AN INVESTIGATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED

WITH RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT

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AN INVESTIGATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Research suggests that a relationship exists between church attendance and mental health, although the parameters of the relationship are unclear. The present study has focused on the relationship between religious involvement and social interest (belongingness). This relationship was examined in a population comprised of 259 adult members of conservative Christian churches in Northwest Alabama by use of the Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale (SIBS), the Social Interest Scale (SIS), the Hope Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS).

The SIBS and SIS were demonstrated to have a strong relationship suggesting that there is a strong relationship between church attendance and mental health as measured, in this case by a sense of belongingness and unity with the broad human community. The

relationships between the SIBS, the SES, and SWLS were less clear as was the relationship of the SIS and the SWLS, highlighting a need for further study regarding these relationships.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the past several years there has been increasing interest in the role of religious involvement and spirituality in therapy and the therapeutic relationship (Abe-Kim, Gong, & Takeuchi, 2004; Carr, 2000; Castellini, Nelson III, Barrett, Nagy, & Quatman, 2005; Griffith, & Griggs, 2001; Hall, Dixon, & Mauzey, 2004; Hill, 2005; James & Wells, 2003; Wink, Dillon, & Fay, 2005). Some researchers propose that the study of spirituality should be a specialization within psychology (Helminiak, 1996). In spite of all of this interest, it is still unclear what role, if any, religious involvement or spirituality plays in the ability of the individual to find a sense of belongingness, for the person to integrate or find a place in the world. The purpose of this study was to collect data that explored whether religious involvement plays a role in the social and psychological development of an individual, and by extension, whether it plays a role in the ability of the Self to find a place in the world.

Social and Spiritual Development

Maslow's Theory of Development

In 1970 Abraham Maslow proposed a theory of motivation, wherein he suggested that human motivations may exist in a hierarchy. His theoretical construct places self-actualization at the pinnacle of the hierarchy and all lower level needs must be met prior

to an individual becoming self-actualized. The physiological, safety, and social needs are seen as deficiency needs, which are basic needs that must be met before growth can be achieved; so according to Maslow's theory the social development of an individual is an intrinsic part of personhood.

Erikson's Theory of Development

Erik Erikson, a developmental psychologist, addressed human growth in a slightly different manner. He theorized that the human person develops in eight distinct stages. In each stage, the individual is faced with a new drive and a concurrent need to be fulfilled. This creates the opportunity for the individual to increase their social interaction, and to affiliate themselves with social institutions created to help them develop within certain socially prescribed patterns. In Erikson's theory interaction between social structures and the individual is essential if the individual is to develop fully (Erikson, 1987).

Social development and interaction with others outside of oneself, then, is seen as being a vital part of the development of the individual person. It is necessary for the individual to be in relationship with others in order that they may fully develop their potential as human persons, as well as to be self-actualized, that is, to find meaning and purpose in life.

Existential Theory

Existential theorists posit that the reality of this world is that we share our lives with others who are very much like us, but at the same time may seem very alien to us; in fact, it is sometimes a struggle to relate to individuals who seem so different to and from us. The way we relate to others is greatly influenced by our parents or primary caregivers. As children we are very dependent upon the adults in our lives, particularly those who are

our parents. "Whether we feel protected and cared for, or coerced, ignored or ill-treated, is bound to have a decisive impact on the way in which we relate to others" (van Deurzen-Smith, 1997, p. 112).

Spiritual Development

Another of the four dimensions of personhood in existential theory is the spiritual dimension. Existential theorists believe that in this dimension we organize our worldview, which we then place into our overall philosophy of life. This philosophy is not explicitly articulated by us; rather, it is lived out implicitly in the way in which we relate to others and the way that we choose to live our lives. As we come into contact with others and examine their ideas, beliefs and values we may come to believe that our previous convictions may have been flawed. So we change our behaviors in order to make them consistent with this new set of ideas and beliefs.

> The spiritual dimension of our existence is, to a large extent, informed by the dominant ideology of the society in which we grow up and it is often determined by the religion to which we belong, although for many people today it would have nothing to do with religion at all. (van Deurzen-Smith, 1997, p. 123)

Although this existential view might seem to suggest that those without religion may lack a system of meaning and value at the foundation of their existence, nothing could be further from the truth. It could be argued that a system of meaning is at the foundation of all human experience which is fundamentally about making sense of the world, and is therefore a part of all of our lives, whether or not we profess to have faith or a belief in something outside of ourselves.

Our first experiences of the concepts of faith or faithlessness begin with our experience of our parents. Those who are caregivers welcome us into this world with varying degrees of consistency as regards their level of fidelity in the provision of our needs. This gives us our first experience of loyalty and dependability and from this we begin to form our worldview and how we fit into its social structure.

> Notice that even in this rudimentary form faith exhibits what we may call a covenantal pattern of relationship. In the interaction of parent and child not only does a bond of mutual trust and loyalty begin to develop, but already the child, albeit on a very basic level, senses the strange new environment as one that is either dependable and provident, or arbitrary and neglectful. (Fowler, 1981, p. 16)

The parents, in caring for the child, bring much into the relationship with their child; they bring with them their way of being in the world as well as the way that they perceive the world. They bring their trusts, loyalties, fidelities, and even infidelities. In short, they share with the child the relationships with others, institutions, and centers of power that give meaning and transcendence to their lives. The first experiences of the child are not bound up in the child attempting to "figure out" parental beliefs and values. The child, instead, begins to form basic, but long-lasting, images of what the centers of power are for the parents and what brings meaning to their lives. "As love, attachment, and dependence bind the new one into the family, he or she begins to form a disposition of shared trust and loyalty to (or through) the family's faith ethos" (Fowler, 1981, p. 17).

In a 2005 study (McDonald, Beck, Allison, & Norsworthy, 2005) it was found that children who grew up in homes where intimacy was lacking were found to be avoidant of intimacy with God. Children who grew up in rigid, authoritarian homes were

found to exhibit a fearful attachment style, in which they believed the love of God was conditional, or that they were unworthy of that love. On the contrary, in an intimate family where the parents had an appropriate attachment to God, it was more likely that the children of that family would have more intimate attachment to God (McDonald et al., 2005). These same attachment styles may be utilized by individuals in their relationships with others throughout their lives.

In the past many individuals who were seeking transcendence have turned to religion and religious authorities for guidance in their quest to become more "faithful" or "spiritual". The structure of most traditional religions reflects this way of thinking. Various clergy are seen as the obvious leaders (or parents) in the spiritual journey due to the power of tradition and the trappings of authority. With spiritual identity built upon the foundation of faith could it not be posited that religious involvement plays a role in the individual finding the place of the Self in the world?

Statement of the Problem

The relationship of involvement in religion, as reflected in one's church attendance and mental health is somewhat unclear. There is a need to improve our understanding of how such psychological variables as self-esteem, belongingness, satisfaction with life, and hope are related to religious involvement. Moreover, there's a need to examine relationships of these variables to church members who attend church with varying degrees of regularity. A greater depth of understanding would hold promise for improving therapeutic services provided this population by psychologists and by clergy assigned pastoral counseling responsibilities. Also, there's a need to examine the

psychometric properties of an instrument that has shown early promise as a measure of religious involvement and beliefs, *The Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale* (Hatch, Burg, Naberhaus, & Hellmich, 1998).

It is clear that American society as a whole perceives spirituality as important; this value is being lived out in everyday life, and, as a result, being brought into the therapy room. “Spirituality as a pervasive force in contemporary American society is deeply influencing several helping professions such as counseling, education, medicine, nursing, psychology, social work, education, and addictions treatment” (Stanard, Sandhu, & Painter, 2000, p. 204). Due to this spiritually-oriented worldview more therapists are taking spirituality into account in an attempt to treat the whole person.

Spirituality and psychology are both aspects of everyday life for many individuals. While experiences of each can be distinct such as attending a church service or struggling with some issue in therapy, they often overlap, such as when faced with experiences which demand acceptance or forgiveness from or toward an individual. Many psychologists and theologians struggle with the distinctions and interrelations between psychology and theology (DeHoff, 1998).

Oftentimes in a society there are behaviors exhibited by individuals that can be thought of as strange, unique, different, or odd. When these behaviors either hurt others or break laws then the individuals engaged in them are punished. At times when the behaviors are thought to be the result of mental illness the individuals are referred to treatment. When dealing with a society in which there is one culture it is a fairly simple task to differentiate between behaviors that are morally wrong and behaviors whose “wrongness” is mitigated by mental illness. In a multicultural society such as the United

States such behaviors may be the result of an individual acting in a way that is considered acceptable within their cultural milieu, but possibly not in the broader social milieus.

These behaviors can be more difficult to interpret when they are lodged within the individuals' religious social context. Take, for example, the Filipino spiritual tradition of ancestor worship, in which individuals may speak to dead relatives as if they are in the room with them (Hall et al., 2004). In Western society, these individuals may be perceived to be talking to "no one" or talking to themselves and may be referred to mental health treatment. In such situations the mental health practitioner may be called upon to treat a person by accessing and utilizing their religious beliefs and finding a way to integrate the individual's spiritual beliefs and Western cultural norms (Carr, 2000).

This blending of religious and social contexts may cause a "disconnect" between the individual and the social group or environment in which they find themselves. A psychologist with an understanding of these concepts and dynamics may be able to assist a religiously oriented individual in finding a sense of connection and belongingness within their religious milieu, and thus assist them in feeling a sense of belongingness in the world that they inhabit.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study the term Christian will be used for individuals who adhere to the concept of a monotheistic, Trinitarian God as presented in the New Testament through the teachings of Jesus Christ, who is believed to be the Son of God. Conservative Christians are those who hold to traditional practices and beliefs, such as strict adherence to the primacy and immutability (nothing added, nothing removed) of

scripture. Spirituality, as a term used here, refers to an individuals' relationship with their higher power, while religious affiliation or involvement is considered to be an outward expression of that relationship.

Research Question

The principal research question that guided the study was the following: What is the relationship of religious involvement, as measured by the *Spiritual Beliefs and Involvement Scale*, and selected psychological variables, including social interest, as measured by the *Social Interest Scale*, self-esteem, as measured by the *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale*, hope, as measured by *The Hope Scale*, and satisfaction with life, as measured by the *Satisfaction with Life Scale*.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study should be of interest to psychologists for several reasons. First, psychologists are committed to studying and changing behavior to improve the condition of individuals and society. Religious involvement or spirituality often plays a role in the behavior of an individual when they are alone or with others; if those behaviors need to be modified then the use of spirituality could be helpful in such modifications. If religious involvement or spirituality plays a role in identity development, then that information could be used to inform and plan treatment options for individuals seeking therapy, or those already involved in the therapeutic process.

