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Allison C. Culey

*University of St. Thomas, Minnesota*

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# An Analysis of Religious and Spiritual Beliefs and Behaviors in College Students

by

Allison C. Culey

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the  
School of Social Work

University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University  
St. Paul, Minnesota

in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implemented the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

## Abstract

In a survey of religion and public life done by the Pew Forum in 2007, it was found that the ways in which Americans practiced their religion was changing. There has been a trend of moving toward less dogmatic approaches to religion in the United States. It was found that of the twenty percent of Americans who do not practice any type of religion, the majority were ages eighteen to twenty-four. The current study was designed to understand the religious and spiritual behaviors in university students in order to develop methods to better cultivate religious and spiritual growth. The researcher explored the idea of religiosity and spirituality as protective factors and aids to successful development. A sample of undergraduate students was recruited from a small, religiously affiliated university in the Midwest. The researcher used an existing survey called the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality and added demographic questions. The results showed that there was no relationship between religiosity and spiritual and current academic performance. There was a positive correlation between historic religious practices and current religious practices. It was found that there was not a correlation between religiosity and spirituality and resiliency in college students. However, students reported that religiosity and spirituality were a form of strength and comfort. Those who reported religiosity and spirituality as a form of strength and comfort did not participate in a high frequency of private religious practices. Students did report that they participate in infrequent private religious practices.

### **Acknowledgements**

This research is dedicated to my cousin, Dylan, who lost his life to his battle with mental illness in February of 2014.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>List of Tables.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Changes to Religion and Spirituality.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Successful Development/Resiliency.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Literature Review.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Spirituality Defined.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Religiosity Defined.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Risk Factors for University Students.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Drinking and drug use.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Risk sexual behaviors.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Development of psychiatric illness.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Important protective factors for university students.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Religiosity and spirituality in coping.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Health, Religiosity, and Spirituality.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Social support.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Identity Development.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Dysfunction of Faculty/Staff and Student Needs.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Statement of the Research Questions.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Conceptual Framework.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Methods.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Participants.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Sample.....</b>	<b>24</b>

<b>Human Subjects.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Research Design.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Beliefs.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Private religious practices.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Religious/spiritual coping.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Religious/spiritual history.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Organizational religiousness.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Validity.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Data Analysis.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Association to the Literature.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Results.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Discussion.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Interpretation of Results.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Implications for social work practice.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Implications for research.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Strengths and limitations of research.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Appendix A.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Appendix B.....</b>	<b>57</b>

### List of Tables

<b>Table1 .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Table 2.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Table 3.....</b>	<b>35</b>

## Introduction

### **Changes to Religion and Spirituality**

There is a perception of the researcher based on personal experiences and modern research that the way in which Americans practice religion and spirituality is changing. In 2007, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life conducted a survey of 35,000 Americans (a representative sample) of a wide variety of organized religious groups. The Landscape Survey, as it was referred to, examined the religious beliefs and practices of the American populous. It was found in the study that more than ninety percent of the representative sample of the American population believes that there is a God. Whether one believes in Allah, God, or a higher power, over half of Americans state that religion is important in their lives (Pew Research Center, 2012). Approximately eighty percent of Americans report practicing a type of religion. Of the twenty percent that do not, the majority is young people, ages eighteen to twenty-four (Pew Research Center, 2012). However, the number of young people who are developing an interest in spirituality and religion is on the rise (Pew Research Center, 2012).

What seem to be changing are non-dogmatic approaches to religion. Overall, only four out of ten Americans surveyed stated that they attend religious services at least once a week (Pew Research Center, 2012). In the Landscape Survey, it was also found that two thirds of Americans surveyed believed that there was more than one way to interpret the teachings of their faith (Pew Research Center, 2012). There is a modern belief that society and religion conflict. There are substantial amounts of participants in the Landscape Survey who stated that tension exists between religion and modern society and popular culture (Pew Research Center, 2012). There are shifting trends in organized religious practices and changes in attitudes toward organized religious practices.



It should be noted that there is a difference between private and public religious and spiritual practices. In the current study, the researcher evaluated both private and public religious and spiritual practices. Examples of private religious practices are praying, reading the Koran, or saying grace at home before a meal. These practices have their roots in organized religion, but are incorporated into private lives. Public religious practices take place within an organized religious or spiritual community, for example, attending church services or praying at a mosque. According to the Landscape Survey, fifty-eight percent of participants reported that they pray at least once per day outside of religious services. Of the total sample that was surveyed, thirty-nine percent meditated on a weekly basis. Additionally, the Landscape survey found that thirty-five percent of those surveyed read Scripture weekly outside of religious services.

It is important to note that the Landscape Survey is one of many that have been distributed to the American public. However, it provides a snapshot of trends and beliefs about religion and spirituality that is invaluable. Based on the data collected by the Pew Researchers, the researcher was interested in the undergraduate university population.

### **Successful Development/Resiliency**

There are many changes that happen in young people's lives as they transition into the university environment. Developmentally it is a time when identity formation is challenged with exposure to new concepts and individuals who are different from oneself. Young adults learn to depend less on their parents or guardians for the formation of their belief systems. In relation to religious and spiritual beliefs and practices, the historical participation in religious practices in comparison to current participation is of interest to the researcher. This study will also evaluate to what extent university students view religion and spirituality as a factor in strength and comfort.

Young adults experience periods of stress and adjustment as university students (Hsien-Chuan, Krügeloh, Shepherd, & Billington, 2009). Aspects of religion and spirituality can function as supports during stressful situations (Graham, Furr, Flowers, & Burke, 2001; Krok, 2008; Pargament, 1997; Yangarber-Hicks, 2004). It is expected that religiosity and spirituality could provide comfort and strength during the stressful adjustment to university (Hsien-Chuan, Krügeloh, Shepherd, & Billington, 2009).

Religion and spirituality have often been associated with the concept of resiliency. In this study, the concept of resiliency will be related to psychological resiliency. Psychological resilience is adapting well to adversity and significant sources of stress (American Psychological Association, 2014). Resilience is not a trait that one either possesses or does not. It is based on behavior, thoughts, and actions. Resiliency can be developed in anyone (American Psychological Association, 2014).

Resiliency is exemplified in many different aspects of life. In this study, resiliency is related to current academic performance. Academic performance in college students is often measured by Grade Point Average, or GPA. GPA, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is “the average obtained by dividing the total number of grade points earned by the total number of credits attempted” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Though there are countless numbers of ways to measure and evaluate resiliency, this survey used in this study uses GPA as a measure of resiliency.

With religion and spirituality as a perceived and studied protective factor, there are still many young adults questioning what to believe in. In today’s world, stress is ever present and disasters are constantly being revealed in the media. At a time when the world seems more

vulnerable than ever, the younger generations continue to rely on forms of comfort other than religion and spiritual growth.

It was previously assumed that during their years at university, individuals' religious commitment declined. However, it has been recently found that their religious commitment does not either increase or decrease. Students are reexamining their beliefs and incorporating philosophical dispositions rather than abandoning these beliefs (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). A study executed by Lee (2002) sampled 4,000 students at seventy-six different universities. Lee found that more students strengthened their religious beliefs during the university years than those whose faith was weakened during university (Lee, 2002). In a study conducted by Bryant, Choi, and Yasuno (2003) a large sample of university students were surveyed, and it was revealed that there was a decrease in religious activity during university, but there was a spiritual increase. However, one must understand that a decrease in religious participation does not necessarily mean that there is a decrease in commitment to spirituality and faith (Clydesdale, 2007).

Given that university students grapple with the meaning of life and cultivate a sense of purpose in a diverse and ever-changing world, spirituality and its components should be evaluated and integrated into daily life. Patel (2007) and other researchers have claimed that further research and dialog is needed to understand religiosity and diversity on university campuses. Faculty must also join the discussion about religiosity and spirituality in order to promote moral development and positive outcomes in the lives of students. The current study was designed to understand the religious and spiritual behaviors of university students in order to develop methods to better cultivate religious and spiritual growth.

### **Literature Review**

## **Spirituality Defined**

When one thinks about spirituality, many different concepts could come to mind: health and wellness, life goals, prayer, a relationship with a higher power, and meditation. These are all personal aspects of sacredness. According to Muldoon and King (1995), spirituality is how people understand and live their lives, as well as how they view their meaning and value.

