

Religious Continuity and Discontinuity in Three-Generation Families: Are Grandparents Important Agents of Transmission?

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Transmission of Religion across Generations

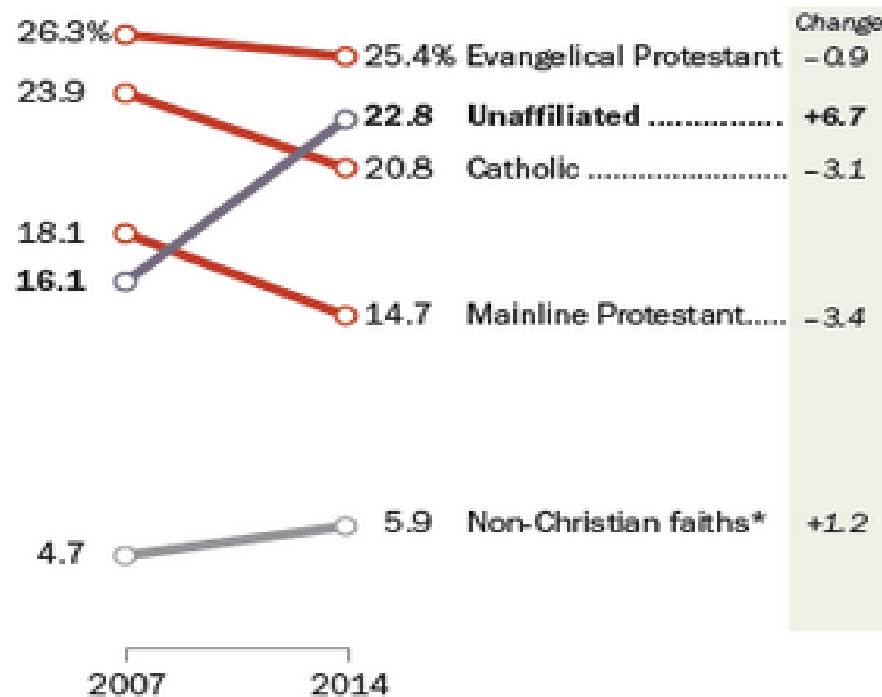
- To what degree do grandparents transmit religious orientations to their grandchildren?
- Under what conditions are grandparents more effective transmitters of religiosity to their grandchildren?



Pew Research Center: May 2015

Changing U.S. Religious Landscape

Between 2007 and 2014, the Christian share of the population fell from 78.4% to 70.6%, driven mainly by declines among mainline Protestants and Catholics. The unaffiliated experienced the most growth, and the share of Americans who belong to non-Christian faiths also increased.



Unaffiliated Make Up Growing Share Across Generations

Unaffiliated Make Up Growing Share Across Generations

% of each generation that identifies current religion as atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular

	2007	2014	Change
Silent generation (b. 1928-1945)	9	11	+2
Baby Boomers (b.1946-1964)	14	17	+3
Generation X (b. 1965-1980)	19	23	+4
Older Millennials (b. 1981-1989)	25	34	+9
Younger Millennials (b. 1990-1996)	n/a	36	n/a

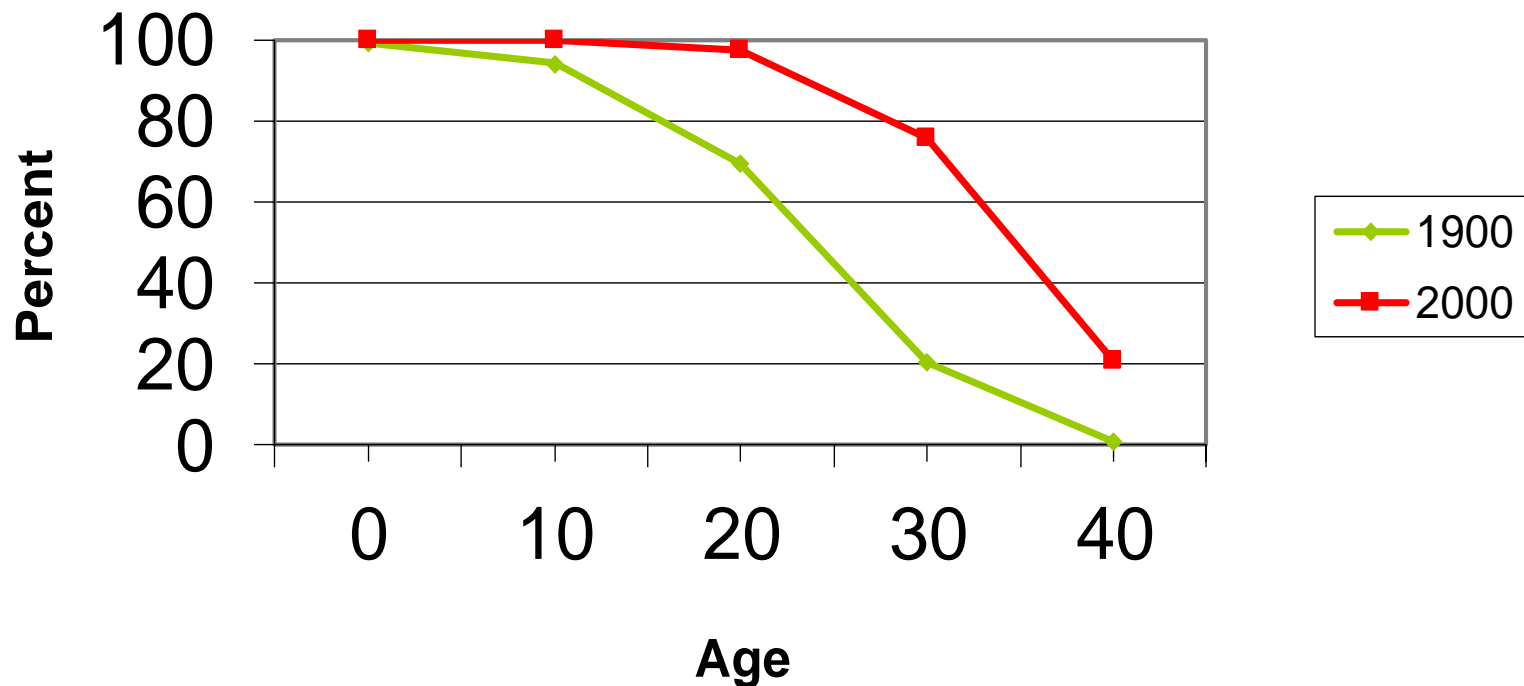
2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014. All changes are statistically significant.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The Importance of Grandparents

