Multi-Religiosity: Expanding Research on Ties to Multiple Faiths in the 21st Century*

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Abstract

In the 21st century, it is not uncommon to encounter people with ties to more than one religion. Some examples of such multiple or dual religious ties (referred to as "multi-religiosity" for the purposes of this paper) include the practice of Buddhism among Christians and Jews, regular church attendance among those who say they are not religious, and the children of mixed religious couples who might be raised with some level of identification with the spiritual traditions of both parents. Yet, literature and data on the topic of multi-religiosity is scarce. Through an analysis of qualitative data gathered by the author in Brazil in 2007–2008 and data from a poll conducted by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life in the United States in 2009, this paper aims to draw attention to the prevalence of dual or multiple religious ties in 21st-century Western countries, and to encourage a reconsideration of traditional concepts and categories in scholarly approaches to studying religion.

Keywords: multi-religiosity, religious pluralism, dual religious belonging, religious super-diversity, sociology of religion

Introduction

In the twenty-first-century Western world, it is not uncommon for individuals to draw on beliefs and practices from multiple faiths, or even to identify with more than one faith. While this phenomenon has been part of Asian religious cultures for centuries, it is relatively new in the West (Cornille 2003). Some examples of multiple religious ties in the West include the practice of Buddhism among Christians and Jews, regular church attendance among those who say they are not religious, and the children of mixed religious couples who might be raised with at least some level of exposure to the spiritual traditions of both parents.

Among the many cultural changes likely contributing to the increasing number of individuals with ties to more than one faith are the prioritization of individual freedom and choice, greater tolerance toward marriages between people from different religious backgrounds, and increased contact with other religious traditions through globalizing forces such as the spread of technology and migration (Steele 2012). In such increasingly plural societies, intersectional identities proliferate, and boundaries between religions can begin to break down. Vertovec (2007) coined the term 'super-diversity' to refer to such unprecedented social complexity.

Yet, literature on any form of multiple or dual religious ties in the West is scarce. In recent years, scholars have taken important steps forward in a conversation about how best to conceptualize the complex and nuanced aspects of individuals' engagement with religion in the

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21st century (e.g., Demerath 2000, Hout and Fischer 2002; Ammerman 2003; Wuthnow 2007; Storm 2009; Voas 2009; Lim, MacGregor, and Putnam 2010; Soares 2011; Droz et al. 2016). However, this conversation has primarily, though not exclusively, focused on better understanding engagement with single faiths, or the murkiness of the "no religion" category.

Despite the many documented complexities influencing contemporary everyday religion, a major obstacle to studying multiple ties persists; most quantitative and qualitative research instruments only allow respondents to choose one religious affiliation. If the respondent says that s/he is "not religious," questionnaire filters often prevent religious participation from being measured at all.

The present study is motivated by an incidental finding from my research on the role of religion in the lives of adolescent mothers in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Seven of the 32 young women I interviewed described participation in, or identification with multiple religions, or multiple approaches to engaging with religion that simply did not fit into traditional categories. Although understanding such ties to multiple faiths was not the motivation for that particular study, the regularity with which I encountered this phenomenon in my interviews aroused my interest in the topic.

In this paper, I present my preliminary evidence from Brazil to build a case for expanding the consideration of ties to multiple faiths. I then supplement those findings by analyzing data from a poll conducted by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life in the United States in 2009. The aim of this paper is to draw attention to the phenomenon of multi-religiosity in order to encourage further research in this area.

Ties to Multiple Faiths in Scholarly Literature

Below, I begin by presenting a definition of multi-religiosity. Then, I explore theories of religious ties and newer approaches to measurement, including theories and findings about ambiguous religious ties. Finally, I present theories and findings pertaining to engagement with two or more religions.

Definition

For the purposes of this paper, I define "multi-religiosity" starting from the following broad definition of an individual with multiple faiths:

> An individual who consciously identifies with more than one faith, regardless of beliefs or practices, would be considered to have ties to multiple faiths. However, an individual also may be considered to have ties to multiple faiths if s/he draws on beliefs and/or practices from more than one faith, regardless of whether or not s/he consciously identifies with or declares ties to more than one faith. This definition includes individuals who practice, adhere to beliefs of, or identify with more than one established denomination or subgroup of the same larger religious tradition, but excludes institutionalized group practices or identities involving the syncretism of multiple faiths (Steele 2012, 841).

To this definition, I further specify that those who say they are not religious, but who regularly attend places of worship[1] and/or regularly engage in religious practices, would also be considered to have multiple religious identities. Moreover, adhering to beliefs of more than one religious tradition would only qualify an individual as multiply religious if that belief were not consistent across traditions.[2]

Religious Ties

First, I address the question of what it means to have a (single) religious tie. Wuthnow (2007) observes that the geographic mobility and general unsettledness of our contemporary society

[1] In this paper, "regular" religious attendance is defined as attending places of worship at least a few times per year.