Vaughn (1991) stated that spirituality was more of an experience of something sacred. Vaughn also described spirituality as “a quality that goes beyond religious affiliation, that strives for inspirations, reverence, awe, meaning and purpose, even in those who do not believe in any good” (Vaughn, 1991, p. 105 ). Meezenbroek et al. concluded that spirituality was a striving for a connection to self, others, nature, and the transcendent (2012).

A variety of definitions for spirituality have been developed by countless numbers of disciplines. Spirituality may be, “the way in which people understand and live their lives in view of their ultimate meaning and value” (Muldoon & King, 1995, p. 336), as “a subjective experience of the sacred” (Vaughan, 1991, p. 105). Poulin, Silver, and Holman define spirituality as the individual and experiential commitment to a religious or spiritual belief system (2011). A broad definition of spirituality as a universal experience is “one’s striving for and experience of connection with oneself, connectedness with others and nature and connectedness with the transcendent (Meezenbroek, Garssen, Berg, Dierendonck, Visser, & Schaufeli, 2012). Conceptual analyses that have been done by past researchers (Dyson, Cobb, & Forman, 1997; Cook, 2004; Chiu, Emblen, VanHofwegen, Sawatzky, & Meyerhoff, 2004; Reed, 1992) and qualitative research (Hungelmann, Kenkel-Rossi, Klassen, & Stollenwerk, 1985; Fisher, 1998, cited in Gomez & Fisher, 2003) have demonstrated the importance of connectedness in relation to spirituality. The authors who recognize spirituality as a universal experience use the terms

“connectedness” or “relatedness” in the literature (Meezenbroek, Garssen, Berg, Dierendonck, Visser, & Schaufeli, 2012).

There are many facets of connectedness that are demonstrated differently in humanity. Authenticity, inner harmony, consciousness, self-knowledge, and the search for the meaning of life are all facets of connectedness to self (Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, & Saunders, 1988; Young-Eisendrath & Miller, 2000; Hungelmann et al., 1985; Howden, 1992; Mahoney & Graci, 1999; Chiu et al., 2004). Compassion, caring, gratitude, and wonder are facets of connectedness to others and nature (Meezenbroek, Garssen, Berg, Dierendonck, Visser, & Schaufeli, 2012). Connectedness to the transcendent is connecting to something or a being that is not of the Earth (Meezenbroek, Garssen, Berg, Dierendonck, Visser, & Schaufeli, 2012). Some examples are the universe or higher powers, such as God (Meezenbroek, Garssen, Berg, Dierendonck, Visser, & Schaufeli, 2012)

Spiritual experiences can happen to individuals who do not consider themselves religious. For example, an individual can experience nature in a spiritual manner and thus be deeply moved by this experience (Meezenbroek, Garssen, Berg, Dierendonck, Visser, & Schaufeli, 2012). Thus, it is important to consider all of the ways in which spiritual experiences may occur when developing a measurement tool. Spirituality is truly a universal experience (Meezenbroek, Garssen, Berg, Dierendonck, Visser, & Schaufeli, 2012).

In this study, the researcher will define spirituality as, “being concerned with the transcendent, addressing ultimate questions about life’s meaning, with the assumption that there is more to life than what we see or fully understand” (Fetzer Institute, 2003). This definition was used in the survey for the current study.

### **Religiosity Defined**

Religiosity is a term that is used to describe practices that relate to institutional and social expressions of connectedness to sacredness. Poulin, Silver, & Holman (2002) defined religiosity as a participation in social structures related to religion. According to Hill and Pargament (2003) religion is defined as principally “institutional, formal, [and] outward” (p. 64). In a study done by Koenig, Parkerson, and Meador (1997) they identified three dimensions of religiosity which were organizational, non-organizational, and intrinsic. The organizational aspect of religion focuses on the frequency of attendance to religious services (Koenig, Parkerson, & Meador, 1997). Non-organizational religiosity was categorized by the amount of time spent in private religious activities (prayer, meditation, worship etc.). Finally, intrinsic religiosity is the ways in which people assimilate religion into their daily lives (Koenig, Parkerson, & Meador, 1997). This study also concluded that a way to define religious faith could be, “a belief in a supreme being that sets standards of conduct, responds to prayer, and often assures the ultimate triumph of good over evil” (Koenig, Parkerson, & Meador, 1997). Koenig, Parkerson, and Meador went on to say that religiosity is best described as an “organized set of doctrines and rituals” (1997).

The definition of religiosity being used in the current study is a combination of definitions used in previous research. The researcher defined religiosity as a belief in a supreme being and using worship and doctrine that fosters spiritual life.

### **Risk Factors for University Students**

Risk factors are characteristics that are associated with poor developmental outcomes specific to individuals, environments, and interactions. During the time spent at university, there are many risk factors that may lead to negative outcomes: use of drugs, alcohol, tobacco, risk sexual behaviors, and the development of mental illness.

**Drinking and drug use.** University-age drinking and drug use is a prevalent issue. The U.S. Surgeon General declared that underage alcohol use was a primary health concern for the

nation as of 2007. This led to the development of research studies that delved into the predictors of university-age drinking (Brown, Salsman, Brechting, & Carlson, 2007). Large amounts of alcohol consumption has been associated with impaired academic performance, is a precursor for substance dependence, increases the risk of vehicle-related accidents, and raises the risk for violence, sexual assault, and illegal behaviors (Ellison, Bradshaw, Rote, Storch, & Trevino, 2008). In a longitudinal study of 13,000 young adults, heavy drinkers had a high frequency of depressive symptoms in comparison to moderate drinkers and abstainers. Though it is known that there is a correlation between alcohol and depressive symptoms in university students, there is more explore in regards to the global impact of drinking behaviors (Burriss, Brechting, Salsman, & Carlson, 2009).

**Risk sexual behaviors.** Currently there is no agreed upon definition of risk sexual behavior (RSB), but empirical evidence has led to the development of a three factor structure. This structure includes greater numbers of sexual partners, high frequency of sexual activity, and lower frequency of condom use (Burriss, Brechting, Salsman, & Carlson, 2009). These factors have been correlated with negative health outcomes, specifically the development of diseases (Burriss, Brechting, Salsman, & Carlson, 2009). In a study done by Valois, Zullig, Huebner, Kammermann, and Drane (2002) it was found that adolescents who reported a greater RSB had a significant increase in greater life dissatisfaction in comparison to adolescents with lower RSB. University students who participate in vaginal intercourse with multiple partners have greater psychological distress than university students who have one sexual partner or abstain from sex (Burriss, Brechting, Salsman, & Carlson, 2009).

**Development of psychiatric illness.** Many psychiatric and mental illnesses develop in the individual during young adulthood. Psychiatric illnesses in university students and the

problems associated with such illnesses are areas where further examination is needed (Burriss, Brechting, Salsman, & Carlson, 2009).

A study conducted by Payne, Hahn, and Mauer (2005) revealed that university students were found to be vulnerable to experiencing negative emotions associated with rejection and failure. They also found that these negative emotions have the potential to affect the students' advancements in their education. In a study done by Kessler, Foster, Saunders, and Stang (1995) it was found that 86% of individuals with a psychiatric disability did not complete their degree and withdrew from university. The general dropout rate is thirty to forty percent according to national averages (Porter, 1990). The general reasons for dropping out of university when one has a psychiatric disability are symptoms of the disability, lack of educational integration, and a lack of peer supports (Megivem, Pellerito, & Mowbray, 2003; Mowbray & Megivem, 1999; Weiner & Wiener, 1997).

**Important protective factors for university students.** Despite the presence of risk in university students, there are internal and external protective factors that have been associated with university success (Hartley, 2010). Internal protective factors are “good cognitive capacities, adaptable personality, positive self-efficacy, faith and sense of meaning, self-regulation of emotional arousal and impulses, and a sense of humor” (Masten & Reed, 2002). External protective factors that have been identified in the literature are emergency social services, a source of public safety, positive peer relationships, and caring adults (Masten & Reed, 2002).

