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FINDING SAFE PASSAGE: THE EXPERIENCE OF SPIRITUALITY FOR ADOLESCENTS

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FINDING SAFE PASSAGE: THE EXPERIENCE OF SPIRITUALITY FOR ADOLESCENTS

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family, to the young people who so generously offered their

insights, and to God who gave us our breath of life, our spirits, that allow us to

experience the divine and walk in the mystery.

But it is the spirit in a man,
the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding.

It is not only the old who are wise,
not only the aged who understand what is right.

Job 32: 7-9 (Holy Bible, New International Version)

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no matter how much of a stretch some of them have been. This one really was more of a challenge and lasted longer than either of us anticipated. For all the sacrifices, large and small, you have made to support me in this project, I hope I can offer you as much in return. I am truly blessed by you.

Last, first, and most of all, I am thankful to God for sending me on this journey and then carrying me through it. Although I may not yet understand His purpose, I look forward to the continuing revelation of how He will use the changed person He has created in me through this experience.

Finding Safe Passage: The Experience of Spirituality for Adolescents

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Adolescents in the United States are at risk for a number of negative behavioral and health outcomes, and the literature suggests links between spirituality and various risk and protective factors associated with these outcomes. The purposes of this qualitative study were to gain a better understanding of adolescents' conception of spirituality and to explore its role in their life experiences. A bioecological theory of human development provided a sensitizing framework, and a grounded theory of *finding safe passage* emerged through constant comparative analyses of semi-structured individual interviews conducted with twelve healthy Caucasian, lower to upper middle class adolescents ages 13-17 years old. One participant attended a private Christian school; all others attended public schools. Two participants lived in rural areas within 45 miles of a major city, and the others lived in the city or its suburbs.

The basic characteristics of spirituality were categorized as *felt awareness* and *wholeness*. Awareness of spirituality was through its supernatural and physical properties and internal, dynamic, and constant presence. Properties of wholeness included

encompassing and integrated parts, meaning and purpose, and essence of self. Spirituality was facilitated by a supportive environment, creativity, helping and being helped, and connecting to self, God, and others. Consequences were a changed perspective, positive behaviors, relating to others, and the core variable of an *anchored self.* For Christian participants, an important intervening condition was their relationship to God.

Finding safe passage, the basic psychosocial process through which these participants employed their spirituality, had three sequential phases: *turning inward*, *having an inner dialogue*, and *navigating the course*. In *turning inward*, they turned their attention away from the external situation toward internal directions. They then thought through all relevant aspects of a situation in an *inner dialogue*. In *navigating the course*, they initiated and carried out the decisions they considered would best help them *find safe passage*. A key component of each phase was an *anchored self*, with its properties of self-knowledge, self-esteem, self-acceptance, self-confidence, and independence. These phases led them through difficulty in a manner that maintained integrity of self and helped or did not harm others.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The practice of nursing is ideally concerned with the whole person as well as the environment in which they live, function, and interact. This concern extends beyond caring for physical needs to attending to a range of high risk or maladaptive behaviors (e.g., interpersonal violence, substance abuse, unprotected sex) that have a negative impact on the individual and others. Many nursing theories and models of practice either explicitly or implicitly view persons as holistic beings with physical, psychosocial, and spiritual dimensions. Nursing cannot take a holistic approach to care without acknowledging the importance of spirituality to the entire person. In the last 15 years, increased attention on the spiritual dimension of persons has been evident in nursing research, theory development, education, and practice. Reed's (1992) description of spirituality as a basic human characteristic, with importance to well-being and health, supports its inclusion in all areas of nursing science. The focus of interest in this study is the human dimension of spirituality and its effects on the lives of adolescents. Because nursing is concerned with the health needs arising from all human dimensions, including spirituality, efforts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the spiritual dimension in any given population was warranted.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the human dimension of spirituality as it is experienced by adolescents, and to explore the role it plays in helping them through difficult life situations. The qualitative research method of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987) was used to construct

a theory of how the dimension is conceived and experienced, how it affects the lives of adolescents, and how it is employed in the processes used by them to deal with difficulty or hardship.

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BACKGROUND

The Potential Impact of Spirituality in Adolescence

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The developmental work that occurs throughout adolescence has its own unique vulnerabilities as youth transition from childhood to adulthood. New identities are formed and new ways of relating to the world are developed based on a dynamic and complex interplay of factors within and across multiple bioecological systems. Each dimension of the person is involved in this process and the spiritual dimension may have a particularly important role as an integrative force. The following research suggests numerous ways that spirituality may potentially exert an influence during adolescence and thus why understanding the ways this happen are important.