[2] For example, the belief that there is only one God is central to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, among other faiths, but an individual who believes that would not qualify as multi-religious. On the other hand, an individual who identifies as Jewish but believes that Jesus was the messiah would be considered multi-religious.

gives opportunities to make spiritual choices that are unprecedented. Similarly, Cornille (2003) points out that traditional religions' geographical and spiritual monopolies have gradually dissolved, leaving the religious field wide open, and religious belonging increasingly a matter of choice and degree. Given such circumstances, Ammerman (2003) observes that if religious identity ever was a given, it certainly is no longer; within the everyday marketplace of modern identity narratives, people can choose how and whether to be religious. Just considering alone the fact that 56 percent of Americans are married to someone of another faith calls into question the likelihood of singular religious ties in such mixed-religious families (Sherkat 2004). Ammerman describes religious identity as a dynamic process best understood through the multiple narratives that shape social life, and contends that it is difficult to classify using a checklist of categorical questions. In fact, Ammerman (2003) finds situations where multiple identities intersect – as they are remade in new contexts (e.g., immigrants) or even where they clash with each other (e.g., gay evangelicals) – to be theoretically interesting because they are exemplars, rather than anomalies.

Goosen (2007) outlines a framework that offers one useful way to measure religious ties in more concrete terms. He examines religious involvement through three levels that he equates to the three faculties that comprise total human engagement: The intellect, linked to the cognitive level; feelings, operationalized at the affective level; and actions, represented at the conative level. When people are involved with a religion at all three levels, Goosen describes them as being totally engaged. For example, a Christian would be totally engaged if he believed certain teachings (cognitive), experienced certain feelings regarding Christianity (affective), and acted in certain ways, such as attending services with others, giving alms to the poor, caring for orphans, or demonstrating against injustices (conative). Yet, many adherents to any religion engage on only one level. For example, a person might follow some teachings (cognitive), but demonstrate no feelings for her religion (affective), and never attend any services or prayer meetings (conative).

Another classification schema for the relationship between individuals, religious institutions, and primary group ties can be found in Hammond's (1988) work. He describes two contrasting views of the church in contemporary society: The "collective-expressive" view, in which involvement is largely involuntary because it emerges out of overlapping primary group ties not easily avoided; and, the "individual-expressive" view, in which involvement is largely voluntary and independent of other social ties. In terms of religion and identity, Hammond contends that most people would fall into two categories. One group would be church-affiliated people that tend toward collective-expressive involvement in the church, and whose religious identity will tend to be of the involuntary, immutable type. The other group would be church-affiliated people who tend toward individual-expressive involvement in the church, and whose religious identity will tend to be of the transient, changeable type.

A number of recent empirical studies have also aimed to better define contemporary forms of engagement with religion, particularly in regards to the "no religion" category. Demerath (2000) examines what he calls "cultural religion" in Poland, Northern Ireland, and Sweden. He concludes that substantial proportions of all three populations reap a sense of personal identity and continuity with the past from religion without partaking in specific beliefs or rituals. On the other hand, using data from the 1998 General Social Survey (GSS), Hout and Fischer (2002) find that most Americans with no expressed religious preference hold conventional religious beliefs, despite their alienation from organized religion. They find that members of this group, whom the authors refer to as "unchurched believers," made up most of the increase in the "no religion" group (from 7% to 14%) in the 1990s in the U.S.

Bridging both of these ideas, through analyses of cross-national surveys of Europeans, Voas (2009) and Storm (2009) examine what they dub "fuzzy fidelity," a casual loyalty to tradition among individuals who are neither regular churchgoers nor self-consciously non-religious – those who believe without belonging or belong without believing. Both scholars find fuzzy fidelity to be widespread throughout Europe, with Storm pointing out that her findings highlight, "the methodological issues involved in using single-scale measures for multidimensional phenomena" (2009, 702). Finally, Lim, MacGregor, and Putnam (2010) study individuals with liminal religious identities, or "liminars" – those who fail to identify with the 'no religion' preference consistently in panel surveys. They find that, for liminars, religious identity is a situational, rather than a stable, trait that has the potential to vary from one context to the next, and that the assumptions of the stability of religion inherent in the theories of the scholars cited above is problematic.

Multiple Religious Ties

While the studies above have substantially enhanced our ability to conceptualize contemporary religious engagement in more nuanced ways, only a couple of scholars have explicitly addressed the issue of dual or multiple religious ties. Cornille (2002; 2003) observes that the idea of double or multiple religious belonging seems to have become an integral feature of the religious culture of our times. She points out that although this phenomenon has been part of Asian religious cultures for centuries, it is relatively new to the West, where a combination of political and religious forces have shaped religious identities around comparatively rigid and exclusive boundaries. On the other hand, Goosen (2007) points out that dual religious belonging has actually existed at least from the beginning of Christianity. He describes how the first disciples, after the death of Christ, used to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath and then come together to celebrate the Lord's supper on the first day of the week. Until they were thrown out of the synagogue, they saw themselves as Jews and Christians simultaneously.