Resilience, according to researchers, is a multifaceted interaction between risk factors and protective factors (Egeland, Carlson, & Sroufe, 1993). In order for resiliency to occur, the protective factors must support the success of a situation (Egeland, Carlson, & Sroufe, 1993).



Resiliency is used by university students in order to complete age-appropriate tasks (Kaplan, 1999).

**Religiosity and spirituality in coping.** Religiosity, in regards to coping, has been shown to relate to positive affect and a reduced amount of dysphoria after traumatic or stressful events (Poulin, Silver, & Holman, 2011). There are a variety of theories that support religiosity as a coping mechanism. One is that religious involvement, a part of the social aspect of religiosity, is a form of positive social support during times of adjustment (Ellison & George, 1994; Koenig & Larson, 2001; found in Poulin, Silver, & Holman, 2011). Thus, being involved in religious activities, such as attending church services regularly, promotes well-being (Ellison & George, 1994; Poulin, Silver, & Holman, 2011).

Spirituality as a coping method could be interpreted differently. Spiritual identities may provide the interpretive aspect of adjustment (McIntosh, 1995; found in Poulin, Silver, & Holman, 2011). Spirituality provides guidelines to help individuals process traumatic events more effectively and in a shorter time period because they are able to assimilate the traumatic events into a worldview (McIntosh, 1995; Poulin, Silver, & Holman, 2001). Spirituality most likely affects mental health cognitively through altering mental appraisals of events (Poulin, Silver, & Holman, 2011), enhancing self-control and decreasing the desire for control (Poulin, Silver, & Holman, 2011) thus decreasing stress and improving health (Poulin, Silver, & Holman, 2011).

### **Health, Religiosity, and Spirituality**

Currently there is substantial attention on the roles of spirituality on mental illness and mental health (Bullis, 1996; Favier, Engersoll, O'Brien, & McNally, 2001; Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999, 2002; Kelly, 1995; W.R. Miller, 1999; Richards & Bergin, 1997, 2000; Sperry &

Shafranske, 2005). This movement is corresponding with a growing interest in the spiritual needs of university students and the development of spiritual identities (Love, 2001; V.W. Miller & Ryan, 2001; Rogers and Dantley, 2001). Research has proposed that spiritual beliefs, practices, and commitments seem to be linked with positive results like psychological and physical health/well-being; marital satisfaction and stability; positive interpersonal performance/functioning; and better/improved quality of life (Seybold & Hill, 2001). There is a positive correlation between religiousness and spirituality on physical and psychological health (Burriss, Brechting, Salsman, & Carlson, 2009). Religiosity has been linked to lower incidents of mental illness, a more positive affect, and fewer instances of cognitive impairments in the three years after the tragic events of September eleventh, 2001 (Poulin, Silver, & Holman, 2011). Religiosity was a antecedent of fewer reports of physician-diagnosed mental health illnesses, such as anxiety and depression (Poulin, Silver, & Holman , 2011). In a study conducted by Burriss, Brechting, Salsman, & Carlson, it was found that religiousness and spirituality can be meaningfully associated to individual psychological health (2009). Psycho-spiritual interventions should be considered for treating mental health issues in university students (Burriss, Brechting, Salsman, & Carlson, 2009).

**Social support.** Social support is often provided in association with religiosity. Clergy, support groups, and involvement in social networks are all examples of social supports within religious communities (George et al., 2002; Ladd & McIntosh, 2008; found in Poulin, Silver, & Holman, 2011). Social support has been shown to enhance health (Cohen, 2004; House et al., 1988; Krause, 2006; found in Poulin, Silver, & Holman, 2011) and as a result, religiosity could predict health outcomes (Poulin, Silver, & Holman, 2011). For example, it has been found that regular religious service attendance is linked to enhanced immune system effectiveness

(Lutgendorf et al., 2004; found in Poulin, Silver, & Holman, 2011). Religious activities provide emotional and moral support, encourage health lifestyles, and are powerful ways of coping with negative situations (George, Ellison, & Larson, 2002; Krupski, Kwan, Fink, Sonn, Maliski, & Litwin, 2006; Mytko, & Knight, 1999; Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998). Physical and psychologically ill patients can benefit from participating in religious activities (George, Ellison, & Larson, 2002; Krupski, et al., 2006; Mytko, & Knight, 1999; Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998).

### **Identity Development**

Individuals desire to understand themselves in relation to others, as well as in relation to their experiences. Individuals form self-identity based on many factors such as their personal history, beliefs about themselves, and their future aspirations (Poll & Smith, 2003).

An individual's spiritual identity (a belief that he or she is connected to God) can be seen as an effective pathway to protect and restore psychological well-being (Richards & Bergin, 1997).

The effects of spiritual identity on resiliency are associated with research surrounding the benefits of a strong sense of personal identity (Poll & Smith, 2003). Healthy identity development in adolescents may help prevent depression (Koteskey, Little, & Matthews, 1991). Identity development may also promote optimistic outlook and healthy self-esteem (Roberts, Phinney, Masse, Chen, Roberts, & Romero, 1999). Healthy identity development has also been correlated with psychological security in adults (Pulkkinen & Roenkae, 1994).

The modern university experience allows peers of different backgrounds, religions, and cultures to interact now more than ever before (Bryant, 2011). A challenge for young adults as they leave their families and identify adult roles is to become their own authority figure. This also demands that the young adults build self-confidence in order to accomplish this growth (Bowman & Small, 2010).

Zera (1989) inquired about the degree of religiosity in university students and about the home-life of students during their development (Schubmehl, Cubbellotti, & Ornum, 2009). This study revealed that in ten percent of the sample, seventy-five percent of the students rated themselves as higher in both the religiosity and performance during university in comparison to their home life (Zera, 1989). This finding shows that a higher degree of religiosity in university students is positively correlated to a higher grade point average (Zera, 1989).

There are a variety of reasons why students examine their spiritual identities. A sample of students were surveyed at Christian universities revealed reasons why spiritual exploration occurs: “peer relationships, working through crises while at university, personal spiritual disciplines, praise and worship sessions, and Bible or theology classes” (Ma, 2003, p. 330). Another study found that university students are susceptible to formulate opinions about spirituality based on the sentiments of peers and influential professors (Small, 2007). Other students are more motivated to explore spirituality based on ideas of wellness or mindfulness (Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken, & Echols., 2006). The exploration of spirituality in regards to mindfulness has been found to be increasingly common in university students (Bowman & Small, 2010). Denomination boundaries related to religion are being examined by university students as well (Cherry, DeBerg, & Porterfield, 2001).

### **Dysfunction of Faculty/Staff and Student Needs**

Due to the positive relationship between spiritual activity and desirable outcomes in the literature (Kuh & Gonvea, 2005; Posner, Slater, & Boone, 2006), the faculty and staff of universities should aim to promote spiritual development in university students (Bowman & Small, 2010).

It has been found that private faith-based universities and private but non-secular universities encourage moral values in different ways (Chen, Dalton, & Crosby, 2006). Braskamp, Trautvetter, & Ward (2005) evaluated the faculty at ten religiously affiliated universities (Bowman & Small, 2010). It was found that many faculty members did not know how and were not interested in fostering moral development in students (Braskamp et al., 2005). This is discouraging. Faculty at universities, especially religious-based universities, should have an interest in developing spiritual awareness and religious participation. This consideration is of great importance because in a study of university freshman it was found that there was a positive correlation between spiritual beliefs and involvement in campus activities (Posner, et al., 2006). Thus, there is a correlation between spirituality and university outcomes for students.

The staff of university counseling centers has increased their awareness of the ways in which spiritual matters can be addressed while treating mental illness (Soet & Martin, 2007). University counselors found that over seventy percent of students who sought mental health services were open to discussing religion and spirituality in the counseling setting (Weinstein, Parker, & Archer, 2002). Students who participate in counseling programs have indicated that there is a need for training in spiritual and religious counseling on university campuses (Souza, 2002).

