The Exploration of Spirituality and Identity Status in Adolescence

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Abstract

Spirituality may play an integral role in the healthy development of adolescents and yet it has been understudied in the field of psychology. This study explores the relationship between high-school-aged adolescents' spirituality and James Marcia's (1966, 1980) four identity statuses (diffused, foreclosed, moratorium, and identity achieved) through both quantitative and qualitative methods. Results indicated a statistically significant relationship between spirituality and gender with females scoring higher than males, and no relationship between spirituality and Marcia's identity statuses. The qualitative results revealed that adolescents categorized in all four identity statuses experience spirituality and most often experience it in relationship with others. These combined results indicate that adolescents are indeed experiencing spirituality, most often through connection with others.

Keywords: adolescent development, adolescence, positive youth development, identity status, spirituality, spiritual development

Introduction

Spirituality is an aspect of the self that is widely valued and yet highly personal. In the Western world, however, it has been understudied and under-appreciated in the field of psychology (Davis, Kerr, & Robinson-Kurpius, 2003; James & Samuels, 1999; Larson & Larson, 2003; Pargament & Mahoney, 2002; Richards & Bergin, 1997). For adolescents, spirituality may play an integral part in the transition from adolescence into functional adulthood (Davis et al., 2003; Delany, 1995). While there is a growing amount of research focusing on the role of spirituality in the therapeutic setting with adults (Hodge, Cardenas, & Montoya, 2001), few have paid attention to the critical role spirituality may play in adolescent development.

This study explores the emergence of spirituality in an identity development context at the crucial developmental period of adolescence

in order to ascertain the potential importance and value spirituality can play for adolescent development. Erikson's (1950, 1968, 1982) identity development theory and Marcia's (1966, 1980) identity status theory are used to describe the developmental process adolescents traverse. The positive youth development field (Lerner, 2004; Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005; Pittman, 1991) is used to provide a theoretical model for the inclusion of spirituality in adolescent development. Recently, interest and research in adolescent spirituality and spiritual development in the PYD field has risen dramatically (Bridges & Moore, 2002; Dowling, Gestsdottir, Anderson, von Eye, & Lerner, 2003; King & Benson, 2005; Lerner, 2004; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1999). Despite this recent interest, only a few scholars have attempted to psychometrically obtain support for the assertion that spirituality and spiritual development can indeed be awakened and experienced in adolescence (Lerner, Alberts et al., 2005). This study explores, in quantitative terms, the relationship between adolescents' spirituality and Marcia's (1966, 1980) identity statuses as well as how it relates to various demographic variables. The study further investigates, in qualitative terms, how adolescents define and experience spirituality among the four identity statuses posited by Marcia (1966, 1980).

The importance of spirituality in adolescence was highlighted by the John Templeton Foundation's multiyear Spirituality in Higher Education project that explored the trends, patterns, and principles of spirituality and religiousness in college-aged adolescents from their freshmen year to their junior year (Higher Education Research Institute, 2004). With almost 4,000 students from 46 diverse public and private universities surveyed, the results are staggering. Almost 90% of the students agreed that "all life is interconnected" and 77% said that "we are all spiritual beings" (Higher Education Research Institute, 2004, p. 2). Fifty-eight percent placed high value on "integrating spirituality" into their lives, a statistic that had risen nearly 7% over the 3 years of this study (Higher Education Research Institute, 2004, p. 2). These results indicate that a high number of adolescents are thinking about and experiencing spirituality. This is only one of many research projects underway that are illuminating what is truly meaningful and important to adolescents.