For many reasons the role of psychologists is expanding into areas previously served by clergy and other religious leaders. Individuals may feel that they should see a

psychologist for a variety of issues, including issues that directly impinge upon or arise from their concepts of faith, belief, religion, spirituality, and values. In order to adequately provide services for this population, psychologists must know why these individuals think and feel this way. It is very important that psychologists understand that they may be called upon to provide services in areas in which they may not feel competent. In such cases, the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct is clear. In 2.01 (b) the code states:

> Where scientific or professional knowledge in the discipline of psychology establishes that an understanding of factors associated with age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, or socioeconomic status is essential for effective implementation of their services or research, psychologists have or obtain the training, experience, consultation, or supervision necessary to ensure the competence of their services, or they make appropriate referrals, except as provided in standard 2.02, Providing Services in Emergencies.(American Psychological Association, 2002, p. 5)

The results of this study may provide psychologists a stronger basis for understanding the relationship between religious affiliation and a need for a sense of social belonging. The results may also clarify how an individual's spirituality is related to their sense of hope and satisfaction with life as well as how they perceive themselves and measure their self-worth.

II. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Relevant theoretical and empirical studies reported in the professional literature pertaining to the core constructs of the present study are presented in this chapter. Principal areas of specific importance to the present study include literature focused on identity development, social and spiritual development, and the relationships of religious involvement and selected personality factors.

Identity Development

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow's theory of personality is built from his hierarchy of needs, which explores relations among human motives. He speculated that that there are basic motives such as need for food and safety that must be fulfilled.

> It is these needs, which are essentially deficits in the organism, empty holes, so to speak, which must be filled up for health's sake, and furthermore must be filled from without by human beings, other than the subject, that I shall call deficits or deficiency needs for purposes of this exposition and to set them in contrast to another and very different kind of motivation. (Maslow, 1968, pp. 22-23)

Maslow clarified that his theories are derived from primarily psychologically healthy individuals, individuals who want to develop and to grow. “This is in flat contradiction to that version of Freudian theory, which conceives of every child as hanging on desperately to each adjustment that it achieves and to each state of rest or equilibrium” (Maslow, 1968, pp. 23-24).

Maslow believed that in happy, healthy, and secure children a drive toward growth and maturity, in short, a motivation to change could be observed. He believed that what can be observed in healthy children was true for adults as well. Maslow, as evidenced above, differentiates between deficiency needs and being needs. Deficiency needs are those needs that need to be met for an organism to survive, and are found in all animals. Being needs, on the other hand, are for Maslow distinctly human.

Maslow described being needs as unique to human experience, for example, the desire to discover and to understand, the desire to return love to others, and a desire to optimize fulfillment and to reach one's inner potential to achieve self actualization.

> So far as motivational status is concerned, healthy people have sufficiently gratified their basic needs for safety, belongingness, love, respect, and self-esteem so that they are motivated primarily by trends to self-actualization (defined as ongoing actualization of potentials, capacities and talents, as fulfillment of mission [or call, fate, destiny, or vocation], as a fuller knowledge of, and acceptance of, the person’s own intrinsic nature, as an unceasing trend toward unity, integration or synergy within the person). (Maslow, 1968, p. 25)

Erikson's Identity Development

Erikson believed that each individual develops according to eight predetermined stages, which follow a basic formula or ground plan. In order to develop a stable identity the individual must successfully resolve eight crises over their lifespan. According to Erikson the individual develops along a predetermined "growth timeline" in a series of steps. The successful completion of each step, or stage, both requires and enables the individual to participate more fully within their social milieu, and in various organizations that support the proper rate of growth as well as the appropriate sequence of their unfolding (Erikson, 1987).

Developmental crises are an integral part of Erikson's stage theory. "Crisis" used in the context of his developmental theory does not refer to some catastrophic experience in an individuals' life, but to an issue that must be resolved during each stage so that the individual becomes psychologically stronger and more socially adjusted (Erikson, 1987).

Erikson's developmental theory is differentiated from other stage theories by Erikson's contention that the individual does not remain within a stage until they have completed that stage successfully and moved on. Rather, he contends that the individual is pushed through this series of crises by processes of physical maturation, peer group and social group pressure, and by demands created by the roles that the individual chooses to take on. Erikson's theory then contends that these stages come along at roughly the same ages for each individual, and must be dealt with in the same sequence whether or not the individual has resolved the crises of the earlier stages. An important distinction between Erikson's theory and some other developmental theories is that tasks

not resolved in earlier stages can make it difficult for the individual to find ego integrity in later life.

Developmental Experiences with Family or Caregivers

According to Erikson's stage theory the individual's social development begins during infancy. At birth our view of the world is very egocentric but it does not take long for us to realize that we do not exist alone in the world. The world is, in fact, full of others, many of whom are like us and many of whom seem not to be very similar to us at all. There are also other people and things in this world that are very threatening to us. As infants and children we must depend on parents and/or caregivers to provide for our needs. As we develop we also look to them as sources of information about and exemplars of the ways in which to relate with the world around us, and more importantly, how to establish and maintain relationships with other individuals.

> Obviously, our relationships to our parents are crucial in this early exploration of the human relations dimension. Whether we feel protected and cared for, or coerced, ignored or ill-treated, is bound to have a decisive impact on the way in which we relate to others. (van Deurzen-Smith, 1997, p. 112)

One way in which psychosocial and emotional development can be measured is through attachment theory. "Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) theorized that the early attachment bond formed internal working models through repeated daily experiences with caregivers and that these working models serve as a guideline for future social interactions throughout the lifespan" (McDonald et al., 2005, p. 21).

It is believed that attachment is demonstrated in certain "hallmark" behaviors exhibited toward the attachment figure. These behaviors include attempting to maintain

close proximity, modeling of appropriate behavior and provision of safety by the attachment figure, and anxiety caused by separation from the attachment figure.

> Kirkpatrick (1999) cited evidence for the existence of these hallmark attachment behaviors in relationship with God. Among these attachment behaviors are viewing God as close in proximity through prayer and the belief that God is omnipresent. In summary, it has been asserted that a believer's personal relationship with God serves similar functions to other human attachment relationships. (McDonald et al., 2005, p. 21)

Self-Identity

Self-identity is a term that is generally used to "refer to the total set of perceptions one has of who one is as a distinct person" (Pedersen, 1999, p. 73). A way in which researchers traditionally sought to study the concept of self-identity was by asking the question "Who are you?" The respondent was then asked to answer this question in their own words. It was believed that this response gave researchers insight into the individual's true self. The problem with these individualized responses was that it was then difficult to draw comparisons between disparate groups of individuals. People often define themselves according to the context in which they live, thereby giving some aspects of their self-identity more importance than other individuals who may have a different context. "According to personality theory, people share personality traits and personal constructs which are produced by common experiences within a culture (Allport, 1961; Cattell, 1957; Kelly, 1963). In a similar manner, it is likely that there are aspects of one's self-identity that are shared, as well as elements that are unique" (Pedersen, 1999, p. 74).

There is an overall lack of theory and research regarding various aspects of self-identity as they relate to the concept of the self. However, Pedersen (1994) identified four elements of self-identity which appear to be present in all individuals to varying degrees. These levels of self-identity are Spiritual, Personal/Social, Family, and Identifications.

Social and Spiritual Development

Role of Family in Faith Development

The family level of self-identity refers to an individual's ability to achieve identity through association and relationships with one's family. One of the primary ways in which this is accomplished is that family members are divided into a hierarchy in relation to the individual. This hierarchy consists of elders, i.e. ancestors, grandparents and parents; peers, such as older and younger brothers and sisters and those roughly equal in age to the individual; and descendents, such as children and grandchildren. Of course, to personally experience all of these levels the individual must live a lifetime; it is possible, however, to extrapolate from the experience of others. For example, an individual can surmise what it might be like to have children or grandchildren through watching the experience of their parents with these types of relationships (van Deurzen-Smith, 1997).

> Our first experiences of faith and faithfulness begin with birth. We are received and welcomed with some degree of fidelity by those who care for us. By their consistency in providing for our needs, by their making a valued place for us in their lives, those who welcome us provide an initial experience of loyalty and dependability. And before we can use language, form concepts or even be said to be conscious, we begin to form our first rudimentary intuitions of what the world

> is like, of how it regards us and of whether we can be “at home” here. (Fowler, 1981, p. 16)

The individual’s first experiences, then, of exploring and establishing their function and role in the world are made either easier or more difficult by their early experiences with family members or caregivers. These experiences are used as a basis from which the individual ventures into the world. “"The place one takes up in such a group marks the beginning of a long weaving pattern of relationships, for what one learns then always remains a blueprint and is an acquisition from which to develop further” (van Deurzen-Smith, 1997, p. 115).

Social Identity

Socially the United States is a diverse society blending together a unique mix of individuals grouped together culturally and for a multitude of other reasons. Because of this diversity, psychological theories regarding the structure and the nature of the Self must have a high degree of variability in order to encompass as much of this cross-cultural population as possible.

> In East Asian cultures, self-definition is to a large degree based on one’s relationship and group memberships and on the importance of one’s pursuit of harmony with others... In contrast, in many Western societies, self-definition is based on one’s unique abilities or attributes and on the importance of one distinguishing himself or herself from others. (Cross & Madson, 1997, p. 5)

Traditionally, the cultural environment of the United States has supported the development of interdependence among and between women, and independence among and between men. However, in the past 10 years, grass-roots men’s movements have

begun to emerge in American society. These movements promote a sense of solidarity and interdependence between men as being an important aspect of the development of a man's self- identity. These groups educate and encourage men to first look inward to discover their own male identity, after which they are connected with other men so as to be able to work together in their common experience. In this way "he discovers more about himself through sharing the male experience. A characteristic of the men's movement is the turning inward to find a positive charge to go forward empowered by a sense of shared masculine identity and worth" (Castellini et al., 2005, p. 53).

While being part of a group has the benefit of an individual discovering more about themselves and can support a deeper awareness of one's own identity, it also demands that the individual sublimate part of their own identity and assume, at least partially, the mantle of the group identity.