There is a definite need for university counselors to have the ability to address spiritual concerns (Soet & Martin, 2007). There is literature that indicates that religious and spiritual concerns are of importance to university students and could be related to psychological distress (Soet & Martin, 2007). In a study of 5,472 graduate and undergraduate students, twenty-six percent of students reported considerable distress related to religious or spiritual concerns (Johnson & Hayes, 2003). The religious and spiritual concerns were frequently associated with a

stressful event, such as a loss of a friendship, sexual assault, the development of values, and suicidal ideation (Johnson & Hayes, 2003). These are all stressful events that are typically addressed by counseling services on university campuses (Johnson & Hayes, 2003).

Bryant and Astin studied the predictors and consequences of university students' spiritual and religious struggles (2008). It was found that the predictors of spiritual and religious struggles occurred during university and this challenged and presented new worldviews for many students (Bryant & Astin, 2008; Bryant 2011). Primarily, the study found negative outcomes of spiritual and religious struggle in students, which were decline in physical and psychological well-being (Bryan & Astin, 2008; Bryant 2011).

### **Statement of the Research Questions**

The following questions are being utilized in the data analysis in this study. The researcher would like to evaluate the potential relationship between religiosity and spirituality and success in students' education and development. To what extent does religiosity and spirituality have a positive impact on current academic performance in university students? This will be measured by looking at the individual's estimated grade point average and questions related to the importance of religiosity and spirituality in the individual's daily life. The researcher hypothesized that religiosity and spirituality will positively affect current academic performance.

Also, the researcher would like to learn more about the past religious practices in university students compared to current religious practices. Is there a positive correlation between the historical participation of religious practices and the current participation in religious practices? This question will be quantified by the correlation between answers of "how often do you attend religious services?" and "when you were a young child, how often did you attend religious services?" as well as the question "when you were a teenager, how often did you attend religious services?" The researcher hypothesized that there is a positive correlation between the historical participation of religious practices and current participation in religious practices.

In addition to these questions the researcher would like to know if students are able to identify organizations on campus that are associated with the religious affiliation of the university. This will be answered with the question, “Are you aware or do you participate in any organizations on campus that are associated with the religious affiliation of the university?” The researcher hypothesized that there will be few university students are able to identify organizations on campus that are associated with the religious affiliation of the university.

The researcher would also like to better understand how religiosity and spirituality can be used as a form of resiliency. Resiliency in this case means “adapting well to adversity and significant sources of stress.” To what degree are religiosity and spirituality related to resiliency in university students? This question will be evaluated using the answer to questions in the “Beliefs” category of the survey and question four: “what is your academic year in school?” The beliefs sub scale is comprised of questions 9 through 15. The researcher hypothesized that religiosity and spirituality will be significantly correlated.

Another question that the researcher is interested in is whether or not religion is a source of strength and comfort for university students. This question can be answered in reference to the survey question that states, “How much is religion a source of strength and comfort to you?” The researcher hypothesized that religion and spirituality are not a source of strength or comfort to university students.

In addition to this question, the researcher is wondering how often do those who identify religiosity and spirituality as a source of strength and comfort participate in private religious practices. To identify this relationship, the researcher will use the previous question, “how much is religion a source of strength and comfort to you?” and a private religious subscale created from questions from the “Private Religious Practices” section of the survey. The researcher hypothesized that university students who identify religiosity and spirituality as a source of strength and comfort also participate in private religious practices.

Another question the researcher has about private religious practices is whether or not university students participate in private religious practices? The question “how often do you pray privately in

places other than at church or synagogue?” and other questions from the “Private Religious Practices” section will be used to evaluate this question. The researcher hypothesized that many university students participate in private religious practices.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In order to better conceptualize the parallels of identity formation in university students and the development of a spiritual identity, the researcher has used Erikson’s developmental theory. Erikson’s theory has been used countless times in the literature to explain spiritual development (Balswick, King, & Reimber, 2005; Capps, 1983; Gleason, 1975; Loder, 1998; Worthington, 1989). Identity development, according to Erikson (1950), allows for individuals to successfully progress with life tasks, such as intimacy, generativity, and integrity.

Tale and Parker (2007) believed there are two ways in which Erikson’s theory can be applied to spiritual identity development. The researcher chose to use one of these methods for spiritual identity development. Erikson’s developmental theory is a process theory. There are steps that one takes throughout their lifetime to develop into a competent individual. One of the developmental phases is when one learns to trust caregivers during infancy. Tale and Parker (2007) relate this phase to learning to trust God. They believe that in a sense, a young adult is a spiritual infant.

The beginning stages of spiritual identity development are filled with uncertainty and unfamiliarity (Tale & Parker, 2007). This new environment incorporates new caregivers (spiritual authority figures such as pastors, spiritual mentors or guides, and therapists) who lead the individual toward other stages of development. If the individual seeking a spiritual identity cannot trust the caregivers, their identity formation process will be ruptured. This leads to the idea that spiritual caregivers are important to developing adults.



Erikson's stages of human development theory is closely related to how a young adult begins to develop a spiritual identity. According to Erikson, the beginning stages of development are the most vital in forming a trusting relationship. Spiritual caregivers, who take the form of pastors, spiritual mentors, or therapists, help develop the trust in God that is necessary for developing a spiritual identity.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

The participants in the current study were recruited from a small, private, Catholic university in the Midwest of the United States. All participants were undergraduate students, but were not required to be of the traditional university age of 18-23 (students must be over the age of 18 to provide consent). The university where the sampling occurred is historically a predominantly female institution. There was limited male input to the study. The researcher made flyers that were posted in dormitories and other locations on campus. The information on the flyer included the link to the study. Participants were encouraged to take a short survey about their religious and spiritual beliefs, habits, and history. The survey was taken online with the use of SurveyGizmo. At the beginning of the survey, participants showed that they consented to participate by indicating that they have read the consent information in order to proceed to the survey.

### **Sample**

The participants in the present study were recruited using availability and convenience sampling. It was the goal of the researcher to have one hundred participants in this study. The participants were gathered from an institution that is close in proximity to the residence of the

researcher. It would be ideal to gather a sample of participants from many institutions. However, because of the time constraints on this study, it was not a realistic option to use a random sample.

### **Human Subjects**

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Saint Catherine University before recruitment of participants. At the time of the study, participants were required to review and indicate they had read an informed consent document. This consent document notified the researcher that the participant was able and willing to take the survey. Because the survey was taken online, there was no way to identify the participants. Thus, the survey results were completely anonymous. The survey and design of the study had little to minimal risks. However, the participants were notified that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The participants were also notified that the benefit of their participation in the current study will help the development of the research on religion and spirituality.

### **Research Design**

The current study was quantitative in nature. The survey being used is the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality (BMMRS). This instrument was developed by the Fetzer Institute and the National Institute on Aging Working Group (1999). The researcher has adapted the peer-reviewed scale to fit the research questions. The scale that was developed is forty-one questions. The first sets of questions are demographic questions. The following questions are from the original survey. Two questions were added by the researcher (questions forty and forty-one). These questions were developed to answer a research question based on the literature.

Questions one through eight are nominal questions (age, year in school, academic year in school, major, minor, religion or spiritual practice of choice, and parental or guardian religion or

spiritual practice of choice). The remainder of the survey, with the exception of questions thirty-one, forty, and forty-one is ordinal questions. The questions are Likert-scaled.

In the original, full version of the BMMRS the authors identified domains that are applicable to the study of health in relation to religion and spirituality. The domains are based on theoretical and empirical connections to health outcomes. The domains are Daily Spiritual Experiences, Meaning, Values, Beliefs, Forgiveness, Private Religious Practices, Religious/Spiritual Coping, Religious Support, Religious/Spiritual History, Commitment, Organizational Religiousness, and Religious Preference. The organization of this survey is by these domains.

There are many different ways in which the authors of the survey intended to use it in practice. The authors considered the time limitations of a survey. The entire survey is quite extensive. Thus, the survey may be used by domains and not in its entirety. It has been shown to be a valid tool when separated in domains. The authors noted that the comparison of specific domains from the survey may lead to a more informed and specific viewpoint of the health outcomes in association to religion and spirituality.

**Beliefs.** A belief is a cognitive dimension that is the central feature of religiousness. Members of religions are known as believers. Beliefs differ between religions. Religious beliefs are cognitive resources that comfort and sustain believers in the midst of suffering. Beliefs create meaning and comprehensibility. The Belief scale of the survey is based on beliefs about a higher power, as well as strength and comfort. This portion of the survey will take approximately one and a half minutes.