It is important to operationalize the definition of spirituality in order to elucidate the impact of these findings. An extensive review of the literature revealed innumerable definitions of spirituality including, but not limited to, an inner state of being, or force within a person (Beck, 1986; Goldsmith, 1992), being the best one can be (Helminiak, 2001; Vaughan-Clark, 1977), meaning making (Canda, 1989; Carroll, 1998; Chapman, 1987a, 1987b; Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, & Suanders,

1988; Gotterer, 2001; Hettler, 1984; Hodge, 2001; James & Samuels, 1999; Love, 2002; Seaward, 1995; Sermabeikian, 1994; Slater, Hall, & Edwards, 2001; Spero, 1990; Whitmer & Sweeny, 1992), connectedness (to self, the environment, or a higher power) (Bellingham, Cohen, Jones, & Spaniol, 1989; Canda, 1989; Depken, 1994; Fahlberg & Falhberg, 1991; Goodloe & Arreola, 1991; James & Samuels, 1999; Kelly, 1995; Seaward, 1995; Whitmer & Sweeney, 1992), search for what is sacred (Hill & Hood, 1999; Pargament, 1999; Sigmund, 2002; Slater, Hall, & Edwards, 2001), and transcendence (Gotterer, 2001; Helminiak, 1996a, 1996b; Kelly, 1995; Mauritzen, 1988; Schneider, 1989; Slater, Hall, & Edwards, 2001).

This multitude of definitions of spirituality implies that this concept is subjective, vague, personal, and difficult to articulate. The personal and subjective nature of spirituality offers us an important challenge, which is to define and quantify this concept. For the purpose of this research, spirituality is defined as meaning making, feelings of connectedness to others, self, and/or a higher power, and the openness to and search for self-transcendence. This working definition extends the concept of spirituality for consideration outside of the context of religion. Additionally, it can apply to individuals who express their spirituality in ways that even they themselves may not be able to recognize as such (Marquis, Holden, & Warren, 2001). For the purpose of this study, religiosity and spirituality are viewed as distinct but overlapping concepts. More specifically, an individual's religiosity manifests itself within the context of a religious institution and refers to how much one accepts the beliefs and performs the rituals of an established church or religious organization (Canda, 1997; Carroll, 1998; Cook, Borman, Moore, & Kunkel, 2000; Hodge, 2001; Hodge, Cardenas, & Montoya, 2001; Pargament & Mahoney, 2002; Shafranske & Maloney, 1990; Sigmund, 2002; Spero, 1990; Westgate, 1996). The overarching concept of spirituality represents a personal inner state of being that can be found within or outside the context of religion (Beck, 1986; Canda, 1997; Carroll, 1998; Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992; Cook et al., 2000; Hinterkopf, 1994; Hodge, Cardenas, & Montoya, 2001; Ingersoll, 1994; Pargament & Mahoney, 2002; Shafranske & Maloney, 1990; Westgate, 1996).

Researchers have found positive correlations between spirituality and several positive psychological outcomes (Richards & Bergin, 1997) including self-esteem (Falbo & Shepperd, 1986; Pedersen, 1999; Pedersen, Williams, & Kristensen, 2000), subjective well-being (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Ellison, 1991; Fabricatore, Handal, & Fenzel 2000; Myers & Diener, 1995; Pedersen et al., 2000; Witter, Stock, Okun,

& Haring, 1985), and physical health (George, Larson, Koenig, & McCullough, 2000; Gottlieb & Green, 1984; Larson & Larson, 2003; Musgrave, Allen, & Allen, 2002; Pedersen, 1999; Pedersen et al., 2000). In addition, the lack of spirituality in one's life has been associated with several negative behavioral and psychological outcomes including suicide and anxiety (Baker & Gorsuch, 1982; Davis, Kerr, & Robinson-Kurpius, 2003; Gartner, Larson, & Allen, 1991; Sturgeon & Hamley, 1979), depression (Wright, Frost, & Wisecarver, 1993), stress (James & Samuels, 1999), and substance abuse (Hodge, Cardenas, & Montoya, 2001; Maton & Zimmerman, 1992). The aforementioned research evidences positive outcomes correlated with spirituality as well as the fact that many adolescents value spirituality. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the emergence of spirituality in high-school-aged adolescents in a developmental context.