- Grandparents have been little considered in social science research on intergenerational transmission.
- Grandparents commonly share stories and experiences with their grandchildren, providing a “window” into family traditions and cultural scripts.
- Owing to increases in life expectancy, grandchildren spend more time with grandparents, increasing opportunities for shared activities and mutual influence (Uhlenberg, 2005).

Percent of Population with At Least One Grandparent Alive by Age: 1900 and 2000 Cohorts



Source: Uhlenberg, P. (2005). Historical forces shaping grandparent-grandchild relationships: Demography and beyond. In M. Silverstein (Ed.), *Intergenerational relations across time and place*. Annual Review of Gerontology and Geriatrics, pp. 77-97.

Grandparents, More or Less Important to the Family?

- Geographic dispersion, family disruption, “third-age” grandparents, “decline of family” narrative
- Longer lives, smaller family size, child- and parent-savers

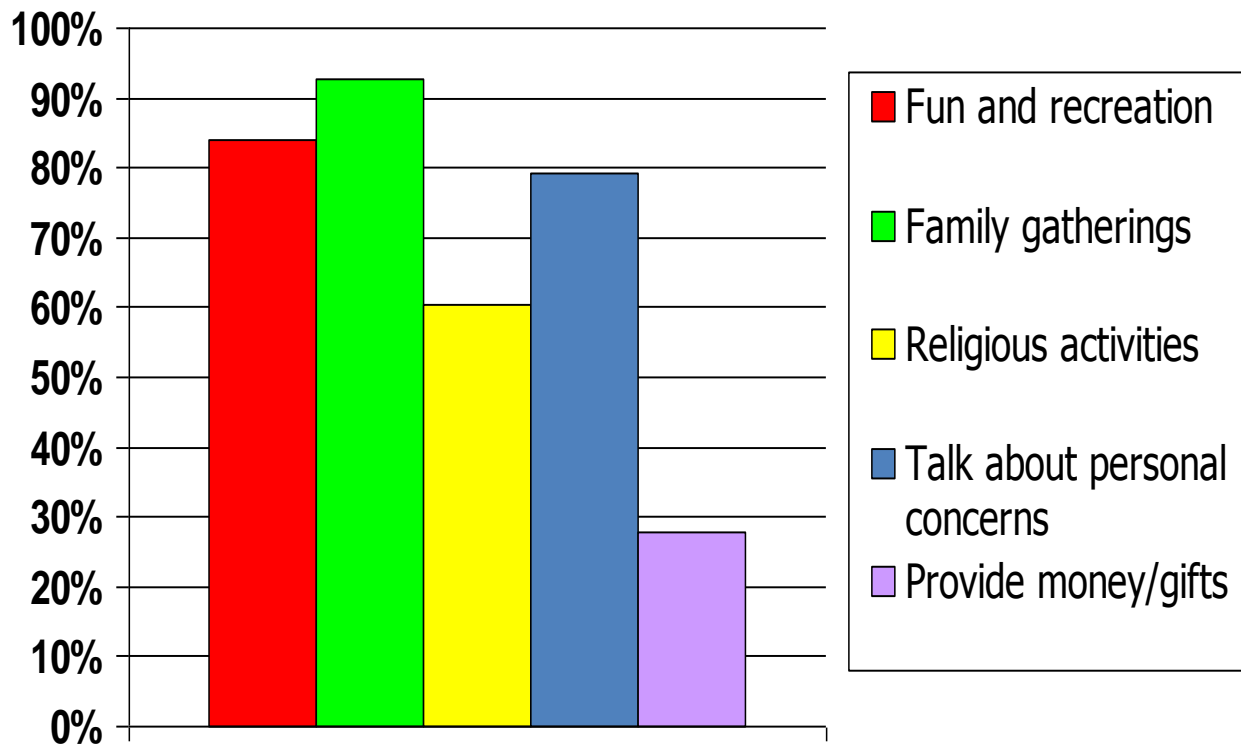
The 4-2-1 Problem in China



“Little emperor” syndrome



National Survey of Grandparents: Activities with Grandchildren (N=980)



Source: Silverstein, M. & Marenco, A. (2001). How Americans enact the grandparent role. *Journal of Family Issues*, 22, 493-522.

Religion and Generations

- In spite of historical change, families remain the main conduits through which values are passed down through time.
- Religiosity may still be stabilized in youth by families through informal socialization, formal training, and behavioral modeling, and be manifest beyond simple affiliation.
- Religiosity, though differentiated by cohort membership, may be stable within families. Yet there are few studies of continuity and discontinuity across generations *within family lineages*.