Identity, Belonging, and Self-Esteem

The years between elementary school and young adulthood are marked by a search for finding out who one is, what group of people provides a nurturing and non-threatening place where one can belong, and how one can feel good about oneself in the midst of all the changes within oneself and in one's world. The need to belong is important throughout the lifespan, but no more so than in adolescence. Thompson and McRae (2001) describe the African American church as a place that fills a need to belong and be connected to a community of others where certainty, continuity, constancy, and comfort can be found. It is an indigenous institution through which spirituality is expressed within the African American community. This provides a sense of identity

within a group context that also protects against threats to survival from a larger hostile community. Religious practices that support its expression, such as church participation, Bible study, and prayer increase social support through a stronger sense of connection to others and to a larger community of believers (Musgrave, Allen, & Allen, 2002). Spirituality in African American women's lives helps them find meaning and purpose, cope, grow, define character, adhere to meaningful moral principles, interrogate and accept reality, confront and transcend limitations, and gain insight and courage (Mattis, 2002).

Self-esteem and sense of self are associated with spiritual well-being in adolescents. They have spiritual needs such as having a sense of self and establishing meaning for their lives (Mallick & Watts, 1999). Mohler (1996) reported positive correlations between self-esteem and spiritual well-being in young adolescents involved in church youth groups. Interestingly, lower self-esteem was reported in youth having higher numbers of siblings or attending larger churches. The latter may possibly be due to greater ease of connecting to smaller numbers of people rather than feeling lost in a larger crowd. Olszewski (1995) defined spiritually-based coping as reflecting a personal relationship with God that is used to deal with life stress by guidance and help. She reported that, in adolescents ages 12-17 in church youth groups, the effect of spiritually-based coping on depression and anxiety is mediated through self-esteem and social support. Dubow, Pargament, Boxer, and Tarakeshwar (2000) reported that while ethnic identity in a sample of young Jewish adolescents might contribute to stressors, the religious beliefs that are a component of the ethnic identity also serve as coping mechanisms.

Brucato (2002) applied group interventions to Latino adolescent males to increase the group's positive ethnic identity, including culturally relevant spirituality. The group members reported that spirituality would provide a means to cope with hardship, and they responded to spiritually significant rewards by demonstrating increased motivation toward pro-social behaviors such as improved behavior and school performance. Brucato's study supports Miller's (2001) assertion that proactive racial socialization and spirituality discussions are important contributors to academic achievement and attribution issues. Miller's proactive racial socialization and Oler's (1996) concept of positive racial identity indicate connectedness to a group, a commonly cited characteristic of spirituality.

Developmental transitions

Recent research shows that spirituality contributes positively to many aspects of adolescent growth and development, and may help to successfully bridge phases of growth such as from adolescence to adulthood (Lindsey, Kurtz, Jarvis, Williams, & Nackerud, 2000; Weber & Cummings, 2003). Anderson (2002) reported that college students (some of whom are older adolescents) with higher levels of spirituality, openness to experience, and emotional intelligence had an increased capacity to appreciate similarities and differences between people. These skills would be particularly useful in their transition from the familiar home and community and adjustment to an expanded social environment.

Young adults (ages 18-24) who were formerly runaways or homeless in their adolescence identified spirituality as a factor in the successful transition to adulthood (Lindsey et al. 2000). Connectedness to others is a characteristic of spirituality (Reed,

1987), and connectedness to family (described as attachment or bond to and support from family) remains important even after adolescence when the young adults are no longer with the family (Weber & Cummings, 2003). This would indicate a need for a continued sense of connectedness even in the absence of physical proximity.

