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Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity: Socialising Agents and Factors Emerging from Qualitative and Quantitative Data of a Nation-Wide Project in the UK

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Summary

This article is based on data arising from focus groups discussions with young people in British schools to draw out socialising influences and factors which shape their approaches to religious diversity. It explores questions such as: is religious socialisation taking place in the home, with active participation in religious communities or is religious socialisation weakening from generation to generation? How does religious socialisation (or its lack) differ between and within religions and between particular localities? Which factors facilitate or impede socialising processes? These questions are addressed in the light of discussions with young people and survey results. The data arise from a project (2009–2012) in the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU) at the University of Warwick, funded by the ESRC/AHRC Religion and Society Programme, which explored the attitudes of 13–16 year-old pupils across the UK towards religious diversity, using a mixed methods approach.

Keywords: young people, religious diversity, socialisation, family, UK

Introduction

This article draws on data produced in focus groups discussions with young people in British schools on religious diversity to explore the factors which are involved in socialising processes, focusing on the role which families—nuclear and extended—play in shaping young people's approaches to religion and religious diversity. The data were analysed to find out whether religious socialisation is taking place in the home, with active participation in religious communities, or whether religious socialisation is weakening from generation to generation. Another question relates to the differences between religions and the role location plays regarding religious socialisation (or its lack). Data from the group discussions are set in dialogue with questionnaire data. Both sets of data arise from a three-year project (2009–2012) in the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU) at the University of Warwick, which explored the attitudes of 13–16 year-old pupils across the United Kingdom towards religious diversity. The project was funded by the ESRC/AHRC Religion and Society Programme.

This article first provides a brief description of the project, then gives an overview of the literature in which the project is embedded and an outline of the data production, before introducing the socialising elements and discussing these in some detail. Young people's own belief and practice is followed with sections on the role of the family, friends, school, and media, with the conclusion drawing the various strands together at the end.

The Project

The three-year project 'Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity' (2009–2012) was based in the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit (WRERU) at

the University of Warwick, UK, and funded by the 'Religion and Society Programme'—a joint research programme of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), two major public funding bodies in the UK. The project was a large research grant under the Programme's 'youth call'. The project team consisted of WRERU staff, representing a range of expertise and academic disciplines, and a PhD candidate.

The paucity of research on young people's attitudes towards religious diversity and the factors which influence and shape their attitudes provided the impetus for the project. The overall aim was to take account of young people's (13–16-year-olds) socio-economic, cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds in order to explore their views and the influence of contextual factors, such as school, family, media, and local neighbourhood. In order to achieve this, the project took a mixed methods approach, combining ethnographic (qualitative) with quantitative (survey questionnaire) research methods. The ethnographic phase was of an exploratory nature and thus took place at the beginning of the project. Its findings then informed the design of the survey questionnaire.[i]

The Project in the Context of Wider Literature

The topic of religious diversity (e.g. Stringer 2013, Salzbrunn 2014) links with the debate about multiculturalism and interculturalism (e.g. Baumann 1999, Parekh 2000, Hasan 2010, Cantle 2012, Meer and Modood 2012) and attendant areas, such as religious pluralism (e.g. Kühle 2012a), 'new' multiculturalism (e.g. Vertovec 2001, Toğuşlu *et al.* 2014), and super-diversity (e.g. Vertovec 2007, 2014), and with debates about (de)secularisation, (im)migration, transnationalism as well as race, ethnicity, and culture and their link with religion. The way religious diversity was

conceptualised for the project is set out elsewhere (Arweck 2013). The question of attitudes towards other people touches on contact theory or contact hypothesis (e.g. Allport 1954) and the social construction of religion (Beckford 2003) and the 'other'.

Young people's religious identity relates to theories of identity and identity formation as well as religious socialisation (transmission) and religious nurture, including the question of socialising agents and factors (e.g. Sherkat 2003, Becci 2012, Bengtson *et al.* 2013). Although socialising processes are complex, existing research suggests a strong link between the religious beliefs of parents, especially mothers, and their children in accordance with parental socialisation (e.g. Axinn and Thornton 1993, Barber 2001), parental preference for passing on their own faith, and contextual influences such as the neighbourhood where parents choose to live. However, the notion of family and family structures have undergone changes in diverse societies, which in turn have an impact on the role of religion in families (e.g. Houseknecht and Pankhurst 1999, Edgell 2006).

The implications of multiculturalism and religious diversity for religious socialisation are another important area of research, including religious nurture of young people of and within ethnic minorities (e.g. Kühle 2012b). Relevant also are the notions of embodied socialisation (e.g. Orsi 2005, McGuire 2002), religion as a chain of memory (Hervieu-Léger 2000), and lived or everyday religion (e.g. McGuire 2008, Ammermann 2006). Socialisation further includes religious education—both in the strict and wider sense, whether in school or community contexts, of a formal or informal nature—and this broadens into educational and pedagogical agendas and curriculum requirements, such inter-religious and inter-cultural education, with the underlying aim of counteracting conflict and promoting tolerance (e.g. Jackson 2004), and post-9/11 concerns, e.g. issues around securitisation (e.g. Quartermaine 2014). As

a curriculum subject, Religious Education also touches on young people's moral and spiritual development and on issues around citizenship and human rights.

