

# Handbook of the Sociology of Religion

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### Religiousness and Spirituality

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#### Trajectories and Vital Involvement in Late Adulthood

Michele Dillon and Paul Wink

Americans today are living longer and healthier lives than earlier generations. Currently 13 percent of the U.S. population is aged sixty-five or over (Kramarow, Lentzer, Rooks, Weeks, and Saydah 1999: 22), and this expanding sector is experiencing lower rates of functional disability than was the case even a few decades ago. These trends and the aging of the populous baby boom generation understandably focus attention on the factors that are conducive to purposeful and socially engaged aging. The focus of current research is thus beginning to move beyond questions of physical health and mortality to give greater attention to the quality or character of older persons' everyday lives.

In the pursuit of "successful aging" some social scientists have begun to investigate characteristics that become particularly salient in the second half of adulthood such as wisdom (e.g., Wink and Helson 1997) and spirituality (e.g., Tornstam 1999). Other researchers have explored characteristics that are not necessarily specific to older adulthood but that nonetheless play a vital role in the negotiation of the aging process. Religiousness is one such factor because although it is positively associated with social functioning throughout adulthood, it takes on increased significance in the second half of the adult life cycle (e.g., Hout and Greeley 1987).

This chapter explores adulthood patterns of religiousness and spirituality and their association with social functioning in older adulthood drawing on our research with a longitudinal study of men and women that spans adolescence and late adulthood. We first briefly discuss our conceptualization of religiousness and spirituality. We then introduce our sample, focus on whether religiousness and spirituality increase in older age, and discuss their relations to various indicators of social functioning in late adulthood.

#### RELATION BETWEEN RELIGIOUSNESS AND SPIRITUALITY

While just a few decades ago it made little sense to differentiate between religiousness and spirituality, such a distinction now seems to have become part of everyday

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conversation (Marty 1993; Roof 1999a, Chapter 11, this volume; Wuthnow 1998). There is a lot of ambiguity, however, about the meaning and use of these terms and their interrelation. The term spirituality is used in multiple and divergent ways with the result that it can be applied equally aptly to describe a pious individual who expresses his or her devotion through traditional religious practices (e.g., church attendance), someone who has no religious affiliation but believes in God or a Higher Power, a New Age seeker who borrows elements of Western and Eastern religions, and a person who is prone to mystical experiences. Obviously, the nature of the relation between religiousness and spirituality shifts depending on the definitions being used and the cultural and socio-biographical context in which they are being investigated (Wulff 1997).

In our research on religion and the life course, we have conceptualized religiousness and spirituality as two distinct but partially overlapping types of religious orientation following Wuthnow's (1998) distinction between dwelling and seeking. We have defined *religiousness* in terms of the importance of institutionalized or tradition-centered religious beliefs and practices in the life of the individual. Highly religious individuals are those for whom belief in God and the afterlife and organized religion (e.g., church attendance) play a central role in life; they are *dwellers* whose religious practices and experiences are based on derived and habitual forms of religious behavior typically performed in a communal setting. In contrast, we operationalize *spirituality* in terms of the importance of noninstitutionalized religion or nontradition centered beliefs and practices in the life of the individual. Highly spiritual individuals are those for whom a personal quest for a sense of connectedness plays a central role in life; they are *seekers* who engage in practices (e.g., prayer, meditation) aimed at deriving meaning from, and nurturing a sense of interrelatedness with, a sacred Other. Importantly, in this schema, to be coded high on either religiousness or spirituality requires that the individual intentionally and systematically engage in practices aimed at incorporating the sacred. (For a detailed explanation of the study's definitions and coding procedures, see Wink and Dillon 2002; in press.)