> In this sense, social identity implies the subordination of individual needs and interests to those of the group. The group is perceived as a safe port, offering support, protection, and a reason for existence. But, in exchange, it requires part of the individual's personal identity and an assumption of the mask of group identity. (Worchel, 1996 as cited in Gouveia, de Albuquerque, Clemente, & Espinosa, 2002, p. 335)

It is important to acknowledge here that social identification and social identity are two different constructs. For the sake of this study it was assumed that social identification is a part of the concept of social identity. "Specifically, social identification includes the notion of *belongingness*. It represents the extent to which one is identified

with several in-groups or their members (e.g., friends, coworkers) and with geospatial units (e.g., state, nation)" (Gouveia et al., 2002; Heaven, 1999; Lisle, 2001, p. 335).

Some theorists believe that the construct of social identity serves the purpose of providing the individual with a useful frame of reference when attempting to navigate the confusing landscape of interpersonal relationships. It helps the individual to interact socially within smaller groups as well as within the more encompassing cultural milieu. Individuals who share social identities or identification will uphold similar value systems and these common values will have an impact on the way that they behave in social situations (Abe-Kim et al., 2004; Crandall & Harris, 1991; Ebstyne-King, 2003; Fisherman, 2004; Gouveia et al., 2002; Pedersen, 1999; Rim, 1983).

Role of Religious Affiliation in Identity Development

An individual's relationships with others, the commitments one makes, the communities or groups that one joins help to shape their identity. According to Fowler (1981) faith is a common foundation upon which the human journey towards transcendence is built and as such, is part of the common human experience. If we accept this broad definition then all of our relationships can be seen as faith-relational triads.

> …we recognize that we are members of many different faith-relational triads. In each of the roles we play, in each significant relationship we have with others, in each institution of which we are part, we are linked to others in shared trusts and loyalties to centers of value and power. In each of these contexts we serve common goals, we hold shared meanings, we remember shared stories, we celebrate and renew common hopes. Our identity and our faith must somehow

bring these diverse roles, contexts and meanings into an integrated, workable unity. (Fowler, 1981, pp. 18-19)

Many individuals affiliate themselves with a church or a group of people who share a set of values and common beliefs which they feel are compatible with their choices in living their own lives. These religious groups offer support, encouragement, and a group of "like-minded" persons with whom the individual can share ideas and discuss issues and struggles that they face in daily life. They also provide the individual with a community in which to worship in a manner that they feel is appropriate and that gives them a sense of connection with their higher power.

Stages of Faith

James Fowler conducted a study of faith based on structured interviews that took place between 1972 and 1981 in which he asked participants to share with him some of their attitudes and values in life. He deliberately avoided telling the participants that these interviews were about faith because he believed that if he were to use that word the responses of individuals would be associated with religion and belief. He and his associates interviewed 359 individuals and developed a theory in which there were six, so called, "stages of faith". He cautions that the data collected in his book (1981) do not support or refute his theoretical framework; that he presents his findings to "provoke thought and comment from the readers and to provide a glimpse at the evidence that does now exist" (Fowler, 1981, p. 323).

Fowler begins by introducing a "pre-stage" which is basically inaccessible through interviews, but he feels is logical. This pre-stage is the time in which the infant begins to trust others in an undifferentiated way. The infant, by necessity, trusts that

others will feed it, care for it, and not abandon it. Fowler states that the strength of this trust, hope, courage, and autonomy, or their opposites will underlie or undermine the entire course of the individuals' later development. The emergence of stage 1 is concurrent with the development of thought and language with which the individual is able to express how they feel through speech and ritual play. During this "pre-stage" the child also begins to experience the interactions of and between significant adults and a God image can begin to emerge based on these observations (Fowler, 1981).

Although Freud often discounted religion, his construct of the "father of personal prehistory" describes many attributes that individuals often ascribe to a God image. In this construct the desire of the mother for the father, and the manner in which the father fulfills that desire, and how the relationship "plays out" between the mother and father supports the child and provides the child with the first sense of familial identification. "This 'primary identification' is the basis for the creation of 'the Ego-ideal,' and is the basis of the first images of God" (Goodwin, 1998, p. 97).

Erikson, in his stage theory of the development of an individual, echoes the belief that the first "God-images" of an individual are experienced in infancy and are derived from experiences with primary caregivers. He also theorized that during infancy the child learns and experiences trust, and by extension faith, for the first time.

Fowler identifies the first stage, as intuitive-projective faith, which is a powerfully imitative stage, where the child is influenced by examples, moods, stories, and actions of intimately related adults. This stage is most often experienced by children between the ages of 3 and 7 years. Because the child often encounters novelties, objects and experiences that they have not encountered before, this is a stage characterized by logical

learning, as well as by the emergence of imagination. During this time imagination produces very long-lasting images and ideas that will only later be sorted out and either retained or discounted as logical and useful or not. A sense of self awareness begins to emerge, but as would be expected in a child of this age this self-awareness is highly egocentric with the thoughts and feelings of others being of much less importance than those of the child.

The emergent strength of this stage is the development of imagination. The crisis of this stage is “the possible possession of the child's imagination by unrestrained images of terror and destructiveness, or from the witting or unwitting exploitation of her or his imagination in the reinforcement of taboos and moral or doctrinal expectations” (Fowler, 1981, p. 134).

In stage two or the stage of mythic-literal faith the individual begins to take on the beliefs, symbols, and observances of their “in-group” as their own. The beliefs, stories, attitudes, and moral rules of the community are interpreted literally by the individual. Social and personal symbols for the individual are literal. Because of this, stories are not reflective or conceptual in nature, so their meaning remains one-dimensional. The individual begins at this time to take on the perspective of others, particularly those in close proximity or those belonging to their “in-group”. “The new capacity or strength in this stage is the rise of narrative and the emergence of story, drama and myth as ways of finding and giving coherence to experience” (Fowler, 1981, p. 149).

The crisis in this stage emerges from a sense of literalness in interpretation, and a reliance on reciprocity. This can result in either a need for over-controlling perfectionism,

or self-abasement brought on by abuse, maltreatment, or abandonment by significant others.

Entry into stage three, that of synthetic-conventional faith, is brought about when the individual begins to notice the contradictions implicit within stories and symbols leading to a deeper contemplation of meaning and truth. In this stage, the individual begins to experience a world that extends beyond their family and "in-group". The world now includes family, peers, friends and others at school and work, society in general, the media, and perhaps religion. In this stage, faith provides the individual with a tool for synthesizing values and information as well as providing a basis for self-identity. This stage is typically entered into and emerged from during adolescence, however, according to Fowler, many adults remain in this stage as "a permanent place of equilibrium" (Fowler, 1981, p. 172).

This stage is closely attuned to the expectations, behaviors, and beliefs of others. This attunement results in conformity as opposed to the individual having the ego-strength to make their own judgments. In stage 3, individuals have deeply held beliefs and values however they have not had the opportunity to step outside of those to examine them closely or to challenge them.

In order to transition from stage 3 to stage 4 the individual must begin to accept responsibility for his/her own beliefs, values, and behaviors. In this stage, usually placed in young adulthood, the individual must choose between being identified by their own standards or by affiliation with a group.

This stage is marked by a double development. The self, previously sustained in its identity and faith compositions by an interpersonal circle of significant others,

> now claims an identity no longer defined by the composite of one's roles or meanings to others… Self (identity) and outlook (worldview) are differentiated from those of others and become acknowledged factors in the reactions, interpretations and judgments one makes on the actions of the self and others. It expresses its intuitions of coherence in ultimate environment in terms of an explicit system of meanings (Fowler, 1981, p. 182).

While critical thinking, the ability to reflect on the self and one's own beliefs and values, is one of the greatest strengths of stage 4 it can also result in a crisis. If the individual places an over-reliance on their own mental abilities they can become narcissistic and believe that they understand or know reality and that the perspectives of others are secondary or completely unimportant to their own worldview.

Stage 5, conjunctive faith, requires that the individual integrate a healthy concept of reality into their own identity and worldview. In a sense the individual must reclaim their own past in order to understand their inner self. "Importantly, this involves a critical recognition of one's social unconscious-the myths, ideal images and prejudices built deeply into the self-system by virtue of one's nurture within a particular social class, religious tradition, ethnic group or the like (Fowler, 1981, p. 198).

Usually taking place in midlife, this stage recognizes the permeability of self imposed boundaries on identity and worldview. The individual is usually ready at this point for intimacy and closeness with that which is outside of the self, including spirituality and religious revelation. There is a new understanding of social justice that stands apart from an ethnicity, class, familial or religious affiliation, or even nation. One's resources are committed to assisting others in cultivating and generating their own

sense of identity and meaning. The crisis in this stage is that an understanding of the paradoxical nature of truth may lead to cynicism and inertia, creating within the individual a sense of hopelessness and withdrawal from others.

Fowler contends that stage 6, universalizing faith, is very rare. In stage 5 the individual struggles with maintaining a balance between preserving universal well-being and one's own identity and well-being. In order to transition between these two stages the individual, in spite of any threats to self, must become an incarnation or an embodiment of absolute love and justice. A person experiencing stage 6 will attempt to transform the present reality into transcendent actuality.

> Persons best described by Stage 6 typically exhibit qualities that shake our usual criteria of normalcy. Their heedlessness to self-preservation, and the vividness of their taste and feel for transcendent moral and religious actuality give their actions and words an extraordinary and often unpredictable quality. In their devotion to universalizing compassion they may offend our parochial perceptions of justice. (Fowler, 1981, p. 200)

As Fowler points out, faith development and religious affiliation are not necessarily the same thing. In fact, he believes that faith is the dynamic process through which we find meaning in our lives. It is about the people that we love and trust, the institutions and causes we embrace, our concepts of good and evil, and the values that we build our lives on and around. He clearly points out that faith is sometimes not religious at all (Fowler, 1981). However during stage 3, which Fowler believes typically is entered into and emerged from in adolescence, the individual begins to experience the world as more than just family and in-group; during this time religion may provide the individual

with a tool for synthesizing values and information as well as providing a basis for self-identity.

