



## **Cohort, Spirituality, and Religiosity**

### **A Cross-sectional Comparison**

David A. Gay and John P. Lynxwiler, University of Central Florida

#### **Abstract**

The social scientific conversation on the relationship between birth cohort, spirituality, and religiosity has been going on for some time. The Millennial cohort has now “come of age” and cross-sectional comparisons of the Millennial cohort, Generation X, and the Baby Boomers are possible. The 2010 and 2012 General Social Surveys are used to analyze the relationship between cohort, subjective religiosity, subjective spirituality, and various sociodemographic variables. Results indicate that members of Generation X are the most likely to be “spiritual but not religious” (SBNR) with the Silent Generation the least likely. Millennials are consistently less religious than Baby Boomers but are similar to Generation X in prayer and attendance at religious services. Future research is needed as the Millennials age to examine life course spirituality and religiosity.

#### **Introduction**

The social scientific conversation of the relationship between spirituality and religiosity (however defined) has been going on for a long time and is still relevant today (e.g., Wuthnow; Zhai, Ellison, Stokes and Norval 2008). Wuthnow contends there is a growing separation between those who make ideological distinctions between whatever it means to be spiritual and the more traditional measurements of religiousness or religious identification. In particular, he points to a higher percentage of young adults in our society who consider themselves “spiritual but not religious” (SBNR). Social scientific scholars have devoted considerable attention to spirituality since the 1960s (Ammerman). Much of this research initially addressed the baby boom cohort. A significant proportion of Baby

Boomers questioned the relevance and legitimacy of a number of social institutions in society. Many members of this cohort began to question institutionalized religion and embraced subjective, voluntaristic approaches to religious beliefs and ideologies (Roof and McKinney).

Recent research suggests that it is now the younger cohorts or age groups of today (e.g., the Millennials) that hold the spiritual but not religious positions (Zhai et al.; Pew Research Center 2010a, 2010b). It is possible that cohort members, such as Baby Boomers, “age out” of individualistic ideological positions and return to the religious institution later in life. In order to examine cohort comparisons, we address the degree to which birth cohorts are more likely to report being “spiritual but not religious” or less religious in general.

Religiousness involves a number of elements or facets of one’s life. Social scientists use the term “religiosity” to indicate the intensity and commitment of an individual’s practice or participation in her or his religion. Clearly, there are several components as to what the term conveys (see Ellison, Gay, and Glass). For this study, we focus on belief in God, belief in the Bible as the actual word of God, frequency of prayer, and attendance at religious services as indicators of religiosity. These components of religiosity are frequently used in the social scientific literature (see Roof and McKinney).

Spirituality is a more difficult concept to measure than religiosity. It is more idiosyncratic and is influenced by a variety of personal and societal factors (Ammerman; Barringer, Gay, and Lynxwiler). Religiousness is often tied to the social institution of religion whereas spirituality is perceived as more individual, subjective, and personal in definition (Roof 1993, 1997). What people mean when they say they are spiritual is less clear than when they say they are religious. Even though research demonstrates a consistent relationship between religiosity and spirituality, many interpret spirituality as something different than religiousness. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine what spirituality means to people (i.e., people were not asked to provide a definition of spirituality). Instead, we examine the correlates of subjective spirituality.

Cohort differences in subjective spirituality and religiosity may be related to other factors. Recent research demonstrates the importance of a variety of sociodemographic variables (e.g., Roof and McKinney; Wuthnow; Baker). This research demonstrates that religiosity varies by marital status, parental status, gender, socioeconomic status, geographic residence, and race and ethnicity to mention a few. As a result, this study incorporates control variables in the analysis.

The purpose of this study is to examine cohort comparisons of subjective spirituality and religiosity in two ways. First, we address cohort variations in spirituality and religiosity using four birth cohorts in the analysis: (1) the Millennials, (2) Generation X, (3) the Baby Boomers, and (4) the Silent Generation. Second, we include sociodemographic variables to see whether they affect the relationship between cohort and spirituality and religiosity.