Cornille (2003) describes multiple religious belonging in any combination of any number of religions, citing as examples the Jews for Jesus; Christians who have become deeply involved in Islamic (mostly Sufi) religious practices; Hindus who also consider themselves partly Christian or, more often, vice versa; and, by far the most common phenomenon in the West – Christians or Jews who also profess to be Buddhist.

Some of the examples Cornille raises might be better described as cases of religious syncretism, rather than multiple belonging. There is already a great deal of scholarship on the topic of religious syncretism, though this may be a gray area for the study of multiple religious ties. For example, Schutte (1974) wrote about dual religious belonging at a Dutch Reformed (*Gereformeerde*) Church in Meadowlands (Soweto), South Africa. He found that church members associated two sets of beliefs and practices with the private and public spheres of religion, respectively. In the private sphere, ancestor beliefs and worship were of great importance to individuals and families. However, Christianity was felt to be closely related to the public sphere, not only in terms of worship in the church, but also regarding the Christian image individuals and families wished to project to the outside world in urban life. Yet, he observed that these two systems of religious belief were not strictly compartmentalized and separated. A tendency existed among church members to fuse the belief in ancestors with the Christian notion of the Holy Spirit. Despite tension with white missionaries and ministers from other congregations regarding such practices, when Schutte concluded his study, this particular church appeared to be on the path towards integrating the popular practices of members into the normal order of worship. In this case, dual religious practice led to syncretism.

Since I am interested in the types of multiple religious ties that are not institutionalized, nor already on the path to being formalized, as sug-

gested by the definition above, I would draw the line between syncretism and multiple ties where practices have moved beyond the individual level, or a collective movement may be coalescing.

Other concepts relevant to the topic of multiple religious ties are spiritual "tinkering" and religious mobility. Wuthnow (2007) introduces the concept of spiritual tinkering. He contends that contemporary circumstances actually make it necessary for seekers to cobble together their faith from the options at hand, which may include choosing from among many potentially suitable congregations, combining teachings from different religions, and selecting innovative ways to express spiritual interests. Similarly, Soares (2011) and Droz et al. (2016) present the concept of religious mobility or "butinage." Churchgoers engaged with multiple faiths, who combine elements from each as part of a dynamic process of individual religiosity, are compared to bees gathering pollen from plants. Soares describes butinage as a form of commuting between denominations, or "a continuous to and fro, in which the practitioner combines various religious contents into a single religious practice" (2011, 228).

Wuthnow (2007) finds spiritual tinkering to be quite common among American young adults and expects it to remain so in the future. Among adults age 21 through 45, Wuthnow finds that 42 percent say they sometimes attend multiple places of worship, and 16 percent say they do this frequently. Likewise, in the Paranaguá-mirim district on the perimeter of the town of Joinville, Brazil, Soares (2011) finds that many of the residents move seamlessly among the district's over 70 places of worship, from which each cobbles together her own unique religion.

Wuthnow's (2007) research shows that a large minority of American young adults are engaged in spiritual tinkering in two specific ways. The first is "church shopping," which entails looking for a congregation to attend, presumably one in which a person will settle and become a regular member. The second, "church hopping," involves staying in the market, or, perhaps better, tinkering with several possible selections, rather than settling down with one. Some of the factors that increase the likelihood of church hopping include having lived at more addresses, being single, not having children, having parents with college degrees, as well as having been to college oneself. Overall, Wuthnow sees church hopping as partly a function of opportunity while being unsettled, and possibly also the kind of seeking mentality that comes with higher education.

In terms of determining when an individual is truly involved with more than one religion, the framework outlined by Goosen, discussed above, could be particularly useful. This framework emerged in the context of his study of 33 adults from the greater Sydney, Australia area who practiced dual religious belonging. He found that they all had some beliefs (cognitive level) or religious practices (affective and conative) from a second faith, though none of them had publicly declared themselves to have "dual religious belonging"; most described themselves with a mono-religious title, except for five interviewees who used a double religious title to label their religion. Thus, he concluded that dual religious belonging tends to be adherence to one main religion while having a second religion on which the individual draws, or with which the individual engages to varying degrees, on one or more of the three levels. To establish the existence of dual religious belonging, Goosen suggests determining if an individual shows any engagement with a second religion on the cognitive, affective, or conative levels. If a given person meets one or more of the above criteria (levels of functioning) regarding a second religion, she could be said to have dual religious belonging. Three out of three would indicate the top end of the scale (a maximalist stance), while only one out of three would be the minimum requirement in order to say they "belong" (minimalist).

To summarize, religious ties are increasingly mutable in Western cultures. Scholars of religion from a range of disciplines have presented theories and findings that call into question the rele-

vance for our era of traditional modes of classifying religious engagement. Yet, precisely because existing forms of measurement are so limiting, empirical evidence on multiple religious ties is scarce. Below, I present preliminary evidence from both qualitative and quantitative studies that further demonstrates the need to reconsider existing schemes of classification. I use qualitative evidence to explore narrative accounts that do not fit into traditional categories, and quantitative analysis to explore how some of the characteristics suggested above – such as age, university education, having a spouse of a different faith, and frequency of religious attendance – are related to having ties to more than one religion.