Social scientists, including educationalists, now also pay more attention to the absence of religion in people's lives, including young people's. This is a research field which has become of topical interest again after having lain fallow for some time (e.g. Arweck 2012). Studies of young people's non-religious stances (e.g. Bullivant 2008, Voas and McAndrew 2012, Arweck 2013, Wallis 2014) thus reflect increasing numbers of young people (as also documented by the 2011 UK Census results) lacking links with or being distant from religion for a number of reasons (not being socialised into one or having rejected a religious heritage), which points to the effect of secularizing trends and the decline of institutional religion.

The Qualitative Phase

The aim of the project's ethnographic phase was to investigate the key themes and issues young people identify with religious diversity and the variety of positions they adopt in response. In order to explore these, focus group discussions were conducted in 21[ii] secondary schools[iii] across the four nations of the UK (England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland) and London (because of its size and distinctive patterns of diversity, due to its immigration history). The choice of the schools was guided by the aim to include a wide range, regarding pupil composition, location, social context, and type of school, access permitting.

The focus group discussions were based on semi-structured schedules, with questions arranged in four clusters: faith background/identity, values, encounter with diversity, and attitudes to diversity. In order to allow for flexibility (e.g. time

constraints) and to ensure reasonably even data (two researchers shared the fieldwork), priority questions were identified beforehand.

The focus groups generally consisted of six pupils, usually mixed in terms of gender, ethnic, and social backgrounds and school classes. The research was designed to separate religious and non-religious groups—based on young people's own identification—but this did not apply to all groups. A teacher, with whom selection criteria had been discussed beforehand, selected pupils, usually asking for volunteers. The young people were generally willing, if not eager, to participate. Some proved impressively articulate. The focus groups generally took the place of a lesson (40–60 minutes). Each group was briefed about the project and the purpose of the discussion. Pupils' consent to participate and their permission to record the discussions were sought.[iv]

Once fieldwork data were gathered, the transcripts from each school were combined so that data and extracts from the discussions were organised in themes.[v] These followed the structure of the schedule, but also reported emerging themes. The collated data then fed into the design of the survey questionnaire. This article draws on young people's responses to questions about their faith backgrounds, religious identities, and their encounter with diversity, and to relevant questions in the questionnaire. As one of the project's objectives was to give voice to young people, as many direct quotes from the focus groups as space allows are included. Given the nature of focus group discussions, the findings derived from them are neither definitive nor representative.

The Quantitative Phase

The quantitative phase formed the second part of the project. Its aim was to obtain data from 2,000 pupils (aged 13–15 years) in each of the five regions using a questionnaire. The sample of 10,000 ensured reliable visibility of minorities. Completed questionnaires were provided by 11,725 pupils: 2,398 from England, 1,988 from Northern Ireland, 2,724 from Scotland, 2,319 from Wales, 2,296 from London. The analysis here is based on a sub-group of 4,494 pupils living in England and Wales, in order to match the qualitative data discussed here. Of these, 2,532 questionnaires were completed by pupils attending schools with a religious character ('religious schools') and 2,212 questionnaires were completed by pupils attending schools without a religious foundation ('secular schools').

The survey was designed for self-completion, using mainly multiple-choice questions and Likert scaling on five points (agree strongly, agree, not certain, disagree, disagree strongly). Six sets of multiple-choice items explore young people's worship attendance, their religious affiliation, parental affiliation and worship attendance (mother and father). Five sets of Likert scaling items explore how young people's attitudes towards religion are influenced by mother, father, friends, religious education and school, and the media. The analysis also shows how these data vary according to school type.

Socialising Agents and Factors Emerging from the Data
As mentioned, the questions in both phases of the project were designed to explore the influence of a range of contextual factors in young people's lives. The social contexts can be seen as a set of concentric circles, with the family in the middle, and the circles of friends, school, and faith community extending outwards. 'Family' is understood here in the wider sense, including parents, grandparents, extended family,

and family friends. 'Friends' includes peers and (non-)religious friends. The school context includes the study or religion(s) and religious education in the wider sense and the community dimension is about awareness of and links with faith communities. Both phases also explored the influence of the media, including television and the internet. For reasons of space, the influence of peers, school, and media will not be discussed in as much depth as that of the family.[vi] The nature of the influence was explored in terms of conversations and discussions young people had with family and friends or in the classroom and their engagement with faith communities and the media—thus how they perceived the influence of the various agents and factors on them.