### **Spirituality and Religiosity**

The literature shows a consistent relationship between these two constructs through the analysis of survey data. For example, a simple cross tabular look at the 2010 and 2012 General Social Surveys (Smith et al.) shows that a little over one half of the respondents

report being moderately or very religious and moderately or very spiritual. Earlier studies (e.g., Xenakis) also show a significant relationship between the two constructs. This is not surprising since spirituality is an important component of Christian ideology, and Christianity is the dominant religious ideology in our society. As result, a large proportion of American adults consider religiousness and spirituality to be overlapping concepts that are embedded within one belief system. Nevertheless, there is an increasing interest in understanding the subset of the population that self-identifies as “spiritual but not religious” (Chaves).

### **Religiosity, Spirituality, Cohort and Age**

Time and again, age has demonstrated a positive relationship with religiosity. As people age and move through various life course transition periods or stages, religious participation and involvement has a tendency to change. The general pattern is that people increase religious participation as they get older but in a non-linear fashion (Argue, Johnson, and White).

What is unclear is whether the relationship between age and religiosity is contingent on historical epoch (the time of measurement) or cohort membership. Studies indicate that memberships in religious collectivities and attendance rates were at a peak shortly after World War II for all ages. That is, rates steadily climbed from the 1940s through most of the 1960s (Salisbury). These rates began to fall during the 1970s (Roof and McKinney). Much of this decline was attributed to the baby boom cohort. This cohort was socialized in a much different political, social, and economic climate than the cohort that preceded them. The Baby Boomers witnessed and were often a part of social and political issues of the time, such as war protests, the feminist movement, and the civil rights movement. Numerous studies (e.g., Bass; Alwin; Williamson, Coupland, Folwell, and Sparks; Hill; Miller) document the differences in the social and political attitudes and behaviors between the baby boom cohort and their predecessors.

It follows that since Baby Boomers questioned major social institutions, they also tended to reject the traditional religious institution and norms as well. Greer and Roof conclude that many adopted a more privatized religion that was not related to institutional religious identification. Bellah’s widely recognized description of the development of religious individualism supports a more subjective, voluntaristic ideological position of this cohort. Bellah did not use the phrase “spiritual but not religious,” but it describes much of the individualism expressed at the time (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton).

Wuthnow does use the phrase and suggests that the SBNRs are involved in “spiritual tinkering” and are also more likely to be involved in “church shopping” and “church hopping.” In addition, he contends that those in their twenties and thirties (during the middle years of the 2000s) are more likely to consider spirituality and religiosity as distinct entities. “Twenty and thirty-somethings” in Wuthnow’s analysis are either young members of Generation X or older Millennials. Hence, we are interested in examining whether younger birth cohorts differ in subjective spirituality and religiosity from older cohorts.

## Birth Cohort

In general, most of the literature focusing on cohort differences in religiosity focuses on variations between the Silent Generation or Depression Era cohort, people born in the 1930's, and the Baby Boom cohort, people born in the 1950's (see Craig and Bennett). In the 1990s, more began to address the Generation X cohort born in the 1970's or so and their attitudes and experiences in general (e.g., Roof and Landres; Trenton; Ortner; Arnett 2000b). Recently, attention has turned toward the Millennial generation and their spiritual and religious patterns (Arnett 2000a; Arnett and Jensen; Smith and Snell). Some of the difficulty in cohort/generation studies is the operationalization of each cohort/generation. In many cases, there is widespread disagreement or at least differences in opinions concerning categorical strategies for cohort designations. This section describes the uniqueness of each cohort and the operational strategy used in this analysis.

*The Millennials.* Today's Millennial generation is often compared to the Baby Boom cohort. They have been called "Generation Y," "Generation Next," and "echo boomers." Howe and Strauss coined the term Millennials, and it is the name that has garnered the most attention. This generation is currently coming of age and entering the adult world. They are in their twenties and very early thirties. Arnett suggests Millennials are in a transitional period characterized by identity exploration and the postponement of adult responsibilities that he refers to as "emerging adulthood." Research suggests that Millennials are less religious than other cohorts. Millennials also attend religious services at a lower rate than Baby Boomers did at the same age in the 1970s. Who are the Millennials? We draw from the Pew Research Center (2010b) and operationalize the Millennials as the birth cohort that was born from 1981 to 1994.