**Private religious practices.** The items in the Private Religious Practices scale measure informal and non-organizational religious and spiritual practices. Private religious practices are a

subset of behaviors within religious involvement. These practices are distinct from public, organized religious behavior. They are not necessarily informed by liturgical formulae or occur at fixed times or places. The items on the scale were formulated from existing instruments. The terms that were used were also taken from existing instruments in order to increase validity. Items on the scale were selected to be applicable across religions in relation to the known United States population. Based on the prior measurement of Private Religious Practices, the survey should 1) measure the most prevalent behaviors, 2) be applicable to a variety of settings, 3) use a common form of measure, and 4) include a minimum of four items. The variables in this section of the survey have appeared in other validated scales or have been confirmed as valid using secondary analysis. This section is useful for the adult population in the United States. It should be noted that this section of the survey is designed for the three largest religious groups in the United States: Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. The estimated completion time is one minute.

**Religious/spiritual coping.** The questions on this portion of the survey measure two patterns of coping with stressful life events. The two patterns are “positive religious/spiritual coping reflective of benevolent religious methods of understanding and dealing with life stressors,” and “negative religious/spiritual coping reflective of religious struggle in coping.” Empirical evidence has shown a connection between stressful life events and forms of religious/spiritual involvement (Bearon & Koenig, 1990; Bjorck & Cohen, 1993; Ellison & Taylor, 1996; Lindenthal, Myers, Pepper, & Stein, 1970). This is because major life events threaten and harm human objects of significance. Some examples of such objects of significance are health, personal control, intimacy with others, or a sense of meaning. Religion offers coping methods for maintaining these objects of significance. Religion can also transform these objects of significance (Pargament, 1997). Empirical studies have also found that religious/spiritual

methods of coping affect the psychological, physical, social, and spiritual adjustment in people who experience crisis (Koenig et al., 1992; Oxman, Freeman, Manheimer, 1995; Pargament et al., 1994; Wright, Pratt, and Schmall, 1985). Religious/spiritual coping do not overlap nonreligious coping. Religious and spiritual coping methods predict significant variance in outcomes of stress even after the nonreligious coping methods are removed (Pargament & Koenig, 1997). Pargament found in another study that religious and spiritual coping methods facilitate the relationship between global variables (prayer, denomination, frequency of church attendance etc.) and stressful life events (1997). During times of stress, individuals make use of their religious orientation to develop methods of coping. Individuals do not use religious and spiritual coping methods individually. Inter-correlations found in religious and spiritual coping scales used previously suggest that religious and spiritual coping is applied in patterns or combinations.

Religious and spiritual coping has been associated with physical and mental health. Methods of religious and spiritual coping have been shown to be a remedy for anxiety (Freud, 1927, 1961). Religious and spiritual coping has also been a source of meaning for the world (Geertz, 1966) and stimuli for personal growth and development (Fromm, 1950).

The Brief RCOPE subset that is used in this survey has been used by Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez (1998) to measure coping strategies in family, friends, and acquaintances of victims in the Oklahoma City bombing. After a factor analysis two factors were established. A positive religious and spiritual coping scale of twelve items was one factor. The other factor was a negative factor scale that echoes the struggle during religious coping. These scales were found to be internally consistent. At a maximum, the short form survey that is used in the current study should take the participant two minutes to complete.

**Religious/spiritual history.** This section of the survey is designed to measure the religious and spiritual history of individuals in comparison to present religious and spiritual participation. This helps researchers assess the religious and spiritual participation over the life time. As of late, there have been four measures of religious and spiritual history. These surveys have not been assessed for reliability or validity. There is also little correlation between health and religious and spiritual history. However, life altering religious and spiritual experiences are the exception. Religious and spiritual experiences that alter one's perception of the world have had an effect on depressive disorders (Koenig, George, Meador, Blazer, & Dyke, 1994a; Meador, Koenig, Hughes, Blazer, Turnbull, & George, 1992; Ellison & George, 1994), alcohol abuse and dependence (Koenig, George, Meador, Blazer, & Ford, 1994b), and anxiety disorders (Koenig, George, Meador, Blazer, & Dyke, 1993; Koenig, Ford, George, Blazer, & Meador, 1993). These were studies done on adults with depression or medical conditions in a clinical setting. The estimated completion time for this section is under one minute.

**Organizational religiousness.** The organizational religiousness portion of the survey assesses the involvement of the individual with public religious organizations: churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, ashrams etc. The dimensions of this section are based on attitudes and behaviors. Most past surveys that measured religion and spirituality have included a section about attendance to religious services. Involvement in a religious community is important for a variety of religions. Experiences in religious communities can influence the attitude an individual experiences toward a certain religion. The evaluation of organizational religiousness is also important to evaluate the experience during a religious service in an organized setting: importance of music, prayer, readings, rituals, architecture etc.

Many of the questions in this section have been used in past surveys. For example, the Gallup Poll has used the attendance questions. Regular attendance to public religious institutions has a positive effect on health and longevity (Idler & Kasal, 1997a; Idler & Kasal, 1997b). Attendance increases behavioral conformity to the belief system in regards to alcohol use, smoking, and sexual intercourse (Gorsuch, 1995). Regular contact with a social network allows the individual to be sustained with social, emotional, and spiritual supports (Ellison & George, 1994). The religious community can also be source of comfort and support during times of crisis (Pressman, Lyons, Larson, & Strain, 1990). The short form of this section that is used in the current study is estimated to last fifteen seconds.

### **Validity**

The survey used is called the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality (BMMRS). It was developed in 1999 and revised in 2003. One of the main advantages of this instrument is that it was developed by a panel of experts in the field (Piedmont, Mapa, & Williams, 2007). This survey was used more prevalently in the research of examining the relationship between variables of religiosity and spirituality and their association to health factors (Johnstone, McCormack, Yoon, & Smith, 2011). Spirituality is conceptualized as emotional connectedness to a higher power (Johnstone et al., 2011). Religious Practices are conceptualized as culturally-based activities (Johnstone et al., 2011). The scales in the BMMRS assess theoretical components of religiosity (Private Religious Practices, Organizational Religiousness, Religious Support). It also measures the theoretical aspects of spirituality (Daily Spiritual Experiences, Meaning, Values/Beliefs, Forgiveness). A single subscale in the BMMRS measures both religious and spiritual features. According to a study by Johnstone and associates

(2011), the BMMRS demonstrated adequate convergent and divergent validity when correlated with the TCI Transpersonal Identification scales.

Preliminary psychometric tests were used to analyze reliability. Preceding studies have shown high reliability estimates for the subscales of the BMMRS, with alpha scores ranging from .71 to .87 (Kendler et al., 2003; Yoon & Lee, 2004; Mokuau et al., 2001; Underwood & Teresi, 2002; Pargament, 1999; Pargament et al., 2000; found in Johnstone et al., 2011).

### **Data Analysis**

Survey questions were incorporated to directly measure and answer the questions of the current research study. In order to answer the question, “To what extent does religiosity and spirituality have a positive impact on current academic performance in university students?” the researcher used a Pearson R correlation. The Pearson’s R correlation statistic is always between 1 and -1. It is an assumption of Pearson’s R that the relationship is linear. To interpret the results, the researcher looked at the closeness of the r statistic to 0. The closer the r statistic is to 0, the weaker the linear relationship. Current academic performance in this test was measured by the student’s reported GPA. Religion and spirituality was a scale score of a combination of questions 16, 38, 39, 40, and 41. These questions provided information on the public and private religious practices of students.

To answer the question, “Is there a positive correlation between the historical participation of religious practices and the current participation in religious practices?” the researcher also used a Pearson’s R correlation. Three questions on the survey were used. The first question from the survey that was used to answer the research question was “When you were a young child, how often did you attend religious services?” In addition to this question, the question “When you were a teenager, how often did you attend religious services” was use to operationalize the first



portion of this question. To answer the correlating part of the question regarding current participation in religious practices, the participants were asked to answer the following question on the survey: “How often do you attend religious services?”