Current Issues in Assessing Adolescent Spirituality

Despite its abstract and subjective qualities, numerous instruments have been developed for adults for purposes of research and practice, and have been used in nursing to assess spirituality, its consequences, and related variables (Ellerhorst-Ryan, 1997; Hall & Edwards, 1996; Howden, 1992; Hungelmann, Kenkel-Rossi, Klassen, & Stollenwerk, 1996). None of these spirituality instruments were developed for or based specifically on research with adolescents, with the exception of college students in late adolescence or early adulthood. On May 8, 2004 the Health and Psychosocial Instruments (HAPI) database was searched using the term 'spirituality' and produced 198 results. However, when the search term 'spirituality' was combined with 'adolescent', 'adolescence', 'teenagers', 'teens', 'youth', or 'child/ren', only ten instruments were found. Of these, the only one for 'child/ren' that specifically assessed spirituality referred to applying an instrument to adult women. Only one of the ten on the 'adolescent' list contained the term spiritual, and it was a questionnaire about spiritual and religious concerns rather than a comprehensive assessment of the dimension of spirituality. Of the remaining nine instruments, eight cited religion or religiosity and one cited faith as the concept being measured. Another HAPI search on September 8, 2004 was limited to 1985 to 2004, and produced ten instruments used in adolescent studies. Again, they all measured some aspect of religion or faith.

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Other instruments found elsewhere do measure various aspects of spirituality in adolescents, but are limited in scope and/or applicability to actual life experiences. A quantitative tool was developed to measure adolescents' behaviors that promote spirituality (Hendricks, Pender, & Murdaugh, 2001), but spirituality was not clearly defined. Smithline (2000) used a sample of upper middle class, mostly Caucasian students from private high schools in neighboring higher income communities around San Francisco to construct a tool to assess spiritual beliefs. Because differences in cognitive development, culture, and socioeconomic factors may influence spiritual development, it is not known whether these instruments would be valid with adolescents from a broader range of socioeconomic backgrounds.

Engebretson (2002) constructed an open-ended questionnaire to get information about religiosity and expressions of spirituality. Her sample was 338 14-year-old Australian Catholic middle school students from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds. Based on the questionnaire results, she developed an instrument to explore links between religiosity and spirituality. However, the instrument did not determine the role spirituality played in the lives of the adolescents. Qualitative studies have been done to discover the meaning of spirituality or related concepts for children from Russia (Savina, 2001) and other countries and cultural backgrounds (Bosacki & Ota, 2000; Coles, 1990), but young adolescents' experience of spirituality has not been fully explored with qualitative methods to identify its full range of characteristics. In summary, a quantitative instrument has not been found that was developed specifically for adolescents of all ages, is appropriate for adolescents from a wide socioeconomic background, from either religious or nonreligious backgrounds, that measures a full range

of characteristics of the dimension similar to those reported with adults, or that assesses the impact of spirituality in their daily life.

Potential Relationship between Spirituality and Risk Behaviors

Results of the 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey of Texas youth aged 10-24 years show their engagement in a number of risk behaviors (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004). For example, in the month prior to the survey, 33% rode with a drinking driver, 43% drank alcohol, 20% used marijuana, 24% smoked cigarettes, and 16% carried a weapon. Among other risk behaviors, 51% had sexual intercourse, 38% had intercourse without a condom, 88% had intercourse without birth control, 32% had been in a physical fight, and 11% had attempted suicide. These risk behaviors contribute to leading causes of death in this age group. Thirty six percent of deaths are due to motor vehicle crashes, 13% to homicide, 12% to suicide, 11% to other injuries, and 1% to HIV infection.

The literature cites numerous links between risk behaviors and spirituality, and these are presented in more detail in Chapter 2. Contributors to risk behaviors and characteristics of spirituality are found within each ecological system, and both may be represented by opposite degrees of the same concept. For example, more connectedness to others is described as a characteristic of spirituality and less connectedness to others is associated with increased violence. They may also appear to not be conceptually related but may be negatively correlated within the same ecological system. For example, stronger connectedness to peers may correspond to increased spirituality, and low bonding to school and community may be positively associated with higher rates of interpersonal violence and school dropout. But they each occur within the immediate

environment with which one interacts. There is a possibility that either a lack of spiritual development contributes to some higher risk behaviors, or that contributors to these risk behaviors may also negatively affect spiritual development.

<div align="center">STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM</div>

As the data illustrate, adolescents in the United States are a population at risk for a number of negative health and behavioral outcomes. The literature suggests numerous links between defining characteristics and consequences of spirituality and factors associated with some risk behaviors, but little has been done to explore the mechanisms of these links. There also is not enough information about how spirituality is experienced by adolescents in their daily lives. For this reason, exploratory research needs to be done to identify the essential defining characteristics of spirituality within this age group and to gain a more comprehensive understanding of its experience in relation to their lives. The influence of spirituality on adolescents is not comprehensively defined, but a greater understanding of this may help nurses to develop methods to assess and foster spiritual development as a contributor to overall health.

