

Children and Adolescents in Socio-cultural Environments: Towards a Spiritual Social Capital Theory

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Abstract

The purposes of this article are to examine key concepts relating to child and adolescent spirituality and to build a theoretical foundation for moving toward a theory of spiritual social capital. In order to better understand the impacts of spirituality on individuals' sense of well-being and on positive social outcomes, the concept of spiritual social capital needs to be explored by examining its relevance to human interactions, networks, and relationships formed in diverse socio-cultural environments in which children and adolescents grow up. This article ties the concept of social capital to the spiritual aspect of human development in order to present a conceptual framework for developing a Spiritual Social Capital Theory that may be applicable to cross-cultural studies of child and adolescent spirituality. Hypotheses are suggested for testing in future empirical research about how spiritual social capital as an intangible social asset is formed and processed for the benefits of young people and the society as a whole.

Keywords: child, adolescent, spirituality, social capital, theory, socio-cultural environment, child development

Children and Adolescents in Socio-Cultural Environments: Towards a Spiritual Social Capital Theory

Spirituality of children and adolescents received little attention as a research subject until the general public's enthusiasm about spirituality grew widely during the last two decades. Although most studies on spirituality have focused on adults, a growing body of literature on child and adolescent spirituality has been formulated in the fields of psychology, education, sociology, religion, and health. In addition, the relatively uninformed field of child and adolescent spirituality has been explored increasingly from social science perspectives. The new initiatives for studying child and adolescent spirituality included the founding of the *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* in 1996, the 2000 International Conference on Children's Spirituality sponsored by

British researchers, the 2003 Conference on Children's Spirituality-Christian Perspectives, and the 2003 *ChildSpirit* Conference. These conferences were attended by religious and humanistic scholars and practitioners from various fields. In addition, in 2003, Search Institute embarked on a major interfaith project for improving cross-cultural and inter-religious understanding of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence (Yust, Johnson, Sasso, & Roehlkepartain, 2006).

Earlier studies on child and adolescent spirituality were approached from a variety of angles. For example, research themes included religious or spiritual education and development (Best, 1996; Eaude, 2003; Eaude, 2004; Hyde, 2004a; Kim, 2004; Meehan, 2002; Pridmore & Pridmore, 2004; Watson, 2000), spiritual intelligence (Hyde, 2004b; Vaughan, 2002), children's right to religion and spiritual education (Gearon, 2006; Rodger, 1996; Schweitzer, 2005; Wright, 1996), and children's needs for holistic care (Barnes, Plotnikoff, Fox, & Pendleton, 2000; McSherry & Smith, 2007; Mercer, 2006a; Nierenberg & Sheldon, 2001). However, even while social scientists have paid increasing attention to religious and spiritual issues, scientific inquiry into child and adolescent spiritual development is in an early stage (Benson, 2006; Roehlkepartain, Benson, King, & Wagener, 2006). This emerging field of study has been largely ignored by social work researchers and educators. Most social workers working with children and adolescents who participated in a recent national survey reported that they were not adequately educated about the importance of spiritually-sensitive practice in working with young people (Kvarfordt & Sheridan, 2007). The emerging body of literature on the spirituality of children and adolescents has covered primarily psychosocial, educational, and developmental themes, rarely linking them with socio-cultural diversity of environments in which young children and youths experience and express their spirituality.

The premise of this study is that the spiritual aspects of human development are related to multi-dimensional environmental factors that influence the formation and expression of child and adolescent spirituality. Spiritually heightened sense of the self, self-identify, or self-esteem may be nurtured and experienced through relationships in family and community environments. For the purpose of better understanding the impacts of spirituality on individuals' sense of well-being and on positive social outcomes, the concept of spiritual social capital needs to be explored. Therefore, this article examines the relevance of spirituality in social work practice as it relates to children and adolescents' interactions, networks, and relationships formed in diverse socio-cultural contexts.