Study of Religion in the Lives of Adolescent Mothers in Rio de Janeiro

A Methodological Discussion

I traveled to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil three times over the course of two years (2007-2008) to collect qualitative data on the role of religion in the lives of adolescent mothers in the favelas (Steele 2011). The goal of the study was to understand how young, unmarried mothers and mothers-to-be in the favelas of Rio had experienced religious morality as applied to themselves and other adolescents in their communities, as well as how religious leaders were grappling with the moral issue of unmarried adolescent maternity in their midst.

I completed 32 semi-structured in-depth interviews with adolescent mothers (including six teenage mothers-to-be and 11 women who were age 20 or older at the time of our interview but had first become pregnant at age 19 or younger) who were recruited through three non-governmental organizations that worked with teenage mothers.[3]

Respondents were asked a range of questions covering their childhoods, relationships with family, life in their communities, the father(s) of their children, pregnancy, motherhood, and religious ties of themselves and members of their immediate families. Although evidence of ties to multiple faiths emerged in the narratives of seven of the women, I had not been explicitly seeking such information; this evidence arose in response to my traditional, but primarily open-ended, questions about their religious identities, attendance, and practices. My own failure to be prepared for such more complex descriptions of religious ties is the motivation for this paper.[4]

Preliminary Evidence of Ties to Multiple Faiths

I had not anticipated that a number of the women I interviewed for my research in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, about the role of religion in their lives would describe participation in, or identification with multiple religions, or multiple approaches to engaging with religion that simply did not fit into traditional categories.

Among the 32 young mothers I interviewed, seven could be classified as multi-religious. Among the remaining 25 young women, an additional eight had ties to multiple denominations of evangelical Pentecostalism. Below, I focus on the multi-religious women, presenting

[3] In addition to these 32 interviews, I also completed six interviews with women who were 20 or older when they first became pregnant, but who were participating in programs for adolescent mothers, and three with young women who did not have children, but were affiliated with the programs or the religious groups I observed. I completed 13 interviews with key informants – eight religious leaders (five Pentecostal pastors, one Episcopal priest, and two Catholic priests), four staff members of non-governmental organizations that worked with adolescent mothers, and a doctor who worked for the government at the Ministry of Health. In total, 54 interviews were completed. In addition, I conducted participant observation at 10 places of worship (four traditional Pentecostal churches, two Neo-Pentecostal churches, one Catholic church, one Catholic Charismatic Renewal youth prayer group, and two Umbanda [Afro-Brazilian] centers) located throughout the city (inside the favelas, just outside favelas, as well as in middle-class neighborhoods), and at the three non-governmental organizations mentioned above. For the purposes of this paper, I focus on the 32 interviews conducted with adolescent mothers.

[4] For more details about this methodology, please see Steele (2011).

illustrations of some of the ways in which they were engaging with more than one religion, or expressing their religiosity in multiple, even conflicting, ways. Since all lived in shantytowns or on the streets, they can all be said to be of lower socio-economic status. The religiosity scores represent their answers to the question: "On a scale of one to five, with one being not at all religious and five being extremely religious, about how religious would you say that you are?" I evaluate their multi-religiosity by considering their self-identification and attendance at places of worship; where relevant, I also consider religiosity scores, and family and cultural ties.

Flávia,[5] age 16, religiosity score=4:
Flávia lives with her family, who are Catholic. Her father is from a Spiritist family, and she attended a Spiritist center as a child, but does not anymore. She considers herself Catholic, and sometimes attends a Catholic church in her neighborhood, though she used to go more frequently – twice per week. She also attends a local Evangelical church.

While Flávia's high religiosity score is consistent with her regular attendance at places of worship, her attendance at an Evangelical church does not match her self-identification as Catholic. In the case of her Catholicism, this may fit with the definition of fuzzy fidelity, but her additional involvement with an Evangelical church qualifies her as multi-religious.

Idolina, 18, religiosity score=did not know:
Idolina considers herself "a little bit" religious. She says, "I'm Catholic, but sometimes I go to the Baptist church … I'm always looking for God." Her family, with whom she lives, is Catholic, and they go to the church some Sundays. She was much more active in the Catholic Church, including participating in Bible study, when she lived with her grandmother in northeastern Brazil. About a year prior to our interview, she had been attending a Baptist church regularly for several months, and still stops by from time to time.

Idolina may be a church shopper or practitioner of religious butinage, and seems to exhibit elements of both collective-expressive and individual-expressive influences. Her identification as Catholic may be primarily a cultural one, which is not consistent with her attendance at a Baptist church. Thus, she would also be classified as multi-religious.

Jovana, 24, religiosity score=1:
Jovana considers herself Catholic, but says that she is not religious. Her family practiced Spiritism when she was a child. In the past, she had spent about a year attending various Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches (she mentioned by name the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God [IURD], Deus é Amor, Assembly of God, and Amor é Vida) around twice per week. She still attends these churches on occasion, but only for *bailes* (dances).

