

LEAVING THE FAITH: FACTORS THAT LEAD TO  
EMERGING ADULT APOSTASY

by

Sammie Louise Davis Dyson

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences

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## Dedication

I dedicate this work of love to my beloved parents, Reverend Arthur and Mrs. Emma Lou Davis, who raised me well enough through their modeling, attachment, and style that demonstrated for me how to raise my own children. I must have done something right during that process because all six of those children have “risen up and called me blessed” (Proverbs 31:28, KJV).

### **Abstract**

The present qualitative study used the transcendental phenomenological model. It investigated the three parenting factors of modeling, style, and attachment and their impact on emerging adult decisions to leave the Christian faith of their upbringing. Six participants, ages 21-25, male and female, white or Hispanic college students yielded information demonstrating that the parenting factors mutually interacted with one another. If the parent or parents had a positive impact in the modeling factor, the same was true for attachment and style. A fourth focal point was whether the emerging young adult would seek out a community of faith of his or her own choosing. The results were mixed, with the unexpected result of the male student who espoused atheism, stating that he would seek to get involved with volunteerism—even though it would potentially be church-sponsored. Two other unexpected results were that two of the female participants revealed their bisexuality and, in whole or in part, blamed the church's non-acceptance as their reason for apostasy. One of them had equal problems with disappointment within the institution.

*Keywords:* parent modeling, parent-child attachment, parental modeling, sexuality conflicts within the church, apostasy

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

Increasing numbers of young adults are leaving the Christian religion—whether Catholic or Protestant, at a rate of at least 30-40% (Brinkerhoff & Mackie, 1993; Hunsberger & Brown, 1984; Sandomirsky & Wilson, 1990). According to the Pew Research Center, young adults are 40% less likely to affiliate with any religious group, and this was the result of looking at 41 different countries between 2008 and 2017. Interestingly, in only two countries was there a reverse trend wherein adults ages 40+ were the least likely to be affiliated with religion. Those countries were Chad and Ghana. To quote from the Pew Research article,

In 41 countries, adults under 40 are significantly less likely than their elders to have a religious affiliation, while in only two countries (Chad and Ghana) are younger adults more likely to identify with a religious group. In 63 countries, there is no statistically significant difference in affiliation rates. (p. 6)

Apostasy is seen as divisive and alienating when it happens within families that have strong Christian beliefs (Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977; Wuthnow & Gluck, 1973). At least, that is the inference, though my extensive searching—though not exhaustive—has yet to find literature that directly addresses parental distress when apostasy happens. It is simply inferred within the “white spaces” between the words. Perhaps the results of this work I am pursuing may yield some insights directly into the otherwise experienced alienation and distress that parents feel when their child not only “leaves the nest” but also leaves the faith on which they were raised.

This qualitative study looks at various parent/child interactions that impact that child as an emerging adult. Specifically, what are the parent/child interactions that factor into the

emerging adult's decision to leave the religion or spirituality of their childhood (i.e., become apostate) or are there factors common to the participants?

I have found no research that combines the factors that are my focus in this study that I am doing (parental modeling, parenting styles, parental attachment), and learning how or whether those factors contribute to the emerging adult deciding to either stay or leave the faith with which they were raised. I am also peripherally interested in learning whether the emerging adult will choose to join a community of faith of their own choosing or if they remain apostate. My assumption, which will be tested herein, is that a truly apostate young adult will have no interest in any faith at all. Will I perhaps discover that could be an incorrect assumption? If I make such a discovery, will that mean that the departure from the faith of their childhood was perhaps less apostasy and more about individuating?

Specifically, I am focusing on Christianity because that is the religion of my youth. Admittedly and perhaps even expectedly, I engaged in some degree of individuating, but I never became an apostate. The former means I "tested" the tenets of my childhood in the "fire" of exegetical and hermeneutical scriptural scrutiny and rational thinking.

In the process, I discovered that a small portion of my upbringing in the faith was not supported by scripture when "rightly divided" (II Timothy 2:15 KJV/NKJV). However, it strengthened the stronger rationale for retaining much of the teachings or tenets of my childhood teachings from my parents, especially my father who was a pastor before I was born, and remained so until he went to be with the Lord when I was a middle aged adult.

Per the writings of Doherty (2003), I will not make what he calls a "false dichotomy" between the terms *religion* and *spirituality*. His writings were in the context of referring to the work of counselors who accepted the dichotomy as valid or factual. They embraced the term

*spirituality* as a concept that secular therapists or counselors could effectively work with but denigrated or at least relegated the term *religion* or *religiosity* to a lesser place of dignity or validity. Doherty (2003) believed there is no such real dichotomy. So, my use of those terms in this dissertation shall be interchangeable, to some degree.

## **Perspectives**

### ***Historical***

From an historical perspective, there is a growing body of literature about various individual childhood experiences that impact that child to the point of him or her walking away from their childhood faith as soon as they are old enough—or think they are old enough—to do so (Bao et al., 1999; Benda, 1995; Berkowitz & Grych, 1998; Flor & Knapp, 2001). Research has shown that parents whose behaviors match their teachings, there is a greater likelihood that the young adult child will retain their faith (Bader & Desmond, 2006). Additionally, emotional intelligence and religiosity are both enhanced in young adults when the parents employed an authoritative parenting style, rather than a permissive or authoritarian style (Aslani et al., 2015). This perspective will receive a more enhanced focus within the literature review of Chapter Two.

### ***Social (Psychosocial)***

From a psychosocial developmental perspective, often in the process of individuating, which is a term used by Erikson (1968, 1982), a young person will challenge parental authority. Rules, curfews, typical viewpoints about how to live one's life are placed under scrutiny by the young adult/older adolescent. The question is what are the factors in why some emerging young adults venture into some areas of life experiences that may be classified as apostasy, while others make choices to remain devoted to the religious tradition of their childhood?

### ***Conceptual***

The concept of *emerging adulthood* is from a book written by Arnett (2007) titled *Emerging Adulthood: What Is It, and What Is It Good For?* The time span was late teens to mid-twenties and his range coincides perfectly with Erik Erikson's intimacy vs. isolation stage of ego development. It is from Eriksonian theory that my research is drawn and expanded to be applicable to the young adult's spiritual development. Though Erikson's focus did not have a spiritual component, it is easily applicable to the spirituality behind why one individuates or spends a bit of time during the individuation process discovering just how valid and, for that matter, reliable their beliefs may actually be.

I would argue that whether or not an emerging adult was raised on a spiritual foundation—specifically, Christian—or not, that a young adult is likely to include in his or her journey of individuating a search for the meaning of life. This existential exploration or pilgrimage is common to the human tripartite body, soul, and spirit. Thus, Erikson's psychosocial theory of development fits well.

To be inclusive of the research that is not quite as supportive of Erikson's theory, there is a study by Franz and White (1985). It argued that the theory is not as inclusive of female development as it is of male development. As such, the authors state that the concept of individuation is not as fully addressed as it could be if it were more broadly focused on overall development and not just on mostly male identity development. I disagree that his theory focuses mostly on identity development, at the expense of the development of intimacy, as the article also argues. This eight-stage theory is very broadly inclusive of both males and females and broader aspects of human development.

Further, the authors of that study misapplies or misrepresents Erikson's notion of *virtues*. They mislabeled one of the aspects of two of the stage names and called them the "virtues." The fifth stage of Identity vs. Identity Confusion—if successfully navigated, receives the virtue of *fidelity*. The study said that the virtue was "identity", which is incorrect. *Identity* is the result of the successful resolution of the *ego crisis*. Further, stage 6 is misrepresented in the Franz and White article. Correctly understood, it is called *Intimacy vs. Isolation* and if there is a successful resolution of the ego crisis, the virtue that results is *love*. This misrepresentation of Erikson's theory hinders an appropriate appreciation of the concept of individuation. Correctly understood, one can most successfully individuate if their journey through the first six stages are psychosocially healthy (Erikson, 1968, 1982).

From a conceptual (theoretical) perspective, not enough has been written about not only a multiplicity of factors and the interactions among them, but also about the phenomenological aspect of what those factors mean to the young adult. Several quantitative studies exist about parent/child interactions wherein parent modeling was shown to have a significant impact on the child later as they approach adulthood (Ahrold et al., 2011; Barton et al., 2014; Bowlby, 1969; Farrell, 2011). However, there is importance to learning about the feelings, emotions, or general psychology of why apostasy is happening or did happen during the age range of 18-25 years old. This age range covers the age that a person may have graduated from high school, until the age where the person is expected to have accomplished a fair amount of autonomy or independence, having earned a college education and started a career.

### **Situation to Self**

I have a very personal connection to the topic of apostasy because one of my daughters made a decision in her late teen years to abandon all things Christian-related. Interestingly, she

does not dislike Christians, but she absolutely abhors being “witnessed” to or “preached” at. To be clear, she has very valid reasons for her apostate position. She experienced trauma at the hand of so-called “Christians” during her formative years. She did not reveal it to me until the early years of her adulthood, specifically, when she was 20 years old. I was devastated.

This experience which was revealed to me more than 30 years ago has been a traumatically painful journey for both her and I, even to the point of some of those years being spent estranged from one another. It is now better, much better between us. I thank the Lord for that. We love each other so much. That is also why I know personally why there is a huge difference between individuation and apostasy. All of my children went through individuation to greater or lesser degrees, but none of them—except one—have totally “thrown out the baby with the bath water” as the adage goes. They have held on to the basic Christian beliefs, tested and tried them, and are more grounded in them with a clearer eye than the kind of faith a child has who is parroting and “puppeting” what the parents are teaching, prior to comparing it against broader worldviews.

Thus, in this research study I want to explore what emerging adults say regarding the factors that contributed to their experience of leaving the religious tradition of their childhood. These factors are of particular interest to me. The topic of emerging adult apostasy interests me because the factors I am focusing on that may show greater and lesser impact may or may not vary from person to person. There may be a pervasive most predictable one among several possibilities. I also am open and even potentially expectant of discovering additional factors of consequence or importance. In order to delve into what this research will reveal, I desire to learn directly from the participants about this, as they recall their experiences as children immersed within their family dynamics.

This calls for a transcendental phenomenological approach, which, according to Moustakas (1994) is “setting aside all preconceived ideas (epoche) to see phenomena through unclouded glasses, thereby allowing the true meaning of phenomena to naturally emerge with and within their own identity.” Within this approach, my philosophy is ontological, which means the study of existence, being, becoming, and reality; it is used in “different senses in different communities” (Guarino et al., 2009). This study is about the existence within a home context as a child is being and becoming a spiritually developed individual. That becomes the person’s reality at any given stage of life. For emerging adults, that is the stage of life that interests me. Finally, this phenomenological approach was participatory because the data were culled from the process of semi-structured interviews.

As a college professor, a licensed minister, a daughter of a pastor, and a born-again believer of Jesus Christ for many decades, I have an interest in this topic. Admittedly, my heart breaks every time I encounter individuals who seem to have thrown out the baby with the bathwater, in terms of totally abandoning the tenets of their childhood faith upbringing. Though, I understand why it would be more likely for that to happen with some emerging adults than others, it nonetheless deeply concerns me when I see it happening.

Also of importance to me is why the departure of the emerging adult is far more of a crisis for some families than for others. It makes sense to me that, at least in part, the difference in parental response has to do with their own level of religiosity. If they are more ritualistic than religious, I see them as more likely to be reasonably accepting of their son or daughter heading in new directions as regards God and faith. On the other hand, it seems logical to me that parents whose faith is the very compass for how to live their daily lives, they are far more likely to not

view their young adult child's departure as not very much of a crisis. They would see it as much more of not only a crisis, but one with both temporal and even eternal ramifications.

### **Problem Statement**

I have found no research that correlates, combines, or amalgamates the dynamics of parental modeling, parental attachment, parenting style, and the emerging adult's engagement in a faith community as a matter of his or her own choice and independence to make that choice. Additionally, I have found no qualitative research examining the ontological experiences and emotions of a young adult's current memories of how his or her childhood interactions with his or her parents are impacting their current choices surrounding issues of faith. There are quantitative studies that deal with the numeric of the phenomenon (Pew Research, 2018), but not the emotions, experiences (i.e., the phenomena involved). Among all the studies included in my research herein, I found none of them suggested future research be qualitative. That means the information from this study will be valuable in terms of discovering or affirming factors in whether the young emerging adult retains his or her childhood faith and why they make their ultimate decisions about all of that.

Apostasy is seen as a problem when it happens within families that have strong Christian beliefs (Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977; Wuthnow & Gluck, 1973). Though apostasy is treated more severely in Muslim families, where the life of the apostate may even be threatened, or at least the person is shunned or excommunicated, yet an apostate within a Christian family of strong beliefs is going to receive some level of expressed grief or backlash. For parents who have done their best, albeit with perhaps some errors, they have had a future for their children in their sights that would be one that demonstrates strong moral, ethical, and characteristics described in scripture as godly. Even in homes where the parents may realize that it is normal for their emerging adult

child(ren) to individuate, those parents still become concerned if that individuation takes on behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes that are antithetical to biblical teachings on which the child was raised.

Experientially, I have witnessed innumerable occasions where the parents of apostate children begin to question themselves or blame themselves for the fact that the young adult son or daughter seems to have left the faith. Though I make this statement without directly citing any published demonstration of this, it is an experiential or existential statement, for which a literature search yielded no scientific support. In fact, it is an ontological statement as well as an existential statement. Existentialism looks at the meaning of life and death and has several historical proponents including Rollo May (1909-1994) and Irving Yalom (1931 --). Depending on the new ideologies or worldviews that the young adult adapts, the parents may attribute a level of mental, cognitive, or spiritual pathology to the child (i.e., being possessed by demons, being *unbalanced*, being *tricked by the enemy*). This is also an experiential statement from both personal and interpersonal life experiences.

I have a vested interest in apostasy because one of my children chose that path. It has been an extremely painful 25+-year journey of trying to come to terms with why she has left the Christian teachings of her childhood, but there has been somewhat of a “smoking of the peace pipe” in the last 10 years between her and me. Though I am still strong in my faith, and though she is still strong in her pagan religion, she and I have a better communication now than we did for many years.

Leaving the faith sometimes is the result of family discord and dysfunction, as much literature reveals in this present body of work, some of which are represented in the work of Bao et al. (1999), Martin et al. (2003), Kim and Wilcox (2014), and Leonard et al. (2013). In the

event that this is the impetus for the child leaving the teachings of their youth, the parents may or may not realize their impact on the child in his or her formative years. Based upon the real-life in-home experiences, the child may have never really inculcated the teachings or what may actually have been perceived as preaching that were part of the home life. The child may have just pretended to do so because they may have felt there was no other choice, in order to do their part to keep the peace.

One would assume that apostasy is primarily a problem for the parents, simply because the child is leaving them. They are not just doing the normal or expected leaving from the nest. They are leaving the foundation of the faith in which they were raised. Then, the assumption, as well as experiential and observational demonstrations, exist that declare that members of the extended family who are people of strong religious faith are also deeply concerned. The church becomes concerned to whatever degree they become aware of the emerging adult's departure from church attendance, participation, and even what may have been seen as interest or even passion during the formative years of spiritual development.

Though it is, indeed, normative for these young emerging adults to make their own decisions about matters of faith as they are coming into their own, it depends on the degree to which that process retains and discards aspects of the beliefs and values of their childhood. This author recalls her time as a first-year college student where certain ideologies and worldviews were introduced, which gave pause to earlier beliefs. In the process of testing those earlier beliefs against the newer ones, ultimately there was a clearness of conscience and of mind as the decision to relinquish certain beliefs, but to retain the main or overarching truths of scripture.

This departure was not an actual departure, or apostasy, but rather a refining of sorts wherein the valid beliefs were tried in the fire and came out shining like gold, while the ones that

got discarded were the dross. So, though it is normative to individuate, the ultimate end result of doing so may not be the result of actual apostasy but rather understandable exploration. Such exploration can have a solidifying effect, such that the young adult can better appreciate and articulate why they believe what they believe. This is the concept of using *reflective thinking* (King & Kitchener, 2004), also called *critical thinking* (Wade & Tavis, 2017)

Consistency or inconsistency of parental modeling of moral or religious values, and the effects on the adult child need further study (Bader & Desmond, 2006). This author's focus will address this problem, as well as the following examples of various kinds of limitations mentioned in the literature being examined. Walker and Hennig (1999) emphasized that studies on moral development have not focused enough on parental modeling of appropriate behavior, nor have such studies focused on real-life moral dilemmas rather than hypothetical ones. Barton et al. (2014) pointed out that the positive impact of perceived parental acceptance and the young adult's decision to maintain their childhood faith would do well to be re-examined for moderating or mediating factors.

Specifically, how does reciprocation and regional location of the sample groups factor into the results (Bao et al., 1999); that is, to what degree was there give-and-take between the parents and the child (i.e., reciprocation). If the child is raised in the authoritative or inductive style of parenting, there will have been a regular presence of listening as well as talking. The child's viewpoint will have been heard and respected, regardless of whether it was always adopted. Regional location also has an impact on parent-child communications around spiritual or religious issues, wherein a family located in the Midwest or south has a higher likelihood of raising a child with ingrained biblical values that would a family from either of the coastal areas

of the United States. This presumptive statement is from this author and may or may not be supported in the literature.

More recently, similar limitations surrounding the generalizability of a study that focused on college students from a Christian university (Leonard et al., 2013). Because these were college students from a Christian university may limit the ability to apply those results across the board, since such students are more often than not the product of the Midwest and the southern United States, as well as the likelihood that the students came from homes where there was a fair amount of reciprocation, or give-and-take between parents and child. Understandably, the data collected from such a group (Christian) may have a higher level of predictable parent/child reciprocal beliefs and practices of those beliefs.

A good body of quantitative research is available on the topic of what are the impetuses of emerging adult apostasy, as will be delineated in the literature review section of this current body of work. Within that body of work, limitations are explained, including the need to gain the emerging adult's insights about strict religiousness within the home, rather than just focusing on the parental view of the value of religiousness (Bowlby, 1969).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological research was to discover transcendental experiences of the interviewees' relationship with their parents. That is, because the overarching focus is on spirituality and its impact on the child's growing into adulthood, and how the relationship with their parents affected their spiritual decision-making. Spirituality is a transcendental matter because it encompasses matters beyond the material world.

Thus, this research project sought answers to certain important questions. What seems to be of greatest importance to raising a child in such a way that they do not turn away or become

apostate? How can they perhaps demonstrate the Proverb that when he or she is older, she or he will be less likely to depart from the biblical teachings of their childhood (Proverbs 22:6), or if they depart, be more likely to return?

Factors contributing to emerging adult apostasy include whether or how parents model their biblical values; how well they bonded or attached to the child; what were the typical ways in which they did that parenting (i.e., authoritarian, authoritative, neglectful, or permissive); and what impact did that have on the child? Finally, this research's purpose was to understand how these factors affected the child as an emerging adult.

This phenomenological study explored the central phenomenon of what the process is of an emerging adult leaving the faith of their childhood, particularly the Christian faith. At this stage in the research, the central phenomenon will be referred to as apostasy or becoming apostate. The theory guiding this study had a couple of foundational starting points for me. There is a term called *individuation*, the original source of its use is difficult to pin down, though family systems therapist Murray Bowen used it regularly. I used the term as applicable to its use by Erikson and his theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1968, 1982). For him, individuation is the point in a young person's life during adolescence when they are trying out their wings to see if they are able to leave the nest and explore the world on their own. Though Erikson was not writing at all from a faith perspective of any stripe, his theory is overarching, covering any aspect of life exploration as one seeks to develop their own independence.

Another theory factoring into this research study was that of the three levels of thinking, including pre-reflective, quasi-reflective, and reflective (King & Kitchener, 2004), wherein reflective is the most mature level, which then allows for the ability to engage in critical thinking. There are eight steps to critical thinking and are not particularly in strict order, except

for the first and last ones. They include 1) asking questions and being willing to wonder, 2) defining one's terms, 3) examining the evidence, 4) examining the evidence, 5) avoiding emotional reasoning, 6) analyzing assumptions and biases, 7) considering other interpretations, and 8) tolerating uncertainty.

Originally, the notion of critical thinking is attributed to Socrates, over 2500 years ago. Iterations of it have traveled through the hands of Plato, Aristotle, Greek skeptics, Thomas Aquinas, forward to John Dewey in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Paul et al., 1997). It is possible that within these explorations that the emerging adult ultimately decides to re-embrace their childhood faith or move on to either another faith genre or none at all.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study focused on the combination, amalgamation, or interactions among several variables that are all important to this author. It also looked at those interrelationships from an important phenomenological perspective of the participants' self-reports. The ontological experiences that were significant in molding these young- or emerging young adults into who they were at the time of being interviewed for this study was information not found in the literature.

The literature addresses each of the factors of interest herein. Walker and Hennig (1999) studied the importance of parenting styles in the development of moral character in their children. Parental modeling of religious characteristics as well as the impact of divorce were both found to have significant impact on the emerging adult in the research of Uecker and Ellison (2012). Short et al. (2015) focused on self-religiousness and father's attitude on the moral attitudes of the young adult child.

Based on how the emerging adult perceives the sincerity of the parents' true religiosity to be, determines the degree to which they develop greater or lesser psychological adjustment. This is from the work of Power and McKinney (2013). When parents model religiosity, their children are more religious as emerging adults (Petts, 2015). Emerging adults are less likely to feel comfortable engaging in pornography if their relationship with their parents has been of high quality, consisting of good modeling and appropriate style of parenting (Perry & Snawder, 2017). Interestingly, the specific moral topic of internet pornography use did not indicate a difference in the activity based upon whether the male doing the viewing had come from an authoritarian religious home (specifically Christian), or a non-religious home. The compulsions were equivalent in each case (Levert, 2007). I am interested in discovering relationships among the variables of this current study because the totality (i.e., combination and comparison) of them have not been addressed in a singular study.