The purposes of this article are to examine key concepts relating to child and adolescent spirituality and to build a theoretical foundation for

moving toward a theory of spiritual social capital. This article ties the concept of social capital to the spiritual aspect of human development in order to present a conceptual framework for developing a Spiritual Social Capital Theory that may be applicable to cross-cultural studies of child and adolescent spirituality. Hypotheses are suggested for testing in future empirical research about how spiritual social capital as an intangible social asset is formed and processed for the benefits of young people and the society as a whole.

Understanding Spirituality and Spiritual Development

Spirituality in its fullest sense is an integral concept that bridges the inner self with one's concerns and empathy for others. Despite the general tendency to understand spirituality in light of pervasive individualism of modern societies, one intuitively understands that spirituality has more than the individual dimension. The dualistic conceptualization of spirituality (i.e. egocentric conceptualization of spirituality that values the inner self versus a socio-centric understanding of spirituality in relation to other realities) is merely a result of socially constructed learning process (Radford, 2006). Spirituality has an intrinsically transcendent quality for overcoming egocentric self-centeredness and the spiritual self cannot be fully expressed in an interpersonal or societal vacuum. Full expression and development of one's spirituality require human environments that consist of meaningful relationships with others as well as with the universe, as clearly understood from the Native American spiritual perspective (Myers, 1997).

In this article, spirituality is conceived as a universal source of influences on individuals and societies that cannot be confined within the boundaries of religion or culturally-specific faith traditions. Because of its all-encompassing influences that touch upon the intrinsic core of humanity, spirituality is relevant to all people regardless of age groups, religious affiliations, and many other social, demographic, and cultural characteristics of people. Being multi-dimensional and global in its practical applications, spirituality is a challenging concept that may be defined in many different ways, depending on the individual scholar's religious and cultural backgrounds and the purpose and the scope of the study. This study uses the following working definition of spirituality that was developed for inter-religious dialogues for understanding spirituality of children and adolescents growing up in diverse socio-cultural environments:

Spirituality is the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence in

which the individual participates in the sacred—something greater than the self. It propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose, and ethical responsibility. It is experienced, formed, shaped, and expressed through a wide range of religious narratives, beliefs, and practices, and is shaped by many influences in family, community, society, culture, and nature (Yust et al., 2006, p. 8).

The above definition places the conceptual focus on the self as situated in environmental contexts. Such emphasis on the self-in-context is very useful for social scientists, particularly for social work researchers who are familiar with the person-in-environment perspective.

From the developmental perspective, spiritual development can be understood as a universal human growth process that has multidimensional domains such as cognitive orientation, experiential and phenomenological dimension, existential well-being, and religiousness. At the same time, being a life-shaping force, spiritual development occurs through interactions between the self and many environmental factors (Roehlkepartain et al., 2006). Based on the spiritual-self-in-environment perspective, this study uses following definition of spiritual development:

Spiritual development is the process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for 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 of religious traditions, beliefs and practices (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003, p. 205-206).

Based on these two definitions, this article focuses on child and adolescent spirituality that is expressed and developed through human interactions that occur in diverse forms of family and community environments. The spiritual element of human development may be considered to be primarily a deeply individualistic phenomenon of human growth. At the same time, it needs to be noted that spiritual experiences of individuals as unique personal phenomena also impart societal and cultural meanings to larger communities and societies.

Spiritual Experiences in Global Environments

Spirituality can be expressed in a variety of ways outside religious institutions as well as within religious traditions of faith communities. A recent study of Finnish pre-adolescents revealed that spirituality can be

perceived as a concept that is closer to humanistic dimensions rather than to religious institutional dimensions (Ubani & Tirri, 2006). Earlier, Robert Coles (1990), a psychiatrist and pioneering researcher of child spirituality, observed that child and adolescent spirituality is experienced in various socio-cultural and political-economic contexts of global communities. Multiple types of protective and risk factors influencing child development and spirituality are found in religious and non-religious cultural contexts, various forms of family and community settings, and in complicated socio-economic and political conditions. From a multi-faceted holistic perspective, the concept of spiritual environment, in this study, is defined as *transforming conditions of time and space within which spiritual experiences, relational consciousness, awareness of the spiritual self, and/or the sharing of spiritual meanings are nurtured, learned, or expressed in multi-dimensional socio-cultural contexts.*