Erikson believes that between the ages of 13 and 18 is the point in development where childhood comes to an end. The adolescent now becomes concerned with psychosocial identity, where they fit in and with whom. The adolescent also wants to be assured that their perception of themselves matches with the perception that others have of them. The danger of this stage, role confusion, is often offset by either identifying or overidentifying with the heroes or idols of their "in-group" and differentiation from their "out-group".

Spirituality and the Process of Individuation

The problem that arises for most individuals is that this process of individuation and formation of one's own identity cannot be completed by relationship and comparison with a community of others. Only in God, Erikson argues, can an individual fully come to an understanding of self-identity.

> The counterplayer of the "I" therefore can be, strictly speaking, only the deity who has lent this halo to a mortal and is Himself endowed with an eternal numinousness certified by all "I's" who acknowledge this gift…The Hindu greeting of looking into another's eyes—hands raised close to the face with palms joined—and saying, "I recognize the God in you" expresses the heart of the matter. (Erikson, 1968, pp 220-221)

"Beit Halakhmi (1991) draws a parallel between three levels of theoretical use of the concept of identity and religious functions. On the first level, Beit Halakhmi includes the collective identity" (Fisherman, 2004, p. 372). The sociological implication here is

that religion becomes a way in which individuals form a group identity by joining a particular religious community that mirrors their values, ideals, and beliefs.

The second level in this theory of identity is social identity, comprised of three areas; the central, marginal, and intermediate areas. The central area refers to self-identity, the marginal area is that of public identity, and the third, or intermediate area, is comprised of a variety of sub-identities created by the diverse social roles played by the individual. According to Halakhmi, religious identity is one of these sub identities from the intermediate area.

> On the third level is ego identity. Beit Halakhmi chose the theory of Erikson (1958) to represent the third level, and in this context, religious identity is a source of support and integration for different portions of the ego identity. (Fisherman, 2004, p. 373)

According to the theory of Beit Halakhmi, very few individuals choose their religious identity. He believes that individuals learn very early in life what social groups they "belong" to, who their "in-groups" and "out-groups" are formed by, and over time they take on the specific characteristics expected and exhibited by their social group. Individuals, then, do not choose a religious group as much as being born into a family and taking on a religious identity as part of the social identity that they possess by virtue of their membership in that family. In this theory, then, only religious converts can be said to have chosen their own religious identity (Fisherman, 2004).

Identity Differentiation and the Self

This brings up the distinction between *assigned* and *chosen* identity. Assigned identity refers to those aspects of an individual's identity which are not chosen, such as

gender, ethnicity, family membership, place in family, etc., whereas chosen identity refers to aspects of an individual's identity, which they freely choose.

> It is possible to take a similar approach to the formation of religious identity in an adolescent raised in a religious society. The adolescent's family, education, and peer group are part of his assigned identity. His doubts, meditations, and beliefs are part of the identity that he forms for himself, the chosen identity (Fisherman, 2004, p. 374).

In contrast to the theory of chosen identity, a self-constructionist explanation of the process focuses on the role of the Self in identity formation. According to Hermans and Kempen:

> … the internal and external worlds function together within an elevated internal system having its own inner relationships. The external world is represented within the Self by an internal dialogue. The relationships between the two worlds organize the internal world. (Hermans & Kempen, 1993) (as cited in Fisherman, 2004, p. 375)

These two worlds come into conflict when the external world attempts to limit the individual by institutionalization within the family, school, church, or any other social structure. These limitations are either accepted or rejected by the Self as valid. According to this explanation, this internal choice has greater significance than that offered by the theory of assigned and chosen identity. The Self acts as an organizer between an individual and the institutions of the external world. When the Self chooses which limitations to accept or reject it chooses which situations will be more dominant, or have greater meaning, to the Self. Without a doubt the external world has an effect on the

individual as well as membership within social structures. The individual, however, chooses the significance of this effect and what impact it will have upon the Self.

When an adolescent grows up in a religiously-oriented home or receives some type of religious education they must struggle with the choice of whether to accept this institution imposed by the external world and incorporate it into the Self or not.

> The struggle may be compared to what Hermans and Kempen term the confrontation between attitudes within the Self, by means of which the Self becomes a center of dialogical juxtaposition, which is the uniting power that gives the vitality of continuous renewal to the Self (Fisherman, 2004, pp. 375-376).

Religious Group

As the adolescent continues to struggle to form a cohesive identity they attempt to maintain a sense of integrity within the Self as well as maintaining external relationships with family, friends, and social structures. “This quest is marked by yearnings and behaviors that bond them to or locate them within something beyond themselves and simultaneously affirm their sense of uniqueness and independence. At its best, religion offers both” (King, 2003, p. 198). Erikson, in fact, points out the importance of religion in society and in identity formation by stating:

> Religion, it seems, is the oldest and has been the most lasting institution to serve the ritual restoration of a sense of trust in the form of faith, while offering a tangible formula for a sense of evil against which it promises to arm and defend man. (1968, p. 106)

Participation in a religious group or membership in a religious tradition can give an individual a sense of belonging and connection not only in a “present” context but an

historical context as well. “Religion provides both a previous community of believers who have gone before them, as well as a present body of believers that live alongside them, giving youth a sense of being a part of something greater than themselves” (King, 2003, p. 200). This sense of belonging is further strengthened by religious rituals such as bar mitzvah, bat mitzvah, baptism, communion, and confirmation. All of these rituals give the individual not only a sense of belonging, but also a sense of being special or unique and of value to the congregation in which they hold membership. This helps to promote a sense of well-being, connection, and a sense of place within the Self and the community.

Religious Affiliation

Religious Affiliation and Well-Being

Although religious belief has rarely been the primary focus of attention in psychological studies, the relationship between well-being and faith has been the focus of interest in research dating back to the 1950s (Hadaway, 1978; Hadaway & Roof, 1978; Levin & Taylor, 1998; McNamara & St. George, 1978; Moberg, 1984). When attempting to measure faith, many studies rely on a few basic markers such as belief in God, personal prayer, and church attendance (Demir & Urberg, 2004; Donahue & Benson, 1995; Francis & Kaldor, 2002; Levin & Taylor, 1998).

Although research studies have suggested a correlation between church affiliation and well-being, some of the studies were incomplete in that they used the absence of negative measures (such as decreased depression) in order to demonstrate the presence of well-being. In answer to this, Demir and Urberg (2004) included both positive and

negative measures in exploring the relationship between positive well-being and religiosity among adolescents.

While some studies have focused on research investigating the correlation between religious affiliation and positive well being (happiness) among adolescents, others have focused on the relationship between religion and happiness in adults. Although several of these studies have confirmed a positive correlation between religion and happiness in adults (Francis & Lester, 1997; Francis & Robbins, 2000), other studies (Lewis, 2002; Lewis, Maltby, & Burkinshaw, 2000) have suggested that no such relationship exists. Because of this inconsistency in results it was suggested that further research be undertaken using different indices for different age groups.

Studies that have focused on the relationship between well-being and church attendance in individuals have also demonstrated that church attendance has an effect on their behavior.

> Research found that religiousness among adolescents (church attendance, viewing religion as important, being a member of a church group) was associated with greater sexual responsibility (Miller & Gur, 2002), lower sexual activity (Holder et al., 2000), higher self-concept (Donahue & Benson, 1995), less depression (Wright, Frost, & Wisecarver, 1993), lower level of cigarette and alcohol use (Bahr, Maughan, Marcos, & Li, 1998; Litchfield, Thomas, & Li, 1997), and more prosocial behavior and attitudes (Donahue & Benson, 1995) (as cited in Demir & Urberg, 2004, p. 63).

Subjective well-being is often seen as comprised of two components, one affective and one cognitive. The affective component is described as whether an

individual displays positive or negative affect. The cognitive component is referred to as satisfaction with life. Life satisfaction is a process through which the individual judges the quality of their life according to a set of criteria unique to themselves. How well they achieve these criteria, or reach their goals determines whether of not the individual reports high or low life satisfaction (Pavot & Diener, 1993). If affiliation with a religious congregation helps an individual to set their criteria for judgment, as well as to strive to achieve realistic goals, then life satisfaction in individuals with a spiritual affiliation should be high.

Religious Affiliation and Prosocial Behavior

It should be noted that past studies have shown mixed results when attempting to demonstrate a relationship between prosocial behavior and religious belief (Batson, 1976; Meadow & Kahoe, 1984; Spilka, Hood, & Gorsuch, 1985), however there is some question regarding the methodologies used. It can be argued that when the specific beliefs of an individual are examined regarding their subsequent social behaviors the relationship becomes clearer (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Sappington & Baker, 1995).

Religious Affiliation, Hope and Self-Esteem

If religiosity, part of which is membership in a church group, lowers depression and increases happiness in individuals, this might suggest that membership in a religious community may give the individual a place where they feel accepted and safe, a place where they have a sense of liking and being liked within a particular community. In 1977 and 1991 Crandall conducted studies to validate the Social Interest Scale (SIS). In both studies it was demonstrated that a relationship existed between scores on the SIS and favorable attitudes toward others in general leading to empathy, cooperation, and

altruistic behavior (Crandall, 1977; Crandall & Harris, 1991). Many religious congregations attempt to instill in participants these very qualities and behaviors that are highlighted by the SIS.

A 1991 study to validate an individual-differences measure of hope (Snyder et al., 1991) demonstrated that hope was significantly related to striving to attain goals and coping strategies, as well as positive self-esteem, reflecting the findings of some of the above studies. In the same study, Snyder and colleagues demonstrated that low goal attainment, related to low hope scores, is associated with somatic disturbance and psychopathology.

The Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale (SIBS). The SIBS is a relatively new instrument that appears to have good reliability and validity. The SIBS was designed to measure the construct of spiritual involvement and beliefs in four distinct yet interconnected factorial areas.

The first factor is External/Ritual and was defined by acceptance of external power as well as a reliance on spiritual activities and religious rites or rituals. The second factor is Internal/Fluid and "includes both items that refer to evolving beliefs and many items that focus on internal beliefs and growth" (Hatch et al., 1998). The third factor is identified as Existential/Meditative and encompasses meditative practices as well as a focus on existential issues. The fourth factor is Humility/Personal Application with the items clustered under this factor focusing on the application of spiritual practices in everyday decisions and actions.

In 2001 a study was conducted comparing the *Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale* (SIBS) and an abbreviated form of the *Revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire*.

