the young woman described in the study who, though raised in a single-religious family, seethed in mid adolescence at the religious domination of her mother. Notwithstanding her anger, she actively practiced

Catholic teachings while tightly holding to oppositional feelings and differing spiritual values. Despite surface appearances to the contrary, being compelled to attend Catholic services while failing to internalize her parent's religious beliefs only served to delay what seemed would be an inevitable break from the church once she gained social independence.

The literature suggests that even if parents are loyal church members, and try to socialize children into the their faith, they may fail to do so because of family tensions. Researchers tend to agree that family tensions interfere with the transmission of family religious values (Johnson, 1973; Landis, 1960). On the other hand, happiness in marriage has been found to correlate positively with the transmission of parental religious values to children.

While the effect of family tensions was not addressed directly in this study, it was nonetheless suggestive to observe how many of the church youth described the church as a haven or sanctuary. Other respondents depicted their membership in terms of being part of an idealized family - one that tried to minimize tension and stress. Generally speaking, the youth described adult church members as accepting, warm and caring, who showed their positive side at church,

were willing to communicate, and who were able to resolve conflict or work things out without one party becoming angry and running away from the problem.

The degree that happiness in marriage has been found to correlate positively with the transmission of parental religious values to children may well be reflected in the fact that most of the church youth viewed their membership in the church in relational terms, ie., as warm and supporting. For many of the youth, the minister was viewed as a benign and friendly father figure, whose function was to unite the members of the church family.

Researchers (Thomas et al., 1974) who distinguished parental support from parental control, found that parental support is clearly the more important in facilitating religious commitment in children. In the present study, the data in some ways support a developmental perspective that suggests in early adolescence, religiousness and family control are not a problem.

However, the findings in this study suggest that by mid-adolescence, a critical juncture in the lives of church youth is reached. At issue during this time is whether or not the parents will allow them the option to choose their own degree of religious practice. Adolescents in the study who valued their church

membership highly and considered themselves to be active participants perceived that they had been given a choice about participation. The findings suggest that if parents remain controlling at a time the youth find that their psycho-social needs are not being met by religious participation, the adolescents are likely to rebel and/or be subject to negative peer group influences.

Peer Group Factors

Research conducted with high school youth in the United States demonstrate that teenagers form close knit peer groups which strongly influence both their attitude and behavior (Coleman, 1961). Among the church youth in this study, the attitude that church going was a natural occurrence was reinforced for them as children by the behavior of their peers, who they saw model religious activity by regularly attending church or church school with them. Indeed, in this social milieu, none of the respondents reported thinking that their own church going families were particularly religious, nor any more religious than the families of church friends.

In this regard, the impact of peer relationships seemed significant early on in establishing patterns of religious participation in later adolescence. For these church youth, relationships extending into young adulthood were formed at this time, as many of the youth reported having selected their childhood friends from church school classmates, and looked forward to being with them each Sunday. Respondents who attended church school regularly, and later joined the youth group, tended to view religious activity as a positive experience, as a social opportunity for interpersonal contact and a chance to renew peer group bonds.

In their research, Havighurst and Keating (1971) found that church activities are only one option among several networks of social participation and leadership among adolescents. These authors found that most of the leaders of church youth activities were not the same persons who led school activities. They concluded that while the impact of peer influence is undoubted, it's strength relative to other influences needed further research.

In reference to this point, surprise engendered in contrasting the responses of the young women to those of the men in terms of their involvement in social activities outside of church revealed gender as a heretofore unsuspected cultural category relevant to

peer group influence on religious behavior. The subjective meaning of social behavior that appeared to be associated with gender became more apparent when examining the differing membership roles that male and female youth assumed in relation to religious activities.

For example, the young women in this study were found for the most part to be highly involved in school activities, often in leadership roles, which might or might not include church friends. However, because their social lives were so heavily tied to relational components, they usually were highly active in church as well. The young women viewed their religious ties as relational or familial, founded on warmth and sharing, and also as an opportunity to assume leadership in an adult membership role, ie., as a Sunday School teacher. In turn, their assuming this role also happened to foster closer relationships between themselves and the younger children, thereby further linking the generations within the church family.

Much as Havighurst and Keating described in their research, the women in this study did indeed utilize religious activities as an opportunity for social participation and leadership. However, religious

practice was viewed not solely but rather as an additional option to the other social activities available to them.

