



What do you believe?

Yes, young women are religious, but not in the way their mothers were, according to a new *Glamour* poll. For one thing, they don't talk much about their secret, spiritual lives—until now.

By Stephanie Booth



odi Thomas, 32, is a Hollywood publicist who hobnobs with A-list celebrities. Her friends know that she loves snowboarding, playing pool and listening to classic rock, but they don't know that several years ago, she began regularly reading the Bible, and although she hasn't gone to church since she was a kid, she closes her eyes and says a silent prayer at the end of each day. "I don't talk about my faith because I don't want people to think I'm trying to push my beliefs on them," she says.

Women have typically been drawn to religion more than men, but these days they seem to be exploring their own spirituality at a younger age than they have in the past: during their twenties, a time that's usually devoted to professional rather than personal growth. "Young women are establishing their independence earlier and marrying later in a world that seems increasingly erratic and unsafe," explains June-Ann Greeley, Ph.D., scholar of women and religion at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut. "It's tough to be out there on your own, and religion provides a sense of predictability and orderliness in our lives. It grounds us."

Some women are taking traditional routes: Theological schools across the country are experiencing record numbers of women enrolling. But others, like Jodi, have a less institutional approach to their beliefs. In a *glamour.com* poll, 83 percent of female respondents said they believe in God and pray, but 75 percent also said they believe that there is some truth in many or all religions. "The church, mosque or synagogue still serves as a cornerstone, but many women under 40 are exploring and incorporating spirituality into their lives on their own terms," says Nancy Ammerman, Ph.D., professor of sociology of religion at Boston University. "Rather than taking established traditions at face value, they're

putting together a package of rituals and beliefs that fulfills their individual needs." Adds Rachel Weingarten, president of GTK Marketing, a trend-tracking firm, "Today, just because your parents are say, Presbyterian, doesn't mean you'll choose to follow that same faith as an adult. Many young women shop around for a belief system that's a better fit, or initially reject their family's religion, only to seek it out again in a time of crisis or because of a milestone such as marriage or childbirth." Although it's hard to know how frequently people convert from one faith to another, the days of being raised in a particular denomination and staying within the fold may be over. Even President Bush isn't practicing the faith he was born into.

But unlike the very devout commander in chief, many young women prefer not to declare their religion publicly. In our online poll, women were almost evenly split between considering their faith to be a private matter and wanting to let others know about it. Some, like Jodi, worry that their beliefs could alienate some of their less religious friends and make them suspect they're being pressured to convert. As a result, many young women tend to keep their faith hidden from public view, perhaps sharing it only with their closest intimates. Here, *Glamour* takes an inside look at the hidden spiritual worlds of women who pray.

“I pray in the car.”



Marita Loughran, 35, stay-at-home mom in Phoenix

As an African American, my presence in a Catholic Church often surprises people. My parents are Baptist, and as a kid I went to a charismatic, stomp-your-feet church, but I never felt a spiritual connection there. Then one day when I was 20, my college boyfriend, Paul, invited me to attend a Catholic mass. I appreciated the serenity of the service and the time it gave me for self-reflection. From then on, I attended regularly, and five years later, I converted to Catholicism. Paul and I now have four children, and we pray together as a family before meals, before bedtime and even in the car on the way to school. We pray for the “standard” stuff—safety for our family and loved ones, or to ace a test at school. When I became a Catholic, I worried I would upset my grandmother, a devout Baptist whom I adored. But she actually gave me the most peace about it, saying, “We all need to find our way to God. It doesn’t matter how we get there.”



Mary Jo Matsumoto, 36, fashion designer in Los Angeles

I was raised Methodist, but I stopped attending church once I hit my teens. As an adult, religion wasn’t even on my radar until I went to India with my yoga instructor and met Tibetan monks and the Dalai Lama. Their serenity was amazing—that’s when I began to really practice Buddhism. I run my own firm, but work for me is about giving back and practicing kindness in an industry not known for its spirituality. That said, I never discuss my spiritual life with others. As Gandhi said: “My life is my message.”