The third question that the researcher sought to answer was, “Are students able to identify organizations on campus that are associated with the religious affiliation of the university?” In order to answer this question, the researcher conducted a Chi Square analysis. Chi Square tests compare groups. They allow us to compare the observed and expected frequencies. Instead of interpreting the results as they are displayed, Chi Square analysis produces a value indicating significant difference. The test implies that the differences of the observed and expected frequencies are not merely due to chance alone, but perhaps outside factors are affecting the groups. “Do university students identify organizations on campus that are associated with the religious affiliation of the university?” is the question on the survey that was used to answer the question. The survey provided two possible answers.

Another research question was “To what degree are religiosity and spirituality related to resiliency in university students?” The researcher used the Pearson R correlation to determine a possible relationship between resiliency and religiosity. Resiliency was measured by GPA. The researcher created a scale score based on the questions and results for the Beliefs category on the survey that included questions 9 through 15. The created a score of religious and spiritual beliefs. The scores for GPA and the Beliefs category scale score were correlated.

“Is religion a source of strength and comfort for university students?” was a question that the researcher was also interested in analyzing. In order to determine results for this question the researcher referred to question 9 on the survey that stated, “How much is religion a source of strength and comfort to you?” The researcher conducted a Chi Square analysis by comparing the groups of three possible answers to the question. The answers to the question were operationalized as, “None,” “A little,” and “A great deal.”

To answer, “How often do those who identify religiosity and spirituality as a source of strength and comfort participate in private religious practices?” the researcher conducted a Pearson R correlation. Question 9 from the survey was referenced for this question: “How much is religion a source of strength and comfort to you?” Then, the researcher created a Private Religious subscale comprised of questions 16 through 19 from the survey. The researcher then correlated the results of question 9 and the Private Religious subscale.

In order to answer the final research question, “Whether or not university students participate in private religious practices?” the researcher conducted a Chi Square Goodness of Fit. This test determines whether or not the frequency fits a pattern. The Chi Square Goodness of Fit produces a degrees of freedom, expected frequency count, and a Chi Square statistic. The use of a Chi Square statistic and the degrees of freedom produces a p-value. If the p-value is less than the significance level, the null hypothesis is not accepted. The researcher used questions 16, 17, and 18 from the survey. The researcher then re-coded the data into two groups. The two groups from each question were analyzed using the Chi Square Goodness of Fit test.

### **Association to the Literature**

There has been a recent trend in health literature regarding the relationship between religiousness and spirituality and aspects of physical and mental health (Masters, Carey, Maisto, Caldwell, Wolfe, & Hackney, & France & Himawan, 2009). Researchers who are familiar with literature regarding the psychology of religion are in agreement that a one-dimensional concept of religion and spirituality is too simplistic (Masters et al., 2009). A study conducted by Hill and Hood (1999) classified over one hundred self-reported measures of the dimensions of religion and spirituality (Masters et al., 2009). The interest in the dimensions and measures of religion and spirituality has led to an increase in interest of the involvement of religion and spirituality in young adults (Masters et al., 2009).

## Results

A total of thirty-three participants were surveyed. Three surveys were not used in the data analysis because they were incomplete for a total of thirty complete surveys. As shown in Table 1, the majority of the students who participated in the study were ages eighteen to twenty.

Table 1

### *Age of Participants*

Possible age	Reported number
18-20	20
21-23	8
24-26	0
26 +	2
Total	30

The majority of the participants reported that they were primarily freshman and sophomores in academic standing as displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

### *Academic Year in School*

Possible academic year	Reported number
Freshman	9
Sophomore	6
Junior	9
Senior	5
Total	30

Also the majority of students who participated in the survey indicated that their current GPA was between 3.00 and 4.00. The majority of students surveyed reported that they practiced Catholicism as a preferred religion as seen in Table 3.

Table 3

*Religious or Spiritual Practices of Choice*

Possible religious or spiritual practices	Reported number
Catholicism	14
Protestantism	6
Other	5
No preference	3
Atheist	1
Islam or Muslim	1
Total	30

One question that the researcher sought to answer was do religious and spiritual practices have a positive impact on current academic performance? In order to answer this question the researcher used two different portions of the survey in the analysis. One portion was the reported GPA of the students. The other portion used was a scale score of five questions (questions 16, 38, 39, 40, and 41). These questions measured different ways in which students reported about how they practiced their religious or spiritual beliefs. These practices included both organized, public, and private practices. The researcher used a Pearson correlation to analyze this question. It was found that  $r = -.065$  and an  $\alpha = .734$ . This analysis revealed that there is virtually no relationship between the GPA as a measure of current academic performance and religious and spiritual practices.

The second question that the researcher wanted to answer is whether or not there was a positive correlation between the historical participation of religious practices and current participation in religious practices. To answer this question, the researcher computed a Pearson's R score between a combined score of questions 32 and 35 with question 38. The  $r = 0.829$  which was significant. The alpha was .000. It was found that there is a positive correlation between the historical participation of religious practices with the current participation in religious practices.

Another research question in this study was whether or not students were able to identify organizations on campus that are associated with the religious affiliation of the university. In order to answer this question, the researcher ran a Chi Square analysis on a specific question from the survey (question 41). The observed frequency for the population was 15 and the expected frequency was also 15. Chi Square = 0 and the obtained alpha level = 1.0 with the degrees of freedom = 1. It was expected that at random 15 individuals would have identified organizations on campus that are associated with the religious affiliation of the university. As a result of the study, 15 individuals did identify these organizations.

The researcher was also interested in to what degree religiosity and spirituality were related to resiliency in college students. Again, the researcher used a Pearson Correlation to test the hypothesis. The researcher used GPA as a measure of resiliency. The researcher then created a scale score of the Beliefs category in the survey. This included questions 9-15 in the survey. The  $r = -.207$  and the obtained alpha was .272. These results revealed that there is a negative, non-significant correlation between GPA and Beliefs. The Beliefs score mean was 12.56 and the standard deviation was 4.25. The average GPA of the participants in the study was 3.9 with a standard deviation of .48. This indicates that there is a negative relationship and is not statistically significant with the alpha. It shows a weak trend toward a negative relationship. The

interpretation of the results shows that GPA as a measure of resiliency was not related to religiosity and spirituality.

Another research question was whether or not religion was a source of strength and comfort for college students. To answer this question, the researcher referred to questions nine and three from the survey. Question three was regarding the Grade Point Average of the students as whole numbers 0 through 4.00 or 4.00 and above as an option. Question nine had three possible answers: “none,” “a little,” and “a great deal.” The expected frequency for “none” was 10 with a residual of -8. The observed frequency was 2. The expected frequency for “a little” was 10 with a residual of 0 and an observed frequency of 10. Finally, the expected frequency for “a great deal” was 10 and a residual of -8. The observed frequency was 18. With the degrees of freedom being 2, the result of the Chi Square was 12.8 at an alpha of .002. There was statistical significance. More people reported that religion as a source of strength and comfort was a coping mechanism in association with their GPA.

An additional research question was how often do those who identify religiosity and spirituality as a source of strength and comfort participate in private religious practices. In order to calculate the results for this question, the researcher used a test for Pearson R to analyze the Private Religious Scale (questions 16 through 19 on the survey) with the results of question 9.  $r = -.729$  with an alpha of .000. This can be interpreted as a significant negative correlation. The mean of the private religious scale score was 18.7 with a standard deviation of 6.56. The mean score for question 9 was 2.53 with a significant difference of .63. Thus, those who identify religiosity and spirituality as a source of strength and comfort do not participate in private religious practices.

The researcher wanted to know whether or not students who attended the university participated in private religious practices. To answer the query, Chi Square analysis for Goodness of Fit was done on questions sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen from the survey. To create the Chi Square analysis, the researcher grouped the scores of the results into two categories represented by 1 and 2. The 1 represented individuals who scored high attendance operationalized by “several times a day.” The 2 represented all other possible answers that reported a lower frequency of private religious practice behavior. The expected frequency for group 1 of question sixteen was 15 and the expected frequency for group 2 was 15. The observed frequency for group 1 was 5 and for group 2 was 25. Chi square was 13.33 with an obtained alpha of .000.