## THE IHD LONGITUDINAL STUDY

Our research uses a longitudinal representative sample drawn by the Institute of Human Development (IHD), University of California, Berkeley, in the 1920s. Participants in the IHD study were born in the 1920s and they and their parents were studied during the participants' childhood and adolescence. Subsequently, the participants were interviewed in-depth four times in adulthood: in early (age thirties; 1958–9), middle (age forties; 1970), late middle (age fifties–early sixties; 1982), and late adulthood when they were in their seventies (1997–2000). At each interview phase the participants were asked detailed open-ended questions about all aspects of their lives including religious beliefs, attitudes, and practices. We are therefore able to explore changes and continuities in religious values and habits across the life course and without having to rely on interviewees' retrospective accounts. Moreover, because the participants talked extensively about religion in the context of a lengthy life-review interview it is likely that their accounts are less biased by the overreporting of involvement that may be a factor in opinions polls of the general population (e.g., Hadaway, Marler, and Chaves 1993). The current sample (N = 181) represents 90 percent of the original sample who were available for follow-up in late adulthood. Fifty-three percent of the current sample are

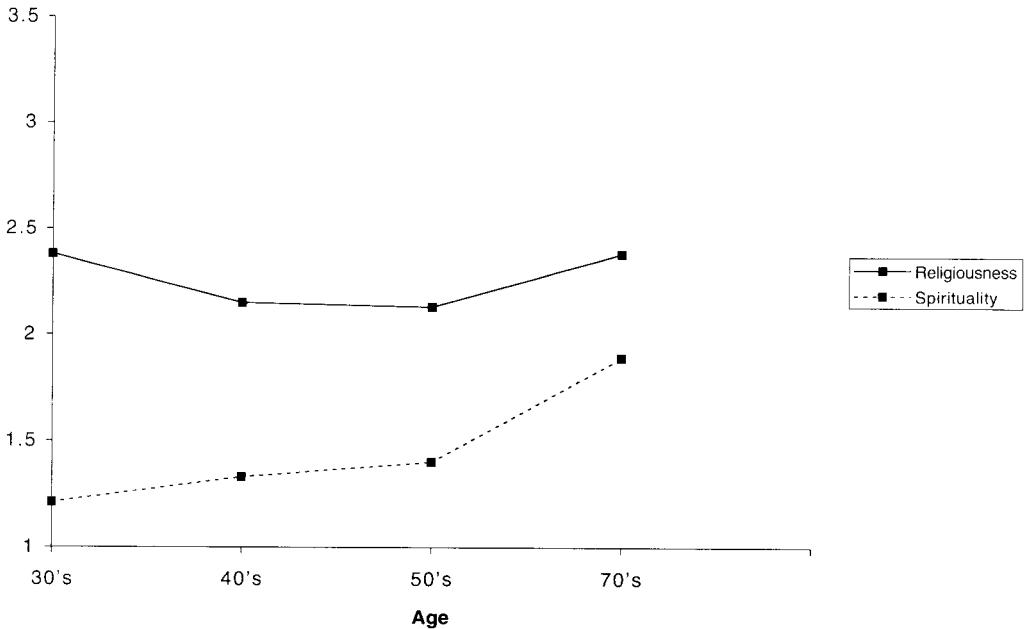
women and 47 percent are men. In late middle adulthood, 59 percent of the participants (or their spouses) were upper-middle-class professionals and executives, 19 percent were lower middle class, and 22 percent were working class. All but six of the participants are white. The majority of the sample (73 percent) grew up in Protestant families, 16 percent grew up Catholic, 5 percent grew up in mixed religious (Protestant/Jewish) households, and 6 percent came from nonreligious families. In late adulthood, 58 percent of the study participants were Protestant, 16 percent were Catholic, 2 percent were Jewish, and 24 percent were not church members. Forty-eight percent said that religion was important or very important currently in their lives, 83 percent still resided in California, 71 percent were living with their spouse or partner, and 89 percent reported their general health as good. Using our practice-oriented definitions of religiousness and spirituality, 40 percent of the participants were rated high on religiousness and 26 percent were rated high on spirituality. The intercorrelation between independent ratings of religiousness and spirituality for the sample in late adulthood was moderate (mean  $r = .31$ ).

### **CHANGES IN RELIGIOUSNESS AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE SECOND HALF OF ADULT LIFE**

**Changes in religiousness.** It is typically assumed that religiousness increases in older adulthood. This view is premised on the idea that aging confronts the individual with concerns over death and dying that increase existential angst and threaten the person with despair (e.g., Becker 1973). A natural response to this involves turning to worldviews and institutions that are sources of meaning and security, and religion has traditionally fulfilled this function. The turn toward increased religiousness may be further enhanced because individuals in the postretirement period have more free time and fewer social roles (Atchley 1997). It is thus assumed that religious participation should increase from the preretirement to the postretirement period only to decline in old-old age (eighty-five-plus) when physical problems make it increasingly harder to attend places of worship (McFadden 1996).