The data reveal that these perceptions were also shaped by the local context, in particular the prominence (the public or private nature) of religion within different local communities. Where religion was visibly practised and public, religious young people were more confident about expressing their religion in school and non-or less religious or young people had more respect for their religious peers. Where public expressions of religion in the local community were not so much in evidence, instances of teasing or 'religious bullying' (Chan 2014) and discrimination against a practising minority could be found. Further, small close-knit religious communities tended to be seen as 'other' ('weird'), with stories and myths surrounding their practices.

Young People's Beliefs and Practice

The focus group discussions asked questions about the young people's own (non-)religious identity and faith backgrounds. There was a wide range in terms of young people's religious beliefs and practice, reflecting degrees of religious involvement or

lack of any connection with a religion as well as practical matters, such as practice

(e.g. regular prayer) being impeded by the school time-table. The following quotes

illustrate this range of belief and practice:[vii]

> I don't go to *shul* [synagogue] regularly. I do go, but not every single week. [...] (Y11 female)

> I do practise [...] on a daily basis; what I do is I wake up—as a Muslim I have to pray five times a day, so I'd wake up and then I'd pray and get ready, go to school; after I come back from school, I pray again and, then, when the sun sets, I have to do another prayer and then just before I go to bed, I also do another prayer. (Y10 male)

> I'm not really religious, like I don't pray or anything, but I believe in God. (Y11 female)

> Not exactly practising Islam, but I do as much as I can, but because we're in school … we have to pray five times a day, but because we're in school we can't do it at the right timing [...], but when we're at home and weekends I try my best to recite the Koran when I have time. (Y11 male)

> I don't practise, but sometimes I do go to a temple to pray [...] mostly on religious festivals and occasions or weddings. (Y10 female)

> I don't like read the Bible every day, but I do go to church, though. I go to church like almost every Sunday. (Y10 female)

> I'm a Christian and I'm a Protestant [...]. My parents aren't kind of strict Christians as well, they come from India and I believe in God … but don't really follow all the teachings, but I try to—sometimes. (Y11 female)

The survey explored religious practice according to frequency of attendance. The data

demonstrate that more than half the young people (53%) had contact with places of

religious worship, with 34% attending occasionally, 17% monthly, and 2% weekly;

47% said they never attended. However, clear differences emerge when the data are

considered according to school type. Pupils in religious schools were more likely to

attend on a regular basis than pupils in secular schools: weekly (3% vs. 1%), monthly

(35% vs. 7%), occasionally (39% vs. 29%). Pupils in secular schools were much more

likely never to attend (63% vs. 33%).

The Role of the Family

In the group discussions, the young people indicated that the family had a strong influence on whether they were themselves religious or not: where a family had a faith tradition, one was bound to follow it, almost as a matter of fact or unspoken convention, especially when parents felt strongly about religious nurture. This confirms findings from previous research which emphasises the central role family plays in religious socialisation and nurture (e.g. Sherkat 2003). The following quotes reflect young people's views on this matter:

> I think that sometimes it's got something to do with family. If you have people in your family who are Christians, you would probably be Christian. My family are all Christian, it's just my mum and my dad and me and my sister and my grandma on my mum's side. (Y8 gender not clear)

> […] I think it's basically based on to [sic] their parents and how religious they are and it influences the child […]. (Y10 male)

> Just been brought up that way [Jewish] so I'm used to it […]. (Y11 female)

> No one can force you to believe in God, it's just your own choice. If you're brought up, you're brought up with religion. (Y9 female)

> I think we're all the same [at home]. We all pray, but […] we're not like really, really dedicated, like read the Bible every day. (Y10 female)

> I'm a practising Muslim […] but […] I don't regularly pray. I do fast and I do abide by the food laws […]. For me, it's more the spiritual aspect of my faith that I'm kind of connected with […]. (Y9/Y10 female)

Regarding parents, gender is also of significance, both in terms of which parent feels strongly about nurturing children in the faith tradition or is generally expected to assume this role (often the mother, as the quote below demonstrate) and in terms of the child's gender. Existing research suggests that a practising parent tends to have more influence on the child(ren) who is (are) of the same

gender (Hoge *et al.* 1982). Thus a practising mother would have more influence on a daughter and a practising father on a son. This seems to be confirmed by the comments below.