I believe this study will affect the participants therapeutically. It is likely that one would assume that they have not likely done introspection (i.e., self-reflection) on why they now believe what they believe. They just know they believe it. Through the process of the interviewing, one expects that the result could either affirm their current mindsets and pursuits, or possibly bring them to a place of pause and understanding not previously considered. My perception of this possibility is drawn from Rogerian counseling theory that posits that a combination of unconditional positive regard, empathy, sincerity, genuineness, and praise will guide and encourage the client toward self-reflection and self-growth, as well as a stronger sense of value and purpose (Rogers, 1951, 1961).

It is much easier for sound-minded rationally-thinking parents to accept the normalcy of individuation, but have a much tougher time accepting the action of apostasy. The former is

about exploration and the latter is seen as desecration of all that is important to one's life for time and eternity. This is my experience and observation. Apostasy feels more final; whereas, individuation is seen as temporary. The former cuts all ties and does not ask questions about their new experiences or perhaps new philosophies being learned in college. Individuation explorations tend to desire conversations about what is being discovered in their new life and new world of new philosophies.

The stage of thinking known as quasi-reflective reasoning (King & Kitchener, 2004) is the point at which adolescents becoming emerging adults begin to question what is truth (Fowler, 1981; King et al., 2014). This is normative and expected because of the process of individuating. At this point, the worldview of the young adult is sifted through the grid of personal struggle (Bryant, 2011; Fowler, 1981; Mayhew, 2012; Mayhew et al., 2012) and cognitive dissonance that is part and parcel of the reexamining process (Bryant, 2011; Ciarrochi & Heaven, 2012; Fowler, 1981), all part of individuation. These exercises in the growth of quasi-reflective thinking may not necessarily lead to outright apostasy. In fact, they may lead to the next level of thinking, called reflective (King & Kitchener, 2004), wherein one has a worldview that is on a firmer ground of rationality wherein they can, as scripture says, "give a reason for the hope that is within you" (I Peter 3:15, KJV/NKJV). This is more rationale than believing what one believes just because they were raised that way.

The level of quasi-reflective thinking that leads to this testing or sifting one's childhood beliefs is triggered by exposure to different worldviews than those with which one is familiar. This is more often than not the result of the college experience (Mayhew, 2012; Mayhew et al., 2012).

Thus, the significance of this study is to discover and clarify the difference between the normative exploration process that is known as individuation, versus the absolute abandonment or dismissal of one's childhood worldview.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are emerging adults' perspectives concerning factors that they believe led them to leave the religious tradition in which they were raised?
2. How do emerging adults perceive the role of parental modeling of Christian values and its relationship to their apostasy?
3. How do emerging adults perceive their becoming apostate on factors including parent-child attachment and the style of parenting used to raise them?
4. What has become the emerging adult's perception or evaluation of the importance of having a continued or discontinued connection with a community of faith?

### **Definitions**

*Apostasy*: defined as a falling away from, or a deliberate abandonment of, what had been established scriptural principles and doctrine (Weaver & Weaver, 2019).

*Attachment*: defined as a two-way process implying interaction between mother and infant (Ainsworth, 1964), or the infant's ability to seek proximity to a specific caregiver (Bowlby, 1969, 1980).

*Critical thinking*: defined as the examination and test of propositions of any kind which are offered for acceptance, in order to find out whether they correspond to reality or not (Sumner, 1906).

*Emerging adulthood*: people in their late teens to mid- to late 20s who live in industrialized societies (Arnett, 2007).

*Parental modeling:* defined as a process of observational learning in which the behavior of the parent acts as a stimulus for similar behavior in his or her child (Tibbs et al., 2001).

*Parenting styles:* defined as three central models of parental control that include, authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive (Baumrind, 1989).

## **Summary**

Apostasy is not the same as individuating. Individuating is a normative process of development that is chosen by the emerging adult, based on their own reflective thinking and considerations derived from how they were raised. Indeed, how they were raised is the rationale behind this author's interest in this study. The Apostle Paul prophesies that a "great falling away" will happen in "the last days" (II Thessalonians 2:1-3 KJV). The theological term for "falling away" is apostasy. It refers to the many who will have been raised in homes teaching biblical principles who will turn their backs on those teachings.

Apostasy is not necessarily normative. Individuation is normative. That is why emerging adults, especially if they have a level of education beyond high school, will often test their childhood mores' and scriptural mandates against what they have discovered from a broadening world of knowledge. It will be interesting to discover within the interview process of this study what the participants reveal to be the greatest impactful factors within their decision to leave the faith of their childhood upbringing. The factors of parental modeling, parental attachment, parenting styles, possible parental internet pornography use, and the emerging adult's resultant decision to be involved in a community of faith as an independent young adult will all be the focal points of the semi-structured interview process of this qualitative phenomenological study.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview

This qualitative study explored the experiences of young adults who have left their religious upbringing, otherwise known as apostasy. Four variables, as discussed in published scholarly literature, are important to this research study. They include the parent-child dynamics of modeling, parenting style(s), attachment, and community faith support.

Parent modeling is its own category that focuses on what the child sees and how they compare that to what they hear, in terms of discovering whether the parent is modeling or demonstrating the behaviors that they are teaching the child to do. Parenting style is especially conducive, I think and as the literature will bear out to how emotionally, spiritually, and generally psychologically healthy the child will become as an emerging adults.

Parental attachment to the child is especially conducive to the child developing a sense of security, self-esteem, and identity, as the literature will demonstrate herein. Finally, the emerging adult's connection to a community of faith will, to greater or lesser degrees be attributable to these three factors of parental modeling, style, and attachment, as shall be discovered herein.

For this phenomenological qualitative study, results that mention gender are only serendipitous or happenstance. Four variables are important to this research study. They include the parent-child dynamics of modeling, parenting style(s), attachment, and community faith support.

### Theoretical Framework

Overarching this study's interest in four factors that may or may not impact apostasy in emerging adults is Erikson's psychosocial development theory found within his fifth stage. That is his stage of identity versus identity confusion (Erikson, 1968, 1982). In some textbooks, it is

called “role confusion,” while others call it “identity confusion.” Among several dynamics within that particular stage is one called individuation, which is the normal developmental tendency to feel that one is now old enough to spread one’s wings and leave the nest to go out and explore the world to practice what they have been taught while still in the nest—and to explore the world to see if there is something new to learn and to perhaps do differently or better than what they were taught within the confines of the nest.

Psychosocial development looks at the ways in which humans develop, for better or for worst, depending on the interpersonal interactions from birth forward throughout all of life. Erikson (1968, 1982) divided life development into eight stages, and within each one there is what he calls an *ego crisis*. This is a point during that stage span where the person concludes that they can have a positive outcome between two resolutions, one is a negative outcome and the other is a positive outcome.

The first stage is within the first 18 months of life, and is the *Basic Trust vs. Mistrust* span of time wherein the child’s ego crisis will ultimately give him or her a sense of being able to totally trust the world or not trust the world. If the decision or resolution of the ego crisis is for trust, it will have been because the child has learned that their basic needs are going to generally be met and met with love and compassion from the caregiver. If this best-case scenario happens, there will be an accompanying *virtue* of Hope. No virtue accompanies negative resolution of the ego crisis where the child develops a sense of general Mistrust because their needs are inconsistently met and without love and compassion when the needs are met (Erikson, 1968, 1982).

The fifth and sixth stages are the ones pertinent to this research. The fifth one is *identity versus identity confusion*, with an age range of puberty to about 17 years old. If the adolescent

positively resolves his or her *ego crisis*, they have a sense of self-awareness and positive self-esteem about who they are. There is an *ego strength* within them that allows them to stand alone for their values if necessary. They are able to develop the virtue of *fidelity*, which means being capable of having true friendships and being totally supportive within them but being self-confident enough and grounded enough to let their friends know if they are making wrong decisions or acting in inappropriate ways (Erikson, 1968, 1982).

The Identity Confusion negative resolution of the ego crisis leaves the adolescent unsure of their value or worth, so they do not have Fidelity, or the ability to be faithful in friendships. These people tend to hang out with people of the same kind of confusion about their worth. Thus, “birds of a feather will flock together,” as the adage goes (Erikson, 1968, 1982).

The sixth stage is intimacy versus isolation approximately from ages 17-35 wherein the psychosocial development experiences whether the person is healthy enough psychologically and emotionally to be able to love and be loved. If the previous Eriksonian stages have had successful positive ego crisis resolutions, it is more than likely that this one will also be successful. It is not only about the ability to have successful romance, but also about whether one can allow him- or herself to be open and vulnerable with anyone, including family and friends and acquaintances. The virtue obtained in this stage is *Love*, if there is a successful ego crisis resolution (Erikson, 1968, 1982).

This is exemplified in my example of a couple who falls in love and want to get married. The couple who are more comfortable with isolation is the couple who are fine with not sharing too much of their negative histories and choices with one another. Their egos are too fragile from past experiences to want to do that. Yet, they have found “love,” but it is to the degree they can handle it and demonstrate it. So even though the virtue from this stage is Love, the love this

unhealthfully psychosocially developed couple can muster is love that cannot afford them the intimacy that comes with absolute vulnerability and genuine openness with their partner (Poulsen, 2003).

My participants were within the ages of 18-25, which is the Emerging Adult time span for Erikson. It is from the focal point of this theory base that apostasy was studied. Apostasy is not just leaving the nest; it is acting in ways that are antithetical to the ways of the nest. It can be seen as deviance or defiance of the nest. So, what Erikson describes as individuation is not usually as strong as apostasy. Individuation is normative as a process of development; whereas, apostasy is more of a belligerence, defiance, or deviance as a retaliation against certain childhood parent/child interactions that hold negative memories for the emerging adult.

### **Related Literature about Apostasy**

#### ***Apostasy in Greater Detail***

According to Brewster (2014, p. 24), “prevalence rates and patterns regarding apostasy among different religious groups are nearly nonexistent.” Even so, many studies have included some of the variables of this proposed study, though they are not all within a singular body of work (Ahrold et al., 2011; Aslani et al., 2015; Bader & Desmond, 2006), including the inclusion of gender (Bao et al., 1999). This research covered the perspective of learning whether any of these variables actually have a significant impact at all on whether an adolescent or adult child leaves the faith of their childhood.

To begin, it is important to differentiate the concept of apostasy from the concept of doubt, according to Puffer et al. (2008) who studied the topic of religious doubt in adolescents. The study was phenomenological and looked at the topic of doubt through the lens of Marcia’s (2010, 2014) stages of identity development. Identity moratorium and identity achievement were

positive predictors of doubting/questioning. Exploration or “testing the waters” is an expected aspect of adolescent development and is, in fact, to be considered healthy. Once the exploration is done, the adolescent is more able to know why he or she believes what he or she believes. Though a level of autonomy should be allowed as part of the developmental process, the authors state that “unabashed, wise adult guidance that gently prods adolescents in an adaptive and God-honoring direction” is optimal (p. 278).

Puffer et al. (2008) clarified that the results of this study need to be considered in the light of their limitations, which include generalizability being possible only in relationship to the features of the sample and, of course, one cannot deduce cause-and-effect. Puffer et al. stated that “doubt has an adaptive, purposeful side, and one way to understand that dimension is to take into account the identity status of religious persons who doubt” (p. 281). This study demonstrates a positive association between doubt and the two vital criteria of identity formation. These findings implicate doubt as a contribution variable in the psychosocial maturity process and they prod many Christians to begin to shed their “pathological only” bent in interpreting doubt.

The overarching topic of interest is often called *apostasy*. Biblically, it is referred to as “a great falling away,” a term the Apostle Paul used in II Thessalonians 2:1-3, referring to a time when people who used to live by biblical teachings will no longer do so. They will fall away (i.e., walk away, discard, and even denigrate) those former beliefs. Apostasy as a term has at least a couple of synonyms including disaffiliation (Bahr & Albrecht, 1989), or the biblical term “backsliding” or words and behaviors synonymous with it (Jeremiah 2:19, 3:22, & 14:7; Matthew 26:41; Colossians 4:2 KJV).

A distinction is also made between *marginality* and *defection* wherein the former describes a person who was never wholly committed to the faith and was more on the fringes

than actively immersed (Bahr & Albrecht, 1989). The latter describes the person who was actively involved in the ritual and religiosity but turned away or defected from it. An additional distinction is given between apostasy and *conversion* (Greenwald et al., 2018). The first is leaving the faith, not just testing it or exploring its validity. The second is joining a faith system that one is spiritually drawn toward, as my experience and training has made clear to me.

Yet, another distinction is important. There is a difference between atheists, agnostics, and apostates (Streib & Klein, 2013). It is a progressive distinction from never having believed in God, to being skeptical about his existence, to having once believed but discarding that belief. Reasons for becoming apostate run the gamut from parents' divorces (Lawton & Bures, 2001) to maternal religiosity (Hayatbakhsh et al., 2014), paternal religiosity (Lau & Wolfinger, 2011; Limke & Mayfield, 2014). A much more comprehensive overview will be given in the literature review section. Yet another interesting study sought to discover if there may be a genetic or heritability connection to becoming apostate, which is from a behavioral genetics' perspective (Freeman, 2019).

Distinctions continue, in the terms *unaffiliated* and *nones*. The former is not necessarily disenfranchised because they may have a sense of being spiritual or religious, but they do not associate with any particular congregational structure. The latter are basically the same as the former. Neither is necessarily irreligious but may be private practitioners who still feel a relatively positive connection to their place of worship or denomination (Albrecht et al., 1988; Fuller, 2001).

Apostasy is not the same as the normative emerging adult exploration process wherein their new experiences in the world that are broadening their knowledge are also widening their curiosity. These new experiences cause them to test their childhood faith against the new word

views and philosophies they are encountering. Rather than seeing this exploration as a dangerous or negative adventure, it is seen by many as a testing that purifies, shapes, sharpens, or refines the values and morés instilled within them, at least in my many decades of life in the church world.

This research will expound upon and expand the concept far beyond this broad overview, but one needs to know immediately that apostasy is not synonymous with terms like *excommunicating*, *shunning*, or *dismissing*. Those terms refer to what the religious organization or institution does to the individual who is considered to be living in blatant violation of the rules of that religious entity. On the other hand, apostasy is a reference to the actions of the individual that demonstrate a definite desire to extricate oneself from that religious entity.

## **Related Literature about Parental Modeling**

### ***Parental Divorce***

A study that ties parental divorce and adult religiosity together is by Lau and Wolfinger (2011). It showed that the impact of divorce on the adult child varied according to whether their parent remained single or if they remarried or if the parent had become widowed, rather than divorced. If the divorced parent remained single, the results showed a greater likelihood that the adult child would go the church with the parent, but they were more likely to change church affiliations due to the memories of them as in intact family as that particular church.

### ***Parental Modeling of Christian Values***

In the best-case scenario, parents have an uphill battle in their efforts to raise their children well, even with the best efforts that include good modeling, good inductive parenting, and having strong attachment established early in the formative years. Additionally, research has demonstrated that the secularization of sexual mores' has made the effort to inculcate these

values into one's child and adolescent even harder (Gunnoe et al., 1999; Hayatbakhsh et al., 2014; Hill et al., 2014).

**What Constitutes Good Modeling?** Petersen and Donnenwerth (1997) posited that good modeling combined with regular church attendance are the two best means of helping adolescents maintain chastity. Yet, that same research shows that the children and adolescents that have the best chance of maintaining those beliefs are most likely to come from conservative Protestant congregations than either mainline Protestant or Catholic congregations. That is, if the family attends these regularly rather than infrequently, there is the greatest chance of chastity being maintained. Another study showed that regular church attendance protects healthy people against death (Powell et al., 2003).

Parental modeling of strong values includes religious identity, religious attendance, and parental control (Kim & Wilcox, 2014), which result in heightened levels of monitoring activities, normative regulations, and network closure (i.e., communication via an inductive parenting style, clarifying fair reasonable expectations for behavior, and clarifying expectations for relationships with peers of good character). Many studies support the general principle of the value of appropriate parental modeling (Manlove et al., 2006, 2008; Matejevic et al., 2014; Merrill et al., 2001; Moore & Smith, 2012; Moore et al., 2015; Snider et al., 2004; Wills et al., 2003).

Of course, I assert that even regular and consistent church attendance loses its impact—or never had an impact—if the child does not see what is preached get practiced at home. This assertion is supported by a study by Quinn and Lewin (2019) who looked at the interaction between family religiosity, parental monitoring, and adolescent sexual activity. Their results revealed that chastity is maintained longer, and certain sex acts are avoided when parental

monitoring is employed and the parents are also demonstrating religiosity but when vaginal sex does happen, it is more likely to be with condom use.

Power and McKinney, (2013) studied the relationships among parental religiosity, parenting practices, and child religiosity when using emerging adult psychological adjustment. The study found that young adults had stronger adult religiosity when they had received what they perceived as positive parental upbringing. This was indirectly related to their adult psychological adjustment. Such results as these would seem intuitive, of course.

Data from a study by Flor and Knapp (2001) gave interesting results about the transmission and transaction of religious values between parent and adolescents who were 10-12 years old, as showing significant effects. The results of two sets hierarchical regression models were applied to 171 intact Caucasian families. One set predicted adolescent religious behavior; the other predicted the importance of religion to the child. The first set predicted that the transmission of parental religious behavior and desire for their children to also be religious predicted the most variance in whether the adult child would become or remain religious.

**Parental Modeling Supported in Psychological Theories.** Various human development theories support the notion that children first internalize what they see demonstrated consistently within their environment, and then they emulate that or it becomes part of their own belief as demonstrated in their behavior. Specifically, the theories include Freud's psychosexual, Bandura's social learning, Vygotsky's socio-cultural, as well as look at sociogenetic theory (Lawrence & Valsiner, 1993). These theories easily support the obviousness of the adage, "as the twig is bent so it grows." I would posit that parental modeling includes all the ingredients that can make or break the twig, otherwise known as the developing child.

**Psychological Health is Optimized.** One can predict that parents who model their faith would be more likely to win the allegiance of their children all through the child's lifetime, from the developmental years onward. The following studies are supportive of this prediction. Longo and Kim-Spoon (2014) did a longitudinal study and their findings revealed that adolescents who had been religious longer were highest in parent communication, parent trust, and social competence. Those who became religious later were found to have had higher social competence prior to becoming religious, and upon conversion their parent communication and parent trust developed and increased. This study points to the importance of both social and familial factors in religious conversion and perhaps a decreased tendency toward apostasy.

Results of research by Power and McKinney (2013) reveal that if an emerging adult perceives his or her parent to be a good role model as demonstrated by positive parenting practices and positive religious modeling, there is a strong likelihood the adult child will grow to be more psychologically healthy. Baier and Wright (2001) showed that positive parental modeling is a strong factor in crime deterrence for the emerging adult.

**Lowered Likelihood of Alcohol and Substance Use, or Immoral Choices.** Each parent has his and her particular or specific impact on the child's choice-making regarding the likelihood of substance use. A study revealed that the mother's religiosity and appropriate modeling of it, along with the resultant religiosity of the young adult will determine the degree to which substance use is undertaken, if at all. Youth who were not attending church at all were more likely to report starting early with tobacco smoking, alcohol drinking, or cannabis use (Hayatbakhsh et al., 2014).

Berkowitz and Grych (1998) parsed out the specific factors that contribute to why parenting induces moral development in their children. The factors in this study included four

social components: social orientation, self-control, compliance, self-esteem and four central aspects of moral functioning: empathy, conscience, moral reasoning, and altruism. The parenting roots of each of these eight psychological characteristics were also examined, and five core parenting processes: induction, nurturance, demandingness, modeling, democratic family process. Empirical evidence revealed statistical significance among these variables and encouraged the researchers toward influencing parents toward a best understanding of how to develop moral standards in their children's lives.

Research shows that rising young adults' decisions to engage in various kinds of deviant behavior are strongly deterred by their parents having exemplified moral values, sobriety values, and generally great social and interpersonal skills between themselves and others (Barton et al., 2014; Quinn & Lewin, 2019; Short et al., 2015) because their study revealed that children internalize the behavior and religious beliefs of their parents when the behaviors aligned with the beliefs, causing them to have less interest in engaging in deviant behaviors of whatever kind. Further, if the deviant behavior was of a sexual nature, the young adult would more readily feel shame, according to a study by Holden et al. (2013).

When fathers and mothers are consistent in modeling sound moral and religious behavior within the home, sexual intercourse was less likely in the emerging adults of that home. Conversely, sexually permissive attitudes within the family predicted sexual intercourse inside and outside a committed relationship (McNamara et al., 2015). Another study showed that even though there are a few institutions that seek to guide young people away from illicit drug use, the greatest or strongest "institution" was the parental and spiritual because it creates within the individual a sense of identity and beliefs that are incompatible with illegal substance use (Longest & Valsey, 2008).

Family relationships, religiosity (i.e., beliefs, past/present personal religious practices, past family religious practices), and personal characteristics (i.e., identity development, depression, self-esteem, and drug use) were all examined in relationship to why some young men engaged in sexually immoral behavior, but others did not (Perry & Snawder, 2017). All the young men attended a religious university in the western United States. There were 192 of them between 18 and 27 years old. The average age was 21, with a standard deviation of 3 years.

While they all believed sexual immorality to be unacceptable, those who did not engage in it (compared to those who did) reported (a) higher levels of past and recent individual religious practices, (b) past family religious practices, (c) higher levels of self-worth and identity development regarding dating and family, and (d) lower levels of depression (p. 1747).

A correlation can readily be seen here between family and religious upbringing and their impact of their sons' self-worth and his sense of identity. These characteristics give him the greatest strength to avoid the pitfalls of sexual misconduct.

Chu's (2007) research findings suggest religious behavior has a direct effect on individuals' desistance from marijuana and hard-drug use. That is, modeling religious behavior which includes not even using any recreational drugs seems to be a deterrent from initiation of drug use. Yet, religious salience—which is the presence of and pervasive rituality of religion has a significant deterrent effect only on the onset of drug use, but does not have a significant effect on individuals' desistance from drugs. Religiosity that is modeled helps the teen to not initiate drug use, but if they do initiate it, the religiosity of the parents do not seem to impact desistance of drug use.