On the other hand, by self report the young men played a far more limited role in school social activities. Instead, the males in this study tended to look toward church activities as their primary or even sole opportunity for socialization with peers outside of school. Some saw these activities as a chance to form friendship bonds with older males in the community who often served as adult role models for them as they grew up in the community.

For example, one youth in the study proudly described his volunteer work at the church promoting the Walk-For-Hunger fund raiser as an opportunity to display his organizational and leadership abilities, as well as a chance to form friendships with the older male members of the church. As he became known to adults for his ability and willingness to serve on church committees, he was in turn invited by community leaders outside the church to work on a town-wide civic project, an added benefit of church membership that delighted him.

Other young men in the study saw church activities such as ushering, serving on a committee, or taking a leadership role in the youth group as a way to bridge

the generation gap and become accepted by adult members as part of the extended church family. Considering a male perspective, it is not surprising that Havighurst and Keating found that most of the leaders of church youth activities were not the same persons who led school activities. The data in this study indicated that while women play an active role in both social arenas, the young men tended to predominate in taking up active and leadership roles in church activities.

In terms of peer group influence, another noteworthy observation is that many of the respondents were Peer Educators trained to help classmates "just say no" to drugs at school. Consequently, several respondents mentioned that they felt able to resist the effects of negative peer pressure regarding their religious practice.

In point of fact, peer group effects most often appeared supportive, as the youth generally tended to engage socially with like-thinking friends who enjoyed participating in church activities or shared the same religious values. For many of the respondents, if church activities were viewed as important or felt to be meaningful, negative peer influences were generally ignored.

In terms of religious behavior, the peer group influence was most clearly seen in the case of the young respondent in the study who was forced by her parents to attend the Catholic church. This young woman reported that all her friendships were church oriented or church school related, and that to maintain a relationship with her friends was a principle reason she went to church at this time. Interestingly, the respondent now resented the pressure from her peers to attend the Catholic church as much as she once had resented religious pressure from her mother.

In considering the data in this study, peer group pressure more often than naught served as a positive support for religious participation. Negative peer pressure was viewed by the church youth as something to avoid by virtue of it representing values foreign to them. On the other hand, if peer group values were similar, even Catholic teachings were viewed by these Protestant youth in positive terms regarding their religious behavior.

Program Factors

Survey research shows that most children of church members attend Sunday School (if Protestant) or Confraternity of Christian Doctrine classes (if

Catholic) for some years. Babin (1963) reviewed research on the effects of such education and found discernible effects in the presence of positive parental attitudes. Jarvis (1967) also found that the impact of formal religious education on church youth depended on the attitude and example set by the youth's parents. Hoge and Petrillo (1974) found that the characteristics of religious training programs had little effect, while both Jarvis (1967) and Strommen (1963) found that the impact on youth of programs sponsored by the church depends greatly on the quality of the leader. Specifically, Strommen found that the pastor and youth leaders needed to be approachable and understanding if the youth were to participate and be satisfied with the program.

Indeed, the respondents in this study were aware that if parents did not stress church school attendance in the early years, or stopped coming to church themselves, it was unlikely that their children would see any benefit in religious participation and more than likely would drop out.

Separation from the church was seen by the respondents as most likely to occur during the transition period between 6th and 9th grade. At this age, the adolescents reported feeling too old for Sunday School, but too young to be an adult member. As

the youth grew older with fewer relational ties to the church, their changing needs, changing values and increasingly marginal status vis-a-vis the demands of childhood and newer adult role responsibilities turned the likelihood of their departure into a certain probability.

In the absence of adult role modeling and support, the respondents thought peer pressure could lead youth away from the church at this point in their lives. Rebellion was also viewed by them as a possibility now if the teenagers were forced to go to church but found no personal meaning in participation. Youth disengaging at this time were seen to fall into either of two categories: those who felt invulnerable and thereby had no need for the church; others who felt a personal relationship with God and did not need the formal structure of the church to support them at this time in their lives. For these reasons the respondents in the study concurred that program and relational incentives and not religious inducements were needed to keep transitional youth as active participants in church.

For many of the respondents, belonging to the church youth group served to bridge the difficult period of adolescent transition, a time of cross-over in role function from Sunday School pupil to adult

member of the church. As such, youth group programs were thought by the respondents to be part and parcel of their religious experience. By providing an opportunity to strengthen peer group bonds, allowing for inter-personnel contact, and serving as a place for youth to play an active and concrete part in the life of the church, the youth group served as a vital link between the younger and older generations. In addition, the youth group was thought by the respondents to be an excellent way to recruit new members for the church, or to allow lapsed teenage members to return.