The World Values Survey (1999-2001) of young adults from 41 countries showed that those in less economically developed countries had higher levels of spirituality and religiosity than their counterparts living in better economic conditions (Lippman & Keith, 2006). In times of stressful situations like homelessness, adolescents are capable of tapping into their own spiritual resources, as found in a qualitative study of formerly runaway youth (Lindsey, Kurtz, Jarvis, Williams, & Nackerud, 2000). Spirituality is also influenced by political environmental factors that are tied to the power structure of a society where children and adolescents grow up. For example, the cultural representations of religion in the public education systems in Britain (Gearon, 2001) and in South Africa (Roux, 2006) tend to reflect the dominance of Christian values embedded in the mainstream political-economic structures. Taking a global view, children and adolescents of minority faith communities tend to grow up in socio-cultural environments that are often unfavorable to them. In addition, young people's protective relationships with adults often become vulnerable in times of war, natural disaster, homelessness, crimes, or abuses. In such challenging situations, young people's spiritual needs for love, peace, trust, belongingness, and relatedness go unmet. Too often, at-risk children and adolescents' personal environments lack the protective factor of spirituality.

The global understanding of the importance of spirituality for healthy growth of children and adolescents is indirectly reflected in Article 14, item #1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted in 1989 by the General Assembly of the United Nations. Although the article did not use the word 'spirituality', it specified the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. The child's right to think freely and

express one's own conscience can be exercised within and outside the framework of religious traditions. Various types of spiritual environments in which children and adolescents can fully exercise their rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion can be broadly categorized into individualistic and collectivistic cultures as discussed below.

Individualistic Socio-Cultural Environments

In Western cultures, spirituality is often understood in light of individualism "as a way which individuals can privately draw strength in isolation from 'otherness'" (Myers, 1997, p. 87). The personal mode of being that is identifiable even among preschoolers involves the private quest of knowing that may be fully expressed within the children's own time and space through games and other individual activities (Champagne, 2003). Spirituality may be tapped into as an individual coping mechanism particularly in times of loss and grief experienced by children (Andrews & Marotta, 2005; Sommer, 1989). The existential aspect of child and adolescent spirituality ties into their individual needs that may be met through spiritual products created from profit motives. American adults' individualistic lifestyles described in Bellah's *Habits of the heart* (1985) can blend easily into the consumption-oriented American culture. Children's spiritual needs have also led to the commodification of spiritual experiences in industrialized countries where the marketing strategies for capitalizing on young people's spirituality have expanded in recent years. An example of consumerism relating to spirituality is a large number of death-related literatures for children and adolescents that deal with the themes of meaningfulness, connectedness, and transcendence (Corr, 2004). According to Mercer (2006b), commodified products for the enhancement of children's spirituality are purchased for an individual child, consumed in the private space of the child's homes and such "individualistic engagements with spiritual commodities" lead to a "domesticating effect on spiritual life" (p. 31).

Relational Consciousness and Collectivistic Cultural Contexts

The core of spirituality may be found in the relational consciousness of children and adolescents. Although relational consciousness can be categorized in terms of various religious traditions (for example, the Christian perspective, the Jewish perspective, and so on) (Nye, 2004), the commonality of all religions' spiritual essences may be found in relational consciousness that goes beyond religiosity that is often egocentric. The relational aspect of child and adolescent spirituality is tied intimately with

their capacity for feeling affection and sympathy toward others. When spirituality is understood in light of relational consciousness, spiritual education for expanding individual and societal capacities for binding people of different faith traditions may be seen as a means of overcoming the damaging effect of individualism on community life (Hay, 2000).

In more collectivistic socio-cultural contexts, the relational mode of being a spiritual child is expressed through her/his relationship with parents, grandparents, and other adults in the community who play key roles in the child's personal environment (Champagne, 2003). Family as a critical environment for children and adolescents provides both protective and risk factors for child development. Children's spiritual development requires parents' sensitivity and interest in fostering the child's spiritual capacities and childhood peak experiences. Unfortunately, children's spiritual experiences are often ignored in family environments, receiving little parental supports (Schlarb, 2007). It appears that the family environment often fails to satisfy children's developmental needs as they grow older. An empirical study revealed that, with age, life satisfaction among Korean children and youth of all ages decreased, while the family domain remained an important predictor of global life satisfaction (Park, 2005).