Although theories of aging and cross-sectional empirical data support the view of religion as a life cycle phenomenon that increases with age (e.g., Greeley and Hout 1988; Hout and Greeley 1987), this thesis has not been investigated using longitudinal data gathered from the same individuals over an extended stretch of the life span. There are very few longitudinal studies that follow participants across the life course, and a number of studies that span adulthood have not paid attention to religion. Longitudinal studies that have focused on religion such as Shand's (1990) forty-year follow-up study of male graduates of Amherst college and the Terman study of intellectually gifted persons (e.g., Holahan and Sears 1995) report stability rather than an increase in religiousness in the second half of adulthood. The generalizability of these studies' findings, however, is limited because the samples comprise rather elite and homogeneous groups of individuals and, or, rely on retrospective accounts of religious involvement (Holahan and Sears 1995).

In contrast to a pattern of stability, studies using cross-sectional, representative samples of the American population confirm the hypothesis that religiousness increases in older adulthood (Hout and Greeley 1987; Rossi 2001), although there is uncertainty about the age interval when the greatest increase occurs. The public opinion data



**Figure 14.1** Mean Changes in Religiousness and Spirituality over the Adult Life Course.

analyzed by Hout and Greeley suggest that the steepest rate of increase occurs between ages forty-five and fifty-five, thus placing it in the pre-retirement phase, a time when individuals may begin to have more time as a result perhaps of occupational commitments being less demanding and children having left home. In contrast, Rossi's (2001: 124) survey data indicate that the sharpest increase occurs when individuals are in their fifties and sixties.

The pattern in the IHD longitudinal data fits with the findings of cross-sectional studies demonstrating an upward trend in religiousness in the second half of the adult life cycle. The IHD participants increased significantly in religiousness from their fifties to their seventies, although the magnitude of the change was small (less than a quarter of one standard deviation (see Figure 14.1) (Wink and Dillon 2001). The increase in religiousness in later adulthood was true of both men and women, of individuals from higher and lower social classes, and of Protestants and Catholics. The increase in religiousness in late adulthood was preceded by a decrease in religiousness in the first half of adulthood: For women, the decline occurred between their thirties and forties, whereas for men the decline occurred between adolescence and early adulthood. The women participants were in their thirties during the 1950s and thus were engaged in the religious socialization of their schoolage children at a time coinciding with the peak in American religious devotion and the cultural expectation that women were primarily responsible for children's religious socialization. Their midlife dip in religiousness, therefore, is likely to have been accentuated by the confluence of life stage (the relative absence of child socialization pressures) and historical effects. The initial decline in religiousness from early to middle adulthood just as the increase in later adulthood, although significant, was of relatively small magnitude.

How are we to interpret the increased religiousness of the IHD participants from middle to late adulthood? Although we cannot exclude the possibility of a cohort effect, the fact that our findings coincide with national cross-sectional trends (e.g., Hout and Greeley 1987; Rossi 2001) minimizes this explanation. Although it is possible that increased religiousness in older age is a strategy to try to fend off death anxiety prompted by specific reminders of mortality that become increasingly prominent from late middle age onward (e.g., the death of one's parents, spouse, or close friends, or personal illness), there are two factors arguing against this explanation. First, death anxiety tends to decline with age and older adulthood is a time when concern about death (although not about the process of dying) is at its lowest (e.g., Fortner and Neimeyer 1999).