*Generation X.* In many ways, this cohort has received the least attention from the basic research literature. Strauss and Howe first referred to this generation as the 13<sup>th</sup> *Generation* just before Coupland's novel, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*. The name for the cohort caught on, and the people in this cohort have received considerable attention from other media outlets (see Thau and Heflin). Some have referred to Generation X as the "overlooked" generation since they represent another cohort that is characterized by lower birth rates (Mitchel). This cohort experienced a very different socialization experience than the Baby Boom cohort. Some research (Peterson; Giles) suggests that there are considerable attitudinal differences between Boomers and Gen-Xers on a range of social and political attitudes, lifestyles, and perceptions of religion.

Some raise the question of what birth years constitute Generation X (Bagby). The operationalization of Generation X varies widely in the literature. For example, Mitchell considers those born between 1965 and 1976 as Generation X and Dunphy considers the time frame to be between 1963 and 1980. By far, the most documented birth years used to define Generation X is the operationalization used by Strauss and Howe. Hence, Generation X is defined as those respondents born between 1965 and 1980.

*Baby Boomers.* The label for the cohort born between 1946 and 1964 has never been ambiguous. It has always been the Baby Boom cohort. This cohort was socialized in a much different political, social, and economic climate than the cohort that preceded them. The Baby Boomers witnessed and were often a part of social and political issues of the time, such

as war protests, the feminist movement, and the civil rights movements. Numerous studies (e.g., Bass; Alwin; Williamson et al.; Hill; Miller) document the differences in the social and political attitudes and behaviors between the Baby Boom cohort and other birth cohorts. Roof and McKinney report that the Baby Boomers responded to a “new voluntarism” that moved away from formal ties to religious organizations. If this is true then the Baby Boomers adopted a less institutional ideological position, or at the very least, became more individualistic and more privatized. However, an age graded argument contends that as Boomers aged, religion became a more important aspect of their lives. Indeed, the Pew and Gallup data show evidence of this trend (Pew Research Center 2010b; Newport).

*Silent Generation.* The birth years and the labels associated with this birth cohort also vary. For example, Owen refers to those born between 1930 and 1945 as the “Silent Generation,” Craig and Halfacre call the 1923-1937 birth cohort the World War II/cold war cohort, Mitchel considers the 1933-1946 birth cohort the “Swing” generation, and Gay and Campbell operationalize the “Baby Bust” cohort as a cohort born in the 1930’s. In general, this cohort was concerned with familism and “other-directed conformity” (Collins and Coltrane). Coupled with confidence in American institutions was an unprecedented increase in denominational growth and participation in religious activities (Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens). Hence, we expect this birth cohort to exhibit the highest levels of religiosity.

## Methods

Like many previous studies of differences in religious, social, and political attitudes, data for this study are taken from the General Social Surveys (hereafter GSS). The data in these surveys were collected from nationwide samples. Each survey is an independently drawn sample of English-speaking persons eighteen years of age or over, living in non-institutional arrangements within the United States (Smith, Marsden, Hout, and Kim). For these analyses, only respondents who were interviewed in 2010 or 2012 are included. The GSS is an appropriate data set because the data set contains survey items tapping the religious and spirituality dependent and independent variables, and they contain a wide range of sociodemographic and background characteristics of respondents.

### *Dependent Variables*

*Spiritual But Not Religious (SBNR).* The spiritual but not religious (SBNR) variable is created through a combination of the religious and spirituality questions. Individuals who report being “very spiritual” or “moderately spiritual” on the spirituality question and “slightly religious” or “not religious at all” on the religious question are coded (1) and represent the SBNR respondents. All other valid responses are coded (0).

The subjective spirituality question in the GSS was: “To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person? Are you . . .” The possible responses to this question were (1) very spiritual, (2) moderately spiritual, (3) slightly spiritual, (4) not spiritual at all, (0) not applicable, (8) don’t know, and (9) no answer. Subjective religiosity is measured by an individual’s religious self-reported importance of religion in their everyday lives. The question in the GSS was: “To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person? Are you . . .” The possible responses to this question were (1) very religious, (2) moderately religious, (3) slightly religious, (4) not religious at all, (0) not applicable, (8) don’t know, and

(9) no answer. “Don’t know,” “no answer,” and “not applicable” codes were excluded from the analyses.