The expression of spirituality in diverse cultural contexts has received increasing scholarly attention from researchers of world religions (Verma & Maria, 2006). Religious or non-religious communities have collective systems of meaning established in unique cultural contexts. The cultural setting of unique religious traditions and values often serves as a naturally meaningful spiritual environment, although spirituality can also be nurtured in non-religious cultural settings. For members of faith communities, the meanings of spiritual experiences are embedded in religious cultural contexts. For example, a study of boy choristers showed a clear linkage between spirituality and the religious culture of a Christian community practiced in a church setting. The case study of a group of Christian youths showed that spiritual peak experiences that they had in the context of religious rituals were perceived by them essentially as a spiritual expression rather than an indication of religious commitment (Ashley, 2002).

When *relational consciousness* becomes a focal point of spiritual education, cultural and social diversity of both religious and non-religious settings should be considered in the study of spiritual development (Scott, 2003). Unlike in individualistic cultures, in societies tied more closely with collectivistic values, the spirituality of individual children and adolescents is inseparable from their spiritual relationships with others. For example, in East Asian countries such as South Korea, where

Confucian principles of harmonious human relationships and collectivism rather than individualism are valued by the general public, young people's spirituality is naturally nurtured and expressed in the light of their needs for experiencing belongingness and togetherness in daily lives, especially in regard for attachment to their parents and extended family members.

In cultures where collectivistic thinking is more prominent than in Western cultures, spirituality is more likely to be understood from the perspective of the entire community. The Native American spirituality that values harmonious relationships with things other than the self also recognizes the healing influence of the natural environment (Hunter & Sawyer, 2006) as well the community's collective responsibility for protecting young people. In U.S.A., minority children of Native American tribes are protected so as not to lose their cultural heritages in the process of adoption. The Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 protects the tribal community's right for placing Indian children in homes that reflect the values of the Indian tribal culture. Under this law, the decision on what's best for the child is not interpreted in a narrow individualistic way, but rather, a collectivistic approach to raising the child in culturally-sensitive ways is honored.

Towards a Spiritual Social Capital Theory

There are three key assumptions in this effort at conceptualizing the meaning of spiritual social capital. The first assumption is that the spiritual development of individual children and adolescents contributes to the advancement of the society as a whole through the formation of spiritual social capital on a societal level. Second, the spiritual developmental process occurs in the context of families and communities where children and adolescents find meanings and purposes in human relationships that are nurtured or developed by spiritual motives. The third assumption is that the spiritual developmental process is a universal phenomenon that applies to all children and adolescents regardless of the degree of religiosity or spirituality embedded in their socio-cultural environments.

Accordingly, the impacts of protective and risk factors of children and youth's environments on their well-being are interrelated with spiritual elements found in relationships with family, group, and community members. Individual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors are not free from spiritual perspectives about relationships with others. Behind family and group interactions and community relations are spiritual forces that shape the meanings of belongingness and caring about something other than self-interest.

Social Capital, Spiritual Intelligence, and Spiritual Development

The concept of social capital centers on human needs for connectedness, meaning, trust, and contribution to a larger society (Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 1993; Putnam, 1995). The concept of social capital is also positioned as a resource for action and “defined by its function.... Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible” (Coleman, 1988, p. 16). Studies on social capital usually focus on relational contexts of individuals, groups, and communities. The concept tends to be measured in terms of community participation, networks of relationships, relational reciprocity, and the level of trust. The spiritual element behind human interactions, networks, and connections needs to be studied to find the role of spirituality in the formation of social capital. By understanding the limitations and potentials for the spiritual factor to construct social capital, it will also be possible to study the extent to which the positive impact of social capital may be attributed to the spiritual elements that influence the qualities of family and community relationships in diverse socio-cultural environments. There are many spiritual characteristics found in children and adolescents. They are broader than the moralistic and ethical dimensions of child development.