Among men, externality and ritualistic spirituality showed a strong positive correlation with extraversion and neuroticism, while being significantly negatively associated with psychoticism. Humility/personal application spirituality also demonstrated a strong negative association with psychoticism. Among women, all aspects of spirituality on the SIBS were strongly correlated with extraversion and strongly negatively correlated with psychoticism on the *Revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire* (Maltby & Day, 2001).

Spirituality, Social Interest, and Belongingness

In a 1983 study on the relationship between social interest, ethics, and values, participants who scored high in social interest strove for completion, fulfillment, or perfection. It was also found that individuals high in social interest claimed that values demonstrating concern for others such as honesty, altruism, helping others, peace, and family security were most important to them (Rim, 1983). All of these values are in keeping with the ideologies of most church congregations. “Almost ninety percent of Americans claim an institutionally based religious identity.… Hundreds of religious denominations in the United States make for a vast array of ‘communities of memory’. They serve as an important basis of social belonging…” (Roof, 1999, p. 36).

One of the primary characteristics of spirituality is that it brings about awareness in the individual that they are not alone, that they share this world with others. Religious affiliation gives the individual an opportunity to become a member of a group or congregation of individuals who have some of the same ideas, beliefs, and values that they consider to be important. Membership in a congregation of believers also encourages the individual to move outside of the self and engage in relationships with others. “This moving beyond the self provides the opportunity for the search for meaning

and belonging that is central to the task of identity exploration" (Benson, 1997; Hill, et al., 2000) (as cited in King, 2003, p. 200).

In seeking affiliation in a religious congregation, the individual opens the dialogue between the Self (internal world) and the social structure (external world). This dialogue helps the Self as it struggles to find its place in the world. Thus, membership or affiliation in a religious group or organization may help the Self to find its place in the world.

Summary of Literature Review

Religious Affiliation and Social Interest

The psychological literature points to a relationship between spirituality and social interest. If religious affiliation or involvement is a behavioral marker of an individual's spirituality then a relationship between social interest and religious affiliation should exist. The present study is an effort to examine the relationship of various personality variables, such as belongingness as expressed through social interest, to religious affiliation. At this time there is a lack of research in this area.

III. METHOD

Research Question

The intent of the investigator was to compare scores on an instrument measuring spiritual involvement and beliefs with scores on a set of instruments designed to measure selected psychological variables (social interest, hope, self-esteem, and satisfaction with life). Originally, the goal was to seek volunteers from two different sample groups: church members who self-described as regular church-attendees, and those who self-described as church members who did not necessarily attend church regularly. In the absence of sufficient numbers in the "non-attending" sample due to insurmountable difficulties in data collection, all members were grouped together for the correlational analysis. The principal research question that provided the focus for the study was as follows: What is the relationship of religious involvement and selected psychological variables, including social interest, self-esteem, hope, and satisfaction with life. The instruments utilized were the *Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale*, the *Social Interest Scale*, the *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale*, *the Hope Scale*, and the *Satisfaction with Life Scale.*

Participants

Recruitment

The investigator discussed the plans for the study with pastors known to him in three different geographical areas of two southeastern states. The researcher sought advice, counsel, and permission to request volunteers from each pastor's church, as well as support for obtaining similar permission from churches in the surrounding communities. In the end, with the support of one pastor who helped contact colleagues who were leaders of other churches in his geographical area, the researcher was able to obtain volunteer participants from members of seven churches located in a single geographical area of a southern state.

The total number of congregants of participating churches numbered approximately 900–1000. A very important consideration for these pastors was the assurance of the researcher that the study was not designed in such a way as to make a mockery of religion, or in any way to demean the beliefs of their members. Pastoral involvement and support seemed to come largely from those who not only found the proposed study interesting, but also found it to be a way of providing support for a local pastor whom they trusted, and support for one of his parishoners. Of the pastors approached, only one declined to participate in the study.

The attending members of the churches were invited to participate in the study by the researcher. They were addressed in the following words: "I am going to ask you to fill out three scales. The first part of the first scale is a series of questions regarding your beliefs about things. The second part of the scale asks how often you engage in certain behaviors. The second scale will have pairs of personal characteristics and I want you to

choose the characteristic from the pair that you would most like to possess. The third scale measures your sense of satisfaction with life. This study is an attempt to understand some of the ways in which spirituality and psychology are related to each other. Please take these scales home and fill them out yourself. I am interested in what you think and believe and how you behave. I am not interested in other people's opinions about you, only in your own opinion about you. Only individuals 19 years old and older are being asked to participate in this study. Please do not put your name on the scales. To preserve your privacy and anonymity there will be a sealed box at the entrance of the church for you to drop the completed scales into next week when you come to church. There will be no rewards or enticements offered for participation in this study."

Many of the congregants who agreed to participate in the study asked if they could bring extra copies home for members of their families who may not attend that church or any church at all. They were given as many extra copies as they requested. It is uncertain how many of these were returned, however, 15 of the total respondents self-reported no church attendance whatsoever.

Non-attending members. Efforts to reach a non-attending population of church members were less successful. Pastors in general, even those who initially offered access to their membership rosters for the purpose of contacting those who did not appear to attend church regularly, were in the end, not able (or willing) to follow through. It became evident to the researcher that the original goal of seeking voluntary participation from non-attending members was simply not possible without official access to membership roles to verify membership, or identification of such persons. In the end, such official access was not granted.

Sample. The participants in the study were 259 (26%) adult members of several conservative Christian churches in Northwest Alabama. The participants included both males and females who were at least 19 years of age. The socioeconomic status, gender, and ethnicity of the participants were not considered in this study. The participants were members of Christian churches in the rural southeast who reported that they attended services on a regular basis, as well as a group of members who reported that they attended services irregularly.

Descriptive data. The vast majority of participants (85%) self-reported church attendance at least 1-4 times per month. The individuals who attended church more often (at least once a week) tended to consider themselves very religious and somewhere between moderately and very spiritual. They self-reported praying several times daily as a whole, but did not report a high level of meditation. Those who attended 1-3 times a month considered themselves to be somewhat to moderately religious, but tended to rate themselves as very spiritual. Their self-report measures of prayer and meditation demonstrated an average of prayer 1 time a day, as well as a higher number who meditated at least 3 times a week in comparison with the high church-attendance group. Of the remaining participants, only 5% reported no church attendance whatsoever, and all of these considered themselves to be not-at-all-religious and moderately-to-very spiritual.

Instrumentation

Self Appraisal Questions

Four questions to enable self-appraisals of participation, religiousness and spirituality were included to provide additional external validity data to confirm or

disconfirm the SIBS authors' claims regarding their measurement of involvement beyond extrinsic actions. These questions can be found in Appendix A.

Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale (SIBS) (Hatch et al., 1998)

The Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale was primarily used to measure the spiritual involvement and behaviors of individuals who are involved in a church or religious organization. The SIBS is a relatively new instrument that appears to have good reliability and validity. The internal consistency of the SIBS using Cronbach's alpha was measured at .92 (Hatch et al., 1998). This would indicate that the test is indeed a valid measure of the construct of spiritual involvement and beliefs. Results of a factor analysis of the same data documented the presence, and that the instrument is comprised of four distinct yet interconnected factors (Hatch et al., 1998).

The first factor is External/Ritual and is defined by acceptance of external power as well as a reliance on spiritual activities and religious rites or rituals. The second factor is Internal/Fluid and "includes both items that refer to evolving beliefs and many items that focus on internal beliefs and growth" (Hatch et al., 1998). The third factor is identified as Existential/Meditative and encompasses meditative practices as well as existential issues. The fourth factor is Humility/Personal Application with the items clustered under this factor focusing on the application of spiritual practices in everyday decisions and actions.

A re-test with the SIBS was completed by mailing copies of the SIBS to participants approximately 7 to 9 months following the first administration of this instrument, yielding an overall response rate of 60%. When the test-retest analysis was completed there was a correlation of .92 between the results on the test and retest. The

developers of the SIBS also assessed the validity of their instrument by comparing scores with the scores generated by the *Spiritual Well-Being Scale* (Hatch et al., 1998). This comparison produced a reliability coefficient of .80. A strongly unique aspect of the SIBS is that it measures spiritual behaviors as well as beliefs.

Social Interest Scale

The Social Interest Scale (SIS) contains 24 pairs of personal characteristics or traits. Each pair of characteristics of traits, with the exception of five filler items that are not scored, contains one trait that is related to social interest and one that is not; the subject is asked to choose that trait which they value more highly. The SIS score is the number of social interest traits chosen by the person. The SIS was found to be significantly related to peer ratings, several values from Rokeach's (1973) survey, favorable attitudes towards others, perceived meaningfulness of life, and self-report measures of hostility and depression (Rokeach, 1973).

A more stringent test of any personality measure is its relation to overt behavior. Social interest has implications for a wide variety of behaviors (Crandall & Harris, 1991). In a study conducted by Crandall in 1991, the reliability and validity of the SIS were investigated using four sets of subjects. The first two groups of subjects were made up of students from introductory psychology courses and were given course credit for their participation. Group I was comprised of 45 men and 40 women, while group II was comprised of 31 men and 15 women. Group III was made up from two high school psychology classes and consisted of 18 men and 27 women. Group IV came from an upper division psychology course and was comprised of 17 males and 20 females. "The split-half reliability for groups I, II, and III, using the Spearman-Brown formula, was .77.

Test-retest reliability over a five-week period, involving Group IV, was .82" (Crandall, 1991, p. 109). Comparison of the groups of college and high school students revealed no statistically significant differences between the groups for the purposes of this study.

One of the necessary criteria to measure the validity of a scale is whether or not the items in that scale have observable behavioral correlates. Crandall set up a peer rating system for this purpose. Members of group III were asked to rate three other members of their group on who showed the greatest interest, liking, and concern for others, after which they were requested to write down the names of three members of their group who showed the least interest, liking, and concern for other people. The choices that they made would be kept confidential, and were to be made from members of their own gender group who were present on that particular day. An individual's rating, then, was calculated by subtracting the number of times they were mentioned as showing low interest, liking, and concern from the number of times they were mentioned as being high in these characteristics.

A correlation between Social Interest Scale scores and peer ratings of this kind would not be valid. Since a person’s rating depended partly on the number of people available to choose him, it was necessary to form high and low criterion groups separately for each sex in each of the two classes. These were then combined to form a high criterion group consisting of nine boys and 14 girls, and a low criterion group consisting of nine boys and 13 girls. The mean Social Interest Scale scores were 10.22 for the high criterion group and 6.86 for the low group. The results were highly significant (t - 3.60, df – 43 $p > .001$), and lend support to the validity of the scale (Crandall, 1991, pp. 109-110).