Adolescence and Spiritual Development

According to Erikson (1950, 1968, 1982), developing a successful identity during adolescence helps to prepare a person to handle the trials and tribulations of one's life more effectively. Poll and Smith (2003) postulated that "developing a sense of spiritual identity may also contribute to such desirable effects for individuals throughout their development" (p. 129). In addition, considering that meaning making is an integral part of an adolescent's journey, spirituality or religious beliefs can cultivate a conviction in adolescents that their lives have meaning and that they have some control over their fates (Werner, 1984). Davis et al. (2003) also noted the finding that adolescents who have a sense of meaning or purpose in their lives are less likely to engage in at-risk behaviors. Therefore, spiritual and religious beliefs may assist adolescents to find meaning or purpose and may discourage them from engaging in risky behaviors.

Adolescence is a time of great questioning and discovery. Many developmental theorists have attempted to describe the adolescent developmental process (e.g., Gilligan, 1979, 1982; Kegan, 1979, 1982; Kohlberg, 1981, 1987; Kohlberg, Levine, & Hewer, 1983; Loevinger, 1976; Piaget, 1969; Piaget & Inhelder, 1958). Historically, Erikson's (1950, 1968, 1982) psychosocial developmental model has been the most widely accepted in psychology. Erikson's model and James Marcia's (1966, 1980) expansion on Erikson's identity-versus-role-confusion stage are especially relevant to this study. In addition, the emerging field of Positive Youth Development (Lerner, 2004; Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas,

& Lerner, 2005; Pittman, 1991) demonstrates the recent inclusion of spirituality in the adolescent development field.

Marcia's Identity Status Theory

Marcia (1966, 1980) expanded on Erikson's theory to describe in greater detail the process adolescents go through during the Identity vs. Role Confusion stage. In his operationalization of Erikson's theory, Marcia (1966, 1980) identified two important aspects of identity formation: (a) commitment to a particular set of beliefs, values, and goals; and (b) exploration of alternative beliefs, values, and goals to define clearly four identity statuses: diffused, foreclosed, moratorium, and identity achieved.

An individual is classified as identity diffused when one is not presently exploring alternatives and has not committed to an ideology. One who is identified as identity foreclosed has high levels of committed beliefs but has not considered alternatives to these beliefs. The classification of moratorium is based on an individual's thoughtful and conscious exploration of alternative identity elements and often by corresponding behaviors. Lastly, an individual classified by the identity achieved status has undergone a process of exploration and has committed to a set of beliefs, values, and goals.

The evolution and growth of the identity status field as postulated by Marcia has given the greater adolescent development field many insights into the relationships between the identity statuses and other variables such as ethnicity, gender, age, acculturation, and religiosity (Allison & Schultz, 2001; Johnson, Buboltz, Jr., & Seemann, 2003; Makros & McCabe, 2001; Schwartz & Montgomery, 2002). Identity status theory is chosen in this study because it appears to be the most comprehensive and widely accepted theory in the identity development field today for adolescents.

Positive Youth Development

As mentioned earlier, the positive youth development (PYD) model is a strengths-based approach that identifies five key factors in helping adolescents stay on track: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring or Compassion (Pittman, 1991; Lerner, 2004; Lerner, Almerigi et al., 2005). It is thought in the PYD field that the five C's lead to a sixth C—Contribution, which is fostered through adolescents giving back to their communities. The main precept of positive youth development is that all young people need support, guidance, and opportunities during adolescence. PYD involves a process

of creating environments that support the social, emotional, spiritual, physical, moral, and cognitive development of adolescents. With this support they can develop self-assurance in these six C's that are key to creating a happy, healthy, and successful life.

One of the most important aspects of PYD for this research study in particular is the acknowledgement, inclusion, and discussion of spirituality and spiritual development in adolescent development. Benson, Roehlkepartain, and Rude (2003), prominent PYD researchers, defined spiritual development as

> the process of growing the intrinsic human capacity of self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred. It is the developmental "engine" that propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose and contribution. It is shaped both within and outside religious traditions, beliefs, and practices. (pp. 205-206)

Benson et al.'s (2003) definition of spiritual development informs much of the understanding and conception of spiritual development for the PYD field. This conceptualization of spiritual development is congruent with the definition of spirituality used in this study.