“I rarely attend synagogue.”



Farrah Rubenstein, 29, nonprofit worker in Watertown, Mass.

I like to say I observe the spirit rather than the letter of Jewish laws. I rarely attend synagogue, because it’s not where I feel most spiritually fulfilled. Instead, I pray in my own space at my own speed. Some nights I recite actual prayers before bed; lately I’ve spent literally all day thinking about my mom, who’s very ill, and wishing and hoping—essentially praying—for her health to improve. (I don’t ask “Why me?” because then I’d have to do the same for the positive situations in my life.) So while I may not “pray” in the way we’ve come to define it, loving my family and friends and living a life of social responsibility are things that bring me closer to God. By this definition, it’s rare that I am not praying.

Your faith:
Whose business
is it, anyway?

49% of women keep their religion private

48% say they’re open about their beliefs

3% actively assert their faith hoping to influence others



Lisa Ann Thomson, 34, freelance writer in Salt Lake City

I remember being in eighth grade and my teacher asking, “What group of people still practice polygamy today?” I was shocked when a girl shouted “Mormons!” Years later, I’m still having to deal with misconceptions about Mormonism. No, we’re not a cult; yes, we can drink soda. I answer people’s questions and just get on with my life. Sure, my husband and I prefer not to watch movies with explicit sex scenes, because

we feel our bodies are sacred. (We’ll stick to *CSI* and *American Idol*.) But it’s not like I’m sitting in church all day long, unaware of what’s going on in this world. I go out with friends. I water-ski, hike, work out at the gym, eat too much chocolate. In many ways, I live like everyone else. But the choices I make are driven by what I believe at my core.

“No, Mormons aren’t a cult.”

How do you see God?

2,000 YOUNG WOMEN ANSWERED THAT QUESTION ON GLAMOUR.COM.

Do you believe in God?

Yes: 83% No: 6% I'm not sure: 11%

If yes, how do you picture God?

As a man: 44%

I don't think God has a shape or form: 36%

As part of nature: 7%

As a woman: 1%

Other: 12%



“Praying makes me feel healthy.”

Terri Muuss, 35, social worker in New York City I was abused as a child, and when I met my husband four years ago, he admitted to having a traumatic childhood as well. But unlike me, Matt had rediscovered the ability to see the best in people, and he attributed his optimism to the Bahá'í Faith, founded in 1844. I began going to weekly devotional meetings with Matt. Acknowledging God and the gifts I'd been given made me feel so much calmer, and praying has become as routine for me as brushing my teeth. Sure, there have been times when I realize I haven't prayed for several days. These lapses remind me that praying, just like eating well or going to the gym, make me feel healthy. Praying hasn't outwardly changed me, but inside, the changes have been miraculous.



Bailey Stoler, 24, writer and yoga teacher in Somerville, Mass.

I was raised Unitarian, and I eventually decided that it was the best fit for me. I don't have a standard way of praying—a lot of people see it as an opportunity to ask for things, but I'm confident that I'll be given everything I need, so praying is just reconfirming that belief within myself. That's not to say nothing bad ever happens. Recently, my car, computer and purse were stolen, and like anyone, I was upset. But then I thought, "What am I supposed to learn from this?" (Besides the fact that I should always back up my computer!) And maybe that itself is the lesson: Although I'll occasionally get shaken up from negative things, I can't let them rule my life.

“I finally embraced the fact that I'm Hindu.”



Suhag Shukla, 34, lawyer in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.

When my parents came to America, they didn't want to lose their Hindu faith and encouraged me to listen to traditional Hindu stories. I resented that I wasn't at the mall with my friends. Then in college I met other American Hindus who, like myself, had been steeped in this religion but didn't really "get" it. That started some soul-searching, and I began embracing the fact that I'm Hindu instead of resenting it. So what if I'm still not fluent in Sanskrit and don't always understand every word of the prayers I say as I get up in the morning, as I join my hands together before every meal and before I go to sleep each night? I'm OK with that.