Jovana may have one of the most complex religious identities of any of my respondents. Her religiosity score of 1 ("not at all religious") could possibly be consistent with a family or cultural tie to Catholicism (when I first asked her if she was religious, she very clearly responded, "yes, I'm Catholic"), but her family is actually Spiritist. Moreover, her attendance in the previous year was exclusively at Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal places of worship – representing at least four different denominations of Evangelicalism. She is clearly a multi-religious individual-expressionist, but her religiosity otherwise defies existing systems of classification.

Claudia, 19, religiosity score=2:
Claudia does not consider herself religious. Her family, with whom she lives, is Catholic. She sometimes goes to both Catholic and Pentecostal (Deus é Amor) churches.

Although Claudia does not consider herself religious, she was attending churches from two different faiths, and held at least some religious beliefs ("there's only one God"). Thus, "belonging without believing" is not sufficiently nuanced to describe her engagement with religion. She is engaging on Goosen's cognitive and conative levels, but not as clearly on the affective level. Overall, she demonstrates at least some concurrent ties to Catholicism, Pentecostalism, and nonreligion.

[5] To protect the privacy of my respondents, I use pseudonyms throughout this paper.

Isadora, 24, religiosity score=did not know:
Isadora does not consider herself religious. She attended a Catholic church with her grandmother as a child. She says, "I go to church, to the [Spiritist] Center … everywhere. I believe in everything. I think that this business of *crente*, Christian, Catholic … for me it's all one God so I go everywhere – a little of everything. I'm curious and I go to these places to find out how they are."

Isadora seems to be a fairly clear case of a multi-religious church hopper or practitioner of religious butinage, in the individual-expressive vein. She believes and attends, but does not properly belong to any particular institution. She is engaging with at least three different faiths while identifying as not religious.

Plácida, 17, religiosity score=5:
In the past, Plácida had attended a youth group for a year at a large Neo-Pentecostal church (Sara Nossa Terra, notable for being one of the few in Rio that was attracting attendees from a wide range of class backgrounds). When asked if she was religious, Plácida said, "No. I go to church but I'm not a *crente*. I go with my mother and with my aunt. They invite me to go and I go" (the church to which she is referring is Evangelical). However, when I asked her how religious she was, she selected a religiosity score of five – "extremely religious." In addition, she was baptizing her 2-year-old son in a Catholic Church to honor the wishes of her child's father.

Plácida would also be classified as multi-religious; she has ties to at least two faiths, and nonreligion. She also appears to have a clear collective-expressive identity, whether she is doing what her mother and aunt want, or what her child's father wants. Perhaps when she says that she is not a *crente*, her own individual view is given voice, while her claim to be a "5," or extremely religious, on the religiosity scale, may be a product of how she thinks those in her primary social group would like her to be.

These religious narratives, all of which represent forms of multi-religiosity, point to a range of elements influencing how these young women understand and practice their religiosity – from alternative forms of spiritual seeking, to opportunities to socialize with or without family members, to honoring societal traditions, to fuzzy fidelity, and all of the above. Some aspects of the religiosities described above fit well into categories outlined by Wuthnow (2007), Hammond (1988), Voas (2009), Storm (2009), and Soares (2011), and some respondents may qualify as having the liminal ties described by Lim, MacGregor, and Putnam (2010), although I cannot determine that definitively because I do not have time-varying data. Yet, many of the cases described above are impossible to classify using existing approaches to studying religiosity.

While the limitations of much of the data we have on religion prevent us from knowing just how widespread these complex multiple religious ties are, and the evidence presented above is essentially anecdotal since it was not part of a study systematically gathering data on multiple religious ties, the fact that seven out of 32 young women spontaneously provided such information is compelling in and of itself. At the least, their narratives show that ties to multiple faiths are far from unusual in the context of Rio de Janeiro's favelas.

A quantitative excursus: The Pew Data

To examine the phenomenon of multiple religious ties more systematically, I sought existing quantitative data related to it in any way. The best match was a study conducted in August 2009 by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life in which telephone interviews were completed with a nationally representative sample of 2,003 adults living in the continental United States (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2009a). Because, to the best of my knowledge, this is the only existing quantitative data set to systematically measure multiple religious ties in a Western country, I analyze it despite the low response rate (15.3 percent) typical of Pew polls. In the methodological appendix to the poll, Pew states, "Statistical results are weighted to correct known demographic discrepancies. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is ± 2.7 percentage points" (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2009c). Given that a paucity of data on the topic of multi-

religiosity is a problem I aim to address herein, and that the Pew data represent an important step forward in this respect, for the purposes of this paper, I set aside my concerns about this response rate.

The other limitation is that ties to multiple faiths are not measured along every dimension. The data included a measure of attendance at multiple places of worship, but no measure of multiple forms of identification. To attempt to address other dimensions, I thus explore some reported beliefs and practices of those who say they are not religious. Again, because more comprehensive studies do not exist at this point in time, I contend that analyzing these data represent a valuable first step, despite the clear limitations.