If the broad definition of social interest is an affirmative attitude toward others as well as toward the world we live in, then "a well developed social interest should enhance the probability of a person finding life to be meaningful and worthwhile, and of being in harmony with the scheme of things" (Crandall, 1991). The Purpose in Life Test (PILT) (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964) was used to test this hypothesis.

> The PILT was administered to group I. The correlation of .32 ($p < .005$) with the Social Interest Scale supports the notion that social interest, narrowly defined, is positively related to an affirmative attitude toward life into being in harmony with the universe(Adler, 1959, 1973) (as cited in Crandall, 1991, p. 112)

This use of the PILT further demonstrates external validity of the SIS as an instrument for measuring social interest.

Hope Scale, Self-Esteem Scale, and Satisfaction with Life Scale

The Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) were included due to the relationships between them as well as their hypothesized relationships with spirituality and mental health. Because hope, self-esteem, and satisfaction with life assess, in part, social connectedness and are theoretically related to social interest and spirituality, these scales were included in the present study to help clarify the nature of those relationships, and in the process to add to what we understand about religious involvement and mental health.

The Relationship between Social Interest and Religious Involvement

If "a well developed social interest should enhance the probability of a person finding life to be meaningful and worthwhile, and of being in harmony with the scheme

of things" (Crandall, 1991, p. 112), and if those who rank high in social interest rank "salvation" as a high priority in their terminal values (Rim, 1983), then the possibility exists of a strong relationship between religious involvement and Adler's construct of Social Interest merits examination. Furthermore, in a 1992 study of religiousness and social interest the results indicated that "social interest was strongly related to various measures of religious interest and activity" (Leak, 1992, p. 296).

Also, the strong correlation between social interest and the Religious Well-Being Scale suggests that religious individuals high in social interest hold orthodox beliefs, coupled with a sincere religious commitment, and that these beliefs provide a sense of spiritual well-being for the person. Finally, social interest was unrelated to either frequency of religious experience or intensity of experience (Leak, 1992, p. 296).

These correlations between social interest and religious affiliation were examined in the present study. It seemed likely that the SIS and the SIBS used together would give indications that those who are affiliated with a religious group/organization feel a strong connection with the world around them. More importantly, these studies seemed to suggest the need for exploring the connection that exists between religious affiliation and the individual feeling a sense of belongingness or "place" in the world.

Research Design and Statistical Analysis

Correlations and Factor Analysis

The present study was a correlational design utilizing the SIS, SIBS, the Hope Scale (HS), the Self-Esteem Scale (SES), and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS). An O type factor analysis was run to identify common dimensions between the items on the

SIS, SIBS, HS, SES, and the SWLS. Because the SIS demonstrates both involvement with others and involvement in the world (which can lead to a sense of belongingness), and the SIBS demonstrates spiritual/religious involvement a high Pearson product moment correlation between these two instruments was expected.

Because hope, self-esteem, and satisfaction with life were hypothesized to be related to religious affiliation and belongingness, the additional scales (HS, SES, and SWLS) were used to examine and clarify the strength of the relationship between the SIS and the SIBS. The correlational design also enabled the evaluation of the reliability of the measurement procedure. The correlational values were recorded and presented in a correlation matrix.

Limitations

Potential Ceiling Effect on SIBS Items

Findings of this study should be viewed with some caution due to possible design limitations. Although the SIBS has been validated and the statistical analysis demonstrates high reliability, some of the items in the SIBS tend to show a ceiling effect (Hatch et al., 1998). In the 1998 study there was some concern that the scores on certain items tended to cluster toward the top of the five-point scale. It has been suggested that the scale be changed to a seven-point scale so as not to limit the range of response to specific items.

Generalizability

The population studied was homogenous in that the participants reside in northwest Alabama in the southeastern United States in an area known as the Bible belt,

where church attendance is encouraged as part of the cultural identity of the area. Added to this is the fact that the study focused on conservative Christian churches. The population for the study included individuals who were primarily Caucasian and socioeconomic status, gender, and ethnicity were not assessed.

Absence of Sufficient Sample of Non-Attending Church Members

The study's sample included an inadequate number of non-attending members of conservative Christian churches; therefore, the findings of this study are limited to church-going volunteers. Thus, these results cannot be generalized to non-attending members of conservative Christian churches.

IV. RESULTS

Research Question

The results of the present study are described in terms of the principal research question. The study was designed to examine the relationship of religious involvement and mental health variables. More specifically, the data were analyzed using SPSS15 to address the question: "What relationship, if any, exists between religious affiliation and social interest (belongingness)?" In addition, the results present data to clarify possible relationships between religious affiliation and hope, self-esteem, and satisfaction with life, in attending members of conservative Christian churches in northwest Alabama. Finally, the results include a review of data extending what is known about the psychometric properties of a primary instrument, though relatively new, in this area of research, *The Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale.*

Correlation of SIBS with Other Scales

The data collected using SPSS 15 revealed a moderate to strong correlation between SIBS scores and church attendance (.455 at a $p < .01$ significance level). The correlational data for scores on the SIBS and the other instruments utilized in this study are presented in Table 1. The correlational data between church attendance and the other instruments are also shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Correlational Matrix of Appraisal Instruments and Church Attendance

		Attend	SIBS	SIS	HS	SES	SWLS
Attend	Pearson Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N						
SIBS	Pearson Correlation		.455**				
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000				
	N		259				
SIS	Pearson Correlation		.574**	.387**			
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000			
	N		259	259			
HS	Pearson Correlation		-.178**	-.016	-.111		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004	.795	.075		
	N		259	259	259		
SES	Pearson Correlation		-.084	.126*	-.094	.436**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.175	.043	.133	.000	
	N		259	259	259	259	
SWLS	Pearson Correlation		.055	.163**	.102	.422**	.534
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.376	.009	.102	.000	.000
	N		259	259	259	259	259

Note. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Abbreviations across the top and down the side of the table are as follows: SIBS = Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale; SIS = Social Interest Scale; HS = Hope Scale; SES = Self-Esteem Scale; SWLS = Satisfaction with Life Scale

Four factor structure of the SIBS. Factor analysis of the SIBS clearly revealed that this instrument measures spirituality across four primary factors. These four factors were first identified by a factor analysis in 1998 by Robert L. Hatch M.D., the author of the SIBS (Hatch et al., 1998). The four factors examined by this instrument are identified as: External/Ritual, Internal/Fluid, Existential/ Meditative, and Humility/Personal Application.

Construct Validity

Construct validity of the *Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale* and each of the other scales used in the study were assessed using factor analysis procedures. Data were analyzed using SPSS 15 with 259 usable responses. Respondents who had items or instruments unanswered (n = 3) were not included in the analysis. The factor analysis of the SIBS resulted in four factors with eigenvalues of 1.0 or greater. The SIS included 3 factors with eigenvalues of greater than 1.0, the HS included 2 such factors, the SES included 3 such factors, and the SWLS included 1 such factor. An eigenvalue of 1.0 or greater indicates that each factor had as much variance as was contained in a single item, thus establishing construct validity.

Convergent and discriminant construct validity. Convergent construct validity was assessed by examining correlational evidence between the domain of spiritual involvement and beliefs and social interest. When analysis was complete, the SIBS and SIS were demonstrated to have a moderate to strong relationship. The SIBS, when correlated with RSES and SWLS showed significant relationships, while the SIS failed to show a predictable relationship with the SWLS.

Discriminant construct validity was established from some unexpected findings. When correlational evidence was examined, it became apparent that there is an inverse though non-significant relationship between the Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale and Hope Scale. An inverse relationship was also discovered between the Social Interest Scale and the Hope Scale, and between the Social Interest Scale and the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale. The above table presents relationships among the various instruments. Of particular interest in this study are the strength of the relationships between church attendance and the SIBS as well as the strength of the relationship between church attendance and the SIS.

Correlations of Religious Involvement Indicators and Personality Measures

The correlational information in Table 1 reveals that among members of conservative Christian churches in northwest Alabama there is a strong relationship between regular church attendance (at least one time per week) and spirituality as measured by the SIBS. There is also a strong relationship between spirituality as measured by the SIBS and social interest, as measured by the SIS. The strongest relationship exists between social interest, as measured by the SIS and regular church attendance.

It should be noted, as well, that an inverse relationship exists between regular church attendance and hope (as measured by the HS). The data also strongly suggest that no relationship exists between regular church attendance, self-esteem (as measured by the SES), and satisfaction with life (as measured by the SWLS).

Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)

Analysis of Reliability

To measure the internal reliability of the instruments, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated. This analysis supported the internal consistency reliability of each instrument with an internal reliability coefficient alpha of .875 for the Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale (SIBS), .776 for the Social Interest Scale (SIS), .723 for the Hope Scale (HS), .818 for the Self-Esteem Scale (SES), and .843 for the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS).

Self Appraisal Questionnaire

Included with the other instruments in the study was a questionnaire asking individuals for their self-appraisals regarding participation in religious services and prayer as well as questions regarding religiosity and spirituality. The responses for each question ranged from 1-5 with 5 being the highest response and 1 being the lowest. The questions are listed below with the mean response for each question shown in Table 2.

1. How often do you attend religious services?
2. How often do you pray outside of religious services?
3. In general, how religious do you consider yourself?
4. In general, how spiritual do you consider yourself?

Table 2

Mean Responses to Self Appraisal Questionnaire

Mean Response	Interpretation of response	
Question 1	4.28	1-4 times per month
Question 2	4.06	7-9 times per week
Question 3	4.02	moderately religious
Question 4	4.28	moderately spiritual

Summary of Findings

Validity of Instruments

This statistical analysis indicates that the SIBS measures spiritual involvement and beliefs, the SIS measures social interest (belongingness, altruism), the HS measures an individual's sense of hope, the RSES measures the self acceptance aspect of self-esteem, and the SWLS measures satisfaction with life. These findings indicate that the instruments utilized were valid for the purposes of this study.

Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale. The SIBS appears to be a valid instrument for examining this type of relationship. Because it examines not only the concept of spiritual beliefs but spiritual involvement as well, The SIBS would appear to be useful for the present study. However, there is a lack of statistical power in the previous study due to the small number of participants (Hatch et al., 1998). The SIS was included as a measure of concurrent validity in that it has been validated numerous times over a period of several years.