Other deviant behaviors of a nonsexual nature were explored by Barton et al. (2014). They looked at whether adolescents engage in drug and alcohol use if there is strong parental

religiosity, and how that impacts adolescent emotional and behavioral health. Findings suggested that adult religiosity is the mediator between parents' religiosity and adolescent health outcomes such as drug and alcohol use and depression.

Neurologically, executive function and emotional regulation have been shown to ameliorate a young adult's decision to engage in risk-taking behavior (Holmes et al., 2019). If one is able to regulate their emotions, it was attributed to higher religiousness; however, executive function was not related to higher religiousness. This seems to indicate that one's *judgment center*, which is in the prefrontal cortex, works well when it is healthy and not overridden by substance abuse, causing it to allow one to be mindful of making right choices in regulating their emotions. But one's level of religiousness is derived by non-neurological factors that include environmental parental and social factors. The level of religiousness dictates or ameliorates one's likelihood of either engaging in high-risk behaviors or, at least, making such behaviors habitual.

**Maternal Impact and Paternal Impact are Differently Important.** Parenting style that induces the child to want to comply because their affect and cognitions have been positively impacted is certainly information that is informative. This begs the question whether there is a difference between mother and father in terms of parenting effectiveness. The results of a study by Bao et al. (1999) showed that both fathers and mothers play important roles in passing along religious beliefs and practices to their male and female children. Mothers' influence was stronger than fathers when the adolescent perceives the parent as accepting. This effect was especially strong for the male emerging adults.

Though accepting mothers are important to the compliance of teens to maternal guidance, the research of Shah (2004) showed the area in which fathers were shown to be important. Shah

studied 15- and 17-year-old youth in Malaysia from religious schools and nonreligious schools and discovered that the father's religiousness had a significant impact on the moral choices of these youth. For those fathers who completed the survey but who were not religious, there was not a significance in better moral choices in those children, whether they were from religious or nonreligious schools. Yet, the fathers who were religious had significant impact on their adolescent children's decisions to behave in moral ways.

The influence that parents have on their children, teens, and young adult children is strongly impacted by whether there is more modeling than coddling, more "show" than "tell." Congruence and consistency are shown as positive influences of the children becoming congruent and consistent in their religious practices. Whereas, the converse is true for incongruence and inconsistency of parental vs. child religious practices (Bader & Desmond, 2006). These results certainly debunk the old-fashioned edict from some households that says, "Don't do as I do; do as I say do!"

In looking at whether parental guidance or parental pressure had the greatest positive impact on the trajectory of the child as an emerging adult, the results show that maternal modeling was most impactful on the young adult's religious tenacity (Holden et al., 2013). All told, this study looked at how pressure or guidance worked in the domains of education, environment, as well as religion. Mothers were found to be more guidance oriented, thus having the greatest influence on the young adult's religious values and the internalization of those values.

#### **What Impact Might Heritability and Culture Have in Parental Modeling.**

Nontraditional families (stepfamilies, never-married, cohabiting) have less of an influence on youth religiosity than do traditional families. Presumably, these findings suggest that "less

effective religious transmission within nontraditional families compared with traditional families is due (at least in part) to less effective religious socialization within these families” (Petts, 2015, p. 95). So, the more traditional family constellations and the more traditional religious beliefs appear to yield a higher likelihood that emerging adults will seek to maintain what they learned in their childhood, believing those beliefs to be pivotal for their lives.

The question of whether an adult child’s development of virtuous character can be solely attributed to parental virtues or possibly to some degree of heritability, was examined by Ramos et al. (2019). They discovered that even when some parents were negative in their tendencies, some children were able to still develop virtuous character—based on heritability. Parental positivity tendencies were also influential, but more with children whose genetic predispositions were aligned with the desire for virtuous living. That finding correlates with the fact that temperament is a genetically predetermined aspect of building personality. Personality is not solely genetic but is built within the first six to seven years of life and is the sum of the innate temperament which produces traits, which all form the personality (Clark & Watson, 2008).

**Collectivist Values Compared to Individualistic Values.** A study of parental modeling of collectivist values versus individualistic across three generations was done by Prioste et al. (2016). They discovered that even though collectivist values were important to grandparents and parents, there is a tendency for the family to also accept individualist values for the children. That is, they value their cultural *morés*, while simultaneously allowing the progeny to seek and make their own choices in life.

Collectivism compared to individualism is reminiscent of Piaget’s (1976) *accommodation* and *assimilation* terms. The former has to do with adapting new experiences into familiar ones. This happens especially with immigrants who adapt certain traditions or

experiences from their new land into their familiar traditions of their native land. The latter has to do with adapting to the new and discarding the old.

The three-generational study mentioned above demonstrated accommodation by the grandparents and parents, and their allowing the children to perhaps be more likely to exercise assimilation. How this all relates to the topic of parental modeling is to demonstrate that there are mediators and moderators involved in why parents model the way they do. Culture does factor into the equation.

The terms collectivist and individualistic are attributed to Jung (1967), who described the former as having a sense of “we’re all in this together, taking care of each other’s needs.” The latter is more of the capitalistic “pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps” mentality.

**The Importance of Social Capital.** Social capital resources are higher in religiously active urban youths. Social capital is the mediator between social interaction, trust, and shared vision when exploring socially embedded religious influences on moral outcomes (King & Furrow, 2008). Succinctly, the more the adolescent is grounded in religious moral development, the more the youth feel supported and encouraged to make appropriate moral choices.

Even though morality can be learned within social knowledge domains, parents specifically have an important impact on the child’s moral development in terms of the types of affect and cognitions the child develops from how the parents promoted or handled the inculcation of these moral principles. The idea being that if the affect produced within the child was negative, which led to negative thinking, it is more likely the child may not retain morals learned that way than if the child has memories of more positive and rational moral inducements (Smetana, 1999). This fits quite well with Kohlberg’s (1964) Moral Development theory that

demonstrates that children who feel positively about themselves and thinking themselves to be rule-followers are most likely to make better moral choices.

**Non-Traditional Families.** Nontraditional families (stepfamilies, never-married, cohabiting) have less of an influence on youth religiosity than do traditional families. Presumably, these findings suggest that “less effective religious transmission within nontraditional families compared with traditional families is due (at least in part) to less effective religious socialization within these families” (Petts, 2015, p. 95). So, the more traditional family constellations and the more traditional religious beliefs appear to yield a higher likelihood that emerging adults will seek to maintain what they learned in their childhood, believing those beliefs to be pivotal for their lives.

**How do Gender and Race Factor into the Impact of Parent Modeling.** Faith discussions between one parent and the child predicted significant variance among all models. The gender of the child was significant only in adolescence but not later on in both the transmission and the transaction of religion values. A significant three-way interaction occurred among the variables of child gender, parental desire for the child to be religious, and the two-way discussions (dyads) of faith. This three-way interaction predicted the importance of gender to the child. The results of the parent-child dyad interactions interacted in a more complex manner within the Flor and Knapp (2001) research.

Serendipitously, good parental modeling is not shown to make a difference across racial boundaries. A study by Ball et al. (2003) showed there was a positive correlation between maternally modeled religiosity of African American urban mothers and the inculcation of those values within their adolescent daughters.

## **Summary of Parent Modeling**

It is evident that appropriate and inappropriate demonstrations of parenting have a major impact on the child in his or her formative years. It is further evident that there is a distinct effect imparted by the mother and another imparted by the father. However, in either case the best modeling is that which the child can both see and hear, rather than just hear. It gives the greatest credibility to the words when they are paired with the actions of demonstrating the most productive or effective ways to live out life's challenges, responsibilities, accountabilities, relationships, not only between and among themselves and others, but especially to God.

## **Related Literature about Parenting Styles**

This is the second of the four variables for this entire study. Just as parental modeling plays a very important role for guiding and training a child in the right paths, it is just as important as to *how* that modeling is done. It can either be done with a “drill sergeant” approach, or a dismissive way where, on the one hand the modeling is happening in a sort of “vacuum” where the child does not even recognize that it is being done for them. Thirdly, there may be good modeling wherein the parent uses appropriate behavior in their personal decorum, but they do not incorporate and kind of discipline into their interaction with the child. Finally, the most effective kind of parenting style combines appropriate modeling along with appropriate discipline that is inductive and winsome, especially as the child matures to the point of being able to appreciate the reasons why this style works. All of these approaches are from the important theory base of Baumrind (1989), and their actual labels are described in detail below.

Baumrind (1989) is the creator or author of the categories of styles or types of parenting, from the most productive in the life of the child to the least productive and most destructive. As we peruse them, it will be obvious as to which are in which category, but the reasons they are

there. I spend a fair amount of time as a psychology professor teaching my classes about these. My not-so-hidden agenda is to help them in advance of becoming parents have a better handle on how to do the best job possible. Another not-so-hidden agenda is that this will be especially true for those students whose own parents did less than an optimal job. They can discover how to change or improve whatever dysfunctional ways in which they were raised. Obviously, statistically it is unlikely that all students in all of my classes were raised in less-than-optimal fashion. For those whose parenting was much better than it was worse, this still helps them understand and appreciate their parents' work in raising them even more.

### ***Authoritarian***

This is one of the less preferable styles herein power assertion rules the day. It is what I nicknamed the “drill sergeant” style. A child is quite likely to hear such platitudes as “my way or the highway,” “children should be seen and not heard,” and other clichés. The impact of this approach yields a child with lower self-esteem, a sense of entrapment, and shame and embarrassment are common. In extreme authoritarianism, the children develop disdain for their parents (Baumrind, 1989).

### ***Permissive***

This style goes by a couple other names, depending on the textbook or research one reads. *Laissez-Faire* or *Indulgent* are terms meaning the same thing. I referred to it above as the parent who may model well, but without the necessary inclusion of appropriate discipline. It is the style that, at least from my perspective, often ends up producing a child who develops a sense of entitlement. He or she also has no sense of boundaries because none are given during the formative years. Anything goes, the child can do no wrong, they are defended at any and all costs—no matter how blatantly wrong they are in any given action (Baumrind, 1989).

### ***Neglectful***

In authoritarian and permissive styles, there is at least attention given to the child, albeit inappropriate or unproductive. Neglectful parenting pays no attention to the child (Baumrind, 1989). The child is not even treated permissively but is rather simply ignored for the majority of the time. Their needs may be met, but without love or positive interaction. The impact of this is a likely to result in a lack of development of conscience because there is no development of the ego. To develop an ego (sense of self), a child has to be taught the difference between right and wrong. This is a safe inference to make when one understands the psychosexual development of the ego in the *phallic stage* (Freud, 1962) and when one understands Erikson's psychosocial development in the first three stages. Those include the first stage wherein the child learns to trust, and gains the virtue of hope, the second stage in which the child learns a sense of autonomy and develops the virtue of will, and the third stage in which the child develops a sense of initiative and develops the virtue of will (Erikson, 1968, 1982). Just like the permissive parenting style leads to the child/adolescent/adult getting into trouble, the neglectful style leads not only to that, but to an attitude of doing wrong behaviors "just for the hell of it."

### ***Authoritative***

This kind of parenting is optimal. It is all about using induction by the process of coregulation which builds autonomy, respect, and emotional regulation within the child. They learn a sense of personal responsibility. Among several examples, one is the parent gives the child certain developmentally-appropriate tasks, teaches them about financial responsibilities, shows and models for them how to own up to what they do that is not the right thing to do, etc. Primarily, this is done by the parent modeling that kind of behavior, not just teaching it to the child. The impact of authoritative parenting yields well-rounded children who are interpersonally

and socially conscious, and who know how to appreciate the parent. Certainly, this is an easy inference with one thinks through this style explained in Baumrind (1989).

**The Impact of Parenting Style on Future Risky Behaviors.** One could hypothesize that an authoritative parenting style would be a strong predictor of less, if any, ongoing autonomous sexually immoral behavior (i.e., that which does not include penetration). It can be hypothesized that the less optimal parenting styles of authoritarian, neglectful, and permissive would logically seem likely to foster such immoral activity. The following research shows negative correlations or inverse relationships between religiosity, church attendance, and frequency or regularity of what I am calling either primary or secondary sexual immorality. Primary is vaginal penetration and secondary is all other kinds.

Additional deviant behaviors are measured against religiosity and/or parental modeling, such as alcohol or drug use. The importance of healthy parent-child interactions was discovered in a study by Benda (1995) wherein relational practice was found to be a more robust predictor of deviant behavior than ritualistic participation, which seems to demonstrate the adage of actions speaking louder than words. Practicing relationally healthy communication styles between parent and child is, as a result, more powerful than church attendance, though both are important. This is very much in line with the inductive or authoritative style of communication, which must originate with the parent(s).

Parental monitoring, style, and parent-adolescent communication were all strong predictors of reduced sexual risk-taking in teens and predictive of less sexual risk-taking in emerging adults (Huebner & Howell, 2003). Pinquart's (2017) study was a meta-analysis of 1,435 studies on the associations of parenting dimensions and styles with whether children and adolescents exhibited negative externalizing symptoms that can include emotional dysregulation,

risk-taking behaviors and many other possibilities. The strongest associations were shown between parental harshness, psychological control, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting. The externalizing behaviors reduced with the presence of authoritative parenting and all of its components. The improved behaviors were the result of *reciprocal determinism* (Bandura, 1977), that is, when parents acted better, so did the child. In turn, this was important in the ongoing healthy developmental processes leading to adolescence and emerging adulthood.

Authoritative parenting was shown to have the impact on their adolescents that was both directly and indirectly associated with a reduction in the young adult becoming involved with heavy alcohol use. This was, however, more likely true when there was also monitoring and support from the parents. The combination of authoritative parenting, monitoring, and support were discovered to have more sway in the emerging adult or adolescent even when they are faced with pressure from their peers (Bahr & Hoffman, 2010).

Authoritarian parenting is more heavy-handed and less warm than is the more inductive approaches found in the authoritative style of raising one's family. Authoritarian parenting style (Baumrind, 1989) is not the recommended style for raising children to have self-esteem and autonomy, as well as a host of other characteristics that healthy parents desire to see developing in their children. Moral development is also impacted because of the impact of authoritarianism during their formative years. Other parenting styles that are not productive include permissive-indulgent and rejecting-neglecting. Authoritative is the type of parenting that brings the best results for the child's life. Baumrind (1989) also stated two additional parenting styles that are not only less than optimal but are in some cases even worse than authoritarian. They are neglectful and permissive, whose titles are self-explanatory.

Authoritative parenting style experienced by 382 boys and 394 girls was the predictor variable when Heaven et al. (2010) studied these adolescents from the seventh to the tenth grade. In the tenth grade, there was shown to be a significant correlation between religious values and hope as outcome variables in these youth, as the result of their being raised within an authoritative parenting style. Potentially confounding variables were controlled for and included self-esteem, trait hope, and students' levels of conscientiousness. Time 1 (seventh grade) measures, exception for self-esteem, were significantly correlated to Time 2 (tenth grade) religious values. Thus, parental authoritativeness and hope were significant predictors of religious values. This author is reminded of the scripture that tells fathers not to *provoke their children to wrath, but the bring them up in the nurture and admonition of God* (KJV, Ephesians 6:4)

Li et al. (2013) found that authoritative parenting is conducive to teen religiosity and that this applies to both parents. However, maternal authoritarian parenting was negatively associated with teen religiosity. Interestingly paternal authoritarianism showed no correlation. This indicates that the appropriate parenting coming from the mother seems to overrule the inappropriate parenting of the father. This does not say that there is no overall impact on the child when receiving negative inappropriate paternal parenting, but it does seem to say that mothers who parent well *save the day* for the future religious development of the emerging adult. This study showed that adolescents demonstrated higher social responsibility when both parents were authoritative, not authoritarian.

Aslani et al. (2015) found that permissive and authoritative parenting styles, religiosity, and emotional intelligence are effective in reducing active addiction potential in high school students, impacting 39% of the variance. Authoritarian parenting style and religiosity

significantly predicted passive addiction potential, effecting 11% of the variance. There was no significant correlation between permissive and authoritarian parenting styles in predicting passive addiction potential. I find it quite interesting that this study found something positive in the permissive parenting style in terms of being predictive of reducing active addiction potential in high school. It makes sense that this was seen to be true of the authoritative, but for it to be true of the permissive leaves one to wonder if the permissive approach may have left the child so open to making their own moral, ethical, and social decisions that they were simply wise enough to learn observationally. It is feasible that this conclusion would be reached by the founder of social learning theory, Bandura (1977, 1986).

Bowlby (1969) researched the question of the correlation parents' greater religiousness had positively and negatively with parenting and child adjustment. They found that parental religiosity coincided with more controlling parenting which, in turn, yielded increased child problem behaviors. Thus, children see their parents' religiousness as parental rejection, whereas, parents see their religiosity and warmth as the cause of more efficacious parenting. This study demonstrates the importance of understanding the effects of parental religiousness on parents and children. This author sees this study as revealing an opportunity for the parents to be more communicative with their child in explaining why they believe and require the child to develop similar beliefs and do so in an authoritative way.

Parents, children, and peers play a significant role in the moral development and moral reasoning processes (Walker, 1999; Walker & Hennig, 1999). Their research was interested in the bases of moral development needing to be looked at from the real-life perspective and real-life dilemmas. Theoretical moral development along with their theoretical or paradigmatic dilemmas were giving short shrift to the forces within the real environment of a child and their

real dilemmas. Two studies were conducted over a 4-year period. The results demonstrated that parenting that was cognitively challenging, with highly opinionated interactions, ego functioning, and moral reasoning were predictive of children's moral development. The nature of the parents' interactions, ego functioning, and moral reasoning are predictive of children's moral development. Further, parents who engage in cognitively challenging and highly opinionated interactions, who are hostile, critical, and interfering, and who display poor ego functioning including defensiveness, rigidity, rationalizations, insensitivity, and inappropriate emotional expression hinder children's ability to move on toward mature moral understandings (p. 370).

Conversely, effective parenting is more child-centered and the development of the child utilizes the Vygotsky (1978) concept of *scaffolding* to build moral reasoning incrementally. The study found that affective factors are given less attention than they should be given because they are important components of effective moral socialization. Parents who attend to or address their child's affect when in the midst of a moral situation, are demonstrating that they care about how the child is feeling when faced with a moral dilemma.

Two crucial factors impact whether a teen or young adult will engage in problem behaviors, or risky behavior: effective parenting and avoidance of associations with delinquent peers (Barnes et al., 2006). Of course, this is related both to parental modeling and parenting style. In that same vein, a longitudinal study comparing an initially virginal group to a later non-virginal group of converts from the virginal group, showed parent-adolescent communication prior to and after first sexual experience plays a significant role in the onset and frequency of that experience. It was specifically pointed out that the mother-child communication was most impactful when the young adult remained virginal (Karofsky et al., 2001).

Of course, the absolute best modeling and the absolute best parenting style is not a guarantee that the emerging adult will not detour off the path, as described by Blakeney and Blakeney (2006), who remind us that the best parental model was God, but his first two children became delinquents. Yet, their study supports the value of religious connection as a strong fortress or guard against delinquency. Further, who is not reminded of the familiar parable of the prodigal son? On the other hand, who is not familiar with the hopeful verse in Proverbs 22:6 that tells parents to raise their children according to their bent—which is the way they should be raised to best utilize their gifts and talents for the good of themselves and others. In so doing, the child will be less likely to want to depart from that ability to use their positive traits if they were not forced into a spiritual mold that didn't fit their shape.

Whether parents are good models demonstrating or practicing what they preach, or parenting in an inductive manner, the family context is the most important context within which to develop strong religious faith within the child (Boyatziset al., 2006).

To give slight credit to the permissive parenting style, studies have been done to discover which style might be best in keeping the child from engaging in substance abuse and it was discovered that both authoritative and permissive can have an impact on decreased substance abuse (Lamborn et al., 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). However, the permissive style was shown to be more conducive to self-esteem and school performance than to avoidance of substance abuse. It is only when other parent/child dynamics are factored into the big picture of parenting that the permissive style had potential for positive impact. This makes sense to me because the permissive (indulgent) style, at best, yields a child whose self-concept is quite strong. But, at worst, that parenting style is more likely to yield a narcissist or, at least, entitled kind of attitude. Psychological literature supports my hypothesis, or at least, strongly alludes to it

(American Psychiatric Association, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 2013).

### **Summary of Parenting Styles**

Parenting styles and parental modeling are “siblings” to one another. They fit together inextricably. Though one could argue that in the instance of the permissive style, one could otherwise model good parenting; however, one can also argue that the totality of good parenting must also include wise and appropriate discipline as needed. It is difficult to decide which among the three less optimal styles is the least beneficial, but there is no indecision about which is the best (Baumrind, 1989).

### **Attachment**

How closely bonded a child, adolescent, and emerging adult feels to their parent(s) is a bidirectional process. The concept of reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1977) is about the fact that offspring will grow together with the parent or apart from the parent, based upon how well the give-and-take goes between them. How well does the parent listen, as well as direct? How well does the offspring respond to that or reciprocate that? The answers come from the combination of parent modeling and parent style.

Personality traits of tendermindedness, introversion, stability, and social conformity were found to impact whether a young person would have a negative attitude toward substance use (Francis, 1997). The study also points out personal religiosity and membership in a Protestant sect as a negative correlation to being interested in substance use. One can infer that these traits and characteristics will have been more likely to have developed due to attachment to the parents. For that matter the inference can also include good parent modeling and good parenting style.

Concerning the young adult's likelihood of getting involved in a faith community, if he or she is simultaneously involved in any type of sexually immoral behavior, one could wonder if they are seeking to be emancipated from such behavior. Being in a supportive church community, especially if there is strong social support from peers within that community, it is conceivable that is why both activities may be in parallel with one another. The goal, one would assume, is to become free from the chains of addiction to whatever type of sexual immorality.