*Belief in the Existence of God.* Belief in God is measured through possible responses to several statements. Respondents were asked to identify which statement “comes closest to expressing what you believe about God”: “I don’t believe in God”; “I don’t know whether there is a God, and I don’t believe any way to find out”; “I don’t believe in a personal God, but I do believe in a Higher Power of some kind”; “I find myself believing in God some of the time, but not at others”; “While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God”; or “I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it.” For the analysis, “I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it” is coded (1) and all other responses are coded (0).

*Biblical Literalism.* Literalism is measured through the following question to assess their beliefs concerning the Bible. “Which of the following statements comes the closest to describing your feelings about the Bible?”: “The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally”; “The Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word”; or “The Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by man” Respondents who considered the Bible to be “the actual word of God and is to be taken literally” are coded (1) and others are coded (0) for the analysis.

*Prayer.* The final variable that addresses subjective religiosity is the question concerning prayer. The frequency of prayer is measured by the following question: “About how often do you pray?” Responses are coded (1) never, (2) less than once a week, (3) once a week, (4) several times a week, (5) once a day, and (6) several times a day. Only valid responses are used in the analysis.

*Attendance.* Public religious participation is measured by religious attendance. The question was: “How often do you attend religious services?” The possible responses to this question were (0) never, (1) less than once a year, (2) once a year, (3) several times a year, (4) once a month, (5) 2-3 times a month, (6) nearly every week, (7) every week, (8) more than once a week, and (9) don’t know/not applicable. Only valid responses are used in the analysis.

#### *Independent Variable*

*Birth Cohort.* The independent variable is birth cohort. The Millennial cohort is identified as respondents who were born between 1981 and 1994. Generation X is identified as respondents who were born between 1965 and 1980. Baby Boomers are identified as respondents who were born between 1946 and 1964, and the Silent Generation are those who were born before 1945. Dummy variables are created for the Millennial cohort, Generation X, and the Silent Generation. The Baby Boom cohort serves as the reference category in all analyses.

#### *Control Variables*

*Marital Status, Gender, Family Status.* The question in the GSS asks respondents if they are currently married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have ever been married. Marital status is recoded to represent three statuses. Dummy variables are created to represent respondents

who are married or widowed, divorced or separated, and never married. Married respondents serve as the reference category in the subsequent analyses. Gender is coded (1) to represent female respondents and males are coded (0). In addition, a dummy variable is created to represent respondents who have children under the age of eighteen living with them.

*Southern Residence, Family Income, Educational Attainment, Race and Ethnicity.* A dummy variable is created for southern residence (South=1, all others=0). The region item in the GSS indicates respondent's area of residence and follows the U.S. census coding. Total family income is measured using a 25 point scale with the highest category representing an income of \$150,000 and over. Educational attainment is measured in actual years of school completed and ranges from 0 to 20. The assumption is that the number of years beyond high school reflects the appropriate years in college and graduate school to earn corresponding vocational and academic degrees. Race and ethnicity is identified by using the questions concerning race and Hispanic identification. For purposes of this analysis, respondents who identify as White, African American, or Hispanic (regardless of race) are included. Dummy variables for African American and Hispanic respondents are created with White respondents serving as the reference category.

#### *Analytic Strategy*

The analytic strategy uses binary logistic regression and OLS multiple regression for the subjective spirituality and religiosity variables. Model 1 for each of the dependent variables exhibits a bivariate examination of the relationship between birth cohort and the dependent variables. Model 2 for each of the dependent variables revisits earlier work (e.g., Shahabi, Powell, Musick, Pargament, Thoresen, Williams, Underwood, and Ory) by including sociodemographic variables. A dummy variable is included for survey year to assess whether differences by year were evident. This variable was not significant in any of the analyses but is reported in each of the tables.

#### **Results**

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the dependent, independent, and control variables. The table shows that 15.8% of the sample report being "spiritual but not religious." For the belief variables, 59% of the sample have no doubt that God exists and 33% believe the Bible is the actual word of God. The mean for frequency of prayer is 4.23 and indicates that respondents pray several times a week. The mean for frequency of attendance is 3.51 and shows that respondents attend religious services between several times a year and once a month. The table also shows that roughly 19% are Millennials, nearly 29% are members of Generation X, another 33% are Baby Boomers, and nearly 19% are members of the Silent Generation.