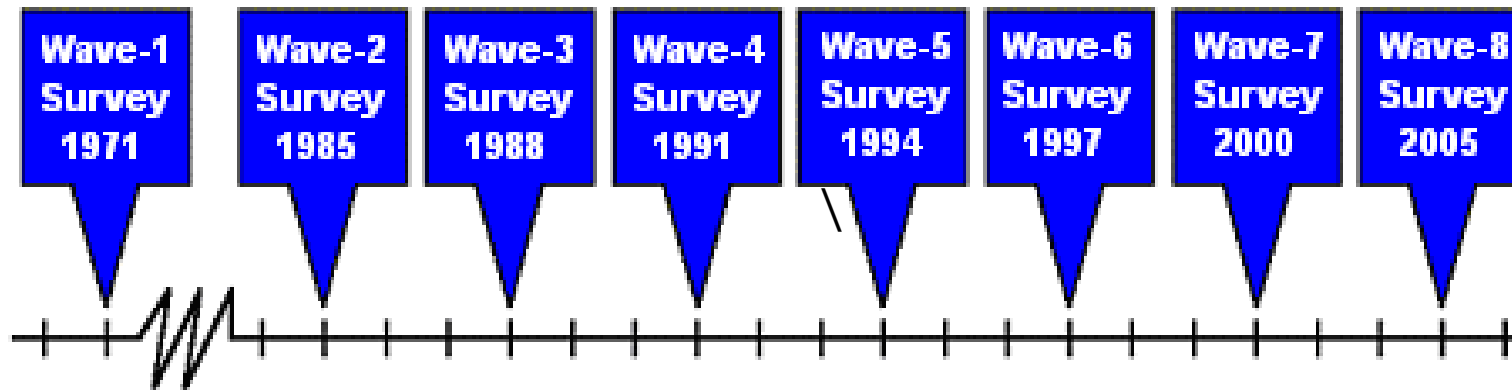
Mixed Methods Approach

- Used in-depth interviews longitudinal survey data to examine if, how, and when grandparents influence the religiosity of their grandchildren.
- Both research strategies treat the family lineage as the unit of analysis to produce family-centered depictions of religious life.

The USC Longitudinal Study of Generations (LSOG)

- A multigenerational multi-time-point study, started in 1971 with repeated panels → 2005.
- Consists of about 3,500 respondents from 418 three-generation families recruited within Southern California region.
- Full families are surveyed: grandparents, parents, and grandchildren (16+), including siblings, spouses, former spouses.
- Fourth generation added starting in 1991 when they turned 16.

The Longitudinal Study of Generations



In-depth Interviews

- In 2006-8 recruited a subsample of 25 multigenerational families to explore mechanisms of religious influence and transmission through in-depth interviewing of multiple family members
 - How and why religious transmission by grandparents might or might not be successful
 - Identify distinctive styles of grandparental religious influence.

Styles of Grandparents' Religious Influence

- *Grandparents reinforcing or enhancing parents' religious socialization*
- *Grandparents not directly involved in grandchildren's religious socialization*
Grandparents replacing or substituting for parental religiosity
- *Grandparents ineffectively challenging or subverting parental religious influence*

Grandparents reinforcing or enhancing parents' religious socialization

- The Wilsons, who have been evangelical Protestants for several generations, exemplify the multigenerational continuity pattern.
 - Granddaughter Susan described the pattern of family religious influence :
 - “We all play a part. Like, right now, my mom teaches her grandkids, my son and my sister’s sons. She’ll tell them about why [we love and follow Jesus]. Then their aunts, like my sisters, will all add things to it. So we’re all active in that. We’re all into it.”

Grandparents reinforcing or enhancing parents' religious socialization

- In the mostly secular Smith family, Crystal describes her grandmother Doris as one of the most significant people in her life. She is “a very strong woman” who influenced the humanistic orientations of her daughter, as well as her three grandchildren:
 - “My grandma Doris was very much against [organized] religion. So we [never] mentioned Jesus or the Bible. She would explain how the Bible was written by man and that it was transferred from person to person. I think it was [she] that started us in this nonreligious spiritual outlook.”

Grandparents not directly involved in grandchildren's religious socialization

- In the Protestant, Jackson family, 56 year old Karen said of her grandmother Myrna's religious influence:
 - “That was just one subject that wasn't brought up, wasn't talked about, because there were too many different beliefs, I guess....If I did believe something, it was best to just keep it quiet, keep it to yourself to avoid coming under attack for believing or not.”

Grandparents not directly involved in grandchildren's religious socialization

- In the West family a strong moral tradition transcends younger members moving among Catholic, Protestant, and nonreligious orientations but with no direct grandparental involvement.
 - Describing the sequential transmission of this strong moral tradition, Harold, age 53, said:
 - “Mom and Dad taught their children, and we passed the same ideals on to our children. And as we sit, today, they’re passing the same ideals on to their children, my grandchildren . . . And hopefully when their children become of age and have families of their own, everybody will still be participating.”

Grandparents replacing or substituting for parental religiosity

- In the Catholic, Sabelli family, Nina talks about her close relationship with their grandfather. in contrast to the emotional distance she felt from her own father:
 - “Because my dad worked constantly. He was probably a very typical husband of the fifties and the sixties. I was kind of neglected. My father was so withholding. My grandfather took me to church. I remember that that was the most comforting thing, to be there with him in church, knowing that God was in control.”