The innate qualities of being a spiritual child include a wide-ranging humanness such as lively awareness, wonder, gratitude, hope, courage, energy, love, gentleness, self-acceptance, humility, compassion, basic trust of others, ethical or moral responsibility, and sensitivity and concerns for others. Outside the family environment, students’ personal involvement in community service activities, leadership, and volunteer work may be seen as a manifestation of spiritual development. Spirituality-related activities may be the expression of their search for meaning (Love, 2001). The participation of the spiritual self in something greater than the inner self occurs through culturally meaningful interactions, networks, and social relationships. In this respect, children and adolescents who have more of caring attitudes expressed in their behaviors toward others might have a higher level of spiritual intelligence than their peers with less socio-centric spiritual qualities. When spiritual intelligence (Vaughan, 2002) is fully developed and manifested in empathetic relationships with others, the individual child or adolescent’s spiritual qualities are transmitted through family and community interactions in daily lives. Young people’s spiritual attitudes and behaviors affect the quality of community life as well as individuals’ sense of well-being. Therefore, spirituality that produces positive

outcomes for the society as a whole can be considered as an intangible social asset. In this sense, a society with children and adolescents with highly developed spiritual intelligence may be seen as a society with greater spiritual social capital than other societies with young people with a lower level of spiritual intelligence. Unfortunately, many previous studies that examined various protective and risk factors found in family and school environments neglected the spiritual element behind human interactions (e.g. Voydanoff & Donnelly, 1999). Future studies will need to investigate whether spirituality embedded in protective factors for children and adolescents can be seen as spiritual social capital that not only benefits the individual child or adolescent but also contributes to collective well-being of the society as a whole.

Holistic webs of human interactions, networks, and the connectedness take on spiritual meanings when spiritual intelligence is demonstrated in relationships with others, thus fully actualizing spiritual development through beneficial social relationships. Based on insights from previous studies, spiritual social capital is defined as follows:

Spiritual social capital is an intangible social asset and public good manifested in networks and relationships with family and community members that are motivated by socio-centric inner qualities of the spiritual self. The development of individual children and adolescents' spiritual intelligence leads to the expansion of spiritual social capital by allowing the inner spiritual qualities demonstrated in culturally meaningful and socially-beneficial relationships with others.

Spiritual Social Capital in Religious Environments

Religion's influences are largely transmitted through family interactions and parental involvement in the lives of children and adolescents. For this reason, the child's "right to commune with God" (as quoted in Crompton, 1998, p. 249) may be exercised more naturally in religious home environments through religiously-minded adults' influences. As implied from a study that tested the Attachment Theory among college students (McDonald, Beck, Allison, & Norsworthy, 2005), parent-child attachment is likely to lead to a higher level of attachment to God among children. When children grow up in religious family and community environments, they often participate in rites of passage observed in the religious traditions of their family and community. Through institutionalized opportunities for communing with God, children and adolescents may find invaluable spiritual meanings. Young people often find spiritual

meanings through religious rites of passage such as birth and naming of a new born child, coming of age, funeral and burial, wedding, and baptism observed in various world religions (Crompton, 1998, p. 83-98; Gay, 2006, p. 81-91). Young children and adolescents' spiritual development may be nurtured through a socialization process and a process of acquiring culturally meaningful spiritual values and social patterns built in multi-dimensional socio-cultural contexts (Haight, 2004). Religious environments, within which spiritual socialization takes place, may have even greater meanings to minority youths, as illustrated by a study of African American children, to whom their church serves as the most significant community resource of protective factors (Haight, 1998).