> [We] Sort of [talk about religion at home], but not on a regular basis. My mum always preaches to me, but no one else really […]. [When Mum preaches, what happens is that] Sometimes, she's like reading the Koran, which is our holy book, and she goes "come over here, read this" and she makes me read it and makes me understand it in that way and sometimes she goes "don't do this and do this" and things. (Y10 female)

> […] my dad is very, very religious and prays three or four times a day. My […] younger brother has kind of followed in my dad's footsteps, but me, my mum and my sister don't believe that much. (Y10 female)

> I'm Muslim, my mum's stricter than my dad. I wouldn't say I'm as religious as them … but … I follow the teachings. (Y11 female)

The survey explored parental worship attendance according to frequency, as reported by the young people. The data demonstrate that the level of attendance for mothers (53%) is synonymous with that of the young people, with 33% attending sometimes, 17% monthly, and 3% weekly. A lower level of commitment to public religious worship is evident among fathers. While 47% of mothers never attend, the proportion rises to 66% among fathers. Also, fewer fathers are present at worship occasionally (22%), monthly (10%) or weekly (2%). This suggests a stronger connection and influence of mothers in terms of religious attendance.

When the data are considered according to school type, two further patterns emerge. Firstly, the parents of young people in religious schools (mother and father) attend more often than the parents of young people in secular schools. For example, mothers of pupils in religious schools are more likely to attend occasionally (29% vs. 23%), monthly (25% vs. 8%) and weekly (5% vs. 1%) and are much less likely never to attend (35% vs. 63%). Similarly, fathers of pupils in religious schools are more

likely to attend occasionally (25% vs. 19%), monthly (16% vs. 7%), and weekly (4% vs. 2%) and much less likely never to attend (44% vs. 64%).

Secondly, the gender difference in attendance patterns between mother and father are only present among the parents of young people in religious schools. For example, mothers of pupils in religious schools are more likely to attend worship regularly than fathers occasionally (29% vs. 25%), monthly (25% vs. 16%), and weekly (5% vs. 4%). Fathers of pupils in religious schools are much more likely never to attend than mothers (44% vs. 35%). Comparatively, the proportions of parents with children in secular schools, who attend worship, are more closely aligned: 23% of mothers and 20% of fathers attend occasionally, 8% of mothers and 7% of father attend monthly, 1% of mothers and 2 % of fathers attend weekly, and 63% of mothers and 64% of fathers never attend.

Regarding the young people's religious affiliation, the data demonstrate that 58% affiliate with the Christian tradition and 38% claim they have no religion; much smaller proportions affiliate with an alternative world faith (4%). Therefore only those who claim Christian affiliation or none are considered. When viewed according to school type, the data show that more Christian pupils attend religious schools than secular schools (77% vs. 37%). Conversely, more pupils claiming no affiliation attend secular schools than religious schools (59% vs. 19%).

The data relating the parents' religious affiliation highlight two key points. Firstly, more mothers affiliate with the Christian tradition (56% vs. 41%) and more fathers claim no religious affiliation (37% vs. 28%). Secondly, the proportion of mothers who claim Christian affiliation is closely aligned with that of the young people (56% and 58%). This suggests that mothers' connection and influence

regarding religious affiliation is stronger than fathers' (41% of whom claimed Christian affiliation).

The survey explored parental influence on young people's attitudes towards religion in two ways. One set of items asked whether their views on religion, broadly speaking, had been influenced by mother or father. These data demonstrate that mothers make a stronger contribution to shaping young people's views about religion than fathers: 41% of young people attributed influence to mother, with 33% attributing influence to father. When school type is considered, parental influence increases among pupils in religious schools, but mothers' contribution remains strongest: 49% of pupils in religious schools attribute influence to mother and 36% attribute influence to father. Among pupils attending secular schools, the level of influence is roughly equal: 31% agree that mother has influenced views about religion and 30% agree that this influence can also be attributed to father.

The second set of items asked young people whether their views about members of particular religions was influenced by mother or father. The data demonstrate that roughly equal proportions of influence are attributed to both parents in shaping views about Hindus (6% both), Jews (8% both), Muslims (9% mother, 10% father), Sikhs (5% both), Pagans (5% mother, 4% father), Protestants (12% mother, 11% father), and Humanists (7% mother, 6% father). However, the influence of mother in shaping views about Christians (36% vs. 26%) and Catholics (22% vs. 18%) is stronger than father's.

Returning to the qualitative data, the family provided the most natural context for religious practice, as this comment suggests:

> I think religion affects you mostly at home, like the things you do at home. Like if you pray or you don't pray, and it's what you do at home, but when you go outside, because you're interacting with people that are of other religions as well, you sort of like […] adapt […]. (Y10 male)

The home could also be the place where conversations about religion took place, as this quote suggests, but there was considerable variation across the focus groups in such conversations taking place at home (or with friends, see below).