Grandparents replacing or substituting for parental religiosity

- In the Jewish, Bernstein family grandfather Norman laments the fact that his own children are no longer religious. It has become his goal to maintain the family's Orthodox Jewish traditions for his grandchildren.
 - “The only thing they're getting out of Judaism these days, or will get, is probably what they get from me,” Norman says. “What I am committed to doing [passing on Jewish traditions] is part of what is Judaism to me.”
 - Norman hosts a Passover Seder for his family every year, noting that his grandchildren “like to kind of imitate me, and it's wonderful. They're striving to be alongside of me, drinking those four glasses of wine, say the prayers in the Hebrew.”
- Granddaughter Rachel, recalls religious holidays she spent with her grandfather as a child:
 - “I remember going to temple with my grandma and my grandpa and walking with them because it was a holiday...I had to sit with my grandma and my grandpa sat with my brother, and I always remember just really enjoying being with them on that holiday.”

Grandparents ineffectively challenging or subverting parental influence

- Gladys Sanchez is a devout Catholic who would very much like all of her family to follow in her Catholic faith, but some of her great-grandchildren have not been baptized, a situation she finds quite distressing. She laments:
 - “They don’t baptize their kids I told them, it’s not right. Natasha’s mother [Gladys’ daughter] should tell them, why they don’t baptize? My other granddaughter, she did the same thing. [Her] kids are not baptized [either]...I wish I could get one of the [boys], and take them to be baptized. Maybe I’ll do it [laughs].”

Grandparents ineffectively challenging or subverting parental influence

- In a former mixed marriage, Elizabeth, an evangelical Christian, did not want her children to embrace the Jewish faith of her ex-husband's parents. Grandson Adam recalls:
 - “When we did go over there my [Jewish] grandparents were always trying to teach me Hebrew, trying to teach me things about the Torah, to try and bring me toward the Jewish religion. Then my [Christian] mom would always get mad and try to correct everything that she said [was] wrong.”

Summary of Qualitative Data

- As these stories suggest, family continuity—or discontinuity—in religion frequently is linked to intentional grandparental (non)intervention.
- Intergenerational transmission appears to occur when grandparent—grandchild relationships are close, and when grandparents' efforts reinforce those of the parents'.
- When grandparents have conflicted relationships with children or grandchildren, or when they are absent from their grandchildren's lives, we see fewer examples of intergenerational continuity.

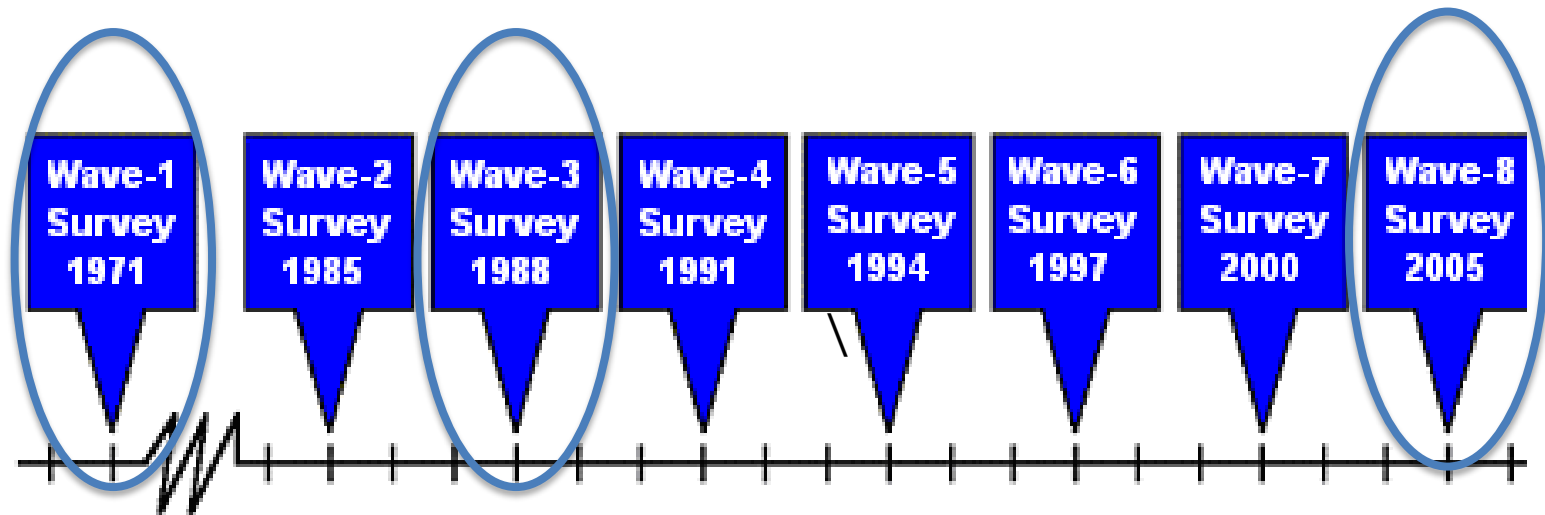
Survey Data

- Assessed statistical associations in religiosity among three generations over a 34 year period.
 - Identify direct and indirect religious transmission from grandparents
 - Examine the family conditions under which transmission is stronger or weaker

Quantitative Analysis: Research Questions

- Do grandparents transmit their religiosity to grandchildren independently of parents?
- Do grandparents and parents reinforce each other's transmission of religiosity?
- Does parental divorce reduce (or enhance) the strength of religious transmission from grandparents?
- Does greater exposure to grandparents during childhood enhance the transmission of religiosity to grandchildren?