Table 2 presents the results for the analysis of birth cohort and sociodemographic variables and the dichotomous SBNR dependent variable. Both binary logistic regression models are statistically significant. Model 1 exhibits the binary results of SBNR regressed on the birth cohort dummy variables. As noted earlier, much of the current literature suggests that Millennials are more likely to identify as SBNR. Our analysis does not support this position. This means that Millennials are no different than their Baby Boom counterparts.

The cohort that is most likely to report being spiritual but not religious is Generation X. As anticipated, the Silent Generation or Depression Era cohort has the lowest odds of being spiritual but not religious. These results hold once controls are entered included in the model.

*Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Proportions*

	Mean/ Proportion	Standard Deviation	N
SBNR (1=SBNR, 0=All others)	.158	---	3825
Belief that God Exists (1=God Exists, 0=All others)	.591	---	3825
Belief in Biblical Literalism (1=Literalist, 0=All others)	.331	---	3825
Frequency of Prayer (Six point scale)	4.228	1.752	3786
Attendance at Religious Services (nine point scale)	3.51	2.811	3809
Millennials (born 1981-1994)	.192	---	3825
Generation X (born 1965-1980)	.288	---	3825
Baby Boom (born 1946-1964)	.334	---	3825
“Silent Generation” (born before 1946)	.186	---	3825
Female	.559	---	3825
Divorced	.201	---	3825
Never Married	.265	---	3825
Married	.534	---	3825
Children Living at Home	.291	---	3825
Southern Residence	.391	---	3825
Family Income	16.53	5.677	3630
Educational Attainment	13.44	3.115	3825
African American Respondents	.159	---	3825
Hispanic Respondents	.132	---	3825

Model 2 in Table 2 shows that divorced and never married respondents are more likely than married respondents to be spiritual but not religious. Respondents with children under the age of eighteen living at home are also less likely to report being spiritual but not religious. This is the case for southerners and African Americans as well. Finally, an increase in educational attainment increases the odds of reporting being spiritual but not religious.

Table 3 displays four binary logistic regression models. Two models for belief in God and two for belief in the literal interpretation of the Bible. All models are statistically significant. The results of these analyses show a significant departure from Table 2. The two dependent variables in the analyses represent the subjective belief dimension of religiosity.



The literature suggests that Millennials are less religious than other cohorts. The results in Table 3 indicate that this is still the case. In addition, Models 1 and 2 demonstrate that Baby Boomers are not significantly different than Generation X or the Silent Generation in their belief in the existence of God. Model 2 shows that females are more likely to believe in God, divorced and never married are less likely to believe than their married counterparts, and southerners are more likely to believe. Educational attainment decreases the odds of believing in God. Lastly, African Americans and Hispanics are more likely to believe in God than whites.

*Table 2. The Impact of Birth Cohort and Sociodemographic Variables on the Likelihood of Being SBNR (Binary Logistic Regression)*

Independent Variable	Spiritual But Not Religious	
	Model 1	Model 2
Millennial Cohort (born 1981-1994)	-.044/.957 (.127)	-.008/.992 (.153)
Generation X (born 1965-1980)	.205/1.228* (.104)	.306/1.358** (.119)
Silent Generation (born before 1946)	-.572/.564** (.147)	-.493/.611** (.154)
Female		.114/1.121 (.094)
Divorced		.421/1.523** (.120)
Never Married		.266/1.305* (.133)
Children Living at Home		-.289/.749* (.115)
Southern Residence		-.258/.773** (.099)
Family Income		-.002/.998 (.010)
Educational Attainment		.104/1.110** (.018)
African American Respondents		-.352/.703* (.144)
Hispanic Respondents		.046/1.047 (.092)
Survey in 2010		.087/1.091 (.092)
Constant	-1.638	-3.126
N	3620	3620
Chi-square	30.629**	115.694**
Cox & Snell R Square	.008	.031
Nagelkerke R Square	.014	.053

Cell entries are given as logistic regression coefficients/odds ratios with the standard errors in parentheses. \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01.

The results for Biblical literalism are also presented in Table 3. The pattern is very similar to the pattern for belief in God. Millennials are least likely to believe in the literal interpretation of the Bible. One cohort variation is evident in the bivariate analysis. Members of the Silent Generation are more likely to be Biblical literalist than the Baby Boomers.