<div align="center">RESEARCH QUESTIONS</div>

This study explored how the dimension of spirituality is experienced by adolescents and how it affects various aspects of their lives. The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the defining characteristics of spirituality in adolescents?
2. How is spirituality experienced in the lives of adolescents?
3. What is the role of spirituality in the basic psychosocial processes of dealing with difficult situations and challenges in adolescents' lives?

RESEARCH DEFINITIONS

Adolescent is commonly defined as a person between 13 and 19 years of age, although the developmental period of adolescence is more frequently being considered as the second decade of life and even extending into the early to mid-20s. However, adolescents in this study will be 13-17 years old.

Using characteristics described by nursing researchers and theorists as a reference (Emblen,1992; Nagai-Jacobson & Burkhardt, 1989; Reed, 1992; Watson, 1988), spirituality in this study is the dimension in which biological, mental, emotional, psychological, and social factors are integrated, and are interconnected with and transcend external influences (Reed, 1992). It is defined in adults as an abstract, nonmaterial, incorporeal human dimension in which the following are experienced:

- harmonious integration of all other dimensions (biological, mental, emotional, psychological, and social);

- connectedness to oneself, others, one's environment, and an external power or force greater than oneself;

- life meaning and purpose; and,

- transcendence.

It is important to distinguish it from the narrower concept of religiosity, which is defined as adherence to an organized and institutionalized set of attitudes, rituals, beliefs, and practices. Religiosity may be one means by which spirituality is expressed, but it may also exist in the absence of spirituality, and vice versa.

Environment is defined as the physical world outside a person, and the external psychosocial, economic, and cultural conditions and contexts with which a person

interacts. These include families, groups, community and governmental structures and organizations (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

ASSUMPTIONS

It is assumed that spirituality is an intrinsic dimension of all humans (Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, & Saunders, 1988; Fowler, 1981; Helminiak, 1987; Moberg, 2002; Reed, 1992; Sellers, 2001). It may be so underdeveloped or otherwise obscured as to be inaccessible to cognitive awareness or expression, but it is assumed that those who can perceive it will, to the best of their ability, report an honest description of their experience. Another assumption is that nurses accept the existence of a spiritual dimension in people and have an interest in promoting its healthy development. Grounded theory is based on the assumption that people are able to interpret their environment and experience in a way that makes sense to them, and that similar circumstances may be associated with common meanings and behaviors (Hutchinson & Wilson, 2001).

SENSITIZING FRAMEWORK

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development provided a sensitizing framework for this study (Bronfenbrenner 1986a, 1986b, 1992, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983). His theory incorporates both the individual and his/her interactions with and influences from different levels of the larger, external environment. This provided a structure for exploring spirituality in the different contexts of the adolescent's life, represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Context for Exploring Adolescent Spirituality
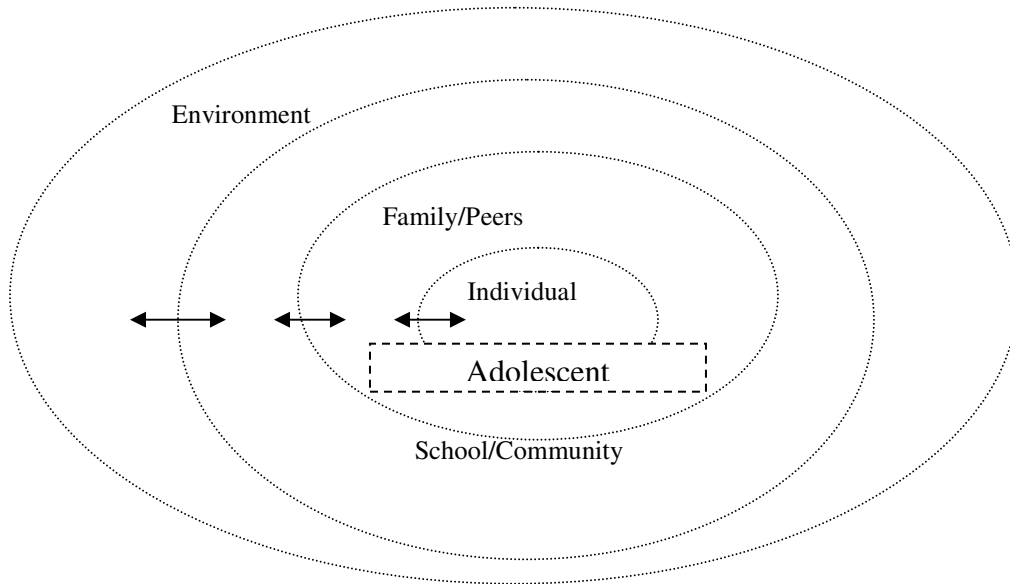
Bioecological theory describes the processes of human development in an ecological context. It centers on outcomes that are a joint function of interactions between the properties of a human and his/her immediate and extended environments. The ecological environment is composed of interdependent systems, referred to (in order of increasing distance from the developing person) as microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems. Proximal processes involve a mutual face-to-face exchange between a person and something or someone in the external environment, which may be other persons, activities, and structures such as family, school, peer groups, and work (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Proximal processes exert their influence over time through multiple encounters with a variety of others. His theory incorporates the dimension of time by changing the focus from behaviors at one point in time to their development over time. Both person and environment are in constant mutual processes of