The Longitudinal Study of Generations



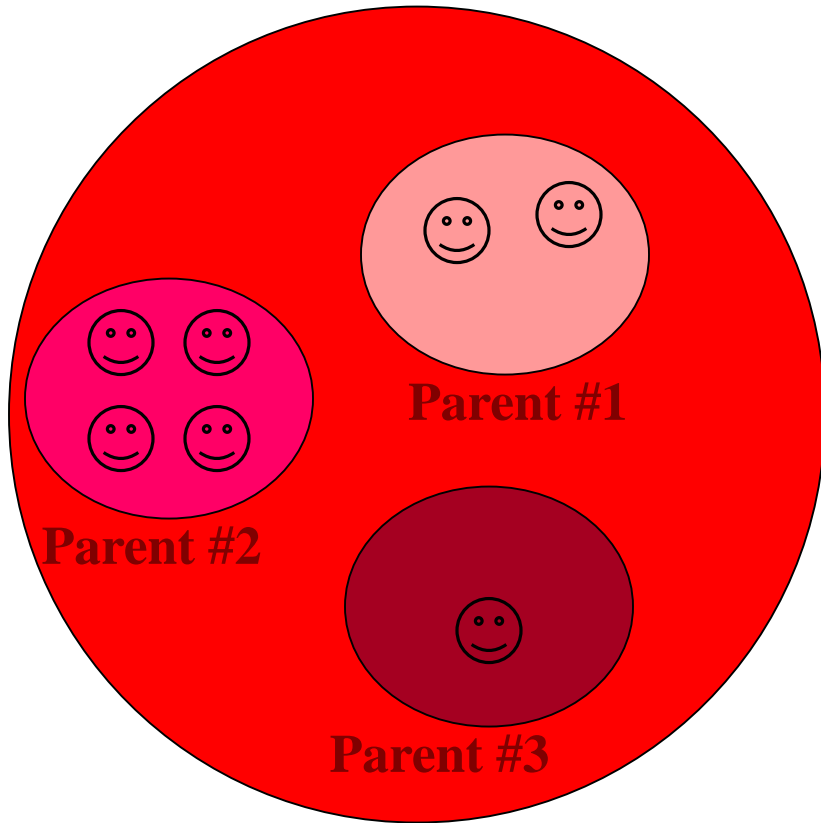
Generational-Sequential Design

Generation	Year Measured	Age at Measurement	N
Grandparents	1971	43	257
Parents	1988	37	341
Grandchildren	2005	28	565

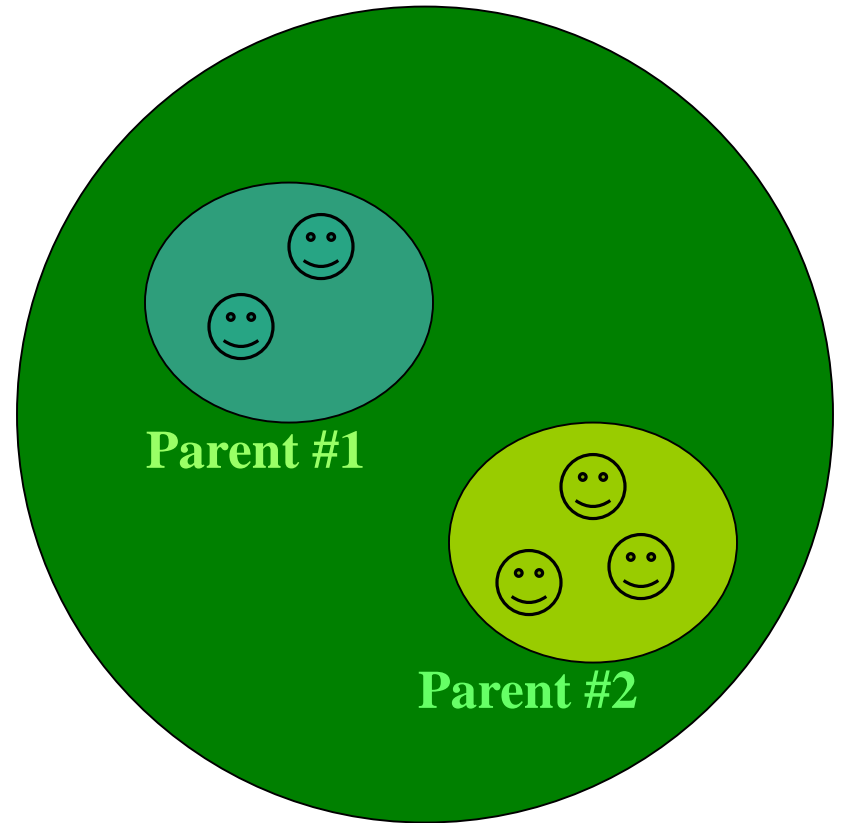
Family Clusters

- Hierarchical linear modeling used to analyze data
 - Children are nested with parents
 - Parents are nested within grandparents.