Child and adolescent spirituality or religiosity expressed in personal lives may be seen as a type of community social capital when it influences group interactions and social outcomes positively. A study of Canadian adolescents showed that, regardless of the level of spirituality, religious youths had more positive psychosocial adjustment compared to non-religious adolescents (Good & Willoughby, 2006). Indeed, a large body of empirical studies shows positive relationships between adolescents' religiosity and social outcomes (King & Furrow, 2004; Smith, 2003). Empirical evidence shows that religious environments lead to healthy behavioral patterns in the areas of school attendance, health-enhancing behaviors, emotional satisfaction, pro-family attitudes and values, and community service. Religion also discourages harmful behaviors including substance abuse, juvenile delinquency, suicidal attempts, teen pregnancy, and so on. Smith's (2003) review of earlier studies identified key dimensions of religion's influence including moral order, learned competencies, and social and organizational ties. Smith's review also identified three specific factors of religious influence (i.e. social capital, network closure, and extra-community skills) that are connected with social and organizational ties.

Because of positive contributions of children and adolescents' spirituality on the larger society, religion is included in regular educational curricula in many countries. South African public schools have incorporated religion in its public education although Christian values have dominated the curriculum, reflecting little religious diversity of the students (Roux, 2006). The 1988 Educational Reform Act of Great Britain adopted an educational policy that promoted spiritual development of public school children through changes in the curriculum (Duff, 2003). In countries that experienced an increasing diversity in religious backgrounds among public school students, it has become an important public policy issue to develop culturally-sensitive religion courses that reflect inter-religious perspectives.

Spiritual Social Capital in Collectivistic Cultural Contexts: Confucian Examples

Healthy and meaningful interactions, networks, and connections between family, group, and community members are more likely to be nurtured in socio-cultural contexts that value familism and collectivism rather than individualism. Families and communities are two key social systems for producing spiritual social capital for children and adolescents. As found in a comprehensive review of literature on social capital and children's well-being, social capital has been defined in terms of relationships or interactions and its benefits to families and communities (Ferguson, 2006). It is not surprising that an empirical study revealed that social capital is generally higher in rural areas than in more individualistic urban communities in terms of community participation, feeling of trust, and neighborhood connections (Onyx & Bullen, 2000).

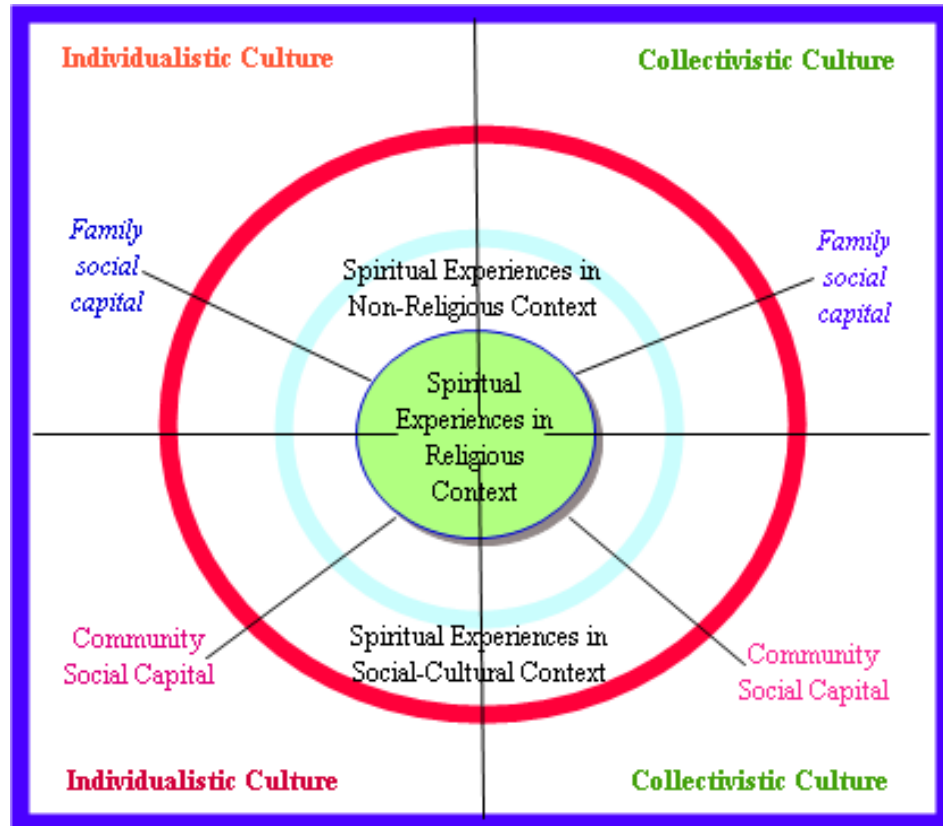
East Asian cultural norms are usually equated with family and communitarian values, in part due to the influence of Confucianism. Some feminists criticize Confucianism for promotion of anti-democratic and authoritarian human relationships that tend to oppress women and children. Yet Confucian values of familism with its emphasis on filial piety permeate collectivistic societies like Korea. Like other East Asian societies influenced by Confucianism, Korea is often considered to be a collectivistic society (Kang, 2004). Within the Confucian cultural context, a sense of individuality is overshadowed by group identity and individual identity is formed in relation to family and the wider network of social relationships (Canda, 2002a & Canda, 2002b). Despite the country's vibrant diversity in religion including Buddhism, Protestantism, and Catholicism, Confucian ancestral worship is prevalent and filial piety has remained a key ethical principle honored in Korea (Korean Overseas Information Service, 2005, p. 161-170). Although less than 0.5% of the Korean population identify themselves as the followers of Confucianism as opposed to other religious categories, the Confucian cultural force is strong in Korean society. Regardless of its rapid modernization, industrialization, and Christianization, Korea has preserved collectivistic values and maintained its Confucian cultural traditions of revering ancestors and parents (Lee, 1997). In such a collectivistic cultural social system, social capital within the family, particularly in extended families with adult relatives, appears to be very high. A famous Korean Confucian scholar, Yi Yulgok, who had his vision of *dae-dong-sa-hoe* (i.e. the Society of the Great Unity), believed that the idealistic Confucian society could be achieved when the Great Unity was realized and the world belonged to all (Lee, 2006, p. 138). Children growing up upholding such