In terms of the study, most of the church youth considered both Sunday School and the high school youth groups to be distinct yet integral aspects of the church. In retrospect, Sunday school itself was generally seen as a positive place that offered an opportunity to be with friends outside of school.

Regarding the impact of the religious education program on the adolescents in this study, the respondents generally had found Sunday School to be important, at least up until the 7th or 8th grades. This was partly due to their awareness that participation in Sunday School allowed for the transmittal of church doctrine and religious values over to them by means of games, projects and hands on

activities of interest to young people and at a level they could understand. Indeed, many of the respondents owed their current religious participation to having had a positive experience in Sunday school.

In general, the respondents reported that what was of most importance regarding their present participation was whether they liked or disliked their religious education experience. Indeed, the youth considered this aspect more relevant than either the number of years of religious education or the knowledge gained.

However, in this regard, as far as the teenagers were concerned, Sunday School classes and religious teachings were not as important to them as was the positive, warm, and accepting attitude of their teachers. While the minister was viewed as a benign and friendly, but somewhat distant father/God figure, the teachers and youth leaders were seen as more human and approachable, warm and caring people willing to share their lives with them as part of the church's extended family.

Supporting the findings of Jarvis (1967) and Strommen (1963) that the impact on youth of church programs depends greatly on the quality of the leaders, the respondents reported that adult church teachers and youth leaders served as role models for them regarding

positive religious values. Additionally, as the older adolescents became Sunday School teachers themselves, teaching served as a gateway into the religious company of adults and a link to adult membership status.

Belief Factors

Research has shown (Loukes, 1961; Strommen, 1963; Bealer and Willets, 1967) that religious interest or a felt need for religion varies from person to person, but is usually strong among adolescent youth. Zuck and Getz (1968) point out that the main focus of church youth tends to be on personal faith and on relationships with family and peers. Religious beliefs may change, and the change may be gradual or sudden, with intellectual maturation. Other research (Hurlock, 1973) shows that the high school years are a period of "deconcretization" of religious ideas and the beginning of confrontation with cultural relativity.

Havighurst and Keating (1971) suggests that these changes occur more often in high school than in college.

Overall, the survey findings above were generally supported in the current study. For these adolescents, the felt need for religion varied as a factor in their participation, ranging in significance from not at all

to definitely important. However, for most of the respondents, religious beliefs were clearly changing as the youth grew older and more experienced, with belief becoming stronger for some, and less relevant for others in terms of the conflicting demands of adolescence.

Some of the youth described feeling invulnerable or immortal at this time, holding to the belief that nothing bad could happen to them. Others reported feeling little stress in their lives during these high school years, and therefore experienced little need of God. In expressing similar beliefs, one youth referred to her religious practice as somewhat like taking out an insurance policy against the risk of future ills. However, other youth had already undergone the loss of a parent or the death of friends in a car accident, and saw religious beliefs as a way of helping them cope with these issues.

While religious beliefs were rarely mentioned by the respondents in this study as a reason they participated in church activities, in support of Zuck and Getz's (1968) findings, relationship factors with family and peers were thought by the youth to be of the utmost importance. This was especially so amongst the

young women, who tended to see the church as homelike, with warm, caring and supportive relationships existing among members.

The respondents in the main viewed the church as an extended family, with the minister as a symbolic father figure binding church members together through his relationship with each individual member. One youth who experienced a strong personal faith thought that membership in the church was a way to extend her familial relationships to include even God. Thus spiritual values strengthened family values and vice-versa.

The males moreover, tended to view the church as a haven or sanctuary, an idealized peaceful place where they could avoid parental pressure and controls. The youth held the expectation that conflict would rarely be seen in church, either because it was thought that worldly values should be left at the door, or because it was believed that there were few conflicts which could not be worked out by like-minded people sharing a common faith.

Rather than for religious reasons, the young men in this study saw going to church as a way to renew acquaintances and strengthen friendship bonds. While some of the youth saw the church as a place to

communicate with other members and plan activities, others saw church participation as a way to network for social action, and also as a way to meet new members.

Focusing less on religious beliefs than on social bonding, open communication, and building supportive relationships, many of the respondents saw membership in the Protestant church as highly attractive compared to their view of Catholicism, which was described by several youths as close-minded, rule bound and dogmatic. Having freely chosen to become members, rebellion against parental authority for most of these youth was an irrelevant issue, for participation was seen by them as a way to establish their self-identity and independence.