Nesting of Grandchildren in Three-Generational Families



Grandparent: Red



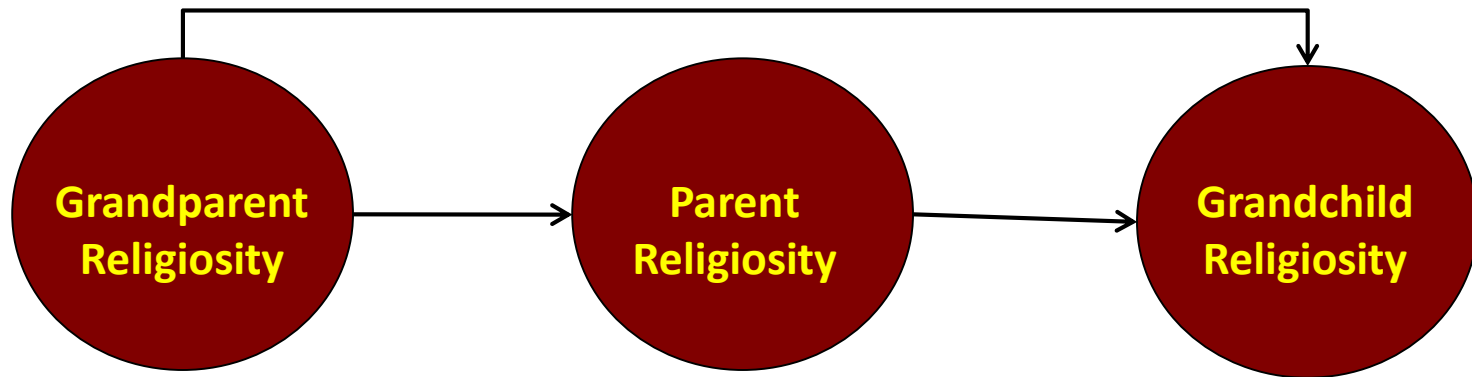
Grandparent: Green

Measures of Religiosity

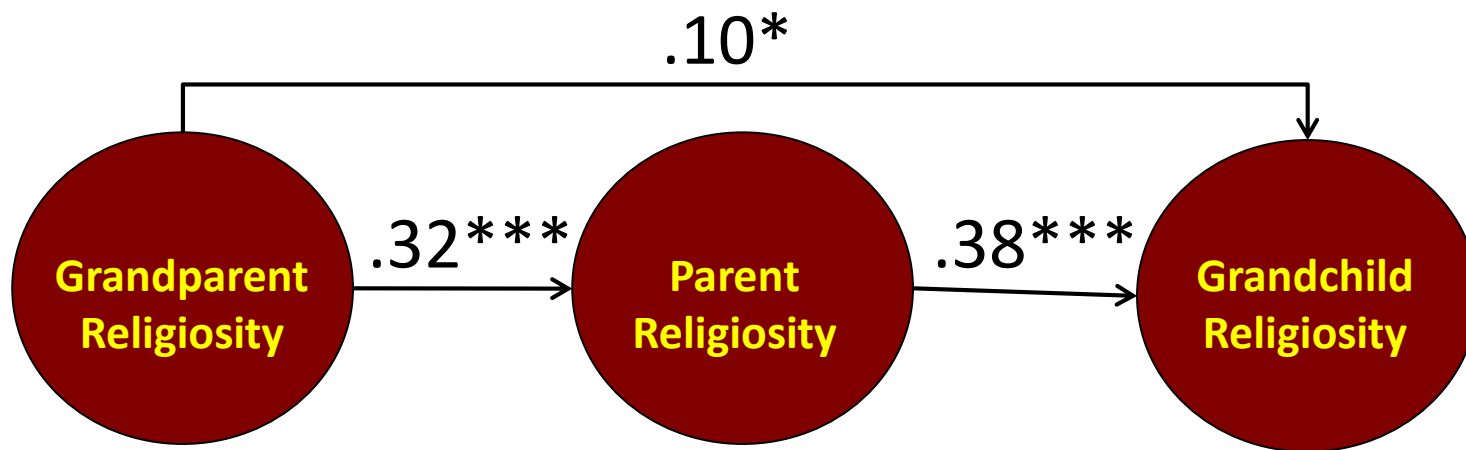
- Practice
 - Attendance at religious services: “never” to “everyday”
- Intensity
 - How religious are you?: “not at all” to “very religious”
- Literalist beliefs
 - Strength of agreement with statements
 - God exists in the form as described in the Bible
 - All people today are descendents of Adam and Eve
- Civic value of religion
 - Strength of agreement with statements
 - All children should receive religious training
 - Religion should play an important role in daily life
- Value of “religious participation” out of nine values
- Additive scale (standardized factor score) computed for each generation

- Do grandparents influence the religiosity of grandchildren independently of parents? ?