However, the chains are hard to break. Years may transpire before there is a successful severance from what I shall call secondary sexual activity which is sexual activity not including vaginal intercourse. One may even consider the possibility that the emerging adult raised in a strong home of religious teaching and modeling, may be thinking that the best way to remain virginal for marriage, is to engage in auto-erotic satisfaction (i.e., masturbation). The point being attempted here is the point of what a religiously raised emerging adult may do to try and conquer the mixed feelings known as cognitive dissonance where moral beliefs and immoral actions are not congruent. The phenomenological approach being implemented in this author's research will delve into the specifics of the participants' mindsets about all of this.

Desmond and Kraus (2012, 2014) studied attachment from the perspective of whether adolescents would be more likely or less likely to lie to their parents if they were closely attached to them. That is, if the adolescent was not only attached but also attended church regularly with them. Interestingly, results showed that regular church attendance did not decrease lying to the parents, but the importance of religiosity did impact or decrease the desire to lie. Parental attachment and self-control are most important in the adolescent's avoiding substance abuse and friends who abuse substances.

Research suggests that the type of attachment one has with one's parents gets extrapolated to the image of God that they have (Moriarty & Davis, 2012). What the emerging adult feels about God is often centered on the child-parent relationship experienced in the formative years, especially as relates to the biological, adoptive, or stepfather. When a child is securely attached to his or her parent, especially the mother, there is a level of trust, self-confidence, and identity that allows more appropriate and psychologically healthy moral decision-making. The mechanisms of marital relationship, parenting practice, and attachment to parents mediates the negative association between familial religiosity and juvenile delinquency (Li et al., 2013). Strong religiosity is pivotal in an emerging female adult's likelihood of requesting sexual health and reproductive health information whether she is sexually active or not, as revealed in a study by Hal et al. (2012).

One can extrapolate that certain factors enter into why an emerging young adult female would be more likely to avoid visiting such clinics because she may feel she is betraying the faith of her youth which she still largely values. Teachings against fornication, abortion, and general licentiousness are but a few such prohibitions. Her attachment to her parents would have to be a factor in her decision to avoid utilizing the services of such clinics.

Fathers are also an important part of the attachment equation. Attachment to fathers predicted attachment to God. Moreover, attachment to God predicted both religious and existential well-being. According to Limke and Mayfield (2011), one's attachment to God is influenced by one's attachment to mother, father, and romantic partner. Further, the study examined spiritual well-being as associated with attachment to God.

Of greatest importance in the development of adult religiosity is parental support and parent-child relationship dynamics even more than the level of parental religiosity. Further,

mothers and fathers have a unique contribution to this development (Leonard et al., 2013). Interestingly, this study also revealed that even when parent-child attachment is weak, the emerging adult can and may still develop a sense of strong attachment to God, as a compensatory mechanism. If parents are attached to their college-aged children by being emotionally warm, these young adults have a greater sense of attachment to God but, conversely, emotionally cold and unspiritual parenting leads to avoidance of intimacy in their relationship to God (McDonald et al., 2005).

Kirkpatrick (1997) conducted a four-year longitudinal study among women who had initially responded to a newspaper survey that measured attachment styles, then 4 years later measured their level of religious belief and religious experience. The results showed that the highest level of religious experience and/or conversion was found in the insecure-avoidant and insecure-anxious groups. Those women whose initial survey results revealed they were securely attached, were the ones least likely to have religious beliefs and conversion experiences within that four-year interim. These findings lend credence to the idea that women who are avoidant or anxious in their interpersonal relationships have a higher likelihood of attaching to or clinging to God for their support and sense of belonging.

According to Moriarity and Davis (2012), people relate to God in a way that mirrors their image of God (their *imago dei*). That image mirrors their parental attachment relationship. Thus, the importance of healthy parental attachment to both mother and father—but especially the father—is invaluable. Ellison et al. (2011) learned in their study that adults who were securely attached to their parents when they were in their formative years, were able to be securely attached to God. Those who were anxiously attached to God were also anxiously attached to their parents and, as a result, their state of mind was an exacerbation of the effects of stress.

As stated by Kim-Spoon et al. (2014), “parents’ religiousness is inversely related to adolescent maladjustment.” The study’s focus was on the type of attachment that developed between the child and parent, and based on that, what kinds of internalizing and externalizing behaviors were exhibited by the child. In turn, how did this manifest when the child became an adult?

The results showed that positive internalizing and externalizing behaviors resulted from strong secure child-parent attachment in combination with strong parent religiousness. Whereas, the predictable opposite was true that negative internalizing and externalizing behaviors were exhibited with insecure or other kinds of weak attachments were the experience of the child. The work of Barry et al. (2018) revealed that if the parents raised their child toward the demonstration of altruism or philanthropy or, simply, the value of giving help to family, friends, and strangers, the child as an emerging adult will often follow suit. Their self-perception becomes one of being a compassionate person who cares.

### **Summary of Parental Attachment**

It seems commonsensical that a securely attached relationship with one’s parents would result in a higher likelihood that the child will follow in the parent or parents’ footsteps as an emerging adult. Thus, that would expect to include the parent or parent’ faith. Commensurately, if the attachment to the parent or parents was insecure or anxious, it would be unlikely to assume that that emerging adult would have a secure and confident attachment to God. The literature bears out these assumptions as demonstrated above. The literature does show that each parent has a differently specific role in creating that attachment and keeping it healthy, but each role is important although that it is often assumed that being attached to the primary caregiver is most

important. This is not shown to be a pervasive truth, as discovered in this ongoing study by this author, and as delineated above.

### **Comparing Faith Community Impact to Parent Impact**

The fourth factor of interest in this study is discovering whether the emerging adult tends to become involved with a community of faith and, if so, what is the impetus for doing so? It would seem logical that if one is attached to parents who are modeling what they teach; that is, practicing what they preach, and are active in a faith community, the adolescent or emerging adult would be more likely to make better moral choices and have little interest in walking away from the faith teachings of their childhood (i.e., becoming apostate). It however, quite the normal behavior for young emerging adults to individuate by testing the waters of being independently able to do so. Interestingly, a study from Uecker et al. (2007) revealed that even though higher education has been assumed to secularize and normalize some behaviors, it did not actually do so. Rather, the greatest religious decline happened in the non-college emerging adults who were more inclined toward cohabitation, nonmarital sex, drugs and alcohol use.

Young adults' religiosity is strongly impacted by their parents' religiosity lived out or modeled. This will often be conducive to that young adult becoming involved in his or her own faith community of choice and it will be similar to that in which he or she was raised or indoctrinated (Barton et al., 2014). Highly religious youth much prefer to talk to their parents about their faith if the conversation is led, guided, or initiated by the young adult or adolescent. This allows for the conversation to not be preachy, hierarchical, or parent centered (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008). It seems reasonable to this author to see how such welcome interaction from the parents would have a long-lasting positive impact on the path the emerging adult will take when they are looking for their own community of faith during their college years.

Reasons that young adults find beneficial to being involved in a faith community include guidance in interpersonal relationships, life decisions, and character development (McMurdie et al., 2013), which this author suggests may be why some young people are drawn to “spirituality” even when not drawn to “religion.” The adage that has been attributed to the ancient philosopher and mathematician Blaisé Pascal, says “There is a God-shaped vacuum in everyone’s soul, and we will fill that vacuum with either a god or the true God.”

Interestingly, a study by Scott and Kraus (2014) discovered that it is not the mere act of attending services at one’s faith community of choice that is sought out, but one’s level of belief in the importance of religious faith that matters and is the stuff of which strong moral values are built. Specifically, the study looked at marijuana use, getting drunk, hitting, and property offenses as actions less likely to be engaged in when one is strong in one’s faith. Further, it was discovered that if one’s religious beliefs are shallower or even nonexistent, going to religious services appeared to diminish rather than increase moral convictions. This author finds this intriguing, though not surprising, because when one attends religious services without the intention for learning, inspiration, and spiritual growth, the reasons must have to do with peripheral factors. Could it be that attendance is under obligatory reasons (i.e., funerals, weddings, religious holidays, the desire to impress a romantic interest, etc.)?

The *channeling hypothesis* is a coined term used across various academic domains, the origin of which is impossible to locate at this juncture. In the case of the academic domain of this author’s study, it argues that parents have a direct effect on their adolescent’s acquisition of religiosity and these parental effects are mediated through congregation and peers. However, according to a study by Martin et al. (2003) their research found that peer influence and parental influence hold significant relationship to adolescent religiosity. There is congruence in the

findings that parental influence has a strong impact, just as the channeling hypothesis states, but without the congregational influence. Specifically, this study demonstrates that the power of good parenting supersedes the power of being part of a good congregation. Yet the good parenting gets channeled or funneled through the emerging adult in such a way that it adds value to their ability to appreciate and benefit from congregational involvement.

Having a sense of connectedness to a community of faith is seen as important and should be seen as a necessary component of adult development and adult learning, according to Merriam (2008) and Tisdell (2008). Emerging adults are interested in spirituality, even if not in active religious affiliation with a particular denomination or organization, so to include topics of faith, spirituality, and religion as part of a broader approach to adult education is what the research of Frye (2014) is about. The target of such a focus is the emerging adult who was either not raised in a home of strong religious faith, or certain dynamics within that home were not conducive to the young adult desiring to hold on to such teachings.

A study by Anderson (1998) was based on whether or not children of pastors or preachers, colloquially known as *PKs* are given more expectations than those given to children of others within the congregation or faith community at large. Four hundred eighty-seven pastors' children were surveyed. Many variables were included into the study consisting of 1) the feelings of the *PK* toward moving, 2) consistency of parental behavior, 3) amount and quality of family time, 4) ability to be oneself without being noticed, 5) expectations by others being perceived as greater than their expectations of others, 6) the status of having a pastor as a father, 7) support of the church and members, 8) intimacy with each parent, 9) satisfying parental marriage, and 10) relationships with friends and extended family. Though there was some measure of correlation between and among all the variables and religious commitment, the

strongest correlation was the *PK's* perception that more exemplary behavior was expected from him or her.

This author's experience as a *PK* allows for a level of experiential appreciation for this study. There is a desire to respond to these ten points from a personal perspective. The first one that asked about the *PK's* feelings toward moving were not an experience for this author. The moves that were made were either at the young age of just 4 years old, or other moves were not from one pastorate to another, but from one worship edifice to another as the congregation expanded.

The second point concerning consistency of parental behavior is a very favorable memory. The choices that have been made throughout this author's life have been made based on the solidified foundation of parental modeling of Christian values. Both of my parents walked the walk of the talk they talked. The amount and quality of family time is the third point of the study and there are a mixture of fond memories and some a bit sad.

The sadness is from the fact that there was not as much interpersonal communication either between the parents or among the four siblings as would have been preferred. The reasons for this are a bit difficult to pinpoint but may likely just be based on the quirks of mostly an introverted family dynamic wherein there were often times spent alone reading or watching television or being involved in the upkeep of the family and home through employment and homemaking duties.

The fourth point, about the ability to be oneself without being noticed is not a memory with repercussions or discomfort. Instead, the ability to be myself was relatively unchallenged, which may have to do with the fact that the congregation was small and consisted of a lot of close or distance relatives and friends. This author participated willingly and strongly in

activities within the church classes and services, and excelled above peers, which led to becoming a leader within the congregation in terms of teaching classes covering all age groups. Being compliant, conscientious, and conservative allowed there to be no “outliers” or nonconformity in the way this author carried herself.

The fifth point about expectations by others being perceived as greater than their expectations of others, is not really one of any real concern. It was somehow intuitive to this author that walking or behaving in an expected way was just the obvious norm. There was no attempt or need for pretense or hypocrisy. As emerging adulthood began, there was a bit of “testing the waters” beyond the confines of childhood teachings, which is the normative process of individuating. It was not so much about a desire to defy or rebel, but more of a desire to find out what is out there on the other side of the fence. In doing such exploring, this author remained tethered to the edicts, morés, and general beliefs with which she was raised.

The sixth point about having a pastor as a father was absolutely all this author ever knew, having been born into the family many years after he had already begun pastoring. There was nothing at all intimidating about it. It was a point of pride, in fact. Watching him preach and listening to the utterances of respect and appreciation he received, made this author a proud daughter, yet, not in any entitled kind of way. It was a source of comfort and a great modeling as a future teacher of scripture as well as academic teaching roles.

The seventh point addresses the level of support of the church and members. It is my assumption that word “support” is not about financial matters, but about interpersonal and spiritual support. It was strong and favorable. The eighth point about intimacy with each parent is not as pleasant for this author, whose parents were raised during a span of time where life was hard. They had to eke out a living from meager means. Those were the days when “men were

men” and “women were women,” which translates to mean there was always work to do from sunup to sundown for the men in the fields and the woman in the kitchen and sewing room. There was little education for them as African Americans, so what they learned was basically or self-taught. The understanding held by their parents was that “children should be seen and not heard,” or that “fathers should not hug, kiss, or embrace their daughters.” As a result, intimacy was grossly absent from the household. Yet, the four siblings, including this author, all knew undoubtedly that we were loved. Yet, the absence of demonstration of physical intimacy was to a large degree accommodated by the parental giving of gifts and times of recreation for the family.

The ninth topic of whether there was a satisfying parental marriage, the answer is yes. Despite certain idiosyncrasies, and especially from a 20/20 experiential hindsight perspective, indeed the marriage was a quirkily satisfying one. Finally, the tenth topic about relationships with friends and family, they ranged between good to fair. This was not the enmeshed or immersed family that kind of did life together, living near one another. Mine was a family who lived in various parts of the country, and still are that kind of family today. Both parents are long deceased, but that seems to be the historical and generational type of family from which this author hails.

### **Summary**

This qualitative study will be a benefit to the current body of literature regarding the factors that impact emerging adults to leave the faith of their childhood. The benefit will come in the results that will reveal the strength of each factor and, thus, the results will automatically fall into a rank order of weight or importance. Statistics will not be employed because it is not a quantitative study; however, it will become obvious to me and future readers of this study, as to what was deemed as most impactful on why the 18-25 year-old left the faith of his or her

childhood—and whether they eventually returned or expected to return. Will the weight of importance be heavier for parental modeling, parental styles, or parental attachment? The answers will play a strong part in whether the emerging adult decides to connect to a community of faith of his or her own accord for his or her own reasons. This is relative to the young adult who is either away at college, or has moved away from home for employment or any other valid reason.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Overview

Though research exists about my three areas of interest regarding factors that impact an emerging adult's decision to retain or discard the biblical teachings of their youth, my interest was in discovering among those whether there was one that would be discovered to be the most impactful. The difference between normative "testing of the waters" of becoming an independent agent of one's own spiritual or religious choices is different from the decision to absolutely discard the faith. I have gone to great length to differentiate between the testing of the waters of independence by trying one's faith "in the fire" versus tossing one's faith into the fire.

The former is intended as a testing process and it is the normative individuation that typically happens in most emerging adults' lives. The latter is labeled as apostasy when the faith is thrown out completely, with no desire to test, purify, or refine it. Several studies have defined apostasy, whether in synonyms or as that actual term (Ahrold et al., 2011; Aslani et al., 2015; Bader & Desmond, 2006; Bahr & Albrecht, 1989; Puffer et al., 2008). Yet others make clear distinctions between what apostasy means and does not mean (Bahr & Albrecht, 1989; Greenwald et al., 2018; Streib & Klein, 2013).

### Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry

My interest clearly called for a discovery of the emotions and feelings involved in the experiences of my participants as regards their interactions with their parents, centered on their learning about religion and spirituality. If I had done a quantitative inquiry, I would have missed the core of what it is I was looking for. I would have gotten statistics about strengths, correlations, and other numeric answers, but it would have been too "sterile," in the final analysis, to understand personal experiences with apostasy. I would have been left not knowing

about the personal and interpersonal relationship factors that are central to the phenomena of parental modeling, styles, and attachment. I also inquired as to whether the emerging adult decided to make a personal choice to connect to a community of faith.

### **Rationale for a Phenomenological Paradigm**

Doing my research as a qualitative study was the only way, in my understanding, for the study to learn the answer to my research questions. I not only wanted to learn the answers to them, but I also wanted to learn the phenomenological and ontological aspects of those answers. In plain English, I wanted to learn about the experiences of my interviewees as they talked about the topics of how their parents modeled their faith, what their style of parenting was, and how the emerging adult felt about the level of attachment they had with their parent or parents. All of this rich phenomenology allowed me to gain a big picture understanding of these interviewees' sense of who they are and their very being in the world, which is their ontology.

A leading voice in the field of qualitative research is Creswell et al. (2007) who wrote his fourth edition of the topic of the five approaches to qualitative inquiry. They are narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. My immediate choice of phenomenological made immediate sense. This work is not receiving stories from participants, except in a tangential sense as they respond to my open-ended questions.

It does not need to take the path of a grounded theory approach because I was not looking to create a new theory base centered on the factors that influenced their apostasy. I just wanted to discover the experiences and rationale behind the experiences. This work is not an ethnography because I was not interested in studying cultures or people groups in some observational or *in vivo* manner. Finally, it was not a case study because it will involve more than one participant. Another couple of writers on this kind of research approach are Denzin and Lincoln (2008) who

explain that the observer and interpreter of the phenomenological information gets to be placed in the world of the participant or interviewee.

### **Research Questions**

- What are emerging adults' perspectives concerning factors that they believe led them to leave the religious tradition in which they were raised?
- How do emerging adults perceive the role of parental modeling of Christian values and its relationship to their apostasy?
- How do emerging adults perceive their becoming apostate on factors including parent-child attachment and the style of parenting used to raise them?
- What has become the emerging adult's perception or evaluation of the importance of having a continued or discontinued connection with a community of faith?

### **Setting**

Due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, my setting was via Cisco WebEx. It was necessary to not only hear the participant responses but also to see their body language and/or facial expressions, as I embedded myself into the process.

### **Participants**

Primarily, these were college students, with the exception of one college graduate, who was later released as a non-viable candidate because she did not fit the criteria completely. She was older than the 25-year-old cutoff, and though she had been apostate in college, she was now an active member of a church community. I was interested in the emerging adult age range of 18-25 and needed to retain that commitment. It is also because I am an adjunct professor with connections to three college campuses, thus I initially thought it would be more likely to obtain students because of my history with the institutions. However, it turned out that I did not need to

utilize social media to access my participants. They all came from the classes that I teach at one of the universities at which I teach. Though my goal was not met of reaching a minimum of seven students (I reached only 6), their ages were all between 18 and 25 years old, and though the ethnic or cultural diversity was not as broad as I had hoped, the study produced valuable information worthy of further study.

I used an instrument known as the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004), to help me choose my participants more efficiently because this instrument contains questions for potential participants that allowed me to obtain those who best fit the purposes of this study. This instrument draws from the foundational work of Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980), Ainsworth et al. (1978), Ainsworth (1985), and others who studied attachment with the primary caregiver in the beginning in the child's formative years of development. The research ultimately examines attachment across the lifespan and its impact on all relationships of importance including peers, friendships, and romantic relationships. The AGI incorporates those studies that include not only Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) and Ainsworth (1985), but also the work of others looking at certain perspectives or focal points of attachment.

Several studies have examined the relationship of attachment to spirituality. Bartholomew (1990) and Brennan et al. (1998) studied intimacy and attachment in young adults; Brokaw and Edwards (1994), Granqvist (1998), Hall and Brokaw (1995), and Hall et al. (1998) studied attachment from the perspective of relationship to God; Hazan and Shaver (1990, 2017) looked at love as an attachment process; Kirkpatrick (1997, 1998, 1999) and Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990, 1992) examined the correlation of attachment style and how it impacts changes in religious beliefs, including God as a substitute attachment figure; Paloutzian and Ellison (1982) and Simpson and Rholes (1998) looked at how loneliness and spiritual wellbeing interact; and

TenElshoff and Furrow (2000) found significant correlation between secure attachment as a predictor of spiritual maturity. They were influential in this study, but none were from a qualitative perspective nor incorporated the factors of parental style and modeling.

## **Procedures**

Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I solicited participants via email to the classes I teach and have previously taught. Though my initial intentions were to solicit all three colleges with which I have connections either as an alum, retiree, or educator, it turns out that I did not need to do that. All of my participants ended up being my own students from the past or current semester, except for one participant who is now a college graduate.

Though Erikson's stage covering emerging adulthood covers approximate ages of 18 to 25 (Erikson, 1968, 1982), I focused on those who are potentially between 20 and 22 years old, simply because that was the age range of my participants. I did not want potential experiential and immaturity factors to confound the validity of the results. I provided my email address as a means through which they responded. From those who responded in the affirmative, I sent them the informed consent form via email attachment.

The interview process lasted an hour or less for each participant, the shortest was about 30 minutes, and the longest was about 1-1/4 hour. Each individual participant's responses to the open-ended research questions was, of course, unique to the individual participant.

Of course, the interviews were video-recorded and audio-recorded, as well as transcribed via Cisco Webex. WebEx is the platform used by one of the schools at which I work, though not the one from which my participants came. The data gathering happened during the interview process. I did some journaling, but mostly mental assessing as I interacted as analyst within the process.

### **The Researcher's Role and Positionality**

Because I was the “human instrument” in this study, aside from my open-ended semi-structured interview approach, I was as dispassionate and objective as possible. Yet, based on the topic of this study, it was and is very close to my heart and one that I am passionate about. Per Creswell et al.'s (2007) terminology, I exercised the concept of “bracketing,” which was the effort to keep my own personal feelings, body language, or other such revealing behaviors private. It was not about me, but about the interviewees being given the freedom to be free in their responses.

I am a licensed and ordained clergy person, a licensed professional counselor, and a doctoral student looking at the topic of emerging adult apostasy. Further, among my children, one of them is living in apostasy, having disparaged and discarded all remnants of the Christian faith with which she was raised. Obviously, pure objectivity from me was challenged at times during the interview process. Yet, as I have reviewed the videos several times, I am happy with my objectivity and dispassionate responses.