Just as Hurlock's (1973) research had shown that the high school years are a period of "deconcretization" of religious ideas, clearly, among the respondents, religious beliefs held since childhood were changing as the youth in the study matured. Several had begun to develop a personal faith which for the most part was supported by like-thinking friends and ties made to older church members, in effect co-constructing a social reality as relationships developed across generations. Other youth who had yet to experience spiritual growth, participated in

religious activities in the high hope and expectation of accruing similar benefits, if not now than most likely later.

In terms of religious beliefs, for most respondents, religious growth was experienced as an extended process over time, rather than a matter of experiencing specific events at particular developmental stages. The youth in this study moved along the religious path at their own pace, each individually determining in the course of events the intensity of religiosity and level of participation that met their psycho-social needs at a given time.

In summary, the survey research has shown that religious interest is strong among adolescents. The data in this study suggest that among church youth, both a high level of religious belief and a high level of social relationship serve as positive reinforcers in maintaining church involvement. Some youth may be highly religious, but feel that formal religious participation is not a necessity at this time in their lives. Often for them, a personal faith in God made formal church attendance at this age seem unnecessary, and a low priority was placed on participation, until their needs might come to shift again in response to life's challenges.

On the other hand, some church youth saw a lack of tangible results from their religious participation, or feeling invulnerable, experienced little need for the church at this time in their lives. Other youth had no option but to attend, or had little familial support in the face of conflicting social or economic demands. Church youth in the latter cases are likely to be persuaded more by peer pressure than familial influence, and are more likely to disengage from religious practice.

This section entailed an examination of the data derived from the long ethnographic interview in respect to the findings of previous research, which for the most part had taken a survey and questionnaire approach in studying the religious practice of adolescent youth. While supporting some of the broader findings in the quantitative literature, other factors thought to effect adolescent membership behavior were not substantiated in the present study. Hopefully, in considering the meaning of membership behavior from the actor's inside perspective, the findings described here will have served to provide an added dimension of depth to the quantitative data. The following section will consider an interesting aspect of the data from a

theoretical perspective in order to provide a broader context in which to understand the ongoing dynamics of adolescent membership behavior.

A Theoretical Perspective

In listening to the voices of adolescents tell what it was like to grow up as the sons and daughters of church members, and in hearing them describe how they made sense of their experience of membership in the church, one notes a common experience among the church youth who considered themselves actively engaged in the church today. Namely, at some point in their religious growth, each had been given the opportunity to decide for themselves whether and to what extent they would come to practice the "faith of our fathers." The significance of this observation is made clearer by considering the theoretical work of Sidney Simon in terms of a process of values clarification.

If, as suggested in Chapter 1, the role of the church in our society is to transfer the values of previous generations to the young, the success or failure of this endeavor is of significance not only to both parents and religious leaders, but to society in general. However, as Sidney Simon (1974) has pointed out, in most instances value transfer based on

moralizing or modeling the "exemplary life" usually fails because people are caught up in value conflicts, ie., opposing views from parents, churches, peers, as well as from media advertising claims, or even the "politically correct" movement. "Too often...", Simon notes, "...important choices in life are made on the basis of peer pressure, unthinking submission to authority, or the power of propaganda" (Simon, 1974, p. xi). In addition, Simon holds that, "values simply don't transmit, and they cannot be taught; but they can be learned (Simon, 1974, p. xi), and has proposed a process of values clarification to accomplish that end.

Based on the work of Louis Rath, the process of values clarification focuses on three words associated with values: choosing, prizing, and acting. Simon maintains that before something can be considered a full value, it must meet seven criteria - anything less is seen as a "value-indicator," ie., that a value is in the process of becoming. To meet the seven criteria, a value must be: chosen freely, chosen from among alternatives, chosen after due reflection, prized and cherished, publicly affirmed, acted upon, and part of a pattern that is a repeated action.

In terms of the religious histories recounted by the adolescents in this study, the point can be raised that church youth who today describe themselves as

active participants appear to have naturally gone through an informal process of values clarification similar to the formal steps described by Simon. For many of the church youth in this study, following a course of choosing, prizing and acting aptly sums up their earlier religious experience and explains their involvement with the church today.

What is striking in their accounts is that not only were these youth happy with the outcome of their decision regarding church involvement, but that they equally recalled with delight having gone through the process of choosing freely for themselves, prizing their membership, and acting on their beliefs. Indeed, Dan's statement, "Before I had to go, now I chose to go, and it's much better," was echoed many times over by the religiously active respondents in this study. Thinking in terms of the church membership as a whole, compared to the attitude and behavior of the church youth who seem to have managed to experience a process of value clarification, it is not hard to understand what Simon means when he observes that people with few values, "tend to be apathetic, conforming, inconsistent, and what psychologists call ambivalent,..." for the "less we understand about

values, the more confused our lives are. The more we understand about values, the more we are able to make satisfactory choices" (Simon, 1974, p. xv).