Transmission Model

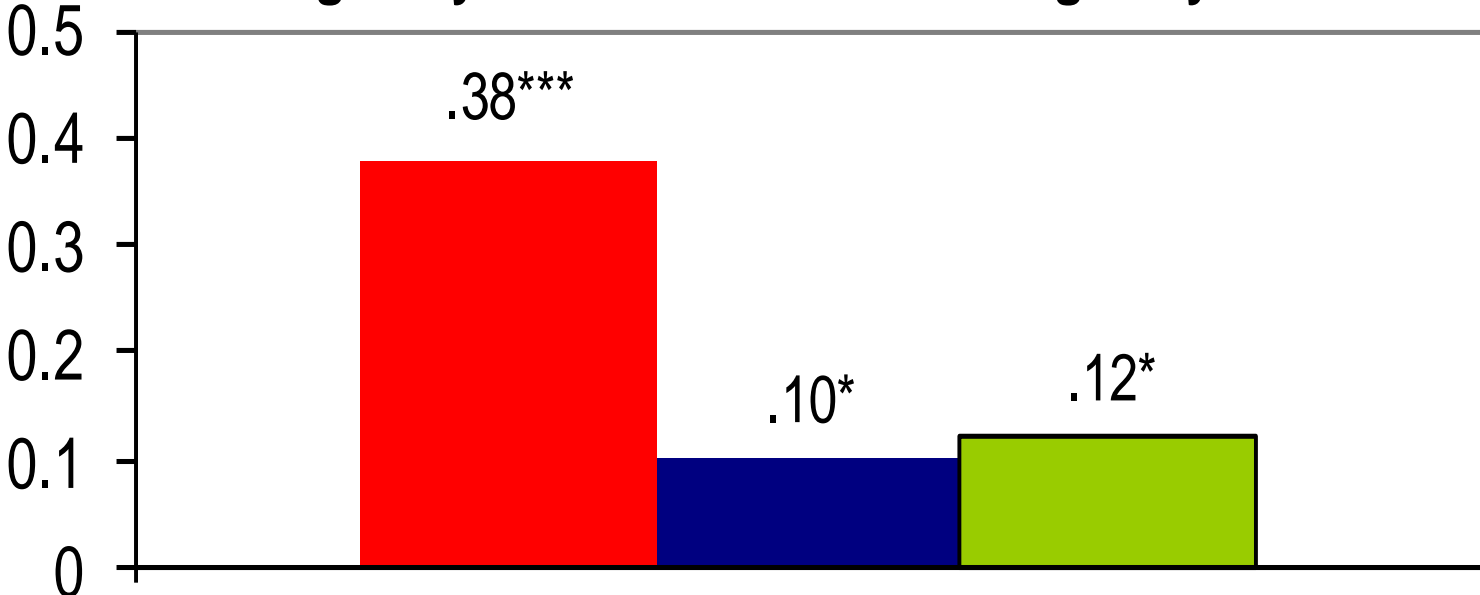


Standardized Coefficients: Multilevel Model



Standardized Effects of Parents' and Grandparents' Religiosity on Grandchildren's Religiosity