Lerner, Alberts, Anderson, and Dowling (2005) elaborated further that in the PYD field spirituality is tied specifically to a process called "thriving," which is considered to be exemplary positive youth development. Thriving entails the symbiotic relationship between a young person who is contributing to one's self, family, and community and the family and community are, in turn, supporting the young person (Benson, 1997; King & Benson, 2005; Lerner, Alberts et al., 2005; Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). A developmental systems perspective also states that spirituality is at the heart of the thriving process because it motivates young people both to participate and contribute to something greater than themselves (King & Benson, 2005).

This study explores the issues of adolescents' spiritual development and identity status through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Methodology

Research Questions
The primary research question for the quantitative portion for this study is: What is the relationship between Marcia's four identity statuses (diffused, foreclosed, moratorium, and identity achieved) as measured by the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ) (Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel, & Geisinger, 1995) and spirituality in high-school aged adolescents as measured by the Human Spirituality Scale (HSS) (Wheat, 1991)? Since there have been no previous research studies in this area, the null hypothesis for this question is: There is no relationship between identity statuses as measured by the EIPQ and spirituality as measured by the HSS.

The secondary research question is: What is the relationship between spirituality as measured by the HSS (Wheat, 1991) and the demographic variables of gender, age, grade, and ethnicity as well as self-reported importance of being religious, self-reported importance of being spiritual, and self-reported description of self as religious and/or spiritual? Due to the lack of previous research in this area, the null hypothesis for the secondary research question is: There is no relationship between spirituality as measured by the HSS and the demographic variables.

Finally, the research questions for the qualitative portion of this study are: (a) How do adolescents define and experience spirituality? And (b) Is there a difference in the expression and/or experience of spirituality between individuals classified in the four different identity statuses?

Mixed Methods Design
This study is a dominant-less dominant design (Creswell, 1994) consisting of a main quantitative component and a smaller, qualitative part. The quantitative portion of the study is a cross-sectional, descriptive survey design comprised of three self-administered questionnaires: a Demographics questionnaire developed for this study, the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ) (Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel, & Geisinger, 1995), and the Human Spirituality Scale (HSS) (Wheat, 1991). The qualitative portion of the study is designed to enrich the quantitative data with 12 semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews consist of open-ended questions exploring such phenomena as the adolescent's ideas, feelings, exploration, past experiences, and current beliefs around the notion of spirituality. The interviewees were identified by using results from the surveys to select the three participants in each of the four identity statuses with the highest scores on the Human

Spirituality Scale. The highest score on the HSS is used as a criterion because the higher a person scores on the HSS the more spiritual (s)he is considered.

Participants
The questionnaires were completed by 261 high-school-age adolescents from two high schools in Northern California. Participation was voluntary, and extra credit was offered by some of the participants' teachers. The criteria for participation were: (a) the willingness to participate in all aspects of the research, (b) the ability to speak and read English, (c) the signed informed consent forms returned, (d) the enrollment in general education classes, and (e) the enrollment in 10th to 12th grade.

Data Collection Procedures
Questionnaires were administered to students in 19 classrooms. The students were instructed to complete three questionnaires during a 20 minute period. Students received all three questionnaires in one complete packet in order of the Demographic Questionnaire, the Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ), and the Human Spirituality Scale (HSS). The packets were then collected and the data was scored by the researcher. Once the data were scored according to the previously established protocol by Balistreri et al. (1995) and Wheat (1991), 12 participants—three from each identity status with the highest score on the Human Spirituality Scale—were identified by a research assistant (also bound to maintain confidentiality) who matched the participants numeric codes with their corresponding names and contact information. The research assistant then generated a randomized list so as to conceal the identity status of each interviewee, thus offering no identifying information to the researcher. The 12 selected participants were then contacted and interviewed individually at the high school.