The Chi Square test for question 17 was executed similarly. The results were grouped into two categories with 1 representing high frequency of watching or listening to religious programming operationalized by “several times a day.” 2 represented all other possible answers that indicated less frequency. The expected frequency for both groups was 15. The observed frequency for group 1 was 1 and the observed frequency for group 2 was 29. The chi square equaled 26.13 with an obtained alpha of .000.

Again, for question 18 the grouping of the results was done similarly to questions 16 and 17. Group 1 represented a high frequency operationalized by “several times a day.” Group 2 represented all other possible answers indicating less frequency. The expected frequency for both groups was 15. The observed frequency for group one of question 18 was 1 and the observed frequency for group 2 was 29. The chi square was 26.13 and the obtained alpha was .000.

For all three of the Chi Square analysis for Goodness of Fit, the expected and observed frequencies were significantly different. The results of the analysis showed that students are not participating in a high frequency of private religious practices.

## **Discussion**

### **Interpretation of Results**

The researcher had hypothesized that religiosity and spirituality would positively affect the current academic performance in university students. The results showed that there is no relationship between current academic performance in the form of a GPA and religiosity and spirituality. Findings of the study indicated that the researcher's hypothesis was disproved.

In regards to the second research question, the researcher hypothesized that there would be a positive correlation between historical participation of religious practices and current participation in religious practices. This hypothesis was supported by the results. University students indicated that there is a positive correlation between the historical participation of religious practices with the current participation in religious practices. This showed that there is a continued pattern of participation in religious and spiritual practices from childhood and teenage years and after a transition to a university. If an individual attended a religious service as a child and a teenager, they were likely to continue attend religious services as a university student.

The researcher believed that few students would be able to identify organizations on campus that were associated with the religious affiliation of the university. After the analysis was conducted, the results showed that fifteen individuals identified organizations that were associated with the religious affiliation of the university. This was half of all the participants. This result neither supported, nor denied the researcher's hypothesis. It simply showed that there were many participants who could identify religious organizations on campus.



The fourth question the researcher sought to answer was to what degree religiosity and spirituality were related to resiliency in university students. The researcher had hypothesized that there would be a positive correlation between resiliency and religiosity and spirituality. However, the results showed that there was more of a negative relationship between resiliency and spirituality in university students. This disproved the researcher's hypothesis.

The researcher hypothesized that that religion and spirituality would not be a source of strength and comfort to students based on previous research. However, the results of the study showed that the researcher's hypothesis was disproved. University students reported that religion was a source of strength and comfort in relation to their current academic performance. This indicates that university students rely on religion as a source of strength and comfort. Religion could be a possible coping mechanism in relation to academic performance as seen in previous research.

In order to deepen the results of the survey, the researcher wanted to know more information about religion as a source of strength and comfort. The study analyzed whether or not students who claimed that religion was a source of strength and comfort also participated in private religious practices, such as praying, listening to or watching religious programming, reading the Bible or other religious literature, or saying prayers or grace before dining. The researcher hypothesized that that those who identify religion as a source of strength and comfort would also participate in private religious practices. This hypothesis was refuted. It was found that university students who indicated that religion was a source of strength and comfort did not participate in private religious practices. This finding showed a potential shift in how individuals practice religion. Even though people indicate that religion is a source of great comfort, they do

not participate in private religious behaviors. This supports previous research that showed Americans are changing the ways in which they practice religion.

In relation to the final research question, it was hypothesized that many participants in the study would report that they partake in private religious practices. The results of the study showed that students do not participate in a high frequency of private religious practices. This refuted the hypothesis. However, many students did indicate that they participated in private religious practices at some level of frequency.

**Implications for social work practice.** It seems as though university students do have religious and spiritual beliefs and that these beliefs are a source of strength and comfort. Social workers and other professionals should be prepared to talk about these beliefs with university students. In the past there has been a lack of knowledge and comfort in talking to university students about their beliefs surrounding religiosity and spirituality. This study shows that there is a definite importance surrounding religious and spiritual beliefs in university students. Perhaps this information can be used to help providers who work with university students become more comfortable in discussing religious and spiritual beliefs.

**Implications for research.** More research should be done on the relationship between religiosity and spirituality and university students. The use of this survey has shown that it is an effective measure for this age group. It is a valid and reliable survey that could be used in future research. In future use of the survey, researchers may choose to include questions that measure development in college students. They may also choose to include questions about the use of religiosity and spirituality as a protective factor for university students. Additionally, the survey may be edited to include better measures of success rather than reporting on GPA.

Future researchers may also choose to use a more representative sample of college students. This study only collected data from one university that was religiously affiliated and all-female. Other studies could examine trends in beliefs of students from non-religiously affiliated universities with samples of male populations included.

**Strengths and limitations of research.** The primary limitation of this study is the sampling method. The sample of students was taken from a single campus. The institution was religiously affiliated. This may have altered the results of the study because of the previous or current religious beliefs of the students. Also, the students may associate with the religion of the institution and not be an inclusive sample of other religions.

Another major limitation of the study was the sample size. With thirty complete surveys, it was difficult to find any significance in the results. Many statistical tests could not be run with so few participants. The small sample size was limited by the opportunity of the researcher. The completion time for the entire study was limited to nine months. The limited amount of time left little time for recruitment. The sample size was also limited to one university. This university was all-female and religiously affiliated. The sample was not a representative section of the population because of these factors. Other colleges, either non-religiously or religiously affiliated, as well as males, were not represented in the study.

The recruitment process was a limitation for the study. The researcher used posting flyers as a method for recruitment at the university. Flyers were placed around campus, as well as in dormitories. However, this was the only method of recruitment. The distribution of flyers also occurred at the beginning of the term when students are preoccupied with classes and other activities. The beginning of the term is often a busy time for students. This may have limited the amount of students who were recruited.

Another limitation to the study was the measure of resiliency that was used. The survey was not based on measures of resiliency. The measure of resiliency in the study was GPA. The answers to this

question that were provided were measured in whole numbers and not qualitatively self-reported which is a limitation. However, there are many different ways to evaluate and measure resiliency in ways other than current academic performance. In future studies, the researcher may refer to other methods of measuring resiliency, as well as developing a survey with questions about protective factors.

One of the main strengths of this study was the use of an existing survey. This provided reliability and validity for the study. The survey was created using pre-existing theories and research. It was also conducted multiple times to test for reliability and validity. The present study could easily be replicated or used as a comparison study in future research.

Another strength of the study was that it is quantitative in design. A quantitative study has many advantages. One strength of a quantitative study is that they are easily replicated. Future research can be done efficiently by using a quantitative design similar to that of the current study. Unlike qualitative studies, quantitative research designs hypothesize the results of the study before the data is collected. The results are independent from the researcher. Finally, the data collected is presented in a precise, numerical manner. Interpretation of the results is based on statistical analysis increasing the reliability of the results.

## **Summary**

There is further research to be conducted on religiosity and spirituality. This study provides basic information and an outline that is beneficial to future research.

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## Appendix A

**Introduction:** You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the behaviors and attitudes of religiosity and spirituality. This study is being conducted by Allison Culey, a graduate student at St. Catherine University under the supervision of Dr. Lisa Kiesel, a faculty member in the Department of Social Work. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you attend St. Catherine University, a university with religious affiliation. Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to be in the study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to better understand the behaviors and attitudes university students may have in relation to religiosity and spirituality. Approximately 100 people are expected to participate in this research.

**Procedures:** If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete this consent form and access the online survey. The online survey will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. After you have completed the survey, you may close the link.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the study:** This study has minimal risk to participants. The questions that are asked on the survey are personal. However, this survey cannot be traced to you or your computer. There is no identifying information on the survey. If at any time you become uncomfortable during the survey, you may choose to quit the survey without penalty. There are no direct benefit to this study other than your contribution to the base of knowledge about religiosity and spirituality.

**Confidentiality:** Any information obtained in connection with this research study that can be identified with you will be disclosed only with your permission; your results will be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only group data will be presented. I will keep the research results in a locked file cabinet in my home and only I and my advisor will have access to the records while we work on this project. I will finish analyzing the data by April 1, 2014. I will then destroy all original reports. Because there is no identifying information in this study, there is no risk in revealing identifying information.