Second, although the IHD participants increased in religiousness from their fifties to their seventies, the sample also showed high levels of rank order stability in scores on religiousness across this same interval ( $r = .82$ ; Wink and Dillon 2001). What this means is that whereas the IHD participants as a group increased in religiousness from late middle to older adulthood, the individuals in the study tended to preserve their rank in terms of their religious involvement relative to their sample peers. In other words, those individuals who scored comparatively higher in religiousness in their fifties also tended to score higher in their seventies. The very high correlation between individuals' scores on religiousness from their fifties to their seventies means that very few individuals experienced radical changes in religious behavior. In addition, similar to Rossi (2001), who used a retrospective measure, we have evidence indicating that the religious atmosphere (defined in terms of practices and values) in the respondent's family of origin (assessed using data collected from the participants and their parents in adolescence) is the single best predictor of religious involvement in late adulthood. Taken as a whole, these findings suggest that the overall increase in religiousness observed for the IHD participants from their fifties to their seventies was much too orderly to be a response to personal crises associated with such life events as the death of a spouse or a life threatening illness. The increase is more likely attributable to socially normative trends in the sample such as the increased time available in the post retirement period, the increased freedom attendant on having fewer social roles, and perhaps a generalized awareness of the finitude of life.

**Changes in spirituality.** Unlike religiousness that tends to be salient in the life of "religious" individuals throughout the life cycle, spirituality has been typically described as a midlife and post-midlife phenomenon. In this sense, similar to postformal stages of cognitive development (e.g., McFadden 1996; Sinnott 1994), it can be described as an emergent characteristic of aging. According to Carl Jung (1964), it is around midlife that individuals begin to turn inward to explore the more spiritual aspects of the self. Prior to this stage, the external constraints associated with launching a career and establishing a family take priority, but the increased awareness of mortality that tends to come at midlife reduces the self's emphasis on this-worldly success and facilitates greater spiritual engagement. Cognitive theorists (e.g., Sinnott 1994) share with Jung the idea that spirituality is the outcome of adult maturational processes. Having experienced the contextual ambiguities and relativity of life, middle-aged and older adults tend to go beyond strictly logical modes of apprehending reality to embrace paradox and feelings in making evaluative judgments. This process, in turn, is seen as

conducive to spiritual growth. McFadden (1996) argues that spirituality may be especially meaningful in old age because of the many losses and difficulties encountered in later life. Following Stokes (1990: 176), who argues that changes in the “process of making sense of life’s meaning and purpose” occur more frequently during periods of transition and crisis than stability, spiritual development may be related to aging because although crises are not age-specific, the chance of having experienced personal crises clearly increases with age.

As far as we know there are no longitudinal data testing the hypothesis that spirituality increases in the second half of adult life. Support for the theory comes from cross-sectional survey data (e.g., Fowler 1981; Tornstam 1999) and individual case studies (e.g., Bianchi 1987) that rely on retrospective accounts. In the IHD longitudinal study we found support for the hypothesis with the participants increasing significantly in spirituality from their fifties to their seventies (see Figure 14.1). As with religiousness, the significant increase was true of both men and women, of Protestants and Catholics, and of individuals from higher and lower social classes (Wink and Dillon 2002).

Although the pattern of mean changes in spirituality in the second half of adulthood was similar to that observed for religiousness, there were three notable differences. First, the magnitude of the increase in spirituality from late middle to late adulthood was much greater, with the total sample increasing by more than one-half of a standard deviation and women increasing by close to three quarters of a standard deviation. Because of this sharper rate of increase, women were significantly more spiritual than men in older adulthood. Second, whereas the mean scores on religiousness across adulthood indicated that many of the IHD participants had been religious all their lives, the mean scores on spirituality indicated that spirituality played virtually no role in the lives of the study participants prior to midlife. Third, whereas the high rank order stability of religiousness from early adulthood onward indicated very little individual variability or change over time in who was religious and who was not, the rank order stability of spirituality was much lower suggesting that there was considerable interindividual change in who scored high and who scored low on spirituality over time.