The strong relationship between the SIBS and church membership and attendance in the study population demonstrated that there is a correlation between a belief system and the behavior of belonging to a group of like minded others and attending religious services.

Social Interest Scale. The strong relationship between the SIS and church attendance was not unexpected in light of the literature on the subject (Benson, 1997; Hill, et al., 2000; King, 2003; Rim, 1983). It was interesting to note, however, that the relationship between the SIBS and SIS was not as strong as the relationship between the SIS and church attendance. This may indicate that affiliation in a religious organization along with attendance at religious services heightens the sense of connection that an individual feels with those outside of the religious organization to which they belong (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Sappington & Baker, 1995).

Hope Scale, Self-Esteem Scale, and Satisfaction with Life Scale. The inverse relationships between the HS and church attendance, as well as no statistically significant relationship between the HS and the SIBS were unexpected findings. The data suggesting that there is no statistically significant relationship between church attendance and the SWLS, as well as that only weak, if any, relationships exist between the SIBS, the SES, and the SWLS were also unexpected.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Religious Involvement and Mental Health Factors

There is a great deal of interest in the importance of spirituality in the lives of a significant portion of Americans but relatively scant research regarding the relationship between religious affiliation and mental health parameters (Stanard, Sandhu, & Painter, 2000). For the purposes of this study the term spirituality refers to an individual's relationship with their higher power, while religious affiliation is an outward expression of that relationship. How that relationship affects an individuals' mental health status, or how the individual's mental health status affects their religious affiliation was the basis for the investigation presented here. This study was designed to address the research question: What is the relationship of religious involvement, as measured by the *Spiritual Beliefs and Involvement Scale*, and selected psychological variables, including Social Interest, as measured by the *Social Interest Scale*, Self-Esteem, as measured by the *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale*, Hope, as measured by *The Hope Scale*, and *Satisfaction with Life*, as measured by a scale with the same name.

Instrumentation

The instruments used for this study were the Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale, the Social Interest Scale, the Hope Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. In addition, a self-appraisal questionnaire was used.

Attendance, Religiosity, Spirituality, Prayer, and Meditation

The vast majority of participants (85%) self-reported church attendance at least 1-4 times per month. The individuals who attended church more often (at least once a week) tended to consider themselves very religious and somewhere between moderately and very spiritual. They self-reported praying several times daily as a whole, but did not report a high level of meditation. Those who attended 1–3 times a month considered themselves to be somewhat to moderately religious, but tended to rate themselves as very spiritual. Their self-report measures of prayer and meditation demonstrated an average of prayer 1 time a day, as well as a higher number who meditated at least 3 times a week in comparison with the high attendance church group.

Among the respondents who attended church 6 times or less per year (15%), scores on the SIBS as well as the self-report measures of prayer showed a great deal of variability. The scores on the SIS were overall lower than those who reported high church attendance. Their scores on the HS, SES, and SWLS were higher than those in the high attendance group.

Out of the remaining participants only 13 (5% of sample) reported no church attendance whatsoever, and most of these considered themselves to be not at all religious and moderately to very spiritual. As with those who self-reported attending church less often they tended to score lower in the area of social interest, although their scores on the HS, SES, and SWLS scales tended to be the highest among the 259 participants.

Conclusions, Interpretations and Speculations

Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs and Church Attendance

Individuals attend church for many reasons, but chief among them might be the desire to be in a closer relationship with their higher power and other people of faith (Erikson, 1968; Fisherman, 2004). The SIBS is a self-report measure of an individual's involvement in religious activities that they feel may bring them to a closer relationship with their higher power. The findings associated with the SIBS suggest that the individuals who participated in this study perceive involvement in spiritual activities such as praying together and attending religious services as being positive and valuable. It should be noted that individuals did not appear to place as much value on items dealing with solo religious/spiritual activities such as meditation or praying alone.

This is consistent with findings that a primary characteristic of spirituality/religion is that the individual becomes aware that they are not alone, that they share this world with others. When the individual becomes a member of a group or congregation of individuals who have some of the same ideas, beliefs, and values that they consider important they are enabled in moving outside of the self and engaging in relationships with others. Once the individual has moved beyond themselves they can continue to search for meaning and belongingness and come closer to finding their place in this world (Benson, 1997; Ebstyne-King, 2003; Hill, 2000).

Social Interest and Church Attendance

That there is a robust relationship between social interest and church attendance should come as no surprise. Church-based altruistic organizations abound, for example, Habitat for Humanity International, whose volunteers are recruited from church

congregations and who express their altruism by volunteering time, materials and effort to build houses for individuals that they do not even know. Christian Children's Fund, Associated Catholic Charities, the Young Women's Christian Association, and the Young Men's Christian Association are a few examples of Christian church based and supported social action organizations grounded in principles consistent with both social interest and spirituality.

Many religious/spiritual organizations profess values that lead congregants to seek out completion, fulfillment, or perfection. These same values are found in individuals high in social interest. Individuals high in social interest also embrace values consistent with concern for others such as altruism, helping others, honesty, security, and family (Rim, 1983). All of these values are in keeping with the ideologies of most religious/spiritual organizations, therefore, religious affiliation can be viewed as one behavioral expression of an individuals' social interest.

Hope and Church Attendance

Hope is defined by Snyder and colleagues (1991) as the ability to attain goals. The two factors that make up hope are referred to as agency and pathways. Agency simply refers to the will of the individual who is setting and attempting to reach their goals. A person with a sense of agency feels efficacious in regard to their own ability to achieve their goals. The term pathways refers to the individual's belief in their own ability to find a way to achieve their goals, even when confronted with obstacles and challenges. It is hypothesized that some conservative Christians may have the will to set and attain goals but may be deterred by the fact that the pathway is not clearly marked. For example, for many conservative Christians the ultimate goal is union with God;

however, there are varied opinions among and within churches as to how one should live their life in order to attain this goal.

Another part of the equation is two types of expectancy. Outcome expectancy is the belief that a particular behavior leads to a particular goal. Efficacy expectancy, on the other hand, is asking the question "Am I able to engage in behavior that is efficacious enough for me to reach my goals?" A particular problem that arises here for many Christians is the efficacy expectations cannot account for outcomes based on forces outside of a person's locus of control for example, religious faith or spirituality (surrender to the will of God). This is compounded by the absence of a feedback loop regarding the efficaciousness of an individual's strategy. For the conservative Christian where does feedback on progress or efficacy come from?

It has been noted that some individuals who report strong religious beliefs increase their participation in religious services during times of negative life events or increased stress as a result of seeking consolation. It is thus hypothesized that hopelessness may lead to some individuals turning to religion and the extrinsic markers of belief as a coping mechanism. Though not necessarily supported by the present study's data, it could be concluded that this could explain the lower Hope Scale scores of some individuals because they are turning to a church as a source of hope to console them while they are feeling less hopeful (Murphy et al., 2000).

The focus for most Christians is not happiness or hopefulness (as seen in the statistical analysis), but service to others and meaningfulness of life (McLafferty & Kirylo, 2001). Therefore, it is understandable that hope for this sample of conservative Christians has an inverse relationship with higher church attendance.

Although this study shows that an inverse relationship exists between church attendance and well-being (hopefulness and happiness) in adults, and these findings are consistent with other studies (Lewis, 2002; Lewis et al., 2000), there are studies that have found a positive correlation between religion and happiness in adults (Francis & Lester, 1997; Francis & Robbins, 2000).

Self-Esteem and Church Attendance

The Rosenberg Self Esteem scale is an instrument used to assess an individual's level of self acceptance, whether they believe their vision of who they should be and who they are is congruent. The data demonstrated that there is no statistically significant relationship between high attendance in religious/spiritual activities and self-esteem.

Satisfaction with Life and Church Attendance

The *Satisfaction with Life Scale* was designed to assess an individual's global judgment of life satisfaction, which is dependent on comparison of life circumstances to individual expectations. Changing life conditions can lead to changes in life satisfaction. Events or conditions that are perceived to make life circumstances better increase satisfaction, while events or conditions that are perceived to make them worse decrease life satisfaction. The data revealed that there is no statistically significant relationship between high attendance in religious/spiritual activities and satisfaction with life.

Summary of Conclusions

The data clearly reveals that the majority of the volunteers in this study place high value on participation in spiritual/religious activities, and the more involved they are in these activities the higher their sense of religiousness and spirituality. It is also clear that

higher church attendance is correlated with higher social interest. The robust relationship between religious affiliation and social interest revealed here is consistent with previous research done in this area. The results are additive in that these particular instruments have not been used to date to investigate the relationship of psychological construct of social interest and religious beliefs and practices measured by the SIBS.

The inverse relationship between church attendance and hope warrants further discussion and study. Although the data reveals the absence of statistically significant relationships in the areas of self-esteem and satisfaction with life with church attendance the responses of the participants indicate that this may be an area from which to generate further study. Because the data was collected from a conservative Christian population the interpretation of the data needs to be viewed in the context of the value systems of such populations.

Discussion

Spiritual/Religious Affiliation

When affiliated with a religious group or being a member of a religious organization, an individual often feels a sense of belonging and connection not only in the present group but in an historical context as well. “Religion provides both a previous community of believers who have gone before them, as well as a present body of believers that live alongside them, giving youth a sense of being a part of something greater than themselves” (King, 2003, p.200). As mentioned earlier, religious rituals such as bar mitzvah, bat mitzvah, baptism, communion, and confirmation further heighten the sense of the present and historical connectedness of the participants. All of these rituals

give the individual not only a sense of belonging, but also a sense of being necessary and of value to the congregation in which they hold membership. This helps to promote a sense of well-being, connection, and a sense of place within the Self and the community.

The individual in seeking affiliation in a religious congregation opens the dialogue between the self (internal world) and the social structure (external world). This dialogue helps the self as it struggles to find its place in the world. Thus, membership or affiliation in a religious group or organization may help the self to find its place in the world (Fisherman, 2004; King, 2003).

Spiritual/Religious Affiliation and Altruism

According to Fowler's theory of stages of faith (1981,) a majority of the population in this study would be in stage three (24%) or stage four (25%) of faith development. This means that adults in this population may find a place of equilibrium within structures (i.e. churches) that construct meaning in interpersonal terms.