**Voluntary nature of the study:** Participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with St. Catherine University in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without affecting these relationships.

**Contacts and questions:** If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Allison, at 605-261-1405. You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, my faculty advisor, (Lisa Kiesel, PhD, LICSW at 651-690-6709), will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739. You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

**Statement of Consent:** You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Clicking next indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after clicking next, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

## Appendix B

1. What is your age?
  - a. 18-20
  - b. 21-23
  - c. 24-26
  - d. 26 +
2. What is your year in school?
  - a. 1<sup>st</sup>
  - b. 2<sup>nd</sup>
  - c. 3<sup>rd</sup>
  - d. 4<sup>th</sup>
  - e. 4 +
3. What is your estimated Grade Point Average?
  - a. 0.00- 1.00
  - b. 1.00-2.00
  - c. 2.00-3.00
  - d. 3.00-4.00
  - e. 4.00 or higher
4. What is your academic year in school?
  - a. Freshman
  - b. Sophomore
  - c. Junior
  - d. Senior

5. What is your Major?

6. What is your Minor?

7. What is your religious or spiritual practice of choice (indicate most applicable to you)?

Catholicism

Protestantism

Islam or Muslim

Buddhism

Hinduism

Taoism

Confucianism

Agnostic

Atheist  
 Secular Humanism  
 Sikh  
 Scientology  
 Rastafarianism  
 Baha'i  
 Shinto  
 Neo-Paganism  
 Unitarian Universalism  
 Chinese Traditionalism  
 Primal Indigenous  
 Judaism  
 No Preference  
 Other

8. What is your parent or guardian's religious or spiritual practice of choice that was dominant in your home (indicate most applicable to you)?

Catholicism  
 Protestantism  
 Islam or Muslim  
 Buddhism  
 Hinduism  
 Taoism  
 Confucianism  
 Agnostic  
 Atheist  
 Secular Humanism  
 Sikh  
 Scientology  
 Rastafarianism  
 Baha'i  
 Shinto  
 Neo-Paganism  
 Unitarian Universalism  
 Chinese Traditionalism  
 Primal Indigenous  
 Judaism  
 No Preference  
 Other

9. How much is religion a source of strength and comfort to you?

- a. None
- b. A little
- c. A great deal

10. Do you believe there is a life after death?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Undecided

11. God's goodness and love are greater than we can possibly imagine.

- a. Agree Strongly
- b. Agree Somewhat
- c. Can't Decide
- d. Disagree Somewhat
- e. Disagree Strongly

12. Despite all the things that go wrong, the world is still moved by love.

- a. Agree Strongly
- b. Agree Somewhat
- c. Can't Decide
- d. Disagree Somewhat
- e. Disagree Strongly

13. When faced with a tragic event I try to remember that God still loves me and that there is hope for the future.

- a. Agree Strongly
- b. Agree Somewhat
- c. Can't Decide
- d. Disagree Somewhat
- e. Disagree Strongly

14. I feel that it is important for my children to believe in God.

- a. Agree Strongly
- b. Agree Somewhat
- c. Can't Decide
- d. Disagree Somewhat
- e. Disagree Strongly

15. I think that everything that happens has a purpose.

- a. Agree Strongly
- b. Agree Somewhat
- c. Can't Decide
- d. Disagree Somewhat
- e. Disagree Strongly

16. How often do you pray privately in places other than at church or synagogue?

- a. Several times a day
- b. Once a day
- c. A few times a week
- d. Once a week
- e. A few times a month

- f. Once a month
- g. Less than once a month
- h. Never

17. How often do you watch or listen to religious programs on TV or radio?

- a. Several times a day
- b. Once a day
- c. A few times a week
- d. Once a week
- e. A few times a month
- f. Once a month
- g. Less than once a month
- h. Never

18. How often do you read the Bible or other religious literature?

- a. Several times a day
- b. Once a day
- c. A few times a week
- d. Once a week
- e. A few times a month
- f. Once a month
- g. Less than once a month
- h. Never

19. How often are prayers or grace said before or after meals in your home?

- a. At all meals
- b. Once a day
- c. At least once a week
- d. Only on special occasions
- e. Never

20. I think about how my life is part of a larger spiritual force.

- a. A great deal
- b. Quite a bit
- c. Somewhat
- d. Not at all

21. I work together with God as partners to get through hard times.

- a. A great deal
- b. Quite a bit
- c. Somewhat
- d. Not at all

22. I look to God for strength, support, and guidance in crises.

- a. A great deal
- b. Quite a bit

- c. Somewhat
- d. Not at all

23. I try to find the lesson from God in crises.

- a. A great deal
- b. Quite a bit
- c. Somewhat
- d. Not at all

24. I confess my sins and ask for God's forgiveness.

- a. A great deal
- b. Quite a bit
- c. Somewhat
- d. Not at all

25. I feel that stressful situations are God's way of punishing me for my sins or lack of spirituality.

- a. A great deal
- b. Quite a bit
- c. Somewhat
- d. Not at all

26. I wonder whether God has abandoned me.

- a. A great deal
- b. Quite a bit
- c. Somewhat
- d. Not at all

27. I try to make sense of the situation and decide what to do without relying on God.

- a. A great deal
- b. Quite a bit
- c. Somewhat
- d. Not at all

28. I question whether God really exists.

- a. A great deal
- b. Quite a bit
- c. Somewhat
- d. Not at all

29. I express anger at God for letting terrible things happen.

- a. A great deal
- b. Quite a bit
- c. Somewhat
- d. Not at all

30. To what extent is your religion involved in understanding or dealing with stressful situations in any way?

- a. Very involved
- b. Somewhat involved
- c. Not very involved
- d. Not involved at all

31. Were you raised in a religious tradition? If you answered no, skip to question #38.

- a. Yes
- b. No

32. When you were a young child, how often did you attend religious services?

- a. Never
- b. Less than once a year
- c. About once or twice a year
- d. Several times a year
- e. About once a month
- f. 2-3 times a month
- g. Nearly every week
- h. Every week
- i. Several times a week

33. When you were a young child, how often did you participate in religious practices at home, either by yourself or with your family?

- a. Never
- b. Less than once a year
- c. About once or twice a year
- d. Several times a year
- e. About once a month
- f. 2-3 times a month
- g. Nearly every week
- h. Every week
- i. Several times a week

34. When you were a young child, how often did you participate in religious practices at home, either by yourself or with your family?

- a. Never
- b. Less than once a year
- c. About once or twice a year
- d. Several times a year
- e. About once a month
- f. 2-3 times a month
- g. Nearly every week
- h. Every week
- i. Several times a week

35. When you were a teenager, how often did you attend religious services?

- a. Never
- b. Less than once a year
- c. About once or twice a year
- d. Several times a year
- e. About once a month
- f. 2-3 times a month
- g. Nearly every week
- h. Every week
- i. Several times a week

36. When you were a teenager, how often did you participate in religious practices at home—either by yourself or with your family?

- a. Never
- b. Less than once a year
- c. About once or twice a year
- d. Several times a year
- e. About once a month
- f. 2-3 times a month
- g. Nearly every week
- h. Every week
- i. Several times a week

37. Do you currently practice the same religion in which you were raised?

- a. No, no longer practice any religion
- b. No, I have changed religious affiliations
- c. Yes, I still practice the same religion

38. How often do you attend religious services?

- a. Never
- b. Less than once a year
- c. About once or twice a year
- d. Several times a year
- e. About once a month
- f. 2-3 times a month
- g. Nearly every week
- h. Every week
- i. Several times a week

39. Besides religious services, how often do you take part in other activities at a place of worship?

- a. Never
- b. Less than once a year
- c. About once or twice a year
- d. Several times a year
- e. About once a month
- f. 2-3 times a month
- g. Nearly every week



- h. Every week
- i. Several times a week

40. Was the religious affiliation of the university a factor when you chose to attend?

- a. Yes it was a factor
- b. No it was not a factor

41. Are you aware or do you participate in any organizations on campus that are associated with the religious affiliation of the university?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Thank you for completing this survey about your religious and spiritual beliefs and practices!  
You may exit out of this window.