All respondents were asked about the frequency of their attendance at any place of worship. They were asked the following: "Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services… more than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom, or never?" Only respondents who answered that they attended a few times a year or more were subsequently asked about the frequency of attending different places of worship. That question was asked in the following way: "Aside from when you're traveling and special events like weddings and funerals, do you always attend religious services at the same place, mostly attend at one place but occasionally go to different places, or do you go to different places on a regular basis?" From this item, I construct two outcome variables, a dummy for going to different places on a regular basis and a dummy for occasionally going to different places.

Given the multitude of Protestant denominations of Christianity in the U.S., I wanted to ensure that most respondents stating that they attend multiple places of worship were not referring exclusively to attendance at services of multiple Protestant denominations within their own faith. Indeed, this was not the case. Among the 553 individuals occasionally or regularly attending different places, only 83 (15%) were Protestants or Christians referring exclusively to attendance at different denominations within their own faith.[6]

To take a different approach to examining multiple religious ties, I also examine religious affiliation ("What is your present religion, if any?"), specifically among those who identify as nonreligious (atheist, agnostic, or "nothing in particular"). In addition, to explore the prevalence of one of the most common religious practices among the nonreligious, I analyze their responses to a question about prayer ("People practice their religion in different ways. Outside of attending religious services, do you pray several times a day, once a day, a few times a week, once a week, a few times a month, seldom, or never?").[7]

Pew only asked questions about attendance at multiple places of worship among those respondents who answered that they attended religious services at least a few times a year. Thus, my analytic sample is limited to this group of 1,478 respondents (72%).[8]

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[6] Only Protestants/Christians were asked about attendance at different denominations within their own faith (see Q282a); however, in the U.S., this is the only religious group whose members are likely to have easy access to multiple places of worship within their own faith. Otherwise, all respondents who said they attended multiple places of worship were asked about attendance at a Protestant church (if not Protestant/Christian [Q282b]), Catholic mass (if not Catholic [Q282c]), a Jewish synagogue (if not Jewish [Q282d]), a Muslim mosque (if not Muslim [Q282e]), and religious services different from the respondent's that were not mentioned by the interviewer (Q282f) (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2009b).

[7] Descriptive statistics for all variables used in the analyses are presented in Table 1. Control variables include religious affiliation (1=Protestant or what Pew calls "just Christian"; 0=all others), gender (1=male; 0=female), age (1=age 55+; 0=younger than 55), education (1=college completed; 0=college not completed), income (1=annual household income of $100,000+; 0=annual household income below $100,000), race/ethnicity (1=white; 0=African-American, Hispanic, other), and spouse's religion (1=married to a spouse of the same religion; 0=all others).

[8] Listwise deletion of observations with missing data on one or more measures used in the analyses yields an analytic sample of 1,155 (78%). Most of the miss-

Below, I present descriptive statistics of Americans with ties to more than one faith and those who stated that they were not religious (all 2,003 respondents are included in my analysis of the no religion category), as well as results of estimating a series of logistic regression models.

Attendance at multiple places of worship and practices of the nonreligious in the U.S.

The Pew data offer an opportunity to explore two aspects of ties to multiple faiths – attendance at multiple places of worship in the U.S. and attendance and practice among those who say they are not religious. Indeed, these data also show that multiple religious ties are far from unusual.

There is clear evidence of multiple or conflicting ties in the Pew data. Unlike many survey organizations, Pew asked about religious attendance even among those who stated that they were "nothing in particular" (NIP), "agnostic," or atheist," in response to the question, "What is your present religion, if any?"[9] This allows us to see further evidence of conflicting claims about ties to religion. More than a third (34.0%) of respondents who said they were "nothing in particular", and more than a quarter (27.8%) of those who said they were agnostic were attending religious services at least a few times per year. Likewise, more than half of NIPs (52.6%) and almost a third (31.5%) of agnostics reported praying at least a few times per month. In contrast, atheists were more consistent with only two (6.1%) attending at least a few times per year, more than 80 percent never attending, and none reporting any regular prayer.[10] The behavior of NIPs and agnostics is consistent with research about fuzzy fidelity in that a substantial proportion of these respondents appear to belong, at least to some extent, without believing.

Moreover, among respondents who attend religious services at least a few times per year, who comprise 73.8 percent of all respondents to the survey, only 50 percent always attend religious services at the same place; 36.9 percent mostly attend at one place but occasionally go to other places, and 12.2 percent go to different places on a regular basis. In Table 2, I present odds ratios for logistic regression models, where regularly (Model 1) and occasionally (Model 2) attending more than one place of worship (among respondents who attend religious services at least a few times per year) are the dependent variables. When all else is held equal, white respondents (compared to black, Hispanic, or other) have about 60 percent lower odds of attending multiple places of worship regularly, and 36 percent lower odds of occasionally attending. Being married to a spouse of the same religion follows the same pattern; compared to having a spouse of a different faith, the odds of attending multiple places of worship regularly are 47 percent lower, and the odds of attending occasionally are 24 percent lower among those who have a spouse of the same religion. In both models, we see that the odds of attending multiple places of worship are higher among those who attend religious services less frequently, although these effects are only statistically significant in Model 2. This is not surprising if attending less frequently is taken to represent a less clear commitment to one particular faith or place of worship.[11]

Thus, an individual would be most likely to regularly attend multiple places of worship if she was non-white (the odds are highest among blacks) and married to a spouse of a different

ing data can be attributed to nonresponse on the income item. Logistic regression analyses suggest that those missing are older (odds ratio=1.7), but otherwise do not differ much from the analytic sample in terms of other measures used in the analyses. Sample weights provided by Pew are applied throughout the analyses.