change, and the person is an active contributor to his/her own development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986a, 1986b, 1992, &1994a).

Bioecological theory is broad in scope in terms of explicitly stated and operationally defined environmental systems existing beyond the individual. Although it does not address the concept of health beyond mental and psychological development, it does not preclude looking at spiritual or other areas of development as outcomes. It acknowledges the holistic nature of humans; that is, the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Bioecological theory contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of all points of impact on spiritual development. When studying spirituality in adolescents, the larger environment is an especially important consideration because adolescents are expanding their world and changing their interactions within it.

Influences on developmental outcomes have been identified within each of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems. Risks and protective factors for positive and negative developmental outcomes are found within multiple ecological systems (Hamburg, 1998), and the theory is useful for organizing those factors. It has been applied to the development of successful multi-level interventions to reduce adolescent problem behaviors such as conduct disorders and substance abuse (Coatsworth, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2002). Flannery et al. (2003) applied it to proximal interpersonal processes by creating a positive climate and culture in elementary schools to build social competence, foster pro-social behaviors and a sense of belonging, and decrease aggression and interpersonal violence. Aber, Brown, and Jones (2003) also applied it to school intervention programs, using constructive conflict resolution and positive inter-group relations to prevent interpersonal violence.

While the different levels of bioecological systems influencing on the individual are defined and structured in bioecological theory, the theory does not specifically address the spiritual dimension on any level. However, Watson (1989) conceptualizes the human as a unified mind/body/spirit, living in the world, and the health of a human is evident in the harmony between and within one's self, others, and nature. She describes a state of health as a harmonious interconnection between body, mind, spirit and environment. The spirit is

> …greater than the physical, mental, and emotional existence of a person at any given point in time. The individual spirit of a person or of collective humanity may continue to exist throughout time. . . . However, the soul can be underdeveloped, dormant, and in need of reawakening. (Watson, 1988, p. 45-46).

The interconnectedness between the bioecological systems and the individual was a useful guide to explore such characteristics of spirituality as the degree of perceived connectedness to others and to the environment (Love, 2002). For this dissertation study, Bronfenbrenner's theory guided construction of the semi-structured interview questions as well as additional questions asked during the course of each interview, and guided data analysis and interpretation throughout the research process. For example, the interview guide asked about participants' awareness and perceptions of spirituality within themselves and in relation to others and the world in which they lived, such as family, friends, neighborhood, and city. Basic psychosocial processes were explored and defined in relation to the interconnections between these systems and the participants' behaviors and experiences of spirituality.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to explore how the human dimension of spirituality is conceived and experienced by adolescents. In this first chapter, a case was made for learning more about spirituality in adolescents due to its potential impact on developmental factors unique to this population. For example, risk factors that increase this group's vulnerability to poor outcomes may be ameliorated by strengthening various aspects of spirituality. The links pointing to a relationship between spirituality and factors that may protect this group from harm and enhance their well-being and positive development narrowed the scope of the problem and pointed to the research questions to be answered by this study. Basic definitions were provided of the concepts, the population, and the context to be studied. Basic assumptions about the concept, the population, and the method were presented, and a brief outline of ecological theory was provided as a sensitizing framework for the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature cited in Chapter 1 supports the need for this research, and the review of literature in this chapter provides representative samples of current theory and research on the human dimension of spirituality that are relevant to this topic. To begin, it is useful to first provide the history that began this inquiry. The trail of clinical questions that led to this particular research began with the identification of an apparent health trend in an identified population. There appeared to be an upward trend in presenting symptoms of increased interpersonal violence in children and adolescents in residential and inpatient psychiatric programs and outpatient treatment. There were no immediate clues found in the psychological, social, and medical histories to account for this, beyond the gradual expected changes in trends of medical diagnoses. Changes in the health care system that restricted inpatient and residential care, both medical and psychiatric, to only the most acute conditions were the more likely reason for the trend in the admitted patients. However, in reviewing the medical records of these youth, there was a noticeable absence of reference to their spiritual condition. Medical and nursing assessments are typically organized by a review of systems, primarily physical systems but with varying reference to psychological and social issues. However, beyond the obligatory question about religious preference that is asked in the initial admission assessments in most inpatient health care settings, the medical record presents at best only a faint picture of the spiritual condition of patients of any age presenting for care.