collectivistic ideals are likely to develop higher spiritual social capital through the family-centered socialization process that values relational consciousness more strongly than individualistic attitudes and behaviors in interacting with others. For example, Korean children's tendency to strive for academic excellence may be explained in terms of the spirit of familism rather than their desire to achieve an individual glory of success. As demonstrated in Korean parents' dedication for their children's intellectual development, intimate interactions between Korean parents and their children that focus on children's education are the manifestation of the family social capital which is deeply rooted in the spirit of Confucianism.

An empirical Korean study revealed a significant positive correlation between spiritual well-being and the parent-child attachment, demonstrating the relevance of parent-child relationship to adolescents' spiritual well-being (Park & Yu, 2003). The study outcomes also implied that healthy parent-child relationships served as a protective factor for overcoming environmental risk factors. Similarly, Chinese children and adolescents' self-transformation is intimately tied with Confucian values and cultural influences on child rearing practices (Verma & Maria, 2006). The spiritual development of children and adolescents growing up in more collectivistic countries reflects socio-centric cultural norms that value the spirit of filial piety, brotherhood, familism, friendship, and loyalty. Future empirical studies need to examine the linkages between spiritual social capital and positive social outcomes from wider cross-cultural perspectives.

To summarize, as depicted in the Figure 1, children and adolescents' spiritual experiences occur in individualistic or collectivistic social-cultural environments within which their spiritual social capital is formed in the contexts of family social capital and community social capital generated in various types of religious and non-religious settings.

Figure 1. Children and adolescents' spiritual experiences and social capital in sociocultural contexts



Towards Cross-Cultural Studies on Children and Adolescents' Spiritual Social Capital

Adolescent spirituality in various faith communities can be understood as a force for moving toward a civil society. Spiritual and religious commitment often leads to young people's civic engagement and their contribution to the improvement of social conditions, as shown in the example of a Buddhist organization in India (Verma & Maria, 2006). Another example is the Baha'i Faith community that recognizes "young people's spirituality as a powerful force that can effect social change" (Noguchi, 2006, p. 285). In the Baha'i Faith tradition, children are accepted as full-fledged community members and expected to apply spiritual principles in their daily lives to advance the civilization of global communities in both spiritual and material aspects (Noguchi, 2006). As shown in these examples, young people's spirituality is often considered to be a spiritually-grounded community asset that is expected to

contribute to greater good in global faith communities.