> I talk about it [religion] more at home than at school because it doesn't really come up at school, but like at home my parents talk about it quite a lot. (Y10 female)

Some young people indicated that they saw themselves in a line of generations, thus indicating a continuous process of religious transmission or, to use Hervieu-Léger's notion, forming the next link in the chain, with their parents and grandparents being grounded in a faith tradition:

> I'm a Catholic. I go to Sunday school. I read the Bible every day when I come home. My grandparents were strong Catholics and so are my parents. (Y11 female)

> I'm Muslim and my parents are Pakistanis and my grandparents are from India and I'm quite strict and I follow all the teachings—well, the majority of them. (Y11 female)

> I'm also a Muslim, my parents are Muslim as well and my grandparents and also from India. I follow what my parents are, which [sic] are Muslims and they're not really full-on Muslims, but they do believe in the teachings and they follow them as much as they can because not everybody's perfect. [laughs] (Y11 female)

However, where parents or grandparents made no point of continuing the faith tradition into the next generation, the link with it lapsed for lack of support, the chain was broken (Hervieu-Léger 2000), as in the case of the young person whose grandmother stopped taking him to church on Sunday:

> I just used to go to church on a Sunday [until I was 5] and then I just never went any more.—Yeah [I stopped], because my Nan [grandmother] didn't go any more and so I just stopped going.—She just used to say 'do you want to go to Sunday School?' and I said 'yes'. [It was a] Baptist [church]. (Y10 male)

Similarly, where religious nurture was not centred in the home, it lapsed when the supporting context disappeared—primary school, for this young woman:

> I did [was brought up with religion], yeah, in my primary school because my primary school was quite religious, but by year 6 I was just like 'I don't believe in it', so I just stopped.—I dunno [what made me decide to stop], because I was never really brought up with it, just in school; I suppose I just didn't carry on after that school. (Y10 female)

The previous two quotes again point to the central role of the family in religious nurture, as in one case, the grandparent stopped facilitating attendance and, in the other case, the influence of the school was not strong enough for the young person to sustain the link with religion.

The formative aspect of the family could extend to the wider family circle, with parents' friends acting in *loco parentis*, which also illustrates the overlap between religion and culture, as this quote demonstrates:

> … if your parents have friends that are quite religious and they see you doing something that doesn't go with your religion, that's a big thing; if they're watching you do something and then they go and tell your parents and say 'your son or your daughter's acting like this', so the culture comes in as well. (Y11 female)

Some of the religious young people saw their faith embedded in and sustained by the wider faith community and the rites of passage associated with it:

> It's like you're part of a certain like community of different people that follow different beliefs and a different God as you would and like a different holy book and all that and different stories. (Y9 male)

> I go to church, so I take communion as well as of course we have to give a lot of our life towards God and Jesus, so I've taken up quite a lot of my time studying God and Jesus. It's the same sort of thing as [name of fellow pupil] said. (Y9 female)

> I have as well, I've been confirmed so I'm allowed to take communion now. (Y9 male)

The communal aspect involves a community identity, a relationship with a tradition, and the importance of family and leadership in the faith community. Young people in our study who identified as Hindu, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim spoke of an individual path that the communal tradition supported. The examples of religious nurture or its lack also point to the complexity of religious transmission—it takes various social layers or circles to make strong links in Hervieu-Léger's chain of religious memory to ensure generational continuity.

Where families had no link with religion or had lost the link, children grew up without any connection to religion, even if, as the third quote shows, there might be interest in religion for non-religious reasons, such as the architecture of places of worship.

> […] your religion is usually defined by your family (sometimes not), but because mostly in your family, they are of the same religion or non-religion—so you don't really discuss it that much, it's just there and everyone follows it […]. (Y10 male)

> [I don't have a religion] Because I don't pray or go to church or anything. (Y9 male)

> […] my family isn't religious, but my dad's quite interested in going to big cathedrals maybe or places of worship, just because they're beautiful and stuff, so I go to a lot of them and I don't feel uncomfortable in there. (Y8 female)

Some young people who had little experience of religious practice referred to generational changes in religious engagement, reporting that grandparents were often more likely to be involved than parents. In these cases, the chain of memory was, to paraphrase Hervieu-Léger (2000), broken, with religion not being passed from generation to generation. In some cases, there were efforts to mend the breaks in the chain, with parents trying periodically to re-establish the link, but not managing to maintain it. These young people thus had sporadic contact with religion.

However, young people also showed agency in terms of rejecting or embracing religious identities, depending on wider social or family circumstances or gender. For example, the young woman who saw herself connected to the spiritual aspects of her faith (Islam) wore the headscarf occasionally and did so for her own reasons rather than in observance of modest dress:

> I do sometimes wear a headscarf, but I think my reasons are different to a lot of other people. For me it's more convenient as opposed to dressing modestly, which doesn't sound all that great, but I'm just being honest. (Y9/Y10 female)

Other examples are young people who were introduced to a faith tradition, but did not remain in it, either consciously deciding to leave or drifting away, as the following quotes demonstrate:

> I was [brought up with religion]. I went to church [with my grandparents] until I was 4 and I stopped going by choice. (Y9 female)

> All of my family has been like Baptist. […] I went to get baptised and afterwards I just didn't really think about going to church or anything, so it's never really crossed my mind. (Y9 male)