[9] In total, of the 2,003 respondents to the survey, 215 (10.7%) identified as "nothing in particular," 33 (1.7%) identified as atheist, and 54 (2.7%) identified as agnostic. Because of the small number of responses in the atheist and agnostic categories, those results should be interpreted with caution.

[10] Three atheists said that they "seldom" prayed, and 30 said they never prayed.

[11] The effects of being male, older, college-educated, or Protestant/Christian, or having higher income are not statistically significant in either model.

faith. An individual would be most likely to occasionally attend multiple places of worship if he was non-white and attending religious services only a few times per year.

Summary and a call for future research

The development of concepts such as fuzzy fidelity (Storm 2009; Voas 2009), cultural religion (Demerath 2000), unchurched believers (Hout and Fischer 2002), and liminality (Lim, MacGregor, and Putnam 2010) represent important advances in attempting to understand the nuances of contemporary religiosity, particularly among individuals who believe without belonging or belong without believing. However, what appears to be an increasingly widespread phenomenon of individuals having ties to multiple faiths – through the effects of globalization, migration, intermarriage, and greater individual freedom and mobility in super-diverse societies – is left at least partially unaddressed by these theories.

In this paper, I have aimed to encourage future research in the area of multi-religiosity through presenting preliminary evidence from two empirical studies. I presented a number of illustrations of ties to multiple faiths among young women in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which were an unanticipated product of my qualitative interview study there on the role of religion in the lives of teen mothers. This study was included because the data unexpectedly yielded some evidence of multi-religiosity. In contrast, an August 2009 study by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life was designed to deliberately gather some data about ties to multiple faiths in the U.S.

Specifically, the Pew study measured attendance at multiple places of worship among respondents attending any religious services a few times per year or more, and also measured attendance and practices among the nonreligious. The results of my analysis of the Pew data indicate that almost half of Americans who attend religious services at least a few times a year are occasionally or regularly attending multiple places of worship. Notably, less than 15 percent of those occasionally or regularly attending different places of worship were Protestants or "Christians" referring exclusively to attendance at multiple denominations within their own faith; thus, this measure does truly capture engagement with multiple faiths. Those most likely to regularly attend multiple places of worship are black or Hispanic Americans married to a spouse of a different faith. The likelihood of occasionally attending multiple places of worship is also higher among blacks and Hispanics than among whites, and increases as frequency of attendance at any services decreases. This inverse relationship may exist because attending less frequently overall may represent a less clear commitment to one particular faith or place of worship. These individuals may be, for example, the church hoppers or shoppers described by Wuthnow (2007), or those practicing what Soares (2011) and Droz et al. (2016) call religious butinage, although the data do not offer an opportunity to test those hypotheses. Gender, age, education, income, and affiliation with the majority religious group (Protestant/Christian) in the U.S. did not have statistically significant effects on either occasional or regular attendance at multiple places of worship.

My analysis of the Pew data also demonstrates the complexity of the nonreligion category. Substantial proportions of respondents whose religious affiliation was "nothing in particular" or agnostic reported attending religious services at least a few times per year, and/or praying at least a few times per month. Such individuals may fit the criteria for fuzzy fidelity (Storm 2009; Voas 2009) or being considered unchurched believers (Hout and Fischer 2002); I would also include them under the umbrella of multi-religiosity.

Although the Brazil study did not aim to gather data about ties to multiple faiths, the findings contribute to a growing body of anecdotal evidence of the prevalence of multi-religiosity. Regarding the implications of this preliminary evidence, the narratives of seven among the 32 young mothers interviewed showed multi-religiosity. Some

had more than one religious affiliation, others attended at places of worship from up to four different faiths, and, at the least, most were mixing seemingly conflicting beliefs, practices, and identities. All of these cases would be difficult or impossible to classify using traditional categories, or even using the newer approaches to understanding ambiguous religious identities. The narratives of these young women reveal a range of forms of engagement with multiple faiths, similar to the complex narratives found in Goosen's (2007) research in Sydney, Australia on dual religious belonging, and consistent with Cornille's (2002; 2003) description of double or multiple religious belonging as an integral feature of the religious culture of our times.

There are important limitations to the generalizability of the empirical findings presented in this paper. The data from Brazil are qualitative and were gathered via a convenience sample; moreover, because of the original motivation for the study, the sample was limited to adolescent mothers from favelas in Rio de Janeiro, a very specific segment of the population. Finally, the most important limitation of all is that understanding ties to multiple faiths was not part of the study's design. However, the fact that this information arose essentially spontaneously as often as it did suggests that multiple ties are likely much more prevalent in that context than my study would suggest. The generalizability of the findings from the Pew data is limited because of the survey's low response rate. In addition, while the Pew data show compelling evidence about Americans, the U.S. is often an exceptional case in the West; our knowledge of the prevalence of multiple ties in Western countries would be greatly enhanced by gathering similar data from additional countries.