There was quite a good incentive for me to exercise a good amount of objectivity because there was a strong desire for me to hear the honest answers, feel the honest emotions, and be able to derive the most honest data set on which to perform an honest data analysis. That is the only way that this research can gain, maintain, and retain validity. So, in order to bracket or contain my reactions, I kept a reflexive mental journal, but also with some field notes. I discovered that I did not feel a great need to express my passions privately, as I had initially assumed I might. I suppose that is because of the decades of immersion that I have had in dealing with the apostasy issue with my daughter. Hays and Singh (2012) are a valuable source for understanding the concept and rationale behind the typical normal need to privately “emote” on paper.

My positionality is that life experience has shown me that very high importance has been demonstrated in the results of how a young adult decides to incorporate spirituality, faith, or religion into their lives. That is, the factors of high importance are directly related to the crucial factors of this study. My decades of living have shown me that the parent/child interactions are most impactful in forming that child into a person with their own faith by choice, or whether other factors have had a greater impact causing them to choose against any system of belief similar to that with which they were raised and within which they were indoctrinated.

The important factors in whether the emerging adult chooses to maintain or discard that indoctrination include what kind of role models their parents were; which parent had the stronger positive modeling; what the attachment was to the primary caregiver as well as to the other parent; and what the general parenting style was and whether the parents were in agreement with that particular style.

This author realizes exceptions to my thesis exist, for valid reasons, including childhood physical, sexual, or emotional abuse foisted upon the child by a nonparent figure. Resulting mental disorders of various kinds develop and sometimes the parent(s) are not aware of why their child is acting out. The child may exhibit behaviors that totally confound all the good and appropriate effort that good parenting has poured into the child, who may have been threatened not to tell about what has happened to him or her.

Aside from such horrific exceptions, it is my otherwise thesis that good parenting produces a higher likelihood that the child will become intrinsically motivated to continue practicing the faith of their childhood when they become an independent adult. However, this is not to say that in the process of individuating, the young adult will not experiment with new behaviors, philosophies, and general experiences. In fact, that is typical and expected, yet

generally is temporary for no more than months to a few short years. It is the process of testing their childhood beliefs in the waters of reality to test their validity.

This dissertation has now discovered what factors are involved in behavioral, philosophical, and overall life changes that are intended to make a clean break, as it were, from all semblances of one's childhood indoctrination. There is every intention not to return to it. That is my position within this study. It is personal to me. I have a daughter who is an apostate, and has been for decades, since she was 15 years old.

### **Data Collection**

All Health Insurance Portability and accountability Act (HIPAA) guidelines for confidentiality and privacy have been adhered to during the interview process. No one was in my vicinity because I live alone. I suggested to the interviewees that they be alone also, if possible. It was my duty to ensure that all information was held in confidence, shared with no one. No identifying information is mentioned in this study other than gender and age. The Cisco WebEx recordings will be securely stored, and then deleted once my research is complete and the dissertation has been successfully defended.

Semi-structured open-ended interviews were my means of collecting the information. Those interviews were conducted via Cisco WebEx. The COVID-19 pandemic made all in-person interviewing untenable. I worked with college students, all of whom had access to WebEx software. The interview process was done with a concentrated focus on transcendental phenomenology (Creswell et al., 2007).

This is an approach that recognizes that momentous events in one's life have consequences beyond oneself, or beyond the norms of daily existence. There is meaning that is

transcendent that encompasses a world beyond that of the five senses, having a metaphysical importance to the ordering of one's life.

Recording of the video and audio, of course, allowed me to ensure that I had not missed any portion of the responses. Similarly, it was just as important for me to hear and critique my own involvement, questions, responses, and objectivity. That was done through the process of mostly mental notes, but also some field notes. The transcription of the interviews was verbatim, except for corrections made to how audio software "heard" and interpreted the utterances. That is, pauses were taken as ending of sentences, or certain words were misinterpreted and, therefore, misspelled, and other issues. Nonetheless, the guidelines for verbatim transcribing were followed as prescribed by Hays and Singh (2012). The interview protocol follows:

1. Please introduce yourself to me, for the purposes of this interview.
2. Please walk me through your journey toward apostasy by first describing your relationship with your parents.
3. What are the factors that you believe led you to leave the religious tradition in which you were raised?
4. How do you perceive the role of parental modeling of Christian values and its relationship to your decision to leave the faith?
5. What relationship, if any, do you see between your decision to leave the faith and your parent's attachment or bondedness to you? (i.e., How would you describe the attachment or bond between you and each of them?)
6. What relationship, if any, do you see between your decision to leave the faith and you are the style of parenting that your parents used? (i.e., were they strict, lenient, neglectful, or did they value your opinions in dealing with moral and spiritual development?)

7. How would you describe the example they each set for you? What kind of models were they?
8. Of the formative experiences you identified on your timeline, which would you say were the most significant?
9. What made them significant?
10. Is there something else you would like to add to your timeline that you have not already explained?
11. Describe where you are in terms of whether you have a desire to be in a faith community of your own choosing. What led you to that decision?
12. Experts suggest that a person is often not aware of his or her worldview and its influence on his or her life and choices. On a scale from one to five, with one being very unaware and five being completely aware, how aware are you of your worldview?
13. Describe your worldview now, whether it is the same or different from that of your childhood (i.e., What is your view of God and how has it changed since your childhood?)
14. Ideally, part of becoming an adult involves the process of examining and evaluating one's worldview. Where are you in that process?
15. How do your parents' worldview compare to yours now?
16. Think about a friend who also has, or still has, a Biblical worldview. What formative experiences do you think they would want to tell me about?
17. Tell me about the struggles you have experienced-- since graduating high school-- as you have worked out your worldview.
18. What questions, if any, came up for you as you developed a Biblical worldview?

19. If you were a parent of a 19-year-old, how would you help her as she or he develops a Biblical worldview?
20. Imagine you are being interviewed at a youth conference, in front of thousands of Christian young people. What would you want to tell them to expect to experience as they develop their worldview over the next few years?
21. I would like to ask you a question that will prompt you to put everything together, so to speak. Reflecting on your lifetime of experience developing a Biblical worldview, what advice would you give to Christians your age as they develop their worldview?
22. This next question is unique in that it will invite you to look ahead. How do you expect your worldview to change or develop over the next several years?
23. We have covered a lot of ground in our conversation, and I so appreciate the time you have given to this. One final question... What else do you think would be important for me to know about the development of your worldview that I have not asked you about?

### **Data Analysis**

Because this was a transcendental phenomenological approach, my analysis followed the guidelines of Moustakas (1994). Those guidelines included all the following components:

1. Horizontalization – include every interviewee expression, then group them into similarities of those expressions
2. Reduction – testing each expression for its relevance and preliminary grouping
3. Elimination – if there is no actual relevance, remove the expression
4. Clustering the remaining invariant constituents – start forming expressions into clusters of similarity

5. Applying thematic labels to those invariant constituents – the clusters get themed or labeled
6. Checking those invariant constituents and their theme against the complete record of the research participant for explicit expression and compatibility
7. Construction of individual textual description; structural description based on ITD and imaginative, variation and textual-structural description incorporating invariant constituents and themes
8. Develop composite description of meanings and essences of experience for the group as a whole
9. Immersion: Centering whole life on the experience
10. Incubation: Withdrawing and waiting for insights
11. Illumination: Themes and patterns emerge, forming clusters
12. Explication: Adding other dimensions of meaning, refining emergent patterns
13. Arriving at a description of the experience and a portrayal of the individuals in the study
14. Creative synthesis: Bringing together pieces and showing relationships

### ***Trustworthiness***

My goals for this study are that it is credible, dependable, transferable, and confirmable, as described below.

### ***Credibility***

Since the topic of my research is apostasy in emerging adults and differentiating that from the normative process of individuation, my study has demonstrated credibility by how well I made that differentiation clear. That was done by the presentation of citations and explanations of why they are important and relevant. Believability was also demonstrated in the data

collection and analysis process (Moustakas, 1994; Priest, 2002) via the transparency of those processes.

### ***Dependability***

The reader of this work will be able to depend on its results. That will be commensurate with the same reasons that the reader will find the work credible. It will hardly be possible to be credible but not dependable. The various processes of data collection and data analysis allow validity and dependability to pervade this study. I have addressed my explicit presuppositions and also acknowledged my subjective judgments (Ashworth, 1997), both within this body of work, as well as in my mental note-taking.

### ***Transferability***

This concept is otherwise known as generalizability in quantitative research. If I have done my job of bringing credibility and dependability to this work, it will reveal the equivalent of generalizability found in qualitative research. There will have been prolonged engagement with the data (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985); and verification with the participant feedback, as well as the use of low inference descriptors, such as extracts from participants' verbatim accounts (Johnson, 1997).

### ***Confirmability***

This is similar to the concept of reliability in quantitative research. It is the notion that whenever the study is replicated, the results will be relatively similar to those of the previous study. Of course, that is due to the study's credibility, dependability, and transferability. The ways in which confirmability has been achieved for me in this study include providing evidence of an audit trail (Koch 1994) and disclosing my personal orientation and context (Ashworth, 1997; Stiles, 1999). Additionally, having intensive engagement with the material and iteration

between data and interpretation (Erlandson et al., 1993; Stiles, 1999); grounding interpretations within the data through the use of verbatim illustration (Johnson, 1997) and, finally, ensuring technical accuracy in recording and transcribing (Perakyla, 1997).

### **Summary**

Whether a study is quantitative or qualitative, it needs to clearly exhibit foundational evidence of good research methods. That means that the core factors of being credible, dependable, transferrable, and confirmable must be evident. They will be evident if the steps of conducting good phenomenological inquiry is done via the interview process, the data gathering or collection, the data analysis, and if the results from doing so are clearly defined and delineated. It is within this work that the entire study has revealed—in quantitative terms—validity, reliability, and generalizability, but being respected as a qualitative work of academic rigor, equivalent to the rigor of a quantitative work. These were my goals for this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Overview

This chapter will explain the results of this study, whose purpose was to examine whether the factors of parenting style, parent modeling, or parent attachment played major roles in the decisions that led these participants to walk away from the faith of their childhood. This is a transcendental phenomenological study because it has to do, ultimately, with matters of this world that transcend or connect to thoughts and feelings about the transcendent world.

The eternal or spiritual world is another way of explaining transcendence. Phenomenology is a study of the lived experience of each participant in terms of emotions, worldviews, experiences within the context of living their lives. This chapter includes sections describing the participants, data results, and summary.

### Participants

Seven people volunteered for this topic because they found that it connected with their lived experience, in one way or another. It turned out that all except one were volunteers from my research class and psychology lab class at one of the universities at which I teach psychology-related topics.

### Person 1 (Charles)

Charles is a college senior who was in my research methods class during Fall semester and is a 21-year-old white male raised Catholic and whose parents are married. He states being closer to his mother than his father, based on communication not being something his father does well. Charles had poor experiences during his years as an altar boy and also his years in Catholic school settings. He also felt that his father pressured Charles and his sister to attend church even when they did not want to do so.

**Person 2 (Maria)**

This 25-year-old Hispanic college senior is the child of married parents and is from a Catholic background, which she seems to have initially felt comfortable. However, due to a disconnect between her father's poor parental modeling in the home conflicting with the perceived "ideal" modeling in the church environment, she became disenchanted with the church.

**Person 3 (Crystal)**

Crystal is a 21-year-old white female whose disdain with Catholicism stems from what she sees as being too strict, especially regarding her sense that she is bisexual. She states that if God is not accepting of her sexuality and is going to send her "to hell", she wants nothing to do with the faith or church of her upbringing. Even though Crystal says that her mother insisted on taking her to mass during Crystal's childhood, she does not attribute that to any negative outcomes in her life. Rather, it is more directly related to the conflict between the church's view on sexuality. Her parents are married. She says her father is not a person with a personal faith.

**Person 4 (Richard)**

Richard is a white male 22-year-old college senior, whose parents are divorced. He has issues with his mother's insistence on taking him to church all during childhood as well as enrolling him in Lutheran school for a year. He was not happy with the strictness of the church and school including its rules for attire, attending chapel services, etc. Richard is not nearly as close to his mother as he is to his father. He describes that father/son relationship as "cool."

**Person 5 (Susan)**

This 22-year-old white female college senior loves her married adoptive parents who raised her from almost the beginning of her life. Even though they took her to their Presbyterian

church regularly, she had no problem with that. In fact, she says she continues to go in order to support her father as the minister of music and her mother as a member of the choir. But, at the same time, Susan says she is not sure she believes the bible anymore nor does she have a personal faith anymore. Largely, this estrangement results from two factors, including a grave disappointment at age 16 when she was not hired as a summer camp counselor at the Christian camp she has attended every summer for ten years. The second factor of discouragement is that she sees herself as bisexual and this conflicts with the teachings of the church.

### **Person 6 (Jennifer)**

This 25-year-old white female college senior has disassociated herself from religion and faith because of a very discouraging and disillusioning series of events that happened in her formative years. Her parents divorced when she was in her early childhood; she was able to go to church only on alternate weekends because she would be with her mother during those times; though she enjoyed learning and growing in the Sunday School class, Jennifer's mother quite taking her to church at the point when the mother got involved in a new romantic relationship. Though Jennifer wanted to keep going to church, she states that her mother lost interest and stopped going or taking her. Jennifer states that from ages 10-13, she tried to get her mother to take her, but she would not. Jennifer "rebelled" and went into drugs and alcohol for a few years.

**Table 1***Demographics and Demeanor of Interview Participants*

Person	Age	Race	Gender Identity	Yr. In School	Relig. Bkgrd.	Parents	Demeanor
Charles	21	W	M	Sr.	Catholic	Married	Pleasant
Maria	25	H	F	Sr.	Catholic	Married	Pleasant
Crystal	21	W	F Bisexual	Rsg Jr.	Catholic	Married	Cooperative
Richard	22	W	M	Sr.	Lutheran	Divorced	Cooperative
Susan	22	W	F Bisexual	Sr.	Prsbyt.	Married	Pleasant
Jennifer	25	W	F	Sr.	Protestant	Divorced	Pleasant

**Data Results**

In order to qualify as eligible for this study, the seven participants took the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004). It has 28 items on it, 14 of which measure one's sense of anxiety over Attachment to God, and 14 measure one's fear of being abandoned by God, thus they avoid God. The scores were as follows, the interpretation of which is cited under the bottom of table:

**Table 2**

*Scores from the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004)*

Participant	Attachment	Attachment	Interpretation
	Anxiety	Avoidance	
Charles	2.79	5.07	No anxiety about being close, but simply does not desire to be close to God
Maria	6.64	5.5	Wants no attachment to God and is strongly avoiding it.
Crystal	4.43	5.07	Small bit of anxiety about attaching to God, but strong desire to avoid it.
Richard	1.86	6.5	No anxiety about being close, but does not desire to be close to God
Susan	3.5	5.93	Not much anxiety about attaching to God, but strong desire to avoid it.
Jennifer	4.14	5.5	Not anxious about attaching to God, but fairly to quite strong desire not to attach

*Note.* Low = below 4 (4 is the average), so the further away from 4, the more pronounced; High = above 4 (4 is the average), so the further away from 4, the more pronounced

### **Theme Development**

The themes evolving from this study came to three, including Aspects of Parenting, Negative Church Experience, and Sexual Orientation Conflicts within the Church (see Table 3). For this transcendental phenomenological approach, my analysis followed the guidelines of Moustakas (1994), whose components are mentioned in the previous chapter. They are all repeated below within the Research Question Responses, in order to include the findings or

responses to each of them:

***Research Question Responses within the Moustakas (1994) Steps Horizontalization***

In this section, I am including every interviewee expression, and then grouping them into similarities of those expressions. To horizontalize is to align closely-related responses together. Ultimately, the purpose of doing so is to continue through all the themes to develop as much of an overall “bottom line” as the data analysis allows.

RQ1: The emerging adults' perspectives concerning factors that they believe led them to leave the religious tradition in which they were raised.

Charles left because of coercive, abusive dominance kinds of behaviors, mostly from the leadership in his local parish of the Catholic church. His father pushed them to go to church, but is not easy to talk to; whereas, his mother does not “push” church attendance, though “she wants us to go” but “doesn’t get upset if we don’t want to.” He reports:

I went to a Catholic school for nine years when I was a kid. I felt like it was alright and like a higher quality education for a kid. And then we got up to, like, 7th or 8th grade in the middle school years when it seemed like the teachers, like, fed off the drama. It was almost like they had a target on my back for me. Like, I was always the kid who would care about school. I still had friends or whatever and, like, and if your friends did something, you got in trouble automatically like you must have done it too.

So [the teachers] try to get you in trouble, too, and it seemed like those teachers just had it out for you. So, that was, like, the first major turnoff for me from the religion. These people were the ones that were supposed to be teaching us religion. That really bothered me and made me not want to believe what they were teaching. And then I was an altar server for, like 3 or 4 years and, like, you really got to see who the priests were as people.

These young guys that came in, like, in their thirties or whatever, and they were just like very arrogant, like, they were always, they would yell at you when you were an altar server, but, I mean, as an altar role [they're] supposed to ... be, like, helping [you] and they would be like, oh, you're doing this and that wrong. Well, when we were taught by the old priest [it] is something different than what the new priests were trying to teach us. And it's, it gives you a change in traditions on how they ran the mass.

And, like, just the way they went about trying to say these things to 5th and 6th graders and such wasn't the right way to go about it. And it just that was one of the main reasons why I stopped going to church because like, one priest, like, every time we would altar-serve, he would like, yell at you and he wasn't, like, he wasn't like saying, "okay, can we do it like this?' He would actually be very rude about it and, like, very arrogant. And I just I really did not like that part about it.

Maria left because of frustrations about her father's dominance and unwillingness to answer her questions about religious differences, concerns, or questions she was having. She states that she left and returned to church attendance more than once, but finally gave up. It was not only her father's stalwart intransigence, but also her mother's subservience to her husband, which is a phenomenon of the culture. Maria puts it this way:

Um, there was always something religious to look for as part of family dynamics so I was raised, I was born to believe that family is directly linked to religion. I would just see it as a task right? It was well, [something] mommy told me to do so I would go and do it. I think, as I started to grow into adolescence, I started questioning why I had to do the things that I didn't [understand] why I had to repeat all these prayers and do all these rituals that I didn't really understand. And I started questioning that. Um, my parents

didn't like the questioning; they were raised a certain way and you never questioned authority right? Um, so they didn't like my questioning and they didn't ever question it themselves.

And that's when I started to realize that by the end of my teen years, I had a very strong—you know how teenagers get into an idea and they stick with it and defend it. Um, [when I was] 17 years old I firmly decided I didn't want to be part of the church. At that point, I had already completed all the Catholic stages, like baptism, communion, and confirmation. I was basically ready to get married. They prepared me for marriage. Um, and yeah, I made the decision to separate myself a little bit from it, but they didn't quite let me.

It's difficult because they are not very flexible...It doesn't change the fact that I think I need to live my life in a different way, a slightly more flexible way...We are a Catholic state, so the church has a lot of power in my country, [but] to my perception, they have never used it to advocate for everyone, they advocate for themselves. So, another part of it for me was the political part of it where you [have your views but you should not] impose them on someone else.

Maria went on to say that she sees her mother as “all devotion” and she is “what a mother is supposed to be” and that she believes [mother] still believes in her faith and Maria respects her for that.

Crystal does not attribute her departure from the faith to either of her parents. She says, “My relationship with my parents is really good, actually” She states that it was “a combination of things” that included religion being “used as a weapon” as well as “trying to find out who I am.” It was not until further into the interview that she revealed herself as bisexual and the

church telling her she is “going to hell.” This was consistent with her revelation that her mother strongly disapproves of this participant’s revelation of bisexuality. She does not feel close to her mother or to the Catholic church in which she was raised because she wonders if they “were right” when they taught that same-sex attraction is an unforgiveable sin. She expressed that she finds that hard to believe, on the one hand, but unsure if it is true, on the other hand.

I think it's probably a combination of like, the older I got and realizing how the people around me used religion as kind of like, you know, a weapon. And also just figuring out who I am as well...My dad was never really all that religious, but my mom is a Roman Catholic and growing up we did go to church when we could and I made my communion and my, um, confirmation. I don't necessarily think that she did anything specifically to, like, guide me away from the faith.

I think part of it was that she also probably had religious trauma from things that she suffered at the hands of the Catholic church when she was younger. So, I think while she kind of wanted us to, like, you know, know what God is in their religion she was never like, you know, pulling us into it completely [because she] understood.

Richard decidedly appears to never have been personally interested in church, but described that his mother was very insistent and consistent in getting him involved in church and church school in the Lutheran tradition. He describes his father and his relationship as very close. His parents are divorced and have been since he was one year old, but says that what led him away from the faith is that he “fell in love with science” and “learned so much” about what was a problem with faith.

He puts it this way:

Uh, so I've lived in a split household pretty much my whole life. Um, I was pretty much raised in the faith. I would say I ended up going to a Lutheran, middle school, and then all through high school for a year. Um, and since then, I've kind of just strayed away from the faith. I would say. I inquired, "What are the factors that you believe, led you to leave the religious tradition in, which you were raised?" I think it, I think it was a few things.

Actually I think some of the, the bigger things for me was. Really falling in love with science. I think falling in love with science was a big reason why I left, but I think also being raised so much in the faith and going to school with the religion included kind of led me to almost know so much to a point that I just couldn't believe it was real, based on being someone who loves science and also just seeing how much there actually was involved in the faith...

Um, I like that question actually so I think for me, I think, especially with what we see, not only in my generation specifically, but also generations, um, before me, is that, um, parents kind of tend to force their kids to go to church and force their kids into the faith without really giving them their own freedom of thinking, and I think that that is something that parents have been doing for a while. And instead of letting your child choose the faith or choose the religion that they believe in they are kind of forced or coerced into it, instead of the freedom of thinking.