Having discussed a theoretical perspective that may serve to inform our understanding of the findings in this study, the last section in this chapter will consider the practical application of these findings in terms of planned interventions leading to organizational change.

Application of Action Research

As the first step in an action research approach to problem solving, the collection of data based on information provided by the organizational actors themselves was undertaken with a group of adolescent members of a main-line Protestant church. Since the action research model is a data-based problem solving model that replicates the steps involved in action research: data collection, feedback of data to the clients, and action planning based on the data (French and Bell, 1973), the next step undertaken was to jointly define the problem to be addressed with client system members. In order to facilitate the collaboration of researcher and subject in the diagnosis and evaluation of problems existing in the

practice setting, a series of meetings were scheduled with the respondents in this study in order to provide the church with scientific data about its own operation which could be used for self-evaluation.

Over a period of a month, three meetings were scheduled with the respondents, the minister, and an acting lay leader of the church youth group, to review and discuss key findings in the research. These meetings resulted in the identification of areas of concern and problems to be addressed. Also, initial recommendations were formulated as suggestions to be passed on to church officers for future consideration by the Church Council.

At least four respondents were in attendance at each meeting. However, due to scheduling problems and the start of the new school year, not all of the youth providing data in the study were able to attend consistently, and two others declined to take part in this phase of the research project.

Each of the respondents who attended the feedback sessions had an opportunity to review a transcript of his or her interview with the author beforehand. The youth greatly enjoyed reading their own responses and generally were quite surprised at the breadth and depth of the material covered.

The agenda for the meetings involved a discussion of each of the major themes and conceptual categories associated with the active involvement or religious disengagement of the church youth. Usually, highly productive brain-storming sessions resulted in the generation of many ideas, which in turn served as the basis for the formulation of either specific suggestions or areas of concern requiring new policy guidelines.

The group discussions resulted in identification of four problem areas requiring the development of possible solutions. These were: 1) Selection of Sunday School teachers; 2) Youth group; 3) Hospitality; 4) Membership. After considerable discussion, an initial diagnosis was formulated by the group in each of the problem areas, denoting the gaps between "what is" and what "ought to be" as supported by the data. Suggestions for broader policy guidelines were also noted.

Sunday School Teachers

An initial problem focus in this area was that Sunday School teachers were often selected because of teaching ability or religious knowledge, rather than for personality characteristics, or love for the

children. It was felt that the Christian Education Committee ought to interview perspective teachers using a criteria that stressed positive personality factors as much as knowledge of the Bible. In addition, senior high students should be encouraged to be teachers or teacher assistants. A substitute teacher list needed to be created to ensure that teachers were not selected on an "as available" basis on Sunday morning. In addition, it was felt that teachers and lay leaders ought to be offered an opportunity to attend a retreat with the minister focused on issues related to being a role model for church youth.

Youth Group

The problem focus in this area was concern that, at the time of the study, the once active youth group program was in disarray, with no regular adult leaders in place. Older students were frequently drafted on Sunday morning to supervise younger children in Sunday School. The group concluded that a youth group ought to be formed for junior high students, perhaps facilitated initially by the minister, until regular lay leaders were obtained. Additionally it was felt that the focus of youth groups ought to be on social activities, civic action, and fun. If lay leaders

could not be found, consideration ought to be given to merging the youth groups with similar programs at other community churches.

Hospitality

The problem focus here was that opportunities for inter-generational mixing were rare. Additionally, new members in church were often ignored rather than being warmly greeted. The Christian Education Committee was the only committee in the church that encouraged teenagers to be members. Other functions, such as that of usher, were usually covered by the same people year in and year out.

The group concluded that teenagers ought to be assigned a membership slot on every church committee, and allowed to take on new roles, ie., be eligible to be a committee officer. In addition, the group felt that a church-wide planning group should be formed comprised of members of all ages to generate opportunities for frequent socializing, community action, or even to schedule work/supper parties, ie., to paint a room in the church. New members ought to be assigned as greeters Sunday morning as a way of being introduced to all active members.