Decisions to disengage with a religion could be triggered by particular circumstances, such as disruption in the fabric of the family or geographical distance:

> I used to be a Muslim and then I'm not any more, I just don't follow it. I don't know if I like don't believe in God or heaven and hell, but I just don't want to be a Muslim.—[I decided] When I got put into care I could see … [that] I was kind of forced throughout my childhood to go through the … to go to the Mosque and everything like that and I just thought 'well', I just turned my life around really and said 'I don't want to do this any more'.—I was 12. (Y10 male)

> I come from an Irish Protestant family, religious, and my grandparents are very religious and intended on *me* getting baptised early and going to Sunday school when I used to live over there.—[And what do you do now?]—I don't often go to church because I usually play rugby on a Sunday, but I still am quite religious, I do follow the teachings … the Ten Commandments and stuff. (Y11 male)

The comments of some young people suggest that religion in the family did not transmit to them, but they gave no indication of what caused this:

> Yeah, family members believe in it, but I think I've grown up to believe what I want, so … (Y11 female)

> My grandparents believe in it strongly, but I've never really taken to it. (Y11 female)—Yeah, same. (Y11 female)

Individual decisions to follow or abandon a faith tradition can also be seen in the light of freedom of choice and individual autonomy which young people often referred to when articulating views of their peers' (lack of) religion, saying that everyone had the right to decide for themselves. However, freedom and autonomy stand in tension with both family and community tradition. Thus the very fact that there is religion in the family does not mean that it will transfer to the children as a matter of course—transmission of religion is not 'automatic'. It involves both the active (deliberate) and passive nurture of parents and other family members, which is in turn linked to and supported by the wider faith community.

In some cases, parts of the family practised a religion and other parts did not. The following quote illustrates such a split in the family, but suggests at the same time that non-practising family members still subscribed to underlying religious values:

> I myself I think I am religious and my parents aren't really religious, but some of my brothers and sisters aren't and some *are* […] when I say they aren't, they are *very* religious, like they will stay away from things that you're not supposed to do and stuff, but they won't pray, *but* they still believe the same as we believe […] but I put it into practice and they don't. (Y10 female)

The Role of Friends, School, and Media

As indicated earlier, the family is but one of the circles of influence on young people's views of religion and religious diversity, even if it may in many cases be the defining influence. Another circle is represented by friends and peers. The questions in the focus group discussions asked about the influence of friends indirectly, exploring friendships and conversations. The qualitative data suggest that friends and peers do have an influence on individuals' attitudes, but this tends to depend on how young people relate to their own religion and on the quality of the relationship they have with others. For example, young people indicated that (non-)religion plays little if any part in forming friendships or in the way they relate to or treat others.

> I wouldn't base it on their religion […] I'd be friends with someone because of who they are and obviously we have something in common, that's why we're friends. (Y8 female)

> Yes, lots of them [non-religious people] are my friends and everything so … […] it doesn't make any difference whatsoever. (Y9 male)

> I know lots of people who don't have religious beliefs. […] I wouldn't put them down just because they didn't follow the same religion. (Y9 male)— Yeah, or they're not your religion. (Y9 male)

Whether they discussed religious matters with their friends varied. In some cases, religion generally did not arise in conversations, but it did in others. Various factors contributed to (not) discussing religion, such as the risk of being embarrassed, if people ridiculed or ignored one's religious stance; people wanting to know what they believed; how comfortable they felt with friends regarding religious matters; making it an exercise in comparison, exploring similarities and differences or explaining activities they cannot engage in; the view of one's own religion as the only truth.

> You might even be embarrassed to talk about it sometimes, if they were the sort of people who just laughed at it or something or maybe ignored it completely. (Y9 male)

> I talk about it more with friends because … you have to watch who you're talking to about it because obviously they will be **very** defensive, if they're

> very religious but … with your friends you can express yourself more and talk about it in more detail. (Y11 female)
>
> If you think yours is 'it', then other people think theirs is 'it', then you just let them get on with it, because it's just life. (Y9 male)
>
> If you think yours is 'it', then other people think theirs is 'it', then you just let them get on with it, because it's just life. (Y9 male)

That friendships develop without (non-)religion being a deciding factor is linked to the freedom of choice mentioned above and to a certain openness towards others: it was good to be exposed to people from different faith backgrounds and some young people wanted to take part in peers' religious practice, such as fasting during Ramadan, or festive occasions. Young people often indicated that part of learning about others' practice was to find out which areas were sensitive so that they could avoid them. This learning occurred implicitly rather than explicitly in open discussion or dialogue. Thus where young people were confident about their (non-)religious stance, they felt comfortable about discussing it. Also, friendships which were based on mutual trust and respect were conducive to conversations about religious matters.