Susan has no issues with her adoptive parents who are people of faith in the Presbyterian church. She says their relationship is great. Her problem stems from having applied for her "dream job" when she was 16 years old, but not getting it. She was so crushed because she wanted to be a camp counselor at the Christian camp she had attended every summer from ages 6-16. She said

that place was where she had felt closer to God than in any other setting. She was so sure that she would be hired, but she has deduced that she probably did not have a “good enough story” about changing from a bad life doing bad things to a good life doing good things. Her life had been wonderfully uneventful and productive. Additionally and separately, she sees herself as bisexual and says that her church does not accept that. She said words that indicated the desire to be in a faith community in the future, especially if she has children. Some of her own words about her experiences include:

Um, so with that being said, uh, my mom's sings in the choir at the church. So, every single Sunday, since I was born, I practically had to be at church no matter what it was. No matter what I believe. No matter what, you know--whatever--I had to be there to support my parents. And so, you know, it was, it was very a lot, you know, the Christian religion was definitely forced on me as a small child and through my adolescent life and through my adult life as well. [Even though] I still attend church today does not mean that I believe, but I still go to support my father and my mother and what they do in the church.

She went on to explain the crux of the matter that pushed her over the edge, which was in response to what caused her to leave the faith:

So, there was a, there's a big one actually, and there is a little bit of a back story. I used to go to a Christian church camp from when I was 6 years old till I was 13 or 14 years of age in [a nearby state]. It's called [name withheld] camp and conference center. It's Christian based. You know, you go there for a week or two. You can go and sleep away. You have no phones no, nothing. And you, you know, you just go and be with God while you're there.

I developed an extremely strong relationship with God while I was there and, you know, I wanted to further that relationship I had with God, because that was the only place that I felt that I could be connected to God was at that camp, like, not even in church not even reading the Bible, not even anywhere else, but so ... when I was 16, I went to apply to work there and I thought to myself, "I've been going here for so many years, so many years that they're, you know, I'm an automatic hire, they're gonna hire me, no doubt, like, you know, I'm going to be fine."

So I went in and did the interview. I felt confident. I was interviewed by one of my very first camp counselors there, and the interview went as well as it could have. I was, you know, a couple of days went by and I was waiting for the call back waiting for the call back. All my friends get a call back every single friend got a call back. I didn't get a call back. I never got that call back. They told me that I was in some "spiritual faith jump" and I was not qualified to be a camp counselor at that camp that I had gone to for so many years, and worked so hard with my relationship with God there.

So, when that happened, it turned to me away from the faith entirely because I felt like, God, gave up on me in that instance. And he said, you, you know, you tried to prove yourself here by wanting to work at this camp. But that's clearly not what I want for you and it hurt, it, it really hurt. But it turned out they were more about politics and they're more political and they want people that have stories, like, you know, some drug addicts that got clean, or, you know, their family's broken or whatever it is, but I clearly didn't have "the story." I had the good life that they didn't want to see in their camp. They wanted people to come from all different backgrounds with all different kinds of stories and it was just, it was, it was a wreck.

Jennifer’s parents divorced when she was 4 years old. Her father was “not religious at all,” so she alternated weekends with them. Her mother was religious and took the daughter to church every other Sunday. She enjoyed it and was growing and learning in Sunday school. However, when her mother got involved in a new romantic relationship and remarried, her church attendance decreased and when this participant would ask her mother to take her, she would not do so. So, she felt disappointed, discouraged, and disillusioned. This is how Jennifer puts it:

She stopped taking me to church and I would just have to ask. Or, like, bother her to take me so when she stopped reading her Bible and stopped going on her own and it turned into me asking, I think that modeling to me, kind of showed me it wasn't truly important because you have a new man, and you just dropped it. So...

**Table 3**

*Degree of Impact of Parent(s) and Perceived Religious Institutional Harm*

	Reason(s) for Apostasy		
Charles	X		XX
Maria	XX	X	XX
Crystal		x	XX
Richard		XX	XX
Susan			XXX
Jennifer	x	XXX	

*Note.* x = Mild impact; X = Moderate impact; XX = Strong impact; XXX = Extreme, Disorienting; = Institution was her love and focus, from which she was torn away by her mother

RQ2: How emerging adults perceive the role of parental modeling of Christian values and its relationship to their apostasy.

Charles described the role of parent modeling as his mother being the “cool mom” by not pushing the family to go to church if they did not want to; whereas, the father would “get hurt or upset” if they did not want to go. He says that it is difficult to talk to his father about “anything, really.” Some of his words:

Um, I have a pretty good relationship with my parents. Both of them are Roman Catholics and I have five sisters and we were all raised Roman Catholics. I have a really good relationship with my mom. I can talk to her about anything, and she’s always been there for me. And then, um, my dad he’s still in my life and I live with them and whatnot, but definitely nowhere as close to him as the relationship with my mom. I don’t talk to him about as much, or anything, really. And he’s the one that pushes religion big time. He’s the one that always wants everyone to go to church and whatnot. I feel like my mom doesn’t care about going to church. I mean, she wants us to go, but if we don’t want to, she’s like “alright, cool”, but my dad he doesn’t say anything but he gets, like...hurt—if that’s the proper term to use—he gets upset about it.

Maria does not see her father as a good parent model, but rather as an arbitrary dictator [my words]. On the other hand, she sees her mother as a would-be good role model, but she is inhibited by the more strict authoritarianism of her father. Her description, in part, includes:

Yes, my parents way of raising me and, uh, interacting with me had a very strong [impact]. They gave me that religion thinking it was the best for me. I truly, I think they did, they have done their best every step of the way the best they can... [There came the] point where they realized that their daughter was not what they hoped for, um, it was like, love was conditional. So that just made me stand stronger.

Crystal says nothing negative about her parents, essentially anyway. She had supportive words for their dedication to caring for her mental health needs from the second to the seventh grade.

My dad was never really all that religious, but my mom is a Roman Catholic and growing up we did go to church when we could and I made my communion and my, um, confirmation. I don't necessarily think that she did anything specifically to, like, guide me away from the faith.

Richard's parents are divorced. Though he does not get along with his mother as well as he does with his father, he does not actually malign or denigrate her. There is simply an automatic chasm between them because of her religious bent compared to his atheistic, naturalistic, scientific bent, which he explained this way:

The bond between my dad, and I is fantastic. I do think that the bond between my mother and I, though is a little bit of a struggle, and I think that actually plays a huge part in me leaving the faith because she was the one who was super influential on getting me into the church and putting me in a Lutheran school and putting me through that. So I think it, it was a little bit of resentment for that, so I think it did play a play a role. Um, so I think that with me struggling like, generally struggling to fit into this Lutheran school setting, um, I think it, it definitely played a role in me leaving my relationship with her.

Susan has nothing but praise for her parents' modeling style:

They were, they were incredible role models. I couldn't ask for better parents too, in the faith. You know, they were both raised on being Christian or being Catholic or whatever they were, and, you know, they wanted to carry that into our family and give that to me. I was actually adopted. I'm not their biological child, so, you know, they wanted to, they

could not have children. So they wanted to raise me as best as they could as close as they could to what they experienced when they grew up.

And I, you know, I feel like that's really important. You know, that's super important to me. It's a great thing to have your family, and have them, you know, be able to give you that lifestyle and you get to experience that. But that does not mean that I'm going to carry it with me forever. You know, wonderful. I don't think my parents had any influence on me leaving the faith, because I was so close with them and we were all going to church at all times. So, we were always that that was our happy place as a family to be.

So, like, again, like I said, what really turned me away from the faith as it is, it was not my parents. It was definitely that camp experience and not getting hired at that camp experience. What was, which is what really turned me away.

Jennifer has little positive to say about how her parents modeled how to raise a child. That was not always the case prior to age 13, but at that point there became a rift between her and her mother because of the mother no longer remaining involved and keeping the participant also involved in church learning and growth. So, the mother who was a good model for the first 13 years of the daughter's life, lost that status.

About parent modeling, Jennifer says:

...when my mother got remarried. She stopped taking me to church and I would just have to ask. Or, like, bother her to take me so when she. Stopped be stop reading her Bible and stopped going on her own and it turned into me asking. I think that modeling to me. Kind of showed me it wasn't truly important because you have a new man, and you just dropped it.



**Table 4***Perceived Impact of Parent Modeling on Apostasy Decision*

Code	Father's Modeling	Mother's Modeling
Charles	Distant, disagreeable	Patient, listener, peacemaker
Maria	Demanding, Controlling	Constrained, subservient
Crystal	Not a believer, nonintrusive	Religious, nurturing, attentive
Richard	Not a believer, nonintrusive	Religious, fervent, appreciated
Susan	Faithful in service to the church	Faithful in service to the church
Jennifer	Distant, unattached, divorced	Great, BUT became hurtful, now estranged

RQ3: How emerging adults perceive their becoming apostate on factors including parent-child attachment and the style of parenting used to raise them.

Charles expressed outside factors as the predominate reason for leaving the faith. He indicated that he is attached to his mother in a more relaxed way, but he did not deny any connection to his father, in spite of feeling like it is not easy to talk to his father, just generally about anything. The mother's parenting style may hover between inductive (authoritative) and permissive, but more the former than the latter. His specific response to this:

I have a pretty good relationship with my parents. Both of them are Roman Catholics and I have five sisters and we were all raised Roman Catholics. I have a really good relationship with my mom. I can talk to her about anything, and she's always been there for me. And then, um, my dad he's still in my life and I live with them and whatnot, but definitely nowhere as close to him as the relationship with my mom. I don't talk to him about as much or anything, really.

Maria expressed anxiety about both of her parents—but in much different ways. She describes her father's attachment or bonding as lacking, at least in the “felt” sense. Her mother's

attachment was far more obvious and the participant felt it. Her words indicated that there was attachment to her mother and that her parenting style was likely authoritative, but with the exception or inability to express that true style because of being prohibited by the cultural norms of the patriarchal and hierarchical society in which the family lived.

Her memory includes these words:

Um, at some point, they will overlook the flaws of the system and the institution and the people's [faults]. They will overlook all that and defend [it] before listening to what their daughter had to say, even if it was wrong, just listening! I didn't need them to tell me that I was right, and it's just [that I desired] having a one-on-one conversation where you, you don't run straight into a wall. I think I'm always running straight into a wall with them. Maybe, if [they] had been just a little more flexible, just a little bit less imposing, yeah, yeah, so that you would have been able to walk away from this or that conversation feeling heard, thus respected and appreciated. Yeah. Yeah.

And I, I thought I mentioned it before, but I don't, I would never disrespect my mom, for example, when she shared her beliefs I listened to her. Um, it took me awhile to, like, have enough courage to tell her that I would like not to participate [in this conversation, but] I'm here for you. I'm not here because I believe in it, um, yeah, it just, it just kind of strained the bond I have with them and made me protect myself and close up maybe when I shouldn't have and it wasn't necessary.

Crystal has nothing negative to say about being attached to her parents and they to her. In fact, she indicates how they were both there for her during her years of having a mental health crisis between the second and seventh grades. So, her departure from the faith was not as profound or debilitating to the family, it seems, especially because her father was not a man of

faith. Though her mother was, it did not seem to take precedent over the mother's concerns for her daughter's general well-being. I would say that the mother's parenting style was somewhere between authoritative and permissive, but much closer to authoritative.

She expressed:

My parents are always making sure that, they're always asking me whether or not I was okay with what I was doing, especially within when I did go to Sunday school, like, communion classes and, like, vacation Bible school. They would always ask me about, like, how what I was learning and, like, if I had any questions necessarily, and I think part of that is because the way my grandma was raised with God was like, "oh, he says all powerful, terrifying being that will strike you down." Whereas my mom was like, no, God is a loving being who is like a second father to you can talk to him. You can pray to him.

Richard has a great relationship attachment to his father, but he appears to be estranged to some degree from his mother, due to her being a woman of faith but he is atheistic in his views. He describes the parenting style in ways that lead me to believe that he sees his mother as authoritarian, but his father as perhaps permissive. However, it is not out of the question that he may see his father as authoritative. Little, if anything, was actually said about the type of disciplinarian his father is. Rather, it was just expressing that he and his father have a "fantastic" relationship. Richard puts it this way:

I do think that the bond between my mother and I, though is a little bit of a struggle, and I think that actually plays a huge part in me leaving the faith because she was the one who was super influential on getting me into the church and. Putting me in a Lutheran school and putting me through that.

Susan absolutely adores her parents to whom she is firmly attached and they to her. Little was said about the parenting style of her parents; however, one can surmise that the relationship was authoritative. I say that because her parents took her to church and participated in activities designed to benefit and nourish their daughter's soul and spirit. "I don't think my parents had any influence on me leaving the faith, because I was so close with them and we were all going to church at all times."

Jennifer is probably still somewhat unattached to her parents, due to the discouragement, disillusionment, and general estrangement that accompanied her parents' divorce when she was very young. Added to this was the distinct disappointment at the actions of her mother who stopped going to church or taking the participant to church. The participant wanted to go and had been learning and growing in the process of doing so. So, a strong maternal attachment with what seemed like it was a good authoritative parenting style, got replaced with discouragement and mourning the loss of that earlier closeness.

Again, her words make that clear:

I would just have to ask or, like, bother her to take me so when she stopped reading her Bible and stopped going on her own and it turned into me asking. I think that modeling, to me, kind of showed me it wasn't truly important because you have a new man, and you just dropped it.

**Table 5***The Impact of Parenting Attachment and Style on their Emerging Adult*

Code	Attached to Parents?	Style of Parenting?
Charles	Mother–Yes	Mother–Authoritative
	Father–Distant	Father–Authoritarian
Maria	Mother–Tenuous	Mother–Privately Authoritative, but not in the presence of the father
	Father–No	Father–Authoritarian
Crystal	Mother–Mostly Yes	Mother–Mix of Authoritarian/Authoritative
	Father–Yes	Father–
Richard	Mother–No	Mother–Authoritarian
	Father–Yes	Father–Authoritative Mixture
Susan	Mother–Yes	Mother–Authoritative
	Father–Yes	Father–Authoritative
Jennifer	Mother–No more	Mother–Initially authoritative, changed to neglectful
	Father–No	Father–Not much said about him

RQ 4: The emerging adult's perception or evaluation of the importance of having a continued or discontinued connection with a community of faith.

Charles has no present desire to be involved in a community of faith, but left the door open to that consideration if he were to become a parent. He feels this way about that:

And if I have the children soon, I'll go back to the faith sooner. So, I guess so. To say, what do you expect? It's hard because you don't know what's going to happen. So, if life

throws me challenges, I can definitely see myself going back to the faith sooner, but if things go as planned and good, I don't know when I go back to the faith, so that's a really hard question for me.

Maria has no present desire to be involved in a community of faith. She indicated that she simply “left and went back several times” and is just not interested anymore. Personally, I do not see her as permanently disenfranchised from the faith. This is some of what she said about that:

In terms of, and even when I've left, I sometimes craved having that community, because the hard parts of life make you need that support. Um, even when I've craved and I needed it, I remind myself that it's never given me the comfort that I seek for. Sorry, no good, um so yeah the process has been lost on and off for a lot of years, and at this point, I know better. So, I have no desire to go back.

Going back and going back and the more often--or not more often--but every time you went back you were less satisfied with your effort and thus because it's sad examining and evaluated the evaluation, I think, for [me] is, bottom line it just doesn't work for me. It's been demonstrated that it hasn't worked for me because I felt less satisfied each subsequent time of returning.

Crystal has no desire to be in a faith community, in part, because her family's interest does not seem to have been one of fervent faith in the first place. And, add to that the fact that she believes she is bisexual and knows the church would not accept that, I see this young woman as having made a determination to try and navigate life and its existential meanings via her own logic and moralities. I think she will remain in a level of strong anxiety about being abandoned by God, as her AGI score of 5.07 indicates.

Through her eyes:

But then as I got older, and I came out as bisexual, things really changed and I started to see that people around me weren't talking about God as if he was this, all-encompassing loving father figure. Instead it was like, oh, you're not straight. Well, you're going to hell. You need to repent for your sins. What's wrong with you? That really stuck with me for a long time.

I asked a peripheral, clarifying question, "In fact, would you say that it still sticks with you?" Yeah, there are times when I wonder if what they're saying is really right? Like, and most of the time I can say, I don't think that God, the way I view him would do those kinds of things, but there's always like that lingering question in mind if, if they're right, then, what's going to happen [to me] you know?

Richard has no desire to be in a community of faith. No desire at all. He sees such a notion as unnecessary and even inhibitive and prohibitive of free and rational thought.

Yeah, so I think, I think where I would want to be in terms of the faith community, I think [it would be in] volunteering. I think no matter what my faith has been, I think volunteering has always been somewhat important to me whether that be helping out in the soup kitchens or that kind of thing. Um, in the beginning of high school, I was super involved in that kind of stuff. Um, so, I think that even though I don't have belief in a God, per se, I believe in helping people. So I think that, um, that is kind of the faith community, because I know that it's heavily involved with the, uh, with the church. So...

Susan was so hurt by the summer camp non-hire experience that she is still rebounding from that. She did indicate that that could change if and when she becomes a parent.

So I okay, so on the record, I'm bisexual, so I obviously cannot just go join, I mean, as a Presbyterian know that I cannot just go join a Catholic church and be fully accepted

there. So, um, I definitely like I said, in the future, I definitely see myself raising my kids in the same religion that I did doesn't mean it has to be the exact same, but I want to expose them to church and, you know, I want to expose them to what I had to go through, I don't necessarily want to push on them that it's, you know, adamant that they have religion in their life. Because that's what my mom did to me. And, like, it's not that I regret that she did that.

[In fact], I'm very grateful that she did, but like, now, with me, kind of pulling away, not going to church as much like, you know, it's kind of been weird, like, bringing me kind of like, in a full circle like, you know, maybe I should go to church. Maybe I should do this. But in general, I do want to raise a family in the future around the same religion that I have.

Jennifer is probably still somewhat alienated or even fearful of becoming a part of a faith community because of her deep discouragement from her early adolescence. She expressed a lack of interest in wanting or needing one. She did say; however, that she wants to continue to grow in terms of being willing to listen to other viewpoints and to respect them, “especially nowadays when we see so little of that in the world.” According to her:

There isn't one at this point. It's very interesting, because very, very recently. Um, I've been feeling. Like, I'm missing that I'm missing that spirituality. But I don't think I'm drawn to any specific like, I'm not at that point yet, but I'm starting to explore again, you know. Gotcha. Gotcha.

**Table 6***Desire for Community of Faith and, if so, When and What Kind?*

Code	Desire?	When?	What Kind?
Charles	Possibly	If he becomes a parent	Back to Catholicism
Maria	No	Not at all	None
Crystal	Not sure	Not sure	Not sure
Richard	Yes	Not sure	Volunteer service to the needy
Susan	Yes	If she becomes a parent	Not sure, likely Presbyterian
Jennifer	Likely Yes	Not sure	Not sure

***Reduction***

Having horizontalized (aligned, compared similarities), the reduction process tests each expression for its relevance and preliminary grouping. The process continues to be rigorous, but will result in an advancing clarity of realizing what may not necessarily have been obvious up to this point. As I went through the process, that was certainly my experience.

RQ1: The emerging adults' perspectives concerning factors that they believe led them to leave the religious tradition in which they were raised.

The relevant factors of certain aspects of the institution of religion itself as the impetus for apostasy, rather than the parents specifically being the impetus apply to Charles and Susan. They were emotionally, psychologically hurt by either ill-treatment and poor clergy-modeling (Charles), or deeply disappointed by the para-church camp experience. Susan did not get her dream job there at age 16 and it was obvious during the interview all these years later that she is still trying to rebound from that. From a different aspect, it also applies to Crystal and Susan, due

to their expressed bisexuality. In both of these categories of hurt, there is the overall theme of institutional rejection or isolation.

RQ2: How emerging adults perceive the role of parental modeling of Christian values and its relationship to their apostasy.

Discouraging or destructive parental modeling as the impetus for apostasy apply to Maria and Jennifer. From the maternal aspect, unproductive modeling applies to Charles, Richard, and Jennifer; whereas, unproductive paternal modeling applies to Charles and Jennifer.

RQ3: How emerging adults perceive their becoming apostate on factors including parent-child attachment and the style of parenting used to raise them.

Poor or lost attachment is applicable to Jennifer; concerns over being bisexual apply to Crystal and Susan, bringing some level of conflict in the parent/child relationship; and apparent non-apostasy but, rather, an earlier misdirected bent toward atheism applies to Richard.

### ***Elimination***

Initially, I had been inclined to remove Richard from this study because I did not seem him as qualifying under the specific definition of “apostasy.” Apostasy means making a clean break from your childhood faith and its beliefs and practices. Even though I see Richard as being made to “go through the motions,” but I do not sense actual devotion or dedication was ever there. Yet, as I worked through the characteristics of some of the other participants, I began to discover that they may not truly be apostates either. Rather, they are disenchanted but still believe in the faith and its practices, for the most part. Disillusionment, discouragement, and disenchantment seem to factor largely into their current stance and choices about religion. No one has been eliminated from the group.

**Clustering the Remaining Invariant Constituents.** This is the section of the analytical process where I formed expressions into clusters of similarity. As I did so, I continued to see how I am the researcher-as-analyst. I am the “software” continuing to “input the data” so that ultimately overall results emerged.

RQ1: The emerging adults' perspectives concerning factors that they believe led them to leave the religious tradition in which they were raised.

Charles and Susan indicted the institution of the church for their decision to leave the faith. Maria attributed blame to her father's heavy-handed authoritarianism; Crystal and Susan cited their bisexuality as being not church-endorsed as a reason to leave, but they also had suffered disappointment at the hands of institutional teachings or doctrines that conflict with their bisexual leanings; and Jennifer left the faith because her mother failed to allow her to continue going to church.