Our results confirming the hypothesis of spirituality as a post-midlife phenomenon do not mean, of course, that spirituality is nurtured solely by life-cycle maturational processes. The post-midlife trajectory we document also may clearly have a cultural explanation. Because the study participants entered middle adulthood in the 1960s, their negotiation of midlife identity during this time of cultural change may have primed their openness to the new spiritual currents that were taking hold in American society. As noted, the 1970s witnessed an explosion of interest in Jungian psychology, Eastern philosophies and practices, and a variety of self-help therapeutic groups and manuals addressed at satisfying the inner needs of Americans (Roof 1999a; Chapter 11, this volume; Wuthnow 1998). These newly accessible spiritual vocabularies and resources could be drawn on to enhance a preexisting disposition toward a journey of self-discovery or, independently, to generate new spiritual interests among individuals who were attracted to this novel aspect of public culture (irrespective of any intrapsychic motivation). Thus the greater salience of spirituality for our study participants from late middle age onward is likely to be the result of a confluence of an expanded and publicly accessible spiritual marketplace, especially in California, where most of the participants were living, and chronological age or stage in the life cycle.



Because spirituality demonstrated low rank order stability across the adult life course (mean  $r = .47$  across four time points in adulthood, as opposed to  $r = .74$  for religiosity), it makes good sense to inquire into the factors that are conducive to its development. In the IHD sample we found that spirituality was highest among women who in early adulthood were introspective and religious, and who in their thirties and forties experienced stressful or negative life events (such as death of a spouse or child, divorce, psychological turmoil). Our data indicated that it is the interaction of introspection and negative life experiences that is particularly conducive to the subsequent spiritual growth of women. In the case of men, spiritual development in older adulthood was associated with early adulthood religiosity and introspection but was unrelated to negative life events (see Wink and Dillon 2002).

### VITAL INVOLVEMENT IN LATE ADULTHOOD

Having reviewed findings showing that religiosity and spirituality are likely to increase in older adulthood, we now turn our attention to the relation of religion to individual meaning and social participation in late adulthood. In doing so, we find it useful to adopt Erik Erikson's (Erikson, Erikson, and Kivnick 1986) concept of vital involvement because it moves the assessment of the positive role played by religiosity and spirituality away from a narrow focus on life satisfaction to include how individuals cultivate purposive and socially responsible lives (Bellah et al. 1991: 273–7). Erikson theorized that successful functioning in old age includes the ability to maintain a vital involvement in life despite suffering the multiple losses associated with later adulthood (e.g., bereavement, illness, fewer social and occupational roles). The investment of the self in purposeful and enriching activities that is the hallmark of vital involvement demonstrates a sense of basic trust in the world and in other human beings. This disposition, in turn, injects a sense of social trust, reciprocity, and optimism among the younger generations who witness it (Bellah et al. 1991; Erikson 1964; Putnam 2000). One way of being vitally involved is through engagement in caregiving activities that show a selfless concern for the welfare of future generations (what Erikson called generativity). One also can be vitally involved in everyday activities or pastimes that may or may not be explicitly generative but that nonetheless allow individuals to give attention to the present and to "live as fully as possible" (Bellah et al. 1991: 275).

It is important to know whether there is a link between religiosity, spirituality, and vital involvement in older adulthood for a variety of reasons. On the most general level, in view of the graying of American society there is increased interest in identifying the factors that are conducive to enhancing the participation and trust of older age persons in social relations and in the world that they will pass on to future generations. More specifically, the growing number of healthy older adults who are outside the work force constitute a potentially productive national resource in terms of caring for the welfare of individuals and of society as a whole. It thus becomes of increased practical importance to know whether religiosity or spirituality enhances older age individuals' engagement in social and community activities. A third reason for investigating the links between religiosity, spirituality, and vital involvement has to do with the ongoing cultural debate about the potentially narcissistic turn in American society. Many authors have argued that, especially since the 1960s, a narcissistic individualism has attenuated Americans' communal obligations and their commitment to religious

**Table 14.1. The Relations Between Religiousness, Spirituality and Vital Involvement in Late Adulthood**

Variables	Religiousness	Spirituality
<i>Generativity</i>		
Interpersonal Engagement	+	○
Broad Societal Perspective	○	+
<i>Life Tasks</i>		
Social/Communal	+	○
Creative/Cognitive	○	+
<i>Narcissism</i>	○	○

Note. This table summarizes findings presented in Wink and Dillon in press. + refers to statistically significant standardized beta coefficients in regression analyses controlling for gender, social class, and the overlap between religiousness and spirituality. Generativity was measured using the California-Q-Set Generativity scale (Peterson and Klohnen 1995); involvement in everyday activities was assessed using Harlow and Cantor's (1996) measure; and narcissism was measured using the CPI Narcissism scale (Wink and Gough 1990).

and civic traditions (e.g., Bellah et al. 1985, 1991). In this view, a socially responsible individualism is being displaced by an expressive and therapeutic individualism (Rieff 1966) that sees communal involvement not as a social good in its own right but only worthwhile insofar as it fulfills the transitory needs of the self.