The survey explored the influence of friends in three ways. The first item asked whether views about religion, broadly speaking, had been influenced by friends. Overall, the data demonstrate that one fifth (22%) felt that their friends influenced their views about religion, 22% were uncertain, and over half (56%) disagreed. When school type is considered, the influence of friends is stronger among pupils attending religious schools. While 59% of them agree that their views were shaped by friends, the proportion falls to 41% among pupils attending secular schools.

The second set of items asked whether young people's views about members of particular religions were influenced by their friends. The data highlight that friends are attributed a low level of influence in shaping views about Pagans (4%), Sikhs

(6%), Hindus (7%), Humanists (7%), Jews (12%), Muslims (13%), and Protestants (13%) but play a larger role in shaping views about Atheists (17%), Catholics (20%), and Christians (26%). As to school type, for pupils attending religious or secular schools, the proportions of friends' influence are roughly equal in shaping views about Hindus (7%), Jews (12%), Muslims (13%), Sikhs (6%), Pagans (4%), Atheists (17% religious, 19% secular), and Humanists (7%). However, among pupils attending religious schools, the influence of friends is higher in shaping views about Christians (30% vs. 21%), Catholics (26% vs. 13%), and Protestants (16% vs. 9%).

The third set of items asked whether young people had friends who were members of a certain religious tradition. These data demonstrate that, while the majority have friends who are Christians (81%) or Atheists (51%), much smaller numbers have friends who are Muslims (34%), Jews (22%), Sikhs (16%), Humanists (14%), Buddhists (13%) or Pagans (8%). As to school type, pupils who attend secular schools are more likely to have friends who are affiliated with a diverse range of faith backgrounds, including Atheists (50% vs. 44%), Muslims (40% vs. 20%), Jews (24% vs. 20%), Sikhs (27% vs. 17%), Humanists (14% vs. 12%), and Pagans (16% vs. 12%). Pupils attending religious schools were more likely to have friends who were Christians (84% vs. 77%).

Regarding the role of school and Religious Education, again, the picture is complex, with a number of factors, including geographical location, school composition, school ethos, and the nature of Religious Education (RE) intersecting. The questions in the focus groups asked both directly and indirectly about this, e.g. asking young people to compare different religions (which lead to comments about what they knew) and the diversity within the school. This picture requires a separate discussion, but, briefly, the focus group discussions revealed that RE provided young

people with knowledge about their own religion and other religions. Schools in which pupils had the opportunity to learn about the religious beliefs and practices of their peers extended young people's understanding in allowing them to translate 'textbook religion' into 'lived religion'. Both informal conversations with friends and discussions in the classroom provided such learning. This applied even to occasions in RE when individuals with strong views clashed with another in heated discussion, for example, atheists and religionists voicing their views on topics such as evolution, Big Bang theory or suffering. Such learning also involved becoming aware of differences within a given religion (the internal diversity of a religion), e.g. Irish Protestantism and Jehovah's Witnesses within Christianity. Young people were clear that such knowledge and understanding mitigated prejudice and intolerance.[viii]

These findings were supported by survey data: over half (52%) of the young people agreed that having people from different religious backgrounds makes their school an interesting place, a third were uncertain (30%), 18% disagreed. Regarding school type, 46% of pupils in secular schools agreed with this statement, while 54% of pupils in religious schools did. The latter are thus more likely to perceive religious diversity as having a positive impact on their school.

The survey also explored appreciation of Religious Education in school. The data demonstrate that six out of ten young people (58%) agreed that RE should be taught in school; equal proportions of young people are uncertain or disagree (21%). Regarding school type, RE is more highly valued by pupils in religious schools: while 62% of them said that RE should be taught in school, the proportion falls to 56% among pupils in secular schools.

Finally, the role of the media (in the wider sense, including TV, print media, Internet), is another topic which was broached in the focus groups. The data indicate

that young people both felt this influence and balanced it with what they knew about religions and how the media operate. Thus the media shaped their views, despite young people recognizing the preponderance of negative images, stereotypes, generalisations, and selective reporting. Thus young people could be shrewd and astute in identifying underlying agendas in media reporting, but they were conscious that repetitiveness and the ubiquity of stereotypical portrayals had an effect on them, whether they were conscious of it or not:

> [The media] Definitely [have an influence]. Like if you see somebody and then you've heard something about a Muslim and then something gets brought up about something, you automatically think about what you heard and think 'oh that's something bad'. (Y9 female)

> It always sticks in your mind that there's people that aren't like it, but it just kind of like controls your thoughts sometimes. (Y9 female)

The survey data demonstrate that television has a stronger influence on young people than the internet. For example, over a third (35%) felt that television had shaped their views about religion; 19% were unsure, while just under half disagreed (47%). Only a fifth (23%) said that the internet had shaped their views; 19% were unsure, while 68% disagreed. As to school type, no differences emerged regarding influence attributed to television (34% secular and religious) or internet (23% secular and religious).