Yet, together, the incidental evidence from Brazil and the more systematic evidence from the Pew survey pose a strong challenge to the validity of existing approaches to measuring and conceptualizing contemporary engagement with religion. Such traditional approaches to measurement were developed in eras when we lived much less mobile and globally interconnected lives – in which contact with anyone of another faith was rare for many people, and the opportunity to attend places of worship of other faiths was simply not available.

I concur with Ammerman's (2003) description of religious identity as a dynamic process that is difficult to classify using a checklist of categorical questions. However, I contend that since categorical questions about religion will continue to be widely employed, the measures could, at the least, be substantially improved. Researchers conducting qualitative studies could be prepared (as I was not) for more nontraditional descriptions of religious engagement, and ask more follow-up questions to capture ties to multiple faiths. However, at this early stage, the critical contribution of qualitative research may come from simply encouraging open, uninterrupted narratives from respondents. In the area of quantitative research, religious identification questions on surveys could allow multiple selections, following the model of the recent revisions of measures of race and ethnicity (for example, see Jones and Bullock 2012). Another way quantitative instruments could be improved would be by using filters sparingly so that those who claim no religious identification or attendance would still be asked any follow up questions about religiosity. The Pew study represents some important improvements in this direction. More studies could follow their model of measuring attendance at multiple places of worship, a practice that appears to be quite widespread in the U.S.

While the limitations of much of the data we have on religion prevent us from knowing just how widespread are the complex multiple religious ties revealed by my data from Brazil and my analysis of the Pew data, the evidence presented in this paper and a growing body of scholarly literature related to this topic suggest that, at the least, multiple ties are far from unusual.

The apparent prevalence of ties to multiple faiths revealed by my research suggests a range of questions for future research. First, I call on scholars of religion to explore how measures of

religious affiliation, attendance, and practice can be improved to better capture the actual ways that individuals engage with religion in contemporary super-diverse societies. Relatedly, future inquiries might explore whether I am correct in defining as multi-religious those who say they are not religious but attend religious services or engage in behaviors like prayer. In the context of better understanding super-diverse societies, studies of ties to multiple faiths would be enhanced by analyses of the country- or community-level factors that contribute to the prevalence of this phenomenon. At the individual level, qualitative researchers could explore how multi-religious people reconcile their attendance at multiple places of worship when one of the religions (for example, Protestantism) inherently demands exclusivity. These are just a few of the many potential research questions pertaining to ties to multiple faiths.

Tables

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Variables Used in Pew Analyses

Variable	Unweighted %	Weighted %
Frequency of attendance at religious services[a]:		
More than once a week	21.8%	22.0%
Once a week	33.2%	29.5%
Once or twice a month	22.0%	23.1%
A few times a year	23.0%	25.5%
Frequency of attendance at multiple places of worship:		
Regularly attends different places of worship	11.3%	12.5%
Occasionally attends different places of worship	36.6%	36.1%
Always attends at the same place	52.1%	51.5%
Male (female)[b]	42.6%	47.6%
Age 55+ (younger than 55)	44.5%	30.9%
Household income $100,000+/year (less than $100,000)	21.0%	18.3%
College completed+ (not completed)	40.3%	29.8%
White (black, Hispanic, other)	76.2%	68.3%
Religious ID:		
Protestant/Christian (other)	61.9%	59.9%
Nothing in particular (other)	4.6%	5.2%
Atheist (other)	0.2%	0.4%
Agnostic (other)	1.0%	1.4%
Married to spouse of same religion (spouse of different religion, not married)	48.6%	48.2%

Note: N = 1,155
[a] Excludes respondents attending less than a few times a year.
[b] Reference categories are in parentheses.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Models of Attending More Than One Place of Worship Using Pew Data

	(1) Regularly Odds ratios	(2) Occasionally Odds ratios
Male	1.35	0.95
	(0.33)	(0.15)
Age 55+	1.05	0.86
	(0.25)	(0.13)
College completed	0.90	1.01
	(0.23)	(0.16)
High income	1.14	1.02
	(0.36)	(0.19)
Protestant/Christian	0.68	1.08
	(0.17)	(0.17)
White	0.39***	0.64*
	(0.10)	(0.11)
Spouse same religion	0.53*	0.76^
	(0.14)	(0.12)
Attends 1 time/week	0.51^	0.98
	(0.20)	(0.20)
Attends 1-2 times/month	1.14	1.76*
	(0.44)	(0.40)
Attends a few times per year	1.53	2.25***
	(0.57)	(0.52)
Constant	0.34*	1.06
	(0.15)	(0.27)
Observations	1,155	1,155
Log pseudolikelihood	-1,710.28	-3,316.10
Wald c2(10)	43.73	37.54

Robust standard errors in parentheses
**** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, ^ p<0.1*

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