Bellah and coauthors' (1985) critique of American individualism highlighted a self-centered spirituality that was autonomous of the social commitments that are fostered by traditional forms of religious involvement. The social trust that for so many generations has been bolstered by the strong association between church participation, interpersonal networks, and social and community involvement (e.g., Putnam 2000; Rossi 2001; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995), is now seen as being undermined by an individualized spirituality. The concern, therefore, is that it is becoming increasingly difficult for Americans to give attention to cultivating the interests and activities that give purpose to life and that in the process serve both the individual and the common good (e.g., Bellah et al. 1985, 1991; Putnam 2000; Wuthnow 1998).

For the IHD sample, we found that both religiousness and spirituality were related to scores on an observer-based measure of generativity in older adulthood (Dillon and Wink in press; Wink and Dillon in press). In other words, both highly religious and highly spiritual individuals were likely to show a deep and genuine concern for the welfare of future generations. We also found that both religiousness and spirituality correlated positively with involvement in a variety of everyday activities and pastimes such as socializing with family and friends or doing arts, crafts, or wood work.

Although generative and purposeful everyday activities were common to both religious and spiritual individuals, the nature of their emphases differed. As summarized in Table 14.1, religious individuals, for example, were more likely than spiritual individuals to express their generativity in a communal way by caring for family members or friends and, in general, through interpersonal relations. They tended to be described

by observers as giving, sympathetic, protective of others, and warm. Similarly, the everyday routines characteristic of highly religious individuals showed a stronger involvement in spending time on social activities (e.g., visiting or entertaining family members and friends) and in community service done with a group (Wink and Dillon in press; Dillon and Wink in press).

In contrast, the generativity of spiritual individuals was more likely to be expressed through involvement in creative projects and in social activities that would make an impact beyond the domain of family and friends and that might leave a legacy that would "outlive the self" (Kotre 1984). The generative concerns associated with spirituality tended to show a broad societal perspective and incisiveness into the human condition rather than an emphasis on interpersonal relations (Dillon and Wink in press). In terms of everyday pastimes, highly spiritual individuals were more likely to work on creative and knowledge- or skills-building projects than to socialize with friends or family. The different, more self-expanding focus of individuals who were spiritual was not, however, excessively narcissistic. In fact, we found no relation between spirituality and a well-validated measure of narcissism (Wink and Dillon in press). Importantly, then, when spirituality is linked to systematic practices (as our measure is) it does not appear to have the negative features that cultural analysts (e.g., Bellah et al. 1985) are concerned about.

Longitudinal analyses showed that the connection in late adulthood between religiosity and vital involvement, including participation in family, social, and community activities, could be predicted from measures of religiosity scored in early adulthood and onward. In contrast, the significant relation between spirituality and involvement in everyday creative and other productive endeavors found in late adulthood could be predicted only from late middle adulthood (age fifties) onward. All of the longitudinal relations between religiosity, spirituality, and the various measures of generativity and everyday involvement continued to be significant after controlling for the gender and social status of the IHD participants (Wink and Dillon in press).

The longitudinal evidence in our study in favor of the long-term impact of early religiosity on social and communal involvement later in adulthood fits with the findings of studies on social responsibility that employ retrospective measures of early religiosity (e.g., Rossi 2001). The fact that spirituality was a significant predictor of generativity and of involvement in everyday activities only from late middle adulthood onward is because, as already indicated, spirituality is primarily a post-midlife phenomenon in the IHD sample. Taken as a whole, the IHD data show that for older age individuals – the parents of the baby boomers – both religiosity and spirituality enhance successful aging by providing mechanisms for maintaining vital involvement in life. These findings may thus suggest that the aging of the more spiritually than religiously attuned baby boom generation does not necessarily augur a decline in the salience of Americans' communal and societal commitments.