The individual uses interpersonal relationships with significant others to form judgments and expectations and ultimately choose values and beliefs (Fowler, 1981; van Deurzen-Smith, 1997). While the individual has formed an ideology with a consistent set of values and beliefs they have not objectively examined them and are still to a large degree unaware that they have an ideology determined in large part by the group (Allport, 1961; Cattell, 1957; Crandall & Harris, 1991; McDonald, et al., 2005). Authority is external and placed in traditional figures or roles (i.e. minister, priest) or in the consensus of a trusted group.

Very often, when the individual chooses to transition to stage four, the move is precipitated by contradictions between external authority figures, a major change of

policies or practices previously considered sacred, or a desanctification of respected roles (i.e. scandal caused by child molestation by priest perpetrators) (Fowler, 1981).

This transition to stage four is particularly critical in that the individual must now begin to take personal responsibility for his or her own system of values and beliefs. The individual must struggle with the tension between individual responsibility as opposed to being defined by the group. In other words, while the judgments and advice of others is still valued the reliance on external authority is interrupted. The individual begins to rely on internal critical reflection in order to inform and form the values and beliefs they embrace. Once these values and beliefs are formed they become a lifestyle for the individual (Erikson, 1958; Fowler, 1981).

Another shift takes place is that the groups a person belongs to take on a new significance in that the individual may leave one group to embrace another more in keeping with their value system. The individual will usually join a group that outwardly reflects the internal values they hold. The individual is beginning to be self-actualized instead of “being like others”. The process of spiritual growth is a critical part of the process of self-actualization (Fisherman, 2004; Maslow, 1968). Many spiritual/religious organizations support the process of self-actualization through altruism (social interest). The relationship between spirituality and social interest is a moderate to strong one, as demonstrated by the statistical analysis. One of the ways through which a Christian exhibits affiliation with a religious/spiritual structure is through attendance; another very strong indicator is through meaningful social involvement/service (Batson, 1976; Leak, 1992; Rim, 1983). Thus, the relationship between church attendance and social interest, as shown in the correlational table, is a strong and vital relationship.

Individuals will often begin attending church when they become unhappy or feel a sense of dissatisfaction with the events or conditions of their life, due to the fact that in times of difficulty individuals often seek out emotional and social support. Spiritual group members, being higher in altruism as demonstrated by their helping behaviors are sought out by individuals in need of support. Upon joining a group of altruistic people their needs begin to be met. The individual becomes connected to other individuals and so begins to internalize the ideas, values, and beliefs shared by the organization, thus increasing social interest (Fowler, 1981; Gouveia et al., 2002; van Deurzen-Smith, 1997).

Spiritual/Religious Affiliation and Hope

What gives Christians hope for themselves, humanity, and the future is that they would like to know that they can count on the world around them to be altruistic, that people are living out the mandate of the Christian Gospel to love one another. Unfortunately the reality often is that they experience selfishness, cruelty, and greed, in short, the very antithesis of altruism. This reinforces feelings of hopelessness and dissatisfaction with life, and reaffirms that the world around them is indeed a hopeless place. This may be demonstrated by the inverse correlation between spiritual involvement and beliefs, and hope.

According to hope theory, an individual is defined as hopeful when they can set and attain goals. Csikszentmihaly (1990) believes that goal attainment is a vital part of individual satisfaction and happiness in life. His flow theory states that “there are two main strategies we can adopt to improve the quality of life. The first is to try making external conditions match our goals. The second is to change how we experience external conditions to make them fit our goals better” (Csikszentmihaly, 1990, p. 43).

The problem is that neither of these strategies works by itself. Although some external conditions can be changed by the research population they are unable to experience the world as an altruistic place, as a place where individuals are living lives in keeping with Gospel values. This decreases hope because one of the ultimate goals of a Christian is that they lead as many individuals as possible to Christ. In a world where Christian values are not seen as important it seems hopeless to lead individuals to live lives they do not see as meaningful.

According to Maslow, individuals fall into two categories, non-transcenders and transcenders. Those who are non-transcenders tend to be high achieving in worldly terms because their focus is more earthly. Transcendent individuals, however, focus on spirituality, and may be more insightful and may perceive the world and others' behaviors as more negative (Maslow, 1970). Individuals then, who are focused on the spiritual may be less hopeful than those not as focused on spirituality because they tend to see things in terms of the fallen nature of man. Conservative Christians are taught that self-actualization is achieved through repeatedly failing to meet their self expectations (perfection) as defined through their spirituality, recognizing that they have failed, and doing better the next time.

Another hypothesis may be that conservatively religious individuals may be less hopeful because they perceive themselves as so sinful that they are being punished by God. This would then also help to explain a lower sense of self-esteem (I am a sinner) and lower satisfaction with life (because of my sinfulness my life is far from ideal).

Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs and Self-Esteem

Conservative Christians are given messages such as “pride goes before the fall” from an early age. Individuals from this background are taught to measure themselves against Jesus Christ, to always strive to be like Christ, who was perfect. The conservative Christian tradition also teaches that humankind is fallen, that humans are sinful. For a conservative Christian to have such sentiments as being satisfied with themselves, to believe that they are who they believe they should be (Christ-like) is counterintuitive.

Because conservative Christians measure themselves against Jesus Christ, who was perfect, they see the incongruence between what they are taught they should be and what in reality they are. As transcenders (Maslow, 1970) they have a great deal of insight into their own sinfulness and flaws, leading to a low sense of self-esteem. Add to this, attendance in religious/spiritual services at least once a week, where they are reminded that they should strive to make themselves like Christ and it becomes clearer why, in this population, there exists a weak relationship between spirituality and self-esteem. Because of the fact that the present study was conducted with congregants of conservative Christian churches self-esteem scores may be low because the group norm is believed to be perfection, which in turn leads to self-actualization.

Spiritual Involvement and Belief and Satisfaction with Life

Satisfaction with life is a measure that is very time limited since it is so dependent upon circumstances or events external to the individual (Pavot & Diener, 1993). Transcendent individuals who are focused on the spiritual may be more insightful and may perceive the world and others’ behaviors as more negative (Maslow, 1970). Considering the population that participated in this study the weak relationship between

spiritual involvement and beliefs and satisfaction with life may be clearer, however more study is necessary.

Limitations

Ceiling Effect on Some SIBS Items

Although the findings of this study are robust, they should be viewed with some caution due to some limitations. Although the SIBS has been validated and the statistical analysis demonstrates high reliability, some of the items in the SIBS tend to show a ceiling effect (Hatch et al., 1998). In the 1998 study there was some concern that the scores on certain items tended to cluster toward the top of the five-point scale. It has been suggested that the scale be changed to a seven-point scale so as not to limit the range of response to specific items, which may result in the attenuation of correlations. If this is the case the correlations would be lower than they would prove to be if the variables were distributed more broadly.

Homogenous Population

The population studied was homogenous in that they reside in northwest Alabama in the southern United States in an area known as the Bible belt, where church attendance is encouraged as part of the cultural identity of the area. Added to this is the fact that the study focused on conservative Christian churches. The population for the study included individuals who were primarily Caucasian and over the age of 19. A more heterogeneous group of individuals may very well provide a different set of data. Culture, was only addressed insofar as the participants are part of a Judeo-Christian heritage and live in a

culture that encourages spirituality or religious involvement. The instruments utilized were all self-report instruments.

Although there were plans to mail out 400 sets of instruments to registered, but non-attending members of a church, in the end this was not accomplished. Thus, the findings are limited to a specifically church-going population and their immediate family members. It is also important to note that the individuals who participated in this study were primarily conservative Christians, therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to either less conservative Christian populations, or to non-Christian populations.

Implications for Future Research

Religious Affiliation, Self-Esteem, and Satisfaction with Life

Although the present study revealed no statistically significant relationships between religious affiliation, self-esteem, and satisfaction with life, the scores on the scales revealed that the population being studied did have low scores on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Satisfaction with Life Scale. Because of these low scores it may be valuable to explore these associations further.

Self-Esteem Scale

The development of a scale to measure self-esteem in more spiritually oriented individuals may increase the overall validity and reliability of this measure with this particular population, since conservative Christian populations my equate saying positive things regarding themselves, or making statements about what they have achieved with sinfulness and pride.

Satisfaction with Life Scale

Subjective well-being is often seen as being comprised of two components, one affective and one cognitive. The affective component is described as whether an individual displays positive or negative affect. The cognitive component is referred to as satisfaction with life. Life satisfaction is a process through which the individual judges the quality of their life according to a set of criteria unique to themselves. How well they achieve these criteria, or reach their goals determines whether of not the individual reports high or low life satisfaction (Pavot & Diener, 1993). If a religious congregation sets unrealistic criteria for judgment, as well as unachievable goals for group members, then life satisfaction in individuals with a spiritual affiliation may be lower than in a non-religiously affiliated population.

Religious Identity Development

To involve a more heterogeneous group it may be worthwhile to involve individuals who are registered with a church but attend either infrequently or not at all. To reach individuals who attend church less frequently or not at all, alternative strategies for soliciting volunteers from churches could be used to contact the full church membership lists through the mail. An enclosed explanation and instructional note as well as a note signed by the pastor of the church would be very helpful in encouraging individuals to participate, if the lists could simply be made available to researchers. It may also be helpful to study younger populations to measure levels of spirituality, social interest, hope, self-esteem, and satisfaction with life. This may provide greater insight into the development of religious identity over the lifespan.

Religious Affiliation with Non-Christian Populations

In that the SIBS was developed and written using generic language whenever possible another venue for this study may be with non-Christian populations. Non-Christian populations may produce different results, thus adding to the psychometric data base for the SIBS.

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APPENDIX

Self Appraisal Questions. Four questions to enable self-appraisals of participation, religiousness and spirituality were included for the purposes of this study.

1. How often do you attend religious services? The mean response was 4.28 or at least 1 to 4 times a month.
2. How often do you pray outside of religious services? The mean response was 4.06 or 7 to 9 times a week.
3. In general, how religious do you consider yourself? The mean response of 4.02 among the participants revealed that most of them consider themselves to be moderately religious.
4. In general, how spiritual do you consider yourself? A mean response of 4.28 from the respondents demonstrates that these respondents consider themselves to be moderately spiritual, and by comparison with the religiosity self-assessment question, they consider themselves to be slightly more spiritual than religious.