This led to the question of how a nurse could assess the health of a youth's spiritual dimension, which began the initial search of the literature for what is known

about it. The searches completed early in the doctoral studies of this researcher began with a concept analysis of spirituality that cast a wide net beyond the health care literature to include sociological, educational, anthropological, philosophical, ecological, and theological perspectives. The results of these searches helped to provide a background for review within the context of individual health, functioning, and well being that would be of concern to nursing. The literature review in this chapter is presented in this context, from the perspective of what the dimension is thought to be and by what methods it has been measured, both quantitatively and qualitatively. It was also reviewed from a developmental perspective, exploring different theories of how the spiritual dimension develops over time. Lastly, literature is reviewed relevant to why it is an important concept to understand in relation to its impact on various health and risk behaviors.

DEFINITIONS OF SPIRITUALITY

Health care professionals' interest in spirituality is primarily for the purpose of assessing its relationship to overall well-being, identifying its protective factors for targeted populations and problems, providing interventions, or promoting health behaviors. The variety of definitions of spirituality developed in various human science disciplines has resulted in a confusion of terms. Many articles on spirituality either do not define the construct or are actually about other similar constructs such as hope or narrower concepts such as religiosity or belief in a higher power. Hill, et. al. (2000) note that there are both overlapping and distinguishing characteristics of religion and spirituality contributing to the confusion. Lack of uniform and consistent definitions hinders valid comparisons between studies, and this should be noted as a qualification in

evaluating the literature. Nevertheless, there is sufficient overlap of defining attributes and definitions of spirituality and religion to warrant inclusion of both in the review of literature. Since the majority of the literature focused on adults, and that literature provided the basis for inquiry in this study, a sample of research on spirituality in this population is included. Because spirituality is also thought to begin its development prior to adolescence, research with children is presented as well. Since the main focus of this current research was on spirituality in adolescents, the review includes more detail of research with this age group.

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CHARACTERISTICS OF SPIRITUALITY

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Concept analyses, qualitative research, and reviews of spirituality in the literature, based primarily on adults, identified a broader range of defining characteristics and consequences of spirituality than did many quantitative tools. These include life meaning and purpose, transcendence, inner resources and/or strength, and a sense of integrated, harmonious interconnectedness to self, others, nature and a higher power (Belcher, Dettmore, & Holzemer, 1989; Burkhardt, 1989 & 1994; Dyson, Cobb & Forman, 1997; Emblen, 1992; Goddard, 1995; Haase, Britt, Coward, Leidy, & Penn, 1992; Howden, 1992; Hungelmann, Kenkel-Rossi, Klassen & Stollenwerk, 1996; Jamison, 1995; Mahoney & Graci, 1999; Meraviglia, 1999; Nagai-Jacobson & Burkhardt, 1989; Nolan & Crawford, 1997; Reed, 1992; & Tanyi, 2002). Related consequences include altruism, empathy, compassion (Engebretson, 2002; Rew, 1989; Staub, 1986; Watson, 1988), coping and healthy responses to stress (Dyson, Cobb, & Forman, 1997; Heriot, 1992; Reed, 1987), and moral reasoning (Belcher, et. al., 1989). A concept analysis by Wright (1999), using procedures recommended by Walker and Avant (1995), broadened the

scope of defining attributes of spirituality to include a central core reality and an animating force.