Membership

The problem focus in the area of membership was a concern that 7th - 9th grade youth were leaving the church shortly after being confirmed as new members. In addition, it seemed that Sunday School classes were shrinking in size as the youth moved up through the grades.

The group suggested that mentors be selected from the adult membership and partnered with each member of the confirmation class. The mentors would be able to tutor the youth in terms of aspects of church history and organizational structure, serve as an adult "buddy," and act as a link between the generations.

It was also suggested that the Deacons, using the same format as the current meeting, ie., discussion and brain-storming, should schedule a meeting of all interested members to discuss what could be done to make people feel more welcome in the church.

Follow-up

At the conclusion of the series of feedback and self-evaluation meetings, a summary of the research findings and a compilation of the results of the discussions with the respondents was provided to the

minister to be forwarded to the Church Council. Additionally, the author agreed to present an overview of the research to the Council at a later date.

At that time, the minister gave his assurance that the data generated in the study by means of interviewing the adolescent members of the church would be incorporated into participatory planning involving a greater representation of church members. With the research data in hand, it is the author's conviction that the stage has been well set for the successful implementation of organizational change in this religious community.

In a final note regarding planned organizational change, it is widely held (Weisbord, 1983) that resistance to change is minimized when the people effected by decisions have had a say in the making of them. To this end, it is expected that church members involved from the beginning with the researcher in systematic problem identification would come to fully realize the necessity of the remedial steps finally decided upon. If as Bougon has said is true, that "...we never talk about the world, social or physical, only about our construction of it" (Bougon, 1983, p. 186), then this study has demonstrated that the long ethnographic interview can well serve future researchers as an effective tool to capture the

subjective meaning of the whole psychological situation to the individual, and thereby produce the necessary data for the successful implementation of planned organizational change.

Implications for Future Research

This study represented an effort to demonstrate the legitimate application of social science research in a religious organization by utilizing the long ethnographic interview as a non-reductionist and holistic qualitative approach. In doing so, its purpose was to identify and communicate the distinctive interpretations of reality made by the adolescent members of the church community under study, as opposed to the description and interpretation of behavior as typically provided by outside observers.

Consequently, the actual meaning of religious participation from the actor's point of view was determined and discussed, thereby providing a perspective on adolescent membership behavior that up till now had not been represented in the social science literature. In addition, by involving the church youth as collaborators with the researcher in the diagnosis and evaluation of problems in the organizational

setting, the church community was provided with scientific data which could be used for self evaluation.

Two approaches now seem warranted in terms of future research. On the one hand, as the underlying assumptions, cultural categories and properties that emerged in the study developed in abstraction and became related, their accumulated interrelations began to form the basis of an integrated central theoretical framework, the core of an emerging theory that can now become the guide to the further collection and analysis of data, within this or other religious communities (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

However, a view of social reality constructed solely by a single group of organizational actors within the church family remains by definition narrow and constricted. In point of fact, other client system members in the church -- young married couples, single parents, the elderly, to name but a few, have yet to be accounted for in terms of their views as to the meaning of church membership. Any theory of membership grounded on the social reality of church members would have to take cognizance of the fact that other realities might just as easily be founded on implicit assumptions, underlying relationships, and cultural categories other than those described by the church

youth. Accordingly, future qualitative research in this regard should strive to incorporate the views of as widely diverse populations of organizational actors as possible.

On the other hand, as previously noted, most researchers interested in declining church membership have utilized quantitative techniques almost exclusively, focused on the adolescent religious dropout phenomenon, and supported their efforts by relying on developmental theory to account for their findings. This approach was not unreasonable, since after all, much of the existent survey data purports that it is these lost youth who are responsible for the decline in membership in mainline protestant churches since the mid-sixties.

Although focused on active participation, the depth and breadth of the data on adolescent membership behavior described in the present study utilizing qualitative techniques suggests that application of a qualitative approach, such as the long ethnographic interview, to a study of adolescent members who in fact are totally inactive and consider themselves to be no longer affiliated with the church is long overdue. Indeed, the application of qualitative techniques to

the population of adolescents regarded by functionalist researchers as religious dropouts remains an obvious opportunity for future research.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Today's Date: _____ Code #: _____

Place: _____

Time: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Age: _____ Gender: _____

Current Place of Residence: _____

Year in High School: 1 2 3 4 College: 1 2 3 4

Other: _____

Clubs, Activities, Class Officer: _____

Birth Order: 1st ___ 2nd ___ 3rd ___ 4th ___ 5th ___

Brothers: Yes No

First Name: _____ Age: _____ Attend Sunday School: _____

Sisters: Yes No

First Name: _____ Age: _____ Attend Sunday School: _____

Church Member: Yes No Name of Church: _____

Confirmed: Yes No

Attend Sunday (Church) School: Yes No

Years Attended Sunday (Church) School

K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Self-Rating Participation: Active _____ Non-Active _____