Data Analysis Procedures
The researcher and a professional statistician scored the EIPQ and HSS through means of the specific Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program. The data was analyzed using multiple regression (MR) to examine the relationship between spirituality, the identity statuses, and the demographic variables of gender, grade level, age, and ethnicity, as well as self-reported feelings of religiosity and spirituality and self-reported description of self as spiritual and/or religious. In this study the dependent or criterion variable is spirituality as measured by the HSS. Running multiple regression addresses the question: What is (or are) the

best predictor(s) of spirituality? The level of significance was held at < .05. All the qualitative data gathered during the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The interviewees retained their numeric code from the quantitative portion of the study and were given a pseudonym of their choice at the end of the interview to ensure confidentiality. Only after all the interviews were complete was the identity status category of each interviewee revealed to the researcher. The transcriptions were examined through content analysis for themes and patterns using a method of categorization and organization of meaning units (Bernard, 2000). The findings of each interview were collected to construct overarching themes of adolescent spirituality, as well as the differences or similarities of spirituality in each identity status. The findings were related to the demographic information to explore possible themes or patterns.

Findings

Demographic Information
Sixty percent of participants were female, 39% were male, and 1% declined to answer. Approximately 3% were 14 years old, 40% were 15 years old, 34% were 16 years old, 21% were 17 years old, and 2% were 18 years old. Approximately 41% of the participants were in 10th grade, 34% 11th grade, and 23% 12th grade. Almost one-half, 48%, of the participants were Caucasian, 18% Latin/Hispanic, 17% Bi- or Multicultural, and 14% Asian.

In order to test the validity of the Human Spirituality Scale (HSS) for an adolescent population, three questions were posed to subjects on the Demographic Questionnaire: the importance of being religious; the importance of being spiritual; and how a person would describe oneself with respect to being religious and/or being spiritual. With regard to being religious, 37% said it was "not important," 27% said it was "a little important," 25% said it was "important," and 11% said it was "very important." With regard to being spiritual, 31%, said it was "a little important," 28% said it was "not important," 24% said it was "important," and 16% said it was "very important." Lastly, with regard to feeling religious and/or spiritual, 34% said they were "neither spiritual or religious," 33% said they were "both spiritual and religious," 21% said they were "spiritual, but not religious," and 12% said they were "religious, but not spiritual."

The Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (EIPQ) (Balistrei et al., 1995) was utilized in order to classify the participants into one of four identity statuses as defined by Marcia (1980). Almost three-fourths of

participants were classified in the less mature identity statuses (i.e. 43% diffused and 30% foreclosed) followed by a little over one-fourth classified in the more mature statuses (i.e. 20% moratorium and 7% identity achieved).

The Human Sexuality Scale (HSS) was used to assess the participants' level of spirituality on three content dimensions: (a) a larger context to view one's life, (b) an awareness of life itself, and (c) compassion for the welfare of others (Wheat, 1991). According to the HSS, the higher the score, the more spiritual an individual is considered. The total mean score = 72, male mean = 67, female mean = 75, and SD = 11. Scores for this sample ranged from 31 – 100 indicating a normal distribution.

Linear Regression Findings
Research identified that a statistically significant relationship between the HSS and two demographic variables existed. Gender was the strongest predictor of spirituality as measured by the HSS, $\beta = -.346$, $p < .001$. More specifically, females were statistically significantly higher on spirituality as measured by the HSS than males thus rejecting the null hypothesis. The other predictor of spirituality as measured by the HSS was self-reported importance of being spiritual, $\beta = 181$, $p < .028$. The null hypothesis was rejected because this statistic indicates that the more important the participants reported being spiritual was to them, the higher they scored on the HSS. In addition, the Pearson correlation coefficient between gender and Yhat is the largest r (-.752) and Pearson r between spiritual and Yhat is the second largest r (.717). Therefore, this statistically significant finding reveals that the people who scored highest on the HSS were most likely to be females who indicated that spirituality was important to them. In addition, the effect size in this study is an R value of .530 which is in the medium range indicating robust findings. Results also indicated that a statistically significant relationship was not found between the dependent variable, HSS, and the independent variables: identity status, age, grade, ethnicity, self-reported importance of being religious, and self-reported description of self as religious and/or spiritual, thus accepting the null hypotheses for each of these variables.