RQ2: How emerging adults perceive the role of parental modeling of Christian values and its relationship to their apostasy.

Richard and Jennifer were, by degrees, negatively influenced by their mothers' modeling. Charles and Maria were, by degrees, negatively influenced by their fathers' modeling; Crystal and Susan attributed good modeling to their parents, though some endorsements were stronger than others.

RQ3: How emerging adults perceive their becoming apostate on factors including parent-child attachment and the style of parenting used to raise them.

Charles, Maria, and Jennifer clearly indicate there was a lack of closeness or attachment to their fathers. The style of parenting for Charles and Maria was somewhat authoritarian, but for Jennifer the style was mostly absent or, in a sense, neglectful. Crystal and Susan claim there was

good-to-great parent to child attachment. Nothing negative is mentioned about the style of parenting but what was said allows me to infer that it was a combination of authoritarian and authoritative, at least in part if not the whole.

RQ 4: What has become the emerging adult's perception or evaluation of the importance of having a continued or discontinued connection with a community of faith.

Charles, Maria, Crystal, Susan, and Jennifer are not pursuing membership in any kind of faith community. However, because Charles and Susan stated that if they become parents one day, they would want to raise the children in a faith community. It is interesting that Richard indicated he has an interest in doing volunteer work in soup kitchens, even though that is often part of a church [outreach ministry].

**Applying Thematic Labels to Those Invariant Constituents.** The clusters get themed or labeled at this point in the analysis. Now that the similarities have been identified, I am free to label those identities. I have done that with each of the research questions included in the process.

RQ1: The emerging adults' perspectives concerning factors that they believe led them to leave the religious tradition in which they were raised.

I am labeling this entire group (Charles, Maria, Crystal, Susan, and Jennifer) as: The Leavers. I hesitate to include Richard because the true meaning of apostasy is that one leaves what he or she once had—faith. However, I wrestle with “excluding” Richard because I see his mindset and experience, in a few ways, as similar to Crystal's.

RQ2: How emerging adults perceive the role of parental modeling of Christian values and its relationship to their apostasy.

I am labeling this entire group (Charles, Maria, and Jennifer) as Recipients of Poor Modeling

RQ3: How emerging adults perceive their becoming apostate on factors including parent-child attachment and the style of parenting used to raise them.

I am labeling this group (Charles, Maria, and Jennifer) as Unattached to One or Both Parents

RQ 4: What has become the emerging adult's perception or evaluation of the importance of having a continued or discontinued connection with a community of faith.

I am labeling this group (Charles, Maria, Crystal, Susan and Jennifer) as Non-Church Affiliated.

Checking those invariant constituents and their theme against the complete record of the research participation for explicit expression and compatibility.

**The Leavers.** The people in this group include everyone. They all left, but for their specific reasons. They also all "left" in various manifestations of "leaving." At least one participant still attends church for the sake of the parent or parents, even though "in the same breath" one of them clearly stated not believing in the Bible anymore or some of the teachings of the church.

The explicit expressions regarding their impetus to leave are as follows:  
Charles reports ill-treatment by the leadership in the church and religious school; Maria reports an authoritarian father who demanded unquestioned obedience to the church and to him, but the father did not model it in the home. Crystal left association with the church because of dealing with mental health issues as well as her parents' more focused on that than on church attendance. As this person got older, she began to believe she is bisexual, so she further pulled away from

religious adherence. Richard left because he felt coerced and confined to “unnecessary” rules about clothing and conduct. He also left because he discovered that science carried more meaning for him than religion did. Susan left because of a huge disappointment in not getting hired to do a dream job as one of the camp counselors at the Christian summer camp she had attended for ten years. It is obvious that she is still hurting from that experience. Jennifer became discouraged and disappointed when her newly remarried mother lost interest in taking her to church, even though the participant enjoyed learning and growing there through Sunday school classes.

**Recipients of Poor Modeling.** These participants directly lay blame at the feet of one or both parents. In some instances, that is where the entire reason for apostasy lies. In other instances, the parent or parents share “equal billing” with the church or church-related entities.

The explicit expressions regarding their experiences are as follows:

Charles indicates that his father was a poor modeling because “I couldn’t talk to him about anything.” The father would “get angry” if the children did not want to go to church. The participant referred to his mother as “cool.” Maria clearly indicated that her father was not at all a good model because he was seen as one of the pillars of the church and a great model of Christianity, but at home he was demanding and very much authoritarian with the family. The participant indicated that her mother was willing to listen to her when she wanted to ask questions or espouse alternate viewpoints to those taught by the church, but the mother was not able to do that when the father was around. This frustrated the participant.

Jennifer makes it clear that there was poor modeling from her father and her mother. Since her parents were divorced, she lived alternate weekends with each parent. Her father was not a man of faith or belief. Her mother was for most of the years of the participant’s childhood.

However, when the participant became 13 years old and her mother remarried, she stopped going to church and stopped taking the participant to church. She explained that she was 10 years old when her mother became involved in the new relationship and 13 years old when her mother remarried. It was during those years of asking to be taken to church that was a great disappointment and discouragement to the participant. She lived a life of rebellion for a few years after that.

**Unattached to One or Both Parents.** The lack of parent/adult-child attachment was experienced by several of the participants. Predominantly, it was one of their parents, but in at least one instance, there was lack of attachment to both parents. Interestingly, it was that latter instance where the participant gives an account of going through what she calls some “rebellious” years during adolescence

Their explicit expressions regarding their experiences include:

Charles is not attached to his father in any kind of real and intimate sense, though he is with his mother. Maria is not attached to her father and though she is attached to her mother, it comes with its frustrations because of what she sees as her mother’s subservient stance as the wife of the participant’s father. This is based on the culture within which she was born and raised.

Jennifer is not closely or intimately attached to either of her parents, for a combination of reasons. Those reasons include their divorce and her mother’s apparent departure from the faith when she remarried. When she remarried, she quit taking the participant to church and that hurt and discouraged the participant.

**Non-Church Affiliated.** At least one or two participants state that they still attend church. One seems to do so more regularly than the other. This section is about the ones who no longer attend at all.

Their explicit expressions regarding their experiences include:

Charles has no interest in being in a faith community, but he states that he may change his mind if he becomes a parent one day. Maria has no interest in a faith community because she says that she tried “several times” to rejoin the faith of her childhood, only to be discouraged again and leave again.

Crystal has no interest in a faith community because I sense that it was never a really central or focal part of her parents’ lives, even though did attend church, but when the participant began having mental health issues, the parents became very focused on that. Further, the participant has no interest in a faith community because she sees herself as bisexual and knows that the church frowns on that—even to the point of telling her that she is “going to go to hell.” She acknowledged that she “wonders if they might be right.”

Susan is still dealing with the devastating pain of not being hired by the Christian summer camp which she had attended for 10 years and at which she stated feeling “closer to God than anywhere else,” including church or bible study. She also sees herself as bisexual and knows the church frowns upon that. Jennifer is non-church affiliated because she suffered much discouragement in her early teen years at the hands of her mother no longer wanting to take her to church, which was a place she loved to be.

Construction of individual textual description; structural description based on ITD and imaginative, variation and textual-structural description incorporating invariant constituents and themes.

This stage of the analysis requires an explanation of the groupings and themes. As I did so, I continued to see and appreciate this step-by-step movement through the process. Moustakas (1994) was very thorough in his creation of this “researcher as analyst” methodology.

What is shared across all participants: They left the faith. The reasons were varied and the focal points on which the “blame” was placed are different for each individual participant. Among all the participants, one of them is no longer apostate but her reasons for leaving when she did were in a similar set of reasons that apply to some of the other participants. There was a prominent theme of rejection from the institution for various reasons, including sexuality, emotional hurt, and abject disappointment.

What is shared among four participants: Poor parent modeling. In two cases, it was poor paternal modeling (Charles, Maria, and Jennifer) and in one case (Jennifer) it was also poor maternal modeling.

What is shared between two participants: A belief that they are bisexual (Crystal and Susan)

Develop a composite description of meanings and essences of experience for the group as a whole.

The group as a whole ranges between nonbelief in the essence and importance of the Christian worldview, to an ongoing belief in it, but disillusionment with some of its teaching. If this were a quantitative analysis, we might see a mean or average that revealed belief in the system of Christian belief, but with some issues that need to be worked out between the participant and the faith system.

Regarding parenting style, modeling, and attachment, the group as a whole had greater or lesser repercussions from some aspect of the experiences with their parents—even though in two cases it was less about parents and more about feeling rejection, isolation, or estrangement from

the institution or its para-church connection (camp). There was a sense of rejection or isolation or estrangement experienced, variously, among these participants, with the exception of one who has no issue with the church, but has a definite sense of being rejected, isolated, and estranged from her mother.

For the group as a whole, they were all ready and cooperative volunteers who ranged from actively desiring to share their experiences, to at least, not minding doing so. Two of the participants (Crystal and Susan) did not attribute their departure from the faith to their parents. Charles attributed his decision to church/priest emotional abuse; Crystal cited her estrangement from the church to her bisexuality; and a Susan blames a painful experience of not getting hired at a favorite Christian summer camp to become a counselor. Secondarily, she also states that the church of her childhood does not accept bisexuality, which she says she is. Richard cites a growing “wiser” or more learned in science and, thus, discarding the religious belief system.

Maria and Crystal attribute their apostasy to the overbearing rigidity of the church or one or both parents not being willing to listen to their divergent views. Crystal and Jennifer did not become disenchanted with the faith of their childhood, but the parents were not consistent in keeping them involved and engaged. Crystal and Susan cite their revelation of being bisexual as putting a wedge between them and their faith.

Bottom line to all this, the categories of style, modeling, and attachment seemed to merge among the participants. If the parent was good or bad at one aspect of parenting, he or she was good or bad in all. The tally shows there were four fathers and six mothers were rated positively; whereas, three fathers and one mother were rated negatively. Further, style, modelling, and attachment with parents had a direct corollary to those factors within the participants’ God

image—with the exception of one participant who loved God, but was torn away from church learning and growth when she was a young child.

**Immersion: Centering Whole Life on the Experience.** This section was the one that gave me the most “free reign,” as it were. It required me to do deep empathic introspection (i.e., “put myself into the shoes” of each participant to the greatest degree possible. That is, indeed, why this section is called “immersion” (Moustakas, 1994).

I see these participants as being strongly impacted in all aspects of their lives, by the events of their lives, especially their spiritual and religious lives. However, there is a gradation or continuum along which they best fit, in terms of how their whole lives have been spiritually impacted. I will look at each person as I examine their spiritual focus. I am using the word “spiritual,” rather than “religious” because this process is about their inner selves, not their faith traditions of indoctrination.

I see Charles as having a set of beliefs that center his moral character and desire to do well in his life. Indeed, he is a focused and sincere student who appears to believe in honesty and hard work, not cheating or laziness. I attribute those characteristics to his upbringing—in spite of the negative experiences he lived through.

Maria presents herself as a spiritual seeker, but yet drawn to the foundational instructions or guidelines of what it means to be a “righteous” person. Her life seems to center around curiosity or the desire to test her childhood teachings within the “fires” of open examination and “purifying.” It seems to me as though it is less about her absolute disagreement with every tenet she was taught, and more about questioning the rationale for those tenets. Maria has what I see as a “precious” spirit.

Crystal has a spirituality that demonstrates a fair amount of insecurity about itself. She seems to be on the tightrope, high wire, or precipice she hovers over assurance on the one hand, but doubt on the other. I see her whole life being impacted and oriented to this kind of thinking. As one of my students, she indeed approaches everything that way. She is somewhat hypervigilant, extremely cautious, and needing exactness in whatever is required of her. I see her spirit as cautious and guarded.

Richard has a kind spirit. Though he is a declared atheist who believes in the predominance of science over religion, his whole life is one of wanting to be kind to others. This was especially revealed in his statement that he would love to do volunteer work, specifically in a soup kitchen. It felt to me like his involvement in a faith community would be appealing—even if connected to a church—and it did not feel as though he would limit that work to only serving food to the ones who need it.

Susan is a tender spirit because she is so easy to interact with. Her desire to be winsome, open, and accepting of others was obvious to me. Yet, it is that very tenderness of spirit that has caused her extreme disappointment over not being hired at the church camp, to still hurt her. It pervades and interferes with her whole life. Her bisexual leanings are also interacting with her tender spirit. By that I am wondering if her whole life is now one that is hoping that her winsomeness, openness, and acceptance of others will be returned in kind back to her.

Jennifer's spirituality seems to be a "wrestling match" between her deep inner love for God and her deep inner hurt from being "pulled away" from him. Her mother intercepted Jennifer's growth and learning in religious teachings and fellowship with people of like mind. As a result, her whole life is one that has become this sense of unsettledness. I see Jennifer as being most likely to obtain a settled life back in active faith practices if she were to meet a type of

“surrogate faith mother” who would not “leave her or forsake her.” I pray she does not have to live within this kind of “limbo” for the rest of her life. I believe she missed God, perhaps even and especially Jesus.

**Incubation: Withdrawing and Waiting for Insights.** Being aware of how my mind works, I get ongoing insights. In a sense, I automatically “withdraw” as a normal process of calculating my thoughts during the interviewing and writing process. I see that as a blessing of being somewhat more introverted than extraverted. So, for me, there was no need to “withdraw and wait for insights;” they were always incoming and informing my writing.

I have several insights that were largely mentioned in the previous section about “immersion” wherein I centered the whole life experience of each participant around their childhood formative experiences that molded them.

The incubation process has given birth to insights that were not part of my consciousness at the beginning of this research journey with these individuals. Now I see each of them differently. I see them more broadly and more fairly—quite honestly—than I initially did. My “lightbulb moments” about each of these participants, as well as an aggregate group is that they are all good people who want to be the best, do the best, and be accepted in this world for who they are.

**Illumination: Themes and Patterns Emerge, Forming Clusters.** The themes, patterns, and clusters from this small study have emerged as less about parenting deficits and more about direct conflict with religious beliefs and practices that conflicted with those participants in this study who were most negatively impacted by them. That is not to say that no blame or negative attributions toward parents emerged from this study. There were three negative attributions

toward fathers, and one toward a mother. There were four positive attributions toward fathers and five toward mothers.

**Explication: Adding Other Dimensions of Meaning, Refining Emergent Patterns.** In this section, I am endeavoring to discover if there is yet more revelations of meaning to be gleaned from these groups. I decided to do that within the labels I gave to the groups, as well as the AGI scores that tend to group together, relatively speaking.

All the participants qualified as “Leavers” because their Attachment to God (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004) scores indicated levels of anxiety over their sense of being attached to God, as well as an indication of not being interested in such attachment. The scores further measured their sense of whether they felt that God abandoned them. With that said, all of them qualified for having some kind of “dysfunctional relationship with God” or a desire to have nothing to do with him.

I see the remaining categories of Recipients of Poor Modeling, Unattached to One or Both Parents, or the Non-Church Affiliated, as all being intertwined and all being the result of either parent-related or religious-institution related. I see the AGI scores as strongly descriptive of their parent/child and child/institution relationships. Their solutions, to greater and lesser degrees, were to just “throw in the towel” and walk away. They all seemed to decide that putting faith in themselves was safer than putting faith either in one or both parents or in their religion. This seems definitely applicable to all of them.

Arriving at a description of the experience and a portrayal of the individuals in the study.

Moustakas’ (1994) guidelines for this section want an accounting of my experiential interactions with my participants, as a whole. I am also to give a “big picture” summation of the

participants. How did they look in the aggregate, or as a “group portrait”? What does looking at that portrait tell me about the “message” or “spirit” of what I am looking at?

My experience throughout this interview process, as well as the deep-thinking that has happened as I have been following the Moustakas (1994) data analysis steps, has led me to realize that what initially appeared to not reveal that any of the three parenting factors led any of the participants into apostasy, I now see otherwise.

All of the participants were negatively impacted by one or more factors that included parenting issues and/or also church or church-based institutions. They were each cooperative and easy to work with. They represent a composite picture of emerging adult “coming of age” set of experiences that needed to be brought “to the light of day.” That need was, I suspect, therapeutic for all of them. One of them even said words to that effect.

**Creative Synthesis: Bringing Together Pieces and Showing Relationships.** The researcher’s job in this segment is to synthesize all that has been learned, in terms of what the study was looking to discover. I have done that to the best of my knowledge and depicted it in the Table below.

To pull this all together, there seem to be three dominant themes for the move into apostasy shared by the participants of the study. They include one or more of the realities of disappointment, discouragement, disillusionment, or disorientation. They apply to the important aspects of parenting, the impact of institution-related negative experiences and, thirdly, the conflict between their sexual identity and the opposing teachings of the church.

**Table 7***Overarching Apostasy-Related Themes Among Participants*

Code	Aspects of Parenting	Negative Church Experience
Charles	Yes	Yes
Maria	Yes	Yes
Crystal	Only slightly	Yes
Richard	Yes	Yes
Susan	No	Strong Yes
Jennifer	Strong Yes	Definite No

**Summary**

This interview process revealed relatively common themes for why emerging young adults choose a life of apostasy; that is, a moving away from the Christian faith of their childhood. While my research has been examining the impact of parenting style, parent modeling, and parent attachment, the interview process revealed that if the parent was deemed to be good in one of those three categories, they were deemed good in all. The same is true for the parent deemed bad in one, being bad in all three.

There was a factor outside of, or aside from parenting that impacted the lives of some of the participants. That was either the church or church-affiliated institutions.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### Overview

This chapter continues to reflect the purpose of this study, which is to determine what impact three factors may have had on causing emerging young adults to walk away from the faith teachings of their youth, specifically the Christian faith. The three factors in question are about parent modeling, parenting style, and parental attachment. This has been a transcendental phenomenological study, which means that its topics have focused on spirituality (transcendence) and its impact within the lives of the study's participants. Phenomenology means every aspect of their lived experience emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and even educationally. This chapter's subdivisions include (a) a discussion of the findings and their implications in light of the relevant literature and theory, (b) an implications section, both methodological and practical, (c) an outline of the study delimitations and limitations, and (d) recommendations for future research.

### Discussion

#### *Effective Parent Modeling*

Parental modeling of strong values includes religious identity, religious attendance, and parental control (Kim & Wilcox, 2014), which result in heightened levels of monitoring activities, normative regulations, and network closure (i.e., communication via an inductive parenting style, clarifying fair reasonable expectations for behavior, and clarifying expectations for relationships with peers of good character). Many studies support the general principle of the value of appropriate parental modeling (Manlove et al., 2006, 2008; Matejevic et al., 2014; Merrill et al., 2001; Moore & Smith, 2012; Moore et al., 2015; Snider et al., 2004; Wills et al., 2003).

As cited from Chapter Two, “Good parental modeling has become more difficult because of the secularization of moral and sexual values” (Gunnoe et al., 1999; Hayatbakhsh et al., 2014; Hill et al., 2014). Petersen and Donnenwerth (1997) posited that good modeling combined with regular church attendance are the two best means of helping adolescents maintain chastity. That same research points out that the children and adolescents that have the best chance of maintaining those beliefs are most likely to come from conservative Protestant congregations than either mainline Protestant or Catholic congregations. That is, regular church attendance gives a higher prognosis for maintenance of chastity within the adolescent.

There is a theme from my research that is somewhat “both/and,” rather than “neither/nor,” with regard to the above-cited research. That is, even though there were no questions within the interview protocol that related directly to chastity or moral and sexual values, there were two participants who describe themselves as bisexual. Each of them stated that the church of their childhoods have belief systems that contradict that lifestyle, orientation, or identity.

In response to my follow-up question, “Is there something that triggered your feelings that you are bisexual?” Crystal stated:

I just always thought girls were really pretty, and like, for the longest time, I was like, oh, yeah, you're just finding your other gal pals really pretty, but, no, and then it's like, I started having crushes on female friends, even though I didn't know it in, like, junior high school. Um, and I'm pretty sure I had crashes on friends before that, but there are some things I just can't remember from elementary school because. It was a difficult time, but yeah.

Specific to the conflict with the church around this issue, she said, “If people in the church were more kind and loving towards me, even when I displayed neurotic behavior, or when I started figuring out my sexuality, if they had been more welcoming, if they were like, oh, of course. No, God loves you no matter what; that’s his whole schtick. I think maybe then I wouldn’t have just drifted away from the faith as much as I have.”

Susan stated:

I haven't completely left. I haven't completely given up on faith as it is, you know, my parents still push it on me that, you know, it's good to have some type of religion or Christianity in your life. You know, it could do some good. I see myself wanting to raise a family when in the Christian area, it may not be Presbyterian but, you know, I still see that. My parents have not separated me from that.

At some point during the interview she said she is questioning her belief in the bible and she stated that she is bisexual and she knows that her church is not in favor of that. This is reminiscent of what Puffer et al. (2008) said in Chapter Two about “taking into account the identity status of religious persons who doubt” (p. 281). I also see my thesis that compares Erikson’s (1968, 1982) *Intimacy vs. Isolation* stage of psychosocial development as applicable here. There used to be a level of intimacy that has been, or is in the process of becoming more and more a stranger to her, an estrangement.

Continuing the themes that have arisen from this research, the theme of the importance of parental impact was quite clear, as cited in several bodies of work (Baier & Wright, 2001; Flor & Knapp, 2001; Power & McKinney, 2013; Quinn & Lewin, 2019), to name only a small portion.

Charles stated:

I have like a really good relationship with my mom. I can talk to her about anything. And she's always been there for me to be a really good relationship. And then, um, my dad, he's still in my life and, like, we talk and I live with them and what not, but like definitely nowhere as close to him as the relationship with my mom nor do I talk to him about as much, or even anything really.