Self-Rating Religious: Very Somewhat Indifferent Non-Re

How Often Attend Worship Service: Daily Weekly Monthly
Several Times/Year Yearly Once in Several Years

Youth Group Member: Yes No Youth Group Officer: Yes No

Serve on Committee: Yes No Committee Name: _____

Choir Member: Yes No From _____ To _____

Sunday School Teacher: Yes No From _____ To _____

Parents Marital Status: Single Married Div. Re-Married

Father Age: _____ Occupation: _____

Highest Level of Education: _____

Ethnic Background: _____ Religion Raised As: _____

Father Attend Worship Service: Yes No

How often: Weekly @ 3/month @ 1/month @ 1/3 Months
@ 1/6 Months @ 1/Year

Serve on Committee: Yes No Committee Name: _____

From: _____ To: _____ Officer: Yes No

Mother Age: _____ Occupation: _____

Highest Level of Education: _____

Ethnic Background: _____ Religion Raised As: _____

Mother Attend Worship Service: Yes No

How often: Weekly @ 3/month @ 1/month @ 1/3 Months
@ 1/6 Months @ 1/Year

Serve on committee: Yes No Committee Name: _____

From: _____ To: _____ Officer: Yes No

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction (Opening Grand Tour Question)

"I'm interested in understanding how you feel about the church and how you perceive the church in your life at this time. To get started, could you tell me what's been your relationship with the church up till now and what the church means to you at this point in your life?"

Grand-Tour Theme Questions

1. Question Category - Organizational Structure

- "Thinking about the way the church is organized, what do you see as its most important aspects for you?"

Planned prompts (Restricted at first only to terms the respondent has introduced. The following terms from literature and cultural reviews to be used to cue as a final resort and then only at end of question category):

- * "What was Sunday School like for you?"
- * "How do you feel about Youth Group?"
- * "What do you think about Sunday worship?"
- * "Could you describe your feeling about what opportunities there are for you to be involved in the church?"
- * "How would you describe your involvement with the youth group or church sponsored activities?"

2. Question Category - Church Leaders

- "How would you describe your view of the pastor?"
- "How would you describe your relationship with the pastor?"

Planned prompts:

- * "How does your relationship with the pastor compare with your relationship with Sunday School teachers or Youth Group leaders?"
- * "What reasons come to mind to cause you to feel that way about them?"
- * "What qualities does A have that B doesn't have?"
- * "Compared to other adults, how sincere about religion do you think these people are?"
- * "To what degree do you feel the pastor takes a personal interest in you?"

3. Question Category - Self-Identity

- How would you describe the kind of person you are?"

Planned prompts:

- * "Compared to the way you feel in other groups, how accepted do you feel by church members?"
- * "Do you feel more like a sinner or more like a do-gooder?"
- * "How do you feel the church has met your needs?"

4. Question Category - Family

- "How would you describe your view of the relationship between you and your family?"
- "How would you describe your family home atmosphere?"

Planned prompts:

- * "Thinking about religious behavior, what was it like for you growing up in your family?"
- * "Thinking about religious behavior, what is the difference between your parents and the parents of other kids you know?"
- * "Compared to other families do you feel your parents are more democratic or more authoritarian?"

- * "How do you experience the relationship with your family affecting your participation in church activities?"
- * "In terms of sincerity about religion, how do you see your parents compared to other families?"
- * "When it comes to being able to do what you want, what is it like for you compared to other families you know?"

5. Question Category - Social Interaction

- "What do you see as the most important things about social relationships for you in this church?"
- "When you think about the church, how would you describe your experiences with peers?"

Planned prompts:

- * "Thinking about your closest friends, are you more with friends from school or from church groups?"
- * "What is the difference between school friends and church group friends?"
- * "Why do you participate in church youth programs?"
- * "How do you feel you are treated by the leaders and other members of the youth group?"

6. Question Category - Religious Beliefs

- "What do you see as the most important things when you think about religious beliefs?"

Planned prompts:

- * "What is the difference between the religious beliefs you once held and the beliefs you hold now?"
- * "What is the importance of personal faith to you?"

- * "What is the difference in emphasis placed in religion in childhood compared to now?"
- * "Do you have a felt need for religion now compared to other times?"