## **RELIGION AS A BUFFER AGAINST ADVERSITY IN LATE ADULTHOOD**

We now turn to consider the effect of religiosity on life satisfaction and its ability to buffer individuals in times of adversity. Although there is a large body of research documenting the positive impact of religiosity on mental health or life satisfaction (e.g., Ellison and Levin 1998; McCullough et al. 2000), there is ambiguity as to whether

this effect is evident among older adults in general or whether it is restricted to samples who have experienced illness or other personal crises. In other words, there is uncertainty in the literature whether religion buffers life satisfaction both when things go well and when things go poorly in life or whether it is only in the latter circumstances.

In exploring this question in our relatively healthy sample of older adults we found that religiousness did not have a direct effect (either positive or negative) on life satisfaction in late adulthood (Wink and Dillon 2001). This finding may have emerged because most of the participants were highly satisfied with their lives and were in relatively good physical health, thus indicating perhaps a ceiling effect in statistical analyses exploring the direct relation between religiousness and life satisfaction.

There was support, however, for the hypothesis that religiousness exercises a buffering effect on life satisfaction in times of adversity. The IHD data showed that among individuals who were in poor physical health, those who were religious tended to be happier and more optimistic about the present and the future than those who were not religious. Moreover, the buffering effect of religiousness on life satisfaction in late adulthood could be predicted from religiousness in late middle adulthood (age fifties) even after controlling for physical health in midlife. By contrast, among individuals who were in good physical health – the majority of the IHD sample – whether an individual was or was not religious did not make any difference to levels of life satisfaction. In fact, the two groups of healthy individuals (religious and nonreligious) had the same level of satisfaction as the group of individuals who were in poor health and who were religious. In preliminary analyses, spirituality had no direct effect on life satisfaction in late adulthood and nor did it have the kind of buffering effect for individuals in poor physical health that was observed for religiousness. Spirituality did, however, buffer the IHD participants, especially women, against a loss of personal mastery and control in response to physical illness. Therefore, while spirituality does not necessarily dampen negative feelings, it may help to preserve a sense of competence and meaning in times of personal adversity.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on religiousness and spirituality in the second half of the adult life cycle and their relations to various aspects of social functioning in older adulthood. The IHD study's findings are based on research with a cohort of Americans born in California in the 1920s and thus are limited in their generalizability. It would be interesting for future studies to investigate whether broadly similar patterns of results would emerge in more ethnically, geographically, and religiously diverse samples and for different age cohorts. It is also important to investigate how other conceptualizations of religiousness and spirituality relate to everyday social functioning.

Nonetheless, the IHD study's longitudinal interview data, available for the same individuals over such a long span of time in which life cycle and cultural changes intersect, offer an important resource for understanding the contextual relation between religion and aging. Our results underscore the basic sociological point that religion matters in people's lives. More specifically, the fact that both women and men increased in religiousness and spirituality from their fifties to their seventies highlights the relevance of religion in the lives of older age Americans. Gerontological and life course studies that give short shrift to the place of religion in late adulthood are thus likely to miss out on

understanding a substantial part of the lives of older persons. Whether it involves traditional forms of religious participation or newer spiritual practices, or a combination of both, religion is a salient dimension in many older individuals' routines.

Religion is not just meaningful to older age individuals in and of itself, but as indicated, it provides an important bridge to purposeful aging. Religiousness and spirituality are associated with generativity and with participation in the everyday activities that make late adulthood a season of vital involvement in life rather than an inconsequential, liminal stage wherein individuals relinquish purpose in life while awaiting its end. To adapt a well-worn phrase, summer's bloom passes but the winter of life is not necessarily harsh (cf. Weber 1919/1946: 128). The IHD participants lived through much of the twentieth century, experiencing firsthand its economic and technological transformations and its major historical events (e.g., the Great Depression, World War II, the Korean War, the Sixties, Vietnam, the collapse of the Berlin Wall). Yet, at century's end, and toward the end of their own life cycle, religion continued to be a meaningful part of many of the participants' lives. From a secularization perspective, this finding in itself testifies to the power of religion to maintain relevance and to endure through the life course and societal changes.