Qualitative Findings
Ten of the 12 interviewees were female with a mean age of 16 compared to the mean age of 16 for the total sample mean. The range of scores for the interviewees on the HSS was 86 – 95 (M = 90) compared to the range of scores for the total sample on the HSS which was 31 – 100 (M = 72). The most prominent theme that was mentioned by the adolescents when

asked to define spirituality was connection and being in relationship to others, especially to parents, family, and friends followed by connection to oneself and a higher power. The interviewees' definitions of spirituality, in decreasing order, included connecting with one's self, connecting is a subjective experience, connecting with something or someone outside of oneself, connecting with a higher power, and finally, connecting spirituality with religion.

After categorizing the interviewees' answers into Marcia's (1966, 1980) identity statuses (diffused, foreclosed, moratorium, and identity achieved), themes or qualities that were expected from the literature review were investigated. Surprisingly, only one participant from each identity status fit the expected profile. The other two interviewees in each identity status showed a discrepancy between their identity status and their answers to the qualitative portion of the study. For example, when a participant classified as identity achieved was asked what contributed to her spirituality she said, "I don't really think I have much . . . that's something I still have to figure out." It is understood in the identity development literature that individuals classified as identity achieved have already explored their beliefs and have chosen a particular belief system, which was obviously not the case for this participant with respect to her spirituality.

Discussion

In spite of the theoretical discussion connecting development and spirituality, the results did not yield statistically significant results for the primary research question: What is the relationship between Marcia's four identity statuses and spirituality in high-school-aged adolescents? This may have occurred in large part because so few participants were classified as moratorium and identity achieved which are considered the more mature identity statuses. In addition, the majority of participants in this study were 15 years old, thus limiting a true comparison of different ages or different identity statuses.

Results yielded a statistically significant relationship between spirituality as measured by the HSS and gender. In fact, gender was the strongest predictor of spirituality. The results indicated that females scored higher on the HSS and were therefore considered more spiritual than males. When comparing mean scores for males (M = 67) and females (M = 75) a large difference emerges which is in agreement with Wheat's (1991) findings for his adult population for males (M = 75) and females (M = 83). In this study, the adolescent participants scored

considerably lower when compared to Wheat's (1991) sample, yet the difference between scores for males and females remained similar.

The statistically significant result between gender and spirituality may have occurred because the HSS is potentially more in line with the ways females experience and express spirituality. The HSS focused primarily on concepts such as connection and primarily connection with others. This may be more aligned with the ways females experience spirituality (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Ochs, 1996) and may not be entirely representative of males' sense and experience of spirituality. If this assertion is true, then it may be that females are not more spiritual than males, but rather females and males experience spirituality differently. With that said, BBYO (2006), the Higher Education Research Institute (2004), Lippman and Keith (2005), Wheat (1991), and this current study all found that females score statistically significantly higher on measures of religion and spirituality. In regards to the qualitative findings, connection with self and/or another was found to be the common thread amongst all the interviewees. The importance of connection with others has long been noted and studied by scholars in the attachment field (Bowlby, 1969). Templeton and Eccles (2005) extended the importance of connection with others with their assertion that "humans are intrinsically motivated to develop a spiritual identity in order to satisfy their need for connection" (p. 256). The fact that adolescents mentioned connection with others most often is not surprising based on what is known about the importance of others (e.g., peers and parents) in adolescent development (Erikson, 1950, 1968, 1982; Gilligan, 1979, 1982), though connection to others has not been highlighted in the adolescent spirituality literature (Fowler, 1981).

In discussions and research dedicated to adult spirituality, many different factors emerge as key components of spirituality. One of the predominant ways adults experience spirituality is through transcendence (Gotterer, 2001; Helminiak, 1996a, 1996b; Kelly, 1995; Mauritzen, 1988; Schneider, 1989; Slater, Hall, & Edwards, 2001) which is commonly defined as the experience of going beyond oneself and connecting with a higher power. The adolescent interviewees in this study cited connection with another most often. This can be classified as a self-transcendent experience, that is, the experience of feeling connectedness with someone, somewhere, or something beyond the self and can include such processes as searching for meaning, purpose, and connection. These are experienced as qualitatively and subjectively different vehicles for spiritual connection. In this study it seems that adolescents experience spirituality most often through a self-transcendent connection with another person.