Maria was quite passionate when talking about her parents. As I inquired about how her parents' parenting led her to a decision to leave the faith, she responded:

Um, I do think it is a strong component of my decision. It was strongly influenced by how strictly they raised me and how much they refused, how strongly they refused to see things slightly different. Um, they just couldn't. Um, I think that has me to stand stronger and question it more because if I didn't, if it wasn't such an important... Um, let me put that better... If it wasn't a decision that needed to be questioned deeply, [that would be different].

I expected a lot of respect back, but it never happened... With my dad, the situation's just very, very different. He is a very dominant controlling man, and he kind of takes my mom along, like even if she felt strongly about something If he feels the opposite way, have to make herself small to fit into his views because everyone fears him. Um, that's the way I see it.

Crystal attributed little blame to her parents, with the exception of the point where she said that her mother was not supportive when the participant revealed her homosexuality. Even so, the participant was otherwise supportive of them. Her words about her mother were, in part:

That you can come to her for anything that she might not have all the answers, but that this is an open, she's an open space and an open person where you can come to and talk to her if you're having trouble.

Susan gave these words about her parents:

Um, he [her father] is the director of music ministries, so, um, he directs the choirs. He does all of the hand bells. He selects all the music for every Sunday service that is known to God. Um, he does all of that. That is his job. Um, so with that being said, uh, my mom sings in the choir at the church. So, every single Sunday, since I was born, I practically had to be at church no matter what it was. No matter what I believe. No matter what, you know, whatever I had to be there to support my parents. And so, you know. It was, it was very a lot, you know, the Christian religion was definitely forced on me as a small child and through my adolescent life and through my adult life as well. I still attend church today [but it] does not mean that I believe, but I still go to support my father and my mother and what they do in the church.

Jennifer gave responsibility to both of her parents that led to her walk away from the faith, Yeah, um, I was not attached to my dad. I didn't have a very close relationship to him. I didn't feel very bonded to him. My mother though, I was very connected to, like, when I would get dropped off at my dad's I would cry. Um, yeah, it was very hard to leave her.

It was later in the interview, however, when she revealed the estrangement from her mother because her mother stopped showing an interest in church and stopped taking this daughter to the place where she felt so much happiness and she learned and grew in Sunday school.

Psychological health is optimized where there is good parent modeling (Baier & Wright, 2001; Longo & Kim-Spoon, 2014; Power & McKinney, 2013). There is a lowered likelihood of alcohol and substance abuse (Berkowitz & Grych, 1998; Hayatbakhsh et al., 2014).

This was discovered during the interview with Jennifer, who said that she went into a life of alcohol and drugs for a few years after her devastating disappointment with her mother. At one point in the interview she stated:

Uh, so, so I, I would say between ages 16 to 18 were really impactful because, uh, I, I just became a rebellion, you know, I did everything I shouldn't be doing. You know, I did the alcohol, I did the drugs, I did the craziness. And it was really impactful; because I realized how that doesn't fulfill the hole, and even though it sucks that it was younger, I'm really glad that it happened when I was younger, cause if it would happen now, I don't know if I would have been able to make it out of it.

Maternal and paternal impacts are both important but are differently important (Bao et al., 1999). Mothers' influence was stronger than fathers when the adolescent perceives the parent as accepting. This effect was especially strong for the male emerging adults. The Bao et al. (1999) results were affirmed in my study because even the three participants (Crystal and Susan) who initially and generally had no real negative attributions toward their parents, still said words indicating situations or timelines that demonstrated otherwise. Crystal said that her mother did not support or agree with the participant's revelation of being bisexual. Susan acknowledged that her parents made her go to church "whether she wanted to or not."

Charles and Maria lay blame for poor parenting at the feet of their fathers for being too pushy or demanding about wanting the children to be involved and go to church. Crystal and Jennifer lay the heavier blame on the mothers; the former for a mother who is unable to accept

the daughter's bisexuality, and the latter for a mother who appeared to abandon faith adherence or faith celebration. Susan did not, in the final analysis, blame their parents for their apostasy—even though they both pointed out some parent/child “disconnects.” Ultimately, however, those areas did not appear to paint the parents in a “bad light” overall.

### *Effective Parenting Style*

Baumrind (1989) is the author of the categories of styles or types of parenting, ranging from the most productive in the life of the child, to the least productive, and most destructive. The best among the four is known as Authoritative, also known as Inductive parenting. This kind of parenting is optimal because it is all about using induction by the process of coregulation which builds autonomy, respect, and emotional regulation within the child. They learn a sense of personal responsibility. Among several examples, some of them include the parent giving the child certain developmentally-appropriate tasks, teaching them about financial responsibilities, showing and modeling for them how to own up to what they do when it is not the right, appropriate, or productive action to have taken.

The less harmful styles, per Baumrind (1989), include Authoritarian (e.g., punitive, exhibiting conditional love, etc.); Permissive (e.g., no boundaries or rules, producing a frustrated child and adolescent who does not know how to make wise or mature decisions in life); and Neglectful (e.g., the child is left to their own vices because the parents are more interested in their own lives than the life of the child or adolescent).

Among my seven participants, parenting style got parsed into perhaps all four styles. However, some were fairly obvious, while others had to be inferred. Authoritative parenting seems to be the experiences of Crystal and Susan; whereas, authoritarian was or may have been the mode for Charles and Maria. Jennifer's maternal parent was initially apparently authoritative,

but changed to neglectful. It was not clear about her father, whose style may have been either permissive or neglectful but, admittedly, there is little support to indicate anything about his parenting style.

### ***Effective Parent-Child Attachment***

As stated in Chapter Two, how closely bonded a child, adolescent, and emerging adult feels to their parent(s) is a bi-directional process known as reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1977), which is about the fact that offspring will grow together with the parent or apart from the parent, based upon how well the give-and-take goes between them. How well does the parent listen, as well as direct? How well does the offspring respond to that or reciprocate that? The answers come from the combination of parent modeling and parent style.

Charles and Maria are more attached to their mothers, while Crystal and Susan indicate relatively equal attachment to both parents. This is a more dependable analysis for some than others, I think. Jennifer had the more jarring estrangement from an initially reciprocal interaction with her mother, but that did a “180” when the mother remarried and discarded church involvement.

As stated in Chapter Two, the personality traits of tendermindedness, introversion, stability, and social conformity were found to impact whether a young person would have a negative attitude toward substance use (Francis, 1997). The study also points out personal religiosity and membership in a Protestant sect as a negative correlation to being interested in substance use. One can infer that these traits and characteristics will have been more likely to have developed due to attachment to the parents. For that matter the inference can also include good parent modeling and good parenting style.

Only Jennifer indicated involvement in alcohol or drug abuse, but it lasted only for two years and she states regretting that behavior because it did not “fill a hole.” It was her retaliation for having been separated from that which was “filling the hole” when she was still in her formative years that included ages 10-13. She spent those years, she says, trying to persuade her mother to take her to church and Sunday school, but to no avail. With all that said, it seems relatively easy to apply the above-mentioned personality traits of tendermindedness, introversion, and stability to Jennifer.

Also from Chapter Two, research suggests that the type of attachment one has with one’s parents gets extrapolated to the image of God that they have (Moriarty & Davis, 2012). What the emerging adult feels about God is often centered on the child-parent relationship experienced in the formative years, especially as relates to the biological, adoptive, or stepfather.

When a child is securely attached to his or her parent, especially the mother, there is a level of trust, self-confidence, and identity that allows more appropriate and psychologically healthy moral decision-making (Baier & Wright, 2001; Longo & Kim-Spoon, 2014; Power & McKinney, 2013). Interestingly, this seems to hold true even in light of the disappointment that Person 6 experienced with the disappointing departure that her mother took from the faith. It seems that because it was not until this participant was 10 years old, the earlier first 10 years of her immersion into the faith was foundational to her future. That is, this participant acknowledged that even though there was a two-year period of making unhealthy moral decisions, she had enough “wits about her” to realize that her behavior was not “filling the hole” that it purports to fill. She also stated that she was happy that it happened when she was younger, rather than now, because she believes it would be harder to pull away from it now. I found that to

be a rather insightful statement, which has left me curious to learn why she feels that now would be harder than then to stop.

The mechanisms of parenting practice and attachment to parents mediates the negative association between familial religiosity and juvenile delinquency (Li et al., 2013). This study is especially reminiscent of what I have learned about Crystal and Susan. In those instances, the parents' marriages seem to be intact, the parenting styles are more productive than not, and each of the participants indicated a close relationship with them. Also, family religiosity seems to have mediated or interfered with Crystal and Susan becoming interested in delinquent behavior.

Strong religiosity is pivotal in an emerging female adult's likelihood of requesting sexual health and reproductive health information whether she is sexually active or not, as revealed in a study by Hall et al. (2012). This particular study does not directly interact with any of the results of my study. However, one could infer that since the females in my study are not parents, each of them may have learned the wisdom of being sexual responsible, perhaps one or more of them could be practicing celibacy. In fact, it is merely my assumption than none of the female participants is a parent.

Fathers are also an important part of the attachment equation. Attachment to fathers predicted attachment to God. Moreover, attachment to God predicted both religious and existential well-being. According to Limke and Mayfield (2011), one's attachment to God is influenced by one's attachment to mother, father, and romantic partner. Further, the study examined spiritual well-being as associated with attachment to God.

I see these studies as differently or variously applicable to Charles, Maria, and Jennifer as an example of the converse result of not being attached to the fathers. But aligned with these

studies are the experiences of Crystal, Richard (in a sense), and Susan, who expressed closeness with their fathers

The work of Ainsworth (1985) and Bowlby (1973, 1980) studied attachment. Four styles were revealed, including secure, anxious-ambivalent, avoidant, and disorganized. When applied to the topic of this research, it is easy to see that two of the participants within the study seem securely attached (Crystal and Susan) as demonstrated by the fact that they lay no blame on their parents, but rather on outside factors. Maria seemed anxiously ambivalent because of the authoritarianism of her father and, to a slight degree ambivalent towards her mother. Crystal seemed to exhibit a somewhat disorganized approach toward her parents because of her greater focus on mental illness issues for which she is, or was at least, taking medication. Jennifer seems to have somewhat of a disorganized attachment with her mother and maybe also her father. On the other hand, her maternal attachment could be more anxious-ambivalent, while her paternal attachment could be avoidant.

My study confirms and corroborates previous research as these examples from Chapter Two explicate. Yet, there are ways in which my study extends on that previous research. An important way is in the fact that no previous studies were found that sought out the interactions of how or whether parent modeling, style, and attachment impacted or predicted future apostasy. The operative term in that statement is “interactions.”

Separately, each term is within the body of literature, but not as a trio. Furthermore, none of the terms had been linked to apostasy, at least in the literature that I discovered. It was linked to certain unfortunate behaviors but those behaviors were not specifically labeled as being apostate. For these reasons, this study adds to the field of knowledge that intertwines the impact of the three parenting factors into why emerging young adults leave their childhood faith.

I think that Ainsworth (1985) and Bowlby's (1973, 1980) separate work on attachment theory may well be applied to this transcendental phenomenological topic. I found it easy and obvious to do so when comparing my participants' experiences to the theories.

## **Implications**

### ***Theoretical Implications of this Study***

The psychosocial stage development theory by Erik Erikson fits this study quite well. Specifically, his stage of *Intimacy vs. Isolation* covers the age ranges of 17-35, which encompasses the 18-25 age range of the participants of this study. This Eriksonian stage looks at the dynamics of closeness coming from love or at isolation stemming from alienation or rejection. Interestingly, the intimacy aspect of the Erikson theory is about not only the ability to be intimate in a romantic relationship, but in those involving family, friends, peers, and others.

The virtue that accompanies the successful navigation of this stage is *love*. It is human nature to desire to be loved and all relationships find it—either in its real form, or in its masquerading form. Applying that knowledge to my participants as to whether they found healthy intimacy with God or isolation from God is depicted in whether there was intimacy with their parents or a sense of isolation (rejection, estrangement) from them. All six of my participants revealed high scores on the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004) for avoiding attachment, which means that none of them have a sense of intimacy either with their parents, or with God, and in some cases both. The same inventory showed that in regard to their level of anxiety about whether they should pursue attachment with parents and/or God, one score showed very high anxiety about doing so, while two scores showed lack of interest in pursuing attachment with a parent or God or both. One of them has no such anxiety

about God-attachment, while one score seems to indicate increasing anxiety about whether God wants to be attached to her.

Thus, the AGI scores align with Eriksonian theory in that intimacy is experienced when anxiety is minimal to non-existent. Isolation is experienced when anxiety about the relationship is high, wherein the person feels alienated or rejected. The person cannot feel loved when their anxiety about being accepted is high, so they isolate themselves from the potential of being rejected if they were to reach out for acceptance—either to the parent or to God or both. These results imply that these participants—with the exception of one—all feel isolated and, for a few of them, signs of feeling rejected are pretty obvious. The love they seek alludes them, whether from the religious institution or from the parent, parents, or God.

I make these statements based upon Erikson’s age-related psychosocial development stage that all my participants are in, which focuses on the person being in the process of “finding themselves.” They are seeking to find love through intimacy with all the important aspects of their lives. Where that search fails to produce the intimacy, the person feels isolated, rejected, or estranged, to whatever degree, based on the experience and disappointing results of that search. So, they can no longer access the Eriksonian “virtue” of Love, and they substitute it for its lesser stand-in by finding the best they can find (acceptance and belonging in spaces, systems, activities, etc., that take them in).

### ***Parenting Factors***

The theories of Baumrind’s parenting style, Ainsworth (1985) and Bowlby’s (1973, 1980) attachment styles, and Moriarity and Davis’s (2012) image of God being created and cultivated by one’s relationship with his or her father, all fit perfectly within this study’s examination of what contributes to apostasy. Table 5 points out the strong corollary between

attachment and style of parenting. This implies that future work that researches apostasy in late adolescence and young adults may readily incorporate the effects of parenting style, attachment, and the importance of fathering as a modeling of God. The following table exemplifies the attachment phenomenon.

**Table 8**

*Comparing Parent-Attachment to God-Attachment*

Code	Attachment Style	God-Attachment
Charles	Ambivalent/Father	Avoidant
	Secure/Mother	
Maria	Avoidant/Father	Avoidant
	Ambivalent/Mother	
Crystal	Secure/Both Parents	Avoidant/Ambivalent
Richard	Secure/Father	Avoidant
	Avoidant/Mother	
Susan	Secure/Both Parents	Avoidant/Ambivalent
Jennifer	Insecure/Father	Anxious/Ambivalent
	Avoidant/Mother	

Parent modeling is illuminated in Table 4 and it is also a strong corollary to attachment and style. All of this implies that these three parenting factors are not only intertwined with one another, but also with God—but to greater or lesser degrees per participant.

### ***Empirical Implications of this Study***

It would be more impactful for a future qualitative study on this topic to include more than six participants. If there were as many as eight or ten (but not a lot more than that), analysis and the results would yield richer information.

I also suggest that more work be done to differentiate the term “apostasy” as distinct from other known terms that represent some level of departure from the faith, or from meaningful interactions within it. In fact, it is that lack of distinction or differentiation that yielded signs that some of my participants are not necessarily specifically apostate.

### ***Practical Implications of this Study***

This section fed into my love of narrative, of storytelling. As an author of a book (Davis-Dyson, 2020) about the power of prayer, I found that writing about my life was invigorating. I found the same to be true within this section, even though it was not yet about my personal input, per se. I was able to bracket my personal experiences because of the guidance that came from Hays and Singh (2012) about the importance of bracketing.

These participants all just want to be heard, appreciated, and understood. For the most part, I do not think they all necessarily want everyone to agree with them on all points about all things. Yet, they just want a listening, patient, empathic, accepting, appreciative, listening ear. That is all. If they had received those priceless, invaluable human responses, they have never volunteered for this study because they may not have ever considered themselves to be “apostate” in the first place.

### **What I Learned that was Most Surprising from this Study**

First, I learned that it is impractical to think that parenting aspects can be unrelated to one another. I discovered that modeling, attachment, and style are intertwined. It seems that if a parent is weak in one of those areas, he or she is weak in all.

Second, it was relatively surprising to discover that the two participants who revealed their bisexuality to me said that, for the most part, they received no prolonged problems from their parents about that revelation. The greater rebuff stemmed from the church itself. Therein is the source of their apostasy. This seemed to fit within the larger theme that was expressed in almost all participants—that of rebuff from the institution of the church through some individual experience with that church

Third, I learned something that I probably should not label as “learned” but rather as “reminded” or “enlightened” about. That is, the one participant, Richard, who is atheistic and scientific in his views, was the one participant who easily answered the question about whether he was interested in finding his own faith community. His response was that he loves volunteerism and had worked in soup kitchens and would love to do that kind of work again. Further, it was interesting to hear him say that even though such work would be likely connected to a church that would be alright with him.

Fourth, this study revealed that the church or its para-church organization (in the case of the summer camp) had a stronger impact on the departure from it, than did the parent or parents’ way of being. At least, that was true for all but one of my participants who had no problem with church or God, but with her mother who stopped taking the participant to church, even though the participant asked her to do so for three to four years before she finally quite asking.

**Why I Think Parents Should Read this Study**

Parenting styles, modeling, and attachment took on a singular grouping where parents were given the same positive or negative attribution across the three categories. For parents reading this as well as future studies with larger sample sizes, they will benefit by learning how very important being a good model is by appropriating effective authoritative parenting (Baumrind, 1989), living what they teach their child, being consistent in taking their children to religious services and including them in religious education. However, this study also revealed that the child and adolescent really appreciate being heard and responded to. According to Bao et al. (1999), both fathers and mothers play important roles in passing along religious beliefs and practices to their male and female children. Mothers' influence was stronger than fathers when the adolescent perceives the parent as accepting. This effect was especially strong for the male emerging adults (Chapter Two).

For parents to learn about the importance of attachment or bondedness is invaluable. For them to learn that it is, as Bandura (1977) labeled it, reciprocal determinism. This means that whatever one gives out, one receives back. That is how bonding or attachment happens. The child is the recipient of and the respondent to what he or she receives from the parent.

Christian worldview is the focal point of this study, so there are many scriptures that parents may take to heart in both the old and new testaments. A couple scriptures are Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21 that include fathers being told not to habitually exacerbate or frustrate their children, bringing the child to angrily lashing out at the father. Implied within that is that the wrath will be foisted upon society.

Interestingly, scripturally, there is far less direct parenting advice given to mothers. I see that as important because it says that the discipline of parenting should initiate with the father. However, more general advice is given to the mother. We are all familiar with Proverbs 31:10-31

wherein the woman whose “price is far above rubies (KJV)” is one whose “children will rise up and call her blessed (KJV)” if she follows the guidelines of being industrious, creative, a great homemaker, and generous to others.

### **Why I Think Counselors and Ministers Should Read this Study**

Counselors would benefit from focusing on these parenting factors are their close relationship to one another and the impact they all have on the child and adolescent. It would be an adjunct to the counselor’s knowledge about the Baumrind (1989) parenting styles, as well as the Ainsworth (1985) attachment information. Imparting the value of using the best parenting skills will bring about at least a higher likelihood of raising more settled and morally sound children and teens as they become adults. Both marriage and family counseling would benefit from this knowledge—that there is much more to parenting than just telling. There needs to be both “show” and “tell.”

Ministers can incorporate this information into their sermons when preaching from scriptures about how to parent. By pointing to a study that was done scientifically that listened to young emerging adults and why they left the faith, it would be of interest to the ears of parents who are still raising their children. Further, it may encourage the parents to seek further information through the process of marriage counseling and perhaps even family counseling.

### **Limitations**

Initially, the focus of the study was to include potential participants from four different schools. However, I eventually ruled three of them out, due to geographical constraints. It is possible that students from other parts of the country or different types of institutions, or young adults who never went to college, may answer the interview protocol differently.

Limitations to this study include there being no real ethnic mix, with the exception of one of the seven participants who is Hispanic. It would have been great to have a broader mixture of students. There were only two males out of the total seven people, but with a larger sample there is a strong likelihood that the percentage of males would increase.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

I recommend that future research include a broader ethnic mix. Though I included the age range of 18 to 25 years old that was because I wanted to be able to include any outlier who may have been a senior at a younger precocious age. I think future research would do well to keep that age range for that very reason, especially because it is not that easy to find participants for this topic. Further, looking at the reasons for apostasy as relates to sexual identity may yield valuable information when linked to the three parenting factors (Baumrind, 1989). I am wondering if a study of apostasy from the perspective of rural versus urban settings while holding the three parenting factors constant would yield interesting results. Finally, in acquiring future participants, the researcher would do well to do a better job of explaining the meaning of “apostasy.” A couple of my participants only weakly qualified.

### **Summary**

Given the small sample size for this qualitative study, the results yielded valuable information and “whets my appetite” to possibly consider researching the topic again at some point with only a *slightly* larger sample group, but no more than ten participants. The depths to which one must immerse themselves into the study prohibits a larger group. The results of this study yielded a few distinct categories of rationale for the young adult’s leaving his or her childhood faith. Those were disillusionment, feelings of abandonment either by parents or by the religious institution rather than the parents, a fear that their sexual identity would not be accepted

by their faith institution, and a desire to break free from the constraints of religion. Having received such valuable information from such a small sample size, I am interested in seeing what future study of this topic would reveal with perhaps three or four more people.

Ultimately, not all of my participants fit the strict definition of apostasy. They all assumed they did, even though I explained the terminology in advance, but it is not necessarily an easy concept to comprehend, as noted earlier in this manuscript (Chapter Two). I have decided to depict this in the following table.

**Table 9***Was Actual Apostasy Demonstrated in Each of the Six Participants?*

Code	Actual Apostasy?	Determining Criteria
Charles	Yes	No interest in church; disillusioned; hurt
Maria	Yes	No interest in church; disillusioned; hurt
Crystal	Yes	No interest in church; disillusioned; hurt
Richard	No	Never had a personal interest in church
Susan	Borderline/Wrestling	Still attends, due to love and support of parents
Jennifer	No	She misses God (church); her hurt stems from mother removing her from church as a child

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