A previous study emphasized the relevance of spirituality as a resource for preventing teenage sexual behaviors among African American girls (Doswell, Kouyate, & Taylor, 2003). A few empirical studies of Korean adolescents examined the relationships between spiritual well-being, religiosity, depression, suicidal attempt, self-esteem, self-concept, purpose in life, and delinquent behaviors (Kang, 2003; Kang, Lee, & Cho, 2003; Kang, Song, Cho, & Kang, 2004; Sohn, 2004). Other studies reviewed by Ferguson (2006) showed evidence for the positive influences of spiritual and religious factors on children and adolescents' well-being. King & Furrow (2004) focused on the role of social capital in explaining positive benefits from religion and spirituality, revealing important empirical evidence that religious influence on youth's positive moral outcomes was mediated through social capital. In this study, compared to non-religious peers, religiously active youths who showed more moral outcomes also possessed higher levels of social capital measured in terms of social interaction, trust, and shared vision.

Earlier studies developed empirically measurable definitions of social capital (Onyx & Bullen, 2000; Runyan et. al., 1998). Measuring child and adolescent spirituality is also feasible by adapting the existing spirituality measurement scales designed to study adult spirituality (The Center for Spiritual Development in Childhood & Adolescence, 2008). To construct a measurement scale of spiritual social capital goes beyond the scope of this article. However, building on earlier studies and the conceptual foundation elaborated in this study, future studies need to examine empirical linkages between children and adolescents' spiritual social capital and positive individual and social outcomes. For future empirical studies on child and adolescent spirituality and its impact on a larger society, a new Spiritual Social Capital Index needs to be developed. Such an index will be useful in facilitating a global level collaborative research on child and adolescent spirituality by tapping into the existing networks of scholars in U.S.A., Canada, Australia, and Korea where literature on spirituality and professional social work has increased dramatically during the last decade (Kim & Canda, 2009).

Although the general direction of influences may be hypothesized to flow from spiritual social capital to personal and societal outcomes, Spiritual Social Capital Theory should not be tested only through linear models of inquiry. In reality, non-linear relationships are likely to be common because individual and societal well-being resulting from spiritual social capital will, in turn, have positive impact on developing spiritual social capital. When quantitative methods of inquiry are employed, key concepts defined in this article will need to be

operationalized for study purposes. Below are some examples of hypotheses that could be tested in future empirical studies.

- Children and adolescents growing up in religious families have greater spiritual social capital than their counterparts in non-religious families.
- Parents' spiritual social capital is positively related to children's spiritual social capital in both individualistic and collectivistic cultures.
- Children and adolescents' spiritual intelligence is nurtured more readily in family and community environments with greater spiritual social capital than in environments with less spiritual social capital.
- Spiritual social capital is higher in more collectivistic communities (for example, rural communities) than in communities with a stronger sense of individualism.
- Children and adolescents with more spiritual social capital are more likely to demonstrate a higher sense of individual well-being (for example, higher self-esteem, less depression, less self-destructive behavior, etc.) than their counterparts.
- Children and adolescents with a higher level of spiritual social capital tend to be more pro-social (for example, have socially inclusive attitudes, show more empathy to others, engage in altruistic helping activities, etc.), compared to their counterparts with less spiritual social capital.

Conclusion

This article examined key concepts for developing a new Spiritual Social Capital Theory that may be tested in future cross-cultural studies. The author focused on families and communities as the major environments for nurturing children and adolescents' spiritual intelligence and spiritual social capital. By linking child and adolescent spirituality to environmental contexts of interactions and networks where spiritually and culturally meaningful relationships are developed, the author aimed to construct conceptual bases for testing a Spiritual Social Capital Theory. For future social workers and other professionals to become more spiritually competent in working with children and adolescents, more empirical studies need to be conducted to build a knowledge base that explains the formation and function of spiritual social capital. When future studies show empirical evidence pointing to the positive outcomes of spiritual social capital, the relevance of spirituality in multi-level social

work practice will become even more important than it has been.

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