While the experience of self-transcendence has most often been studied through intimate relationships between partnered individuals as the vehicle (Boorstein, 1979; Levine & Levine, 1995; Welwood, 1990, 1996), the discussion of experiencing spirituality in relationship does not have to be limited to only one type of relationship. In fact, the adolescents in this study stated that they often experienced spirituality in connection with their parents and friends. Future researchers might benefit from applying what is known in the field of intimate relationship as a spiritual path to broaden the understanding of the adolescent spirituality field.

It is also important to note that the overarching theme of connection to others may be over-represented in this study. The fact that 10 of the 12 interviewees were female may have skewed the findings and was a finding in and of itself. As discussed earlier, the HSS may capture the experience of spirituality for females more accurately than males. Therefore, it is not surprising that the majority of the interviewees, who were selected for scoring high on the HSS, were female. In addition, it is possible that the two interviewees who were male may be atypical in their experience of spirituality. This reiterates the notion that females may not be more spiritual than males, but that the two genders may have different ways of experiencing spirituality.

Another notable finding was the interviewees' lack of reflection and insight into their spiritual experiences. Wilber (2000) contended that there are many different lines of development (e.g., moral, cognitive, identity, and spiritual), and an individual can be at a different stage of development for each line. In this case, the interviewees were all at the same level of spirituality based on their HSS scores, but they were at different levels of identity development based on their classification in the four different identity statuses. Wilber (2000) explained that the experience of spiritual states depends on the person's primary stage of development. However, it is important to clarify that even though these participants were categorized into the four different identity statuses, they were all still operating from Erikson's (1950) identity versus role confusion stage, which served as the overarching stage of development from which they were enacting. Therefore it can be said that despite the fact that these adolescents may not be able to articulate precisely what or how they are experiencing spirituality, they are still experiencing it.

Limitations and Delimitations

The first limitation in this study is that little research on adolescent spirituality has been done. The majority of previous research focused primarily on adult spirituality (Davis, Kerr, & Robinson-Kurpius, 2003;

Hodge, Cardenas, & Montoya, 2001). Most of the previous research focusing on adolescents was based on theoretical articles written on spirituality (Benson, 2004; Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003; Benson, Scales, Sesma, Jr., & Roehlkepartain, 2003; Kessler, 1999) and empirical research looking at religion rather than spirituality (Fulton, 1997; Markstrom-Adams, Hofstra, & Dougher, 1994; Sanders, 1998). As mentioned earlier, spirituality is a construct that is deeply subjective and difficult to define (Reed, 1992). Another limitation is that the population sample was representative of Northern California high school students which may not be generalizable to the entire nation.

A significant limitation of this study is that the majority of participants in this study were 15 years old, thus limiting a true comparison of different ages and consequently, limiting a true comparison of the different identity statuses. Furthermore, the majority of interviewees were 15-year-old females and the qualitative findings are only indicative of this population.

Implications for Future Research

This study is a pioneering effort in the adolescent spiritual development field. Because there is still little known about the relationship between identity status and spirituality, this study should serve as the beginning of further exploration into this relationship. Future researchers would benefit particularly from increasing the age range of participants to ensure that all four identity statuses are equally represented. It would also be fruitful to explore how spirituality manifests and changes as individuals' identity statuses change during development through adolescence and into adulthood. Additionally, future studies may choose to go beyond defining spirituality and explore a description of the process of spiritual development as it unfolds for adolescents.

With respect to the relationship between spirituality and ethnicity, future researchers may want to focus on how different ethnicities experience and express spirituality. Additionally, future researchers could employ numerous questionnaires on spirituality that vary in content and theoretical underpinnings to explore whether females remain consistently more spiritual than males on all the measures.

The understanding of how spirituality manifests during adolescent development is only beginning to be illuminated. The results of this study support the idea that adolescents are experiencing spirituality and are most often experiencing it in the context of relationship to others. The importance of this research cannot be overemphasized because of the strong implications that adolescents' sense of spirituality can have for

their sense of self worth, sense of belonging and community, and their ability to thrive. Since this notion is being introduced for the first time, further exploration into this domain is needed.

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