Effect on GC Religiosity



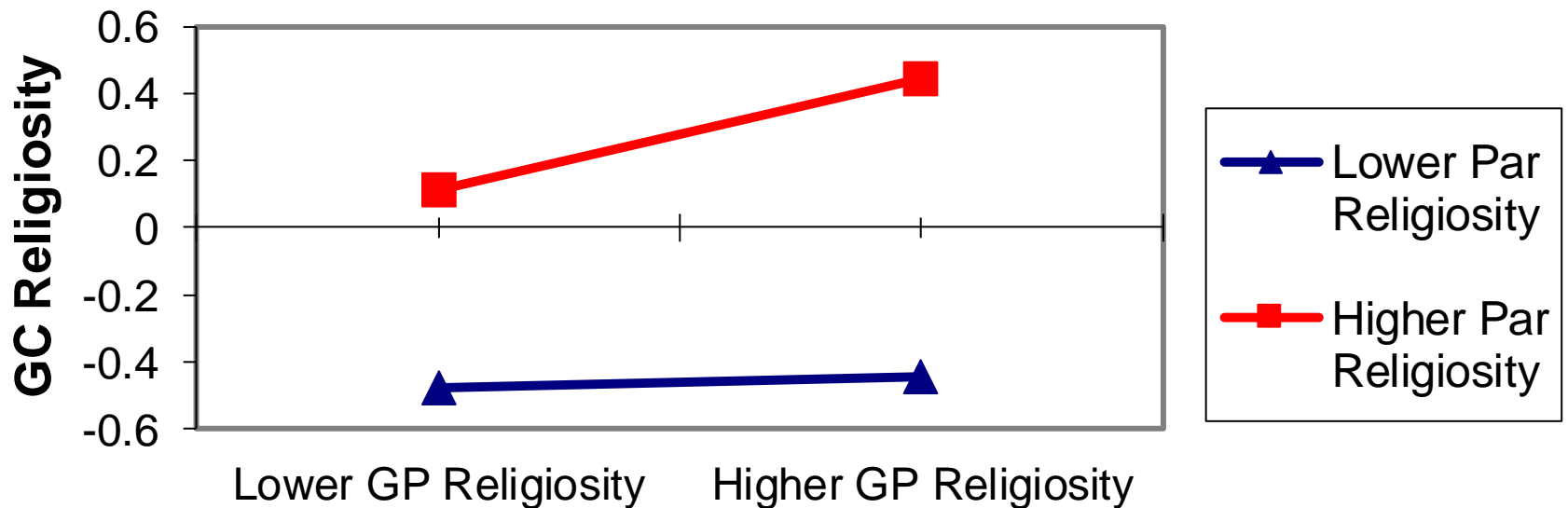
■ Parents' Direct Effect

■ Grandparents' Direct Effect

■ Grandparents' Indirect Effect

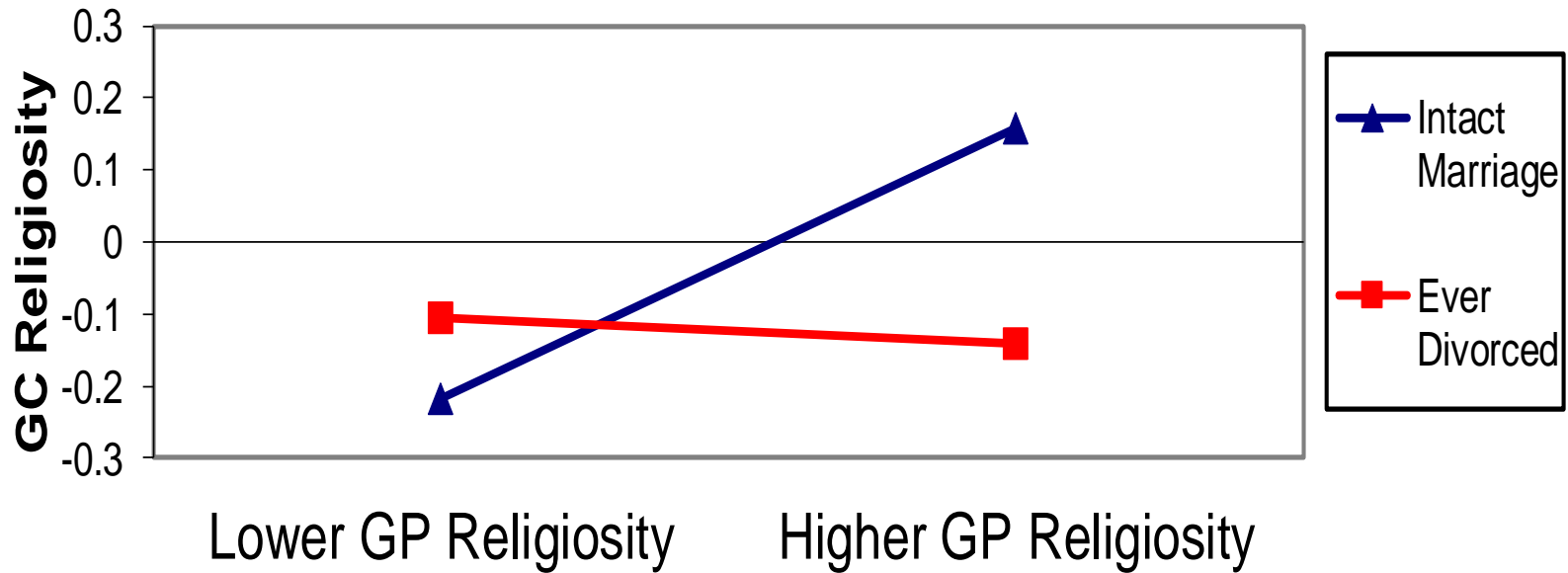
- Do grandparents and parents jointly influence their grandchildren's religiosity?

Grandchildren's Religiosity by Levels of Grandparent's and Parent's Religiosity



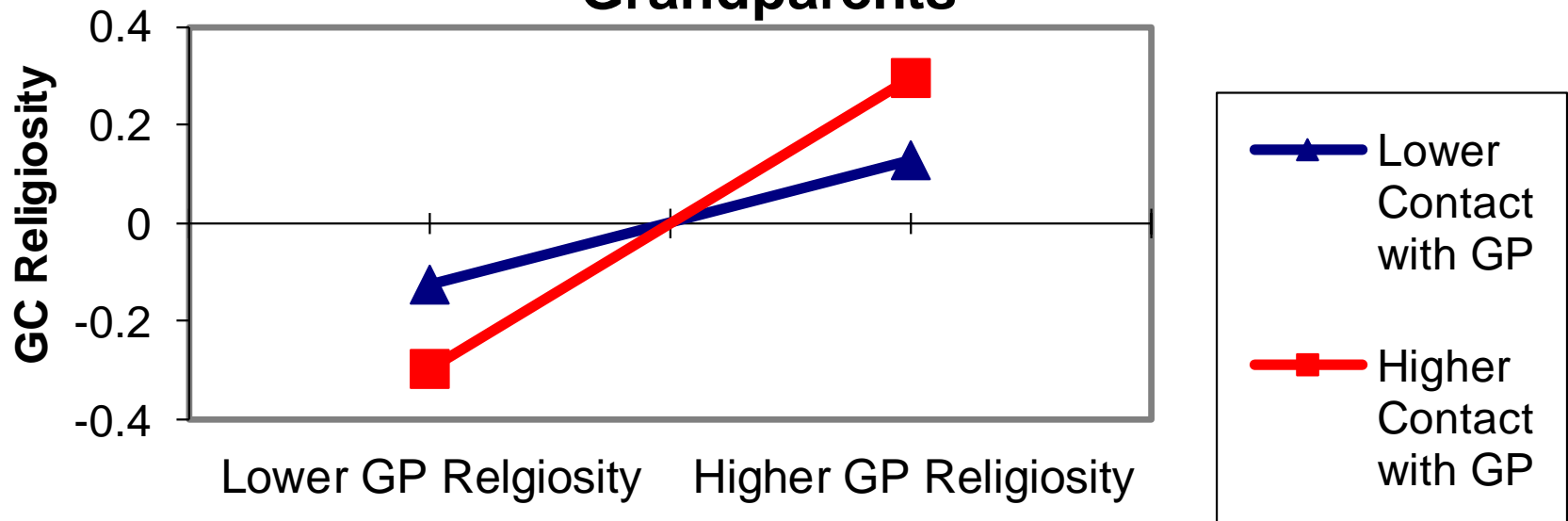
- Does parental divorce reduce or enhance the strength of religious transmission from grandparents?

Grandchildren's Religiosity by Grandparents' Religiosity and Parental Marital History



- Does greater exposure to grandparents during childhood enhance the transmission of religiosity to grandchildren?

Grandchildren's Religiosity by Grandparents' Religiosity and Early Exposure to Grandparents



Summary & Discussion

- Intergenerational transmission of religious beliefs includes grandparents who directly and indirectly influence their grandchildren's religious orientation.
- Grandparent transmission is enhanced when
 - Parents are more religious
 - Parents' marriage is intact
 - Grandchildren had more contact with grandparents in childhood

Conclusion

- The family is a source of relative stability in core religious beliefs and attitudes across generations, in spite of great religious change at the population or cohort level.
- Intergenerational transmission of religious orientations remains a thread of influence through time linking both adjacent and non-adjacent generations in the family.
- Heterogeneity of transmission—with divorce and lack of contact inhibiting grandparent influence—suggests weakened influence.
- However, grandparents may have strengthened their influence over historical time due to communication technology, Skype etc.