However, this difference is no longer significant once controls are entered included in the model. There are two variations among the sociodemographic variables. An increase in family income leads to a decrease in the odds of believing in the literal interpretation of the Bible, and Hispanics show no significant difference from white.

*Table 3. The Impact of Birth Cohort and Sociodemographic Variables on the Likelihood of Believing in God and the Literal Interpretation of the Bible (Binary Logistic Regression)*

Independent Variable	Belief that God Exists		Biblical Literalism	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Millennial Cohort (born 1981-1994)	-.592/.553** (.094)	-.579/.560** (.121)	-.332/.717** (.102)	-.351/.704** (.133)
Generation X (born 1965-1980)	-.022/.978 (.084)	-.037/.964 (.098)	-.113/.893 (.088)	-.127/.881 (.106)
Silent Generation (born before 1946)	.124/1.132 (.097)	.003/1.003 (.109)	.255/1.291** (.097)	.138/1.147 (.114)
Female		.531/1.700** (.073)		.372/1.451** (.080)
Divorced		-.453/.636** (.098)		-.322/.725** (.105)
Never Married		-.603/.547** (.108)		-.601/.548** (.119)
Children Living a Home		.023/1.023 (.090)		.123/1.131 (.096)
Southern Residence		.658/1.930** (.077)		.618/1.855** (.079)
Family Income		-.012/.988 (.008)		-.038/.963** (.008)
Educational Attainment		-.089/.915** (.014)		-.149/.862** (.015)
African American Respondents		1.249/3.488** (.120)		1.248/3.483** (.107)
Hispanic Respondents		.508/1.662** (.118)		.209/1.232 (.121)
Surveyed in 2010		-.036/.964 (.072)		.030/1.031 (.077)
Constant	.469	1.308	-.662	1.371
N	3630	3630	3630	3630
Chi-square	57.197**	489.738**	29.602**	577.801**
Cox & Snell R Square	.015	.126	.008	.147
Nagelkerke R Square	.020	.170	.011	.205

Cell entries are given as logistic regression coefficients/odds ratios with the standard errors in parentheses. \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01.

Table 4 displays the results of the OLS regression for frequency of prayer and frequency of religious attendance. Like Tables 2 and 3, there are two models for each variable. Model 1 explains 3.0% of the variation in prayer and is statistically significant. The table shows that Millennials and members of Generation X pray less than their Baby Boom counterparts. Interestingly, the Silent Generation exhibits no significant difference. Even though the signs of the coefficients appear to show an age related pattern (i.e., as we age, we pray more), the

significance tests support a distinction between the two younger cohorts and the two older cohorts. The pattern remains once controls are entered into the model. The full model accounts for 15.6% of the variation in prayer. Several of the control variables show significant relationships that are similar to the religiosity results in Table 3. Females pray more frequently than males. Divorced and never married respondents pray less than married respondents. People in the south pray more than those in other parts of the country, and African Americans consistently demonstrate higher levels of religiosity.

*Table 4. The Impact of Birth Cohort and Sociodemographic Variables on the Frequency of Prayer and Attendance at Religious Services (Multiple Regression)*

Independent Variable	Frequency of Prayer		Attendance at Services	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Millennial Cohort (born 1981-1994)	-.774/-.173** (.083)	-.676/-.151** (.091)	-.561/-.078** (.133)	-.376/-.052** (.148)
Generation X (born 1965-1980)	-.151/-.039* (.073)	-.190/-.049** (.072)	-.149/-.024 (.117)	-.355/-.058** (.120)
Silent Generation (born before 1946)	.099/.022 (.084)	.052/.011 (.082)	.639/.087** (.135)	.593/.081** (.134)
Female		.721/.205** (.055)		.503/.089** (.134)
Divorced		-.239/-.055** (.073)		-1.082/-.155** (.120)
Never Married		-.476/-.119** (.080)		-1.109/-.174** (.131)
Children Living a Home		.050/.013 (.067)		.348/.057** (.110)
Southern Residence		.538/.149** (.057)		.687/.119** (.093)
Family Income		-.010/-.032 (.006)		-.004/-.008 (.009)
Educational Attainment		-.012/-.020 (.010)		.067/.072** (.017)
African American Respondents		.871/.182** (.079)		1.326/.173** (.107)
Hispanic Respondents		.412/.078** (.086)		.887/.105** (.141)
Surveyed in 2010		-.035/-.010 (.054)		.007/.001 (.088)
Constant	4.385	4.089	3.509	2.242
N	3595	3595	3614	3614
F Ratio	36.738**	50.902**	21.381**	35.812**
R Square	.030	.156	.017	.115
Adjusted R Square	.020	.153	.017	.111