The spiritual dimension has been cited as "the reservoir for that which is spiritual, the means by which one transcends the material and physical, the positive motivating force, and the search for meaning" (Copley, 2000, pp. 3-4). It "cannot be separated from our lives and experiences as physical, emotional, social, and thinking persons. Indeed, spirituality infuses all of who we are . . . permeates all of life" (Burkhardt & Nagai-Jacobson, 2002, p. 5). Spirituality is also "a life-giving force that came from within . . . nurtured by receiving presence from God, nature, friends, family, and community" (Walton, 1999, p. 39). The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2004) defines spirituality as:

> the quality or state of being spiritual . . . condition of being spiritual . . . an immaterial or incorporeal thing or substance . . . the fact or condition of being spirit or of consisting of an incorporeal essence . . . the animating or vital principle in man . . . that which gives life to the physical organism, in contrast to its purely material elements."

It unifies all aspects of a human and is described as "a connectedness intrapersonally, interpersonally, and transpersonally" that transcends divisions between psychological, physical, and social aspects (Reed, 1992, p. 352).

MEASURES OF SPIRITUALITY IN ADOLESCENTS

Various aspects of spirituality have been studied in adolescents using both quantitative instruments and qualitative methods. They either focused on specific

behaviors and practices, were developed with older adolescents or young adults (i.e., college students), or did not otherwise answer the research questions of this study. Summaries of some of these are provided here.

Quantitative Measures

Current quantitative instruments to measure spirituality were limited in scope, and most were developed with either adults or college students (i.e., only late adolescence or older) who differ developmentally from young and middle adolescents. Greenwald and Harder (2003) obtained information about the components of spirituality from 147 participants, the majority (66%) of whom were multiethnic college undergraduates (mean age 24, range 17-59 years) representing a variety of religious backgrounds. Using principal components factor analysis, components identified as most connected with spirituality are a loving connection to others, self-effacing altruism, blissful transcendence, and religiosity/sacredness. Lonely/angry, one negatively coded factor that was identified as the opposite of spiritual, explained 6.16% of the variance.

Smithline (2000) constructed a quantitative instrument, the Smithline Spiritual Inventory for Teens (SSIT), to measure spirituality in adolescents. Based on qualitative analysis of feedback from a focus group of 196 adolescents from a private high school, spirituality was defined as a sense of existential well-being, connection to oneself and one's community and promoting the well-being of both, and a personal and transcendent relationship with an external higher power. Smithline notes that:

> Spirituality exists in four domains of human experience: belief (e.g., belief in God or unity); motivation (e.g., how spirituality shapes one's goals and values);

experience (e.g., near death experiences and mystical experiences); and behavior (e.g., prayer and meditation) (p. 13).

In an exploratory factor analysis of the SSIT, Smithline (2000) identified three subscales. These were belief in a higher power and involvement in spiritual practices, agreement with family spiritual beliefs, and compassion and belief in spirituality as distinct from religiosity. Smithline sought evidence for construct validity of the SSIT by correlating it with two other scales, the Human Spirituality Scale (HSS) (Wheat, 1992) and the Religious Attitudes and Practices Inventory (RAPI) (D'Onofrio, Murrelle, Eaves, McCullough, Landis, & Maes, 1999). The HSS measures adult spirituality and has two subscales, value on life and growth, and honesty and helping others, but the SSIT had only a moderate correlation with it ($r = .37$). The SSIT had a strong correlation ($r = .79$, $p < .01$) with the RAPI that measures religious attitudes and feelings of adolescents with four subscales: theism, family religious practices, spirituality (not defined within the scale), and drug use as sinful.

The Ellison and Paloutzian Spiritual Well Being Scale (SWBS) contains the subscales of religious and existential well-being. However, it was developed with 306 college students whose ages are not specified (Ellison, 1983). Spiritual well-being is distinguished from spiritual health in that the former is considered as an expression or indicator of the underlying state of the latter. Items on the subscale reflect what are described as transcendent experience, including meaning, purpose, ideals, faith, commitment, and relationship to God.

The Adolescent Lifestyle Profile (ALP) developed by Hendricks, Pender, and Murdaugh (2001) was developed specifically for adolescents to measure activities

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thought to promote some aspects of spiritual health. Comprehensive information on instrument development procedures, reliability, and validity is not yet published. The subscale items do not appear to be biased toward any particular set of religious beliefs or cultural background, although it is based on the assumption of an implicit shared understanding of the meaning of spiritual beliefs. With the exception of one item that asks about guidance from a higher power, the spiritual health subscale focuses on distinct activities geared toward promoting and maintaining spiritual health. For example, items address talking with others about spiritual beliefs, attending groups with others that share beliefs, engaging in activities aimed at spiritual growth, praying or meditating, and using spiritual beliefs as guidance. However, it does not gauge the existing level of spirituality as perceived by the adolescent.