7. Question Category - Roles

- "How would you describe your view of the roles people play in the church?"

Planned prompts:

- * "How would you feel about the roles you can play in the church now compared to other times?"
- * "How comfortable are you in the role(s) you may play in church?"
- * "What are the differences in roles you played as a child and the roles you may play now?"

8. Question Category - Membership

- "How would you describe your view about what it is like to be a member of the church?"

Planned prompts:

- * "What was it like for you to become a member?"
- * "What is the difference between being an active member and being an in-active member?"
- * "What are the most important things about being a member to you?"

9. Question Category - Interpersonal Conflict

- "How would you describe your view about conflict between people in the church?"

Planned prompts:

- * "What do you feel is the most important thing when there is conflict between people in the church?"

10. Question Category - Norms and Taboos

- "How would you describe the norms (unwritten expectations) of being a member of this church?"
- "What things are "taboo" (forbidden) if you are a member of this church?"

Planned prompts:

- * "How do you feel about being expected to attend church service on Sunday"?
- * "How do you feel about being expected to attend Sunday School?"
- * "How do you feel about attending youth group?"
- * "How do you feel about young people not staying in church during the Sunday Service?"
- * "What is the difference between being confirmed and not being confirmed?"
- * "Why do you think kids stop coming to church or participating in youth groups?"

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

To Participants in this Study:

I am Ray Matusiewicz, a doctoral student at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, and the Clinical Director of a residential program for adolescents in Worcester, Massachusetts. The subject of my doctoral dissertation is "The Meaning of Adolescent Membership Behavior: A Qualitative Approach to Action Research in a Religious Organization. I will interview adolescents from this church in order to gain a sense of the meaning of church membership from the teenagers' point of view.

I want to thank you for interest in participating in this research project. I would like you to complete a very brief questionnaire about your background before we begin our interview. The interview itself should take about two hours to complete. You should know that there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions that I might ask you. I am simply interested in your personal point of view about membership behavior in this church.

Before beginning, I would like to reassure you that as a participant in this research project you have definite rights. First, your participation in the interview is entirely voluntary. Second, you are completely free to decline to answer any questions at any time. Also, you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time.

The interview itself and the answers on the biographical questionnaire will be kept strictly confidential and available only to myself and the professors who will review my work at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. The interview will be audio-taped and the tape will be transcribed by someone unconnected to this church. You will be given a coded number and your name will not appear on the tape or on the transcribed copy. A codelist will be maintained in a locked cabinet in my office, and will be destroyed after you have been sent a copy of the audio-tape of your interview, or typewritten transcript, if you desire one.

I will analyze the data from the interviews in order to gain a sense of what the experience of membership means from the perspective of adolescents in the church. Exerpts of your interview may be used in the final dissertation or in subsequent publication or presentations. However, not enough detail will be included for anyone who knows you to identify you or tell who provided the information. Under no circumstances will your name or other identifying characteristics be included in these reports.

Please indicate below if you are interested in receiving a copy of the audio-tape of the interview or typewritten transcript, and I would be happy to furnish them to you. If you have any questions about this project, please feel free to ask at any time. I can be contacted at:

Ray Matusiewicz
23 Mechanic St.
Monson, Ma 01057
(413) 267-3589

I, _____, have read and understand the above statement and agree to participate as an interviewee under the conditions stated in this consent form.

Signature Parent / Guardian

Signature of Participant

Date

Interviewer

Please check which of the following you would like to have a copy of:

_____ Audio-tape of interview
_____ Typewritten transcript
_____ Both

Mailing address for those requesting copy of material:

APPENDIX D

OPEN LETTER TO CHURCH YOUTH

June 1, 1992

Dear

My name is Ray Matusiewicz. I am a doctoral student at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. Your pastor has provided your name to me indicating that at one time or another you have either attended Sunday School or were a member of the Youth Group at First Church.

I am working on a research project for my dissertation which focuses on the meaning of church membership behavior from the perspective of teenagers. I am interested in interviewing a small number of adolescent church youth who either participate in church activities or, for whatever reasons, have dropped out. All interviews will be kept strictly confidential.

If you are interested in being interviewed, please fill out the information at the bottom of this letter, and return it to me in the enclosed postage paid envelope. I will contact you within the next two weeks

to arrange a convenient time for your interview. Thank you for your help in assisting in this research project.

Sincerely yours,

Ray Matusiewicz

I am interested in being contacted for an interview.

Name

Telephone Number

Best time to call: _____

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