Cell entries are given as unstandardized regression coefficients/standardized coefficients (Beta) with the standard errors in parentheses. \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01

The last two models in Table 4 display the results for frequency of attendance at religious services. The coefficients for birth cohort demonstrate significant differences that reflect age graded attendance. These full model shows that Millennials have the lowest

attendance level and is followed by Generation X as the next lowest level. That is, both birth cohorts attend less often than Baby Boomers. Consistent with the age graded pattern, the Silent Generation has the highest attendance level. This model is significant and accounts for 11.5 percent of the variation in attendance. The pattern for the control variables is very similar to the pattern for prayer.

## Conclusions

Our study uses a cross-sectional design. We are limited in that we analyze responses to questions that were asked at one point in time. We are unable to (1) compare all cohorts when they were of the same age or (2) follow a particular birth cohort over time. The first would require surveys that were administered on a yearly basis beginning decades ago, and the second would require repeated surveys of the same birth cohort over time. The first would afford us the opportunity to use an age/period/cohort design, and the second would give us a better understanding of life course events. A qualitative study of individual biographies would give us more insight into people's understanding of religion and spirituality. We simply do not have these data available. However, The GSS does give us the opportunity to examine some of our questions and provide insight and suggestions for future research.

The results of our analyses indicate Generation X is the most likely cohort to be spiritual but not religious (SBNR). Maybe Generation X is a unique birth cohort with respect to spirituality and religiosity. Flory and Miller contend that Generation X religion emphasizes sensual and expressive aspects of religious beliefs more so than other generations. Perhaps they are describing "spiritual but not religious" rather than religious belief. They also contend that Gen X religion is creative in their attempts to locate opportunities to exercise their lifestyle interests. Once again, it is possible this description of Gen X religion is what we are now calling "spiritual but not religious."

Interestingly, neither the Millennials nor the Baby Boomers are different from one another in spirituality, but they do differ from Generation X. Again, it is Generation X that is uniquely spiritual but not religious. This cohort is now well into their thirties and forties. They have formed families and are part of the established labor force. Our results show that they are less likely than Baby Boomers to pray and attend religious services. While Generation Xers are more likely to be SBNR than Millennials, they are similar to the Millennials in frequency of prayer and attendance at religious services. While analysis shows differences between the two cohorts in spirituality, we do find that they are very similar when it comes to attendance and prayer. As a result, religious organizations should be concerned. While the Baby Boomers appear to be going back to religious organizations as they get older, Generation X has not.

In *God is Alive and Well*, Newport contends that the future of American religion is bright. His assertion is that Americans go back to religion as they age. Perhaps Baby Boomers have "aged out" of their individualistic, privatized ideological position. That is, over the life course, they may have moved their values toward more traditional religious venues. An important question is when does that occur? If people return to religion as retirement approaches (as appears to be the case with the Baby Boomers), then religious organizations will have a unique age distribution. One that looks very different from the

general population. Equally curious is whether the Millennials will move toward “spiritual but not religious” or more traditional venues. Future research on the patterns of religious participation of Generation X and the Millennials is needed to address this issue.

Our analysis also demonstrates that the Silent Generation is less likely than the Baby Boomers to hold SBNR positions. The Silent Generation is more likely to have a strong tie to American mainline religious organizations and denominations. As a result, they may be more “spiritual *and* religious.” That is, they are likely to interpret spirituality within the framework of being religious.

Finally, the SBNR phenomenon is clearly of interest to religious professionals and clergy. If people locate their spirituality outside of traditional institutions, then the institutions themselves are likely to suffer. If fewer people participate in religious activities and fewer people tithe, religious institutions are likely to face severe financial difficulties. Again, additional research is needed to examine the extent to which religious institutions are experiencing significant declines in adherents as a result of an SBNR movement.

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