Hall and Edwards (1996) studied 663 college students to develop the initial Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI) to measure the spiritual and psychological aspects of spiritual maturity, based on Judeo-Christian perspectives. They conceptualized two dimensions of a capacity for communication with God, which are awareness of God and quality of the relationship. The awareness dimension reflects an experiential awareness of God based particularly on New Testament teaching, and the relationship quality dimension is based on the psychological construct of object relations. This scale focused more narrowly on religious beliefs and did not incorporate the range of dimensions one might expect in a more comprehensive measure of spirituality. They later revised the SAI instrument with 698 adults ages 18-75 years, expanding the subscales to produce an instrument to assess spiritual development and maturity in persons with monotheistic beliefs (Hall & Edwards, 2002).

Other Measures

Coles (1990) did an extensive qualitative review of children's spirituality that illustrates some experiences of the dimension similar to those of adults. Although Coles did not consistently distinguish between religion and spirituality in his interviews and analyses, the content of the interviews illustrated children's experiences of many of the defining characteristics of spirituality reported in the literature, either manifested through or distinct from religious experience. Therefore, there is ample reason to believe that adolescents have the developmental maturity to experience a dimension of spirituality similar to adults, based on studies that were more limited in scope. Qualitative works such as Coles' (1990) with children, Engebretson's (2002) with 338 14-year-olds, and Mize's (1995) with 68 youth ages 7-18 years showed that they have the communication skills to adequately describe at least part of the experience in response to prompts by interview questions. Coles asked children about their experience and thoughts about religion and God or a divine Other, but he also interviewed children with no religious background or beliefs, and found them also able to discuss questions such as meaning and purpose, and right and wrong. Mize's study illustrated the greater ability of older adolescents to give a fuller description of their experiences in relation to natural outdoor surroundings. Mize focused on relationships between experiencing nature, spiritual development, self esteem, and spirituality.

SPIRITUALITY AS A DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS

Background

Spirituality has been conceptualized as a developmental process throughout the life cycle (Estep, 2002; Fowler, 2001; Wheeler, Ampadu, & Wangari, 2002), although

there is no consensus on one universally applicable model of spiritual development. This may be due in part to the absence of a universally accepted definition of spirituality. Religious experience and/or practice, in addition to being frequently used interchangeably with spirituality, have also been described as a means by which spirituality is expressed (Dyson, Cobb, & Forman, 1997; Ellison, 1989; Hill et al., 2000; Tanyi, 2002). Religious faith, moral living, and emotional awareness have been identified as three distinct but interrelated dimensions to address in promoting adolescent spiritual development (Carotta, 1999). Developmental theories about some of these concepts are presented here in addition to those about other interchangeable or proxy concepts related to spirituality.

Stage Theories and Research

Spirituality has been considered by some to develop in stages throughout the life course. Examples of theories about developmental stages of spirituality or its related constructs or proxies (e.g., religiosity, faith) are presented here.

 Harms (1944) described stages of religious experience by analyzing pictures, drawings, and writings about children's and adolescents' conceptions of God or the highest being that existed for them. He did not provide detailed information on the sample, such as size, age ranges, or other demographics. He identified three stages of religious experience – the fairy tale, the realistic, and the individualistic, with the latter stage occurring in adolescents and young adults. In the fairy tale stage, preschool children ages three to six express their deistic experience in the form of a fairy tale, magnified with a sense of awe that separates it from the usual fairy tale and that may make the experience difficult to express at all in words. Harms notes that there appears to be an

openness to the idea of a higher entity from early consciousness, and the questioning that begins around age three and four may be actively focused on trying to understand this higher power.

In the realistic stage, at age six or seven, a child's religious development grows as fairy tales give way to reality, religious teachings begin to be learned and applied, and as God or a higher power is encountered in his/her daily life. Children in the realistic stage begin to use more formalistic expressions of religion through adherence to prescribed or external forms. Fairy tales are replaced by more tangible representations that help express realistic thoughts. Symbols, such as a cross or a Star of David, are more strongly associated with an experience of God. Religious figures are perceived as "helping, assisting, influencing human life and supervising man's ways on earth" (Harms, 1944, p. 117).

The individualistic stage of religious development begins in adolescence, but without specifying ages, Harms refers both to adolescence and to post-adolescence in his sample. Overlap or inconsistencies of age groups in stage theories of development are not uncