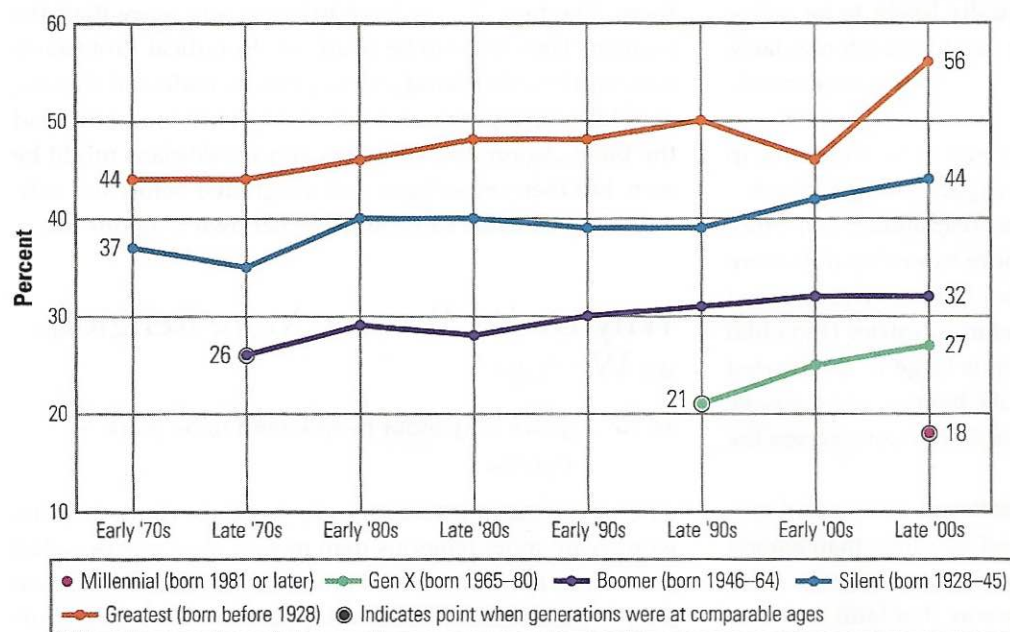
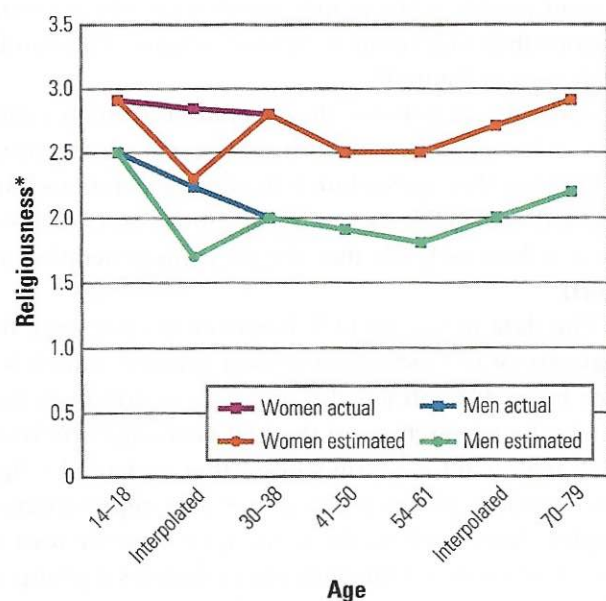


Figure 14.5 Attendance at Religious Services, by Generation

SOURCE: Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life (2010).

where the measure of religiousness is a complex combination of practices and beliefs. Note that, as expected, women in the sample were always substantially more religious than men.

Figure 14.6 Mean Change in Religiousness over Time by Gender

*For a detailed description of the measure of "Religiousness" used in this figure see Dillon and Wink (2007, p. 82).

SOURCE: Dillon and Wink (2007).

The respondents were most religious when they were teenagers. The women remained at the same level in their late 30s, declined in religiosity into their 60s, and increased in their late 70s. Men simply declined rather markedly into their 60s, with some recovery in their late 70s. For both men and women, therefore, there is some evidence the ages between 60 and 80 might involve an increase in religiosity.

Unfortunately, data were not collected during this sample's college-age years. We know from other work that this stage of life, which is when most people in the United States leave home, is

the stage when they are most likely to reassess their religious commitments and decline in religious participation, whether they went to college or not. For example, Smith (2009:244-46) followed a representative sample from ages 13-17 to ages 20-22. He found that between 33 and 40 percent of these young people declined in religiosity, some sharply, while only 3 to 7 percent increased (the rest were "stable").

A general narrative of religiosity over the life course, at least in the United States, as reflected in the data from the Oakland study, might look something like this: (1) Because parents, schools, and churches invest heavily in the religiosity of children, and most children accept these lessons, children's religiosity is high, if somewhat incoherent. (2) With relative independence from their parents during the post-high-school years, many of these young people lose interest in religion, or in their inherited religion, or begin to be influenced by other, less religious views. (3) After people have children themselves, they tend to move to communities where churches are more important and to think that they should teach their children about religion. This is particularly important for women, who most often bear the responsibility for childrearing. Thus, there is a tendency to return to church during this life stage, which for the Oakland sample was probably ages 28 to 40. (4) After their children leave the home, some of the middle-aged return to their earlier, less religious practices and views. (5) In the oldest part of the life course, people leave their jobs and lose friends and spouses. For many, the church and the support of religion might become more important, whether they fear death or not.