Conclusion

This article has sought to interrogate both qualitative and quantitative data arising from the project on Young People's Attitudes to Religious Diversity with regard to the socialising agency of families, friends, schools, and the media. These social agents have been conceived in terms of concentric circles, with the family at the centre. As the data from the focus groups are not representative, we have drawn on some of the quantitative data to broaden the perspective. While the two sets of data do not form an

exact match, they allow for some correlations. While the quantitative data give the general contours of the picture, the qualitative data provide more nuanced pictures, even if they are only snapshots.

The data point to great variation in individuals' and families' belief and practice and/or lack of this, which is related to a range of factors, as we have tried to show. The centrality of the socialising effect of the family that existing literature points to is borne out, as are previous findings on gender. The data also point to diversity of socialisation *within* religious traditions in terms of 'strictness' (which parent is strict), gender (which parent feels strongly about passing things on), sense of community (how is the family linked to it), generational transmission and proximity, given the diversity of practice and belief within the family itself, with some members practising, others not. As existing research has noted, the 'stricter' parent is more influential, with gender being relevant. And there are families where there is no link with religion. Further, young people's agency comes into the picture as well, with some consciously rejecting or embracing (non-)religion, which in turn is linked to wider social and family contexts as well as individual circumstances. Thus religious transmission is not an automatic or straightforward process. It is linked to the various social contexts in which active and passive nurture takes place. This in turn is linked to how closely those who nurture are steeped in the tradition they want to pass on or, to use Hervieu-Léger's metaphor again, how much religion is part of their chain of cultural memory. This is particularly relevant for religious socialisation in ethnic minorities, as affiliation with religion may vary across individuals' lives.

Friends and peers as well as school play an important role in shaping young people's views. Although religion does not ostensibly play a great part in young people's relationship to one another, in that it determines who they associate with, it

plays an underlying role. If they feel confident in themselves and have trusting relationships with friends and peers as well as teachers, this creates opportunities and occasions when they learn or become literate about religion(s), belief and practice, whether religious or not. In this respect, the school context is important, with regard to the composition of the pupil body and the way the school approaches diversity (or its lack), both in curriculum and non-curriculum time. Where diversity is celebrated, this creates opportunities for the 'hidden curriculum'—the learning which takes place as a by-product of the formal, intended lesson content as unspoken social and cultural messages—to take effect. Ipgrave (2012) argues that school and community have greater influence on young people's respect of religiosity of their peers. Thus, where Religious Education is well delivered and combined with classroom debates, such learning helps equip young people for relating to the 'other' and countering the negative messages they receive from the media. The latter reflect the tension between religion in the private sphere where it is a matter of individual and personal choice and the question of how to treat others and religion in the public sphere where media images speak of religiously motivated conflict, violence, and terror. Hence the importance of direct contact with representatives of other faiths, as contact theory suggests: the more young people are exposed to (religious) diversity and deal with it on a day-to-day basis, the less likely it is that they are influenced by media-projected stereotypes and wary of the 'other'—whoever that 'other' may be. Yet, as indicated above, these are not automatic processes.

Returning to the concentric circles of home, friends, school, community, and media, with the latter projecting national and international scenarios, it is clear that the respective influences do not flow in one direction only—from the inside out—but in both directions and thus interact with one another, reinforcing or weakening each

other. To tease out this dynamic is the challenge of research, especially with regard to young people, given the malleability of their views and thought at this stage in their lives.

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Notes

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[i] Details about the project's objectives and research questions can be found at: http://www.warwick.ac.uk/go/WRERU.

[ii] The team had planned 15 school visits (3 in each region) with 3 group discussions per school, but exceeded this in some cases.

[iii] In all four nations of the UK, pupils start secondary (or high) school at age 11 or 12 and then, at age 16, either continue their studies or seek employment after the end of compulsory schooling. In England and Wales, pupils attend sixth form college and then go to further training or university. In Scotland, there is no sixth form college, so pupils either leave at age 16 to gain employment or continue studying for 'Highers' (1 year) and then either study for 'Advanced Highers' (1 year) or go to university. In Northern Ireland, some pupils stay to study Advanced Level (AS and A2 level) subjects (which qualifies them for university) or more vocational qualifications.

[iv] All aspects relating to the project were conducted following the ethics code of the University of Warwick and relevant professional associations (e.g. British Sociological Association).

[v] Except for one school where a technical glitch prevented the recording of all the discussions.

[vi] These will be explored in more detail in separate articles.

[vii] Given the nature of focus group discussions, the selected quotes are only indicative. They are drawn from discussions which the first author conducted in England and Wales.

[viii] A forthcoming chapter is concerned with examining the role and effect of the school context (including RE) on religious socialisation and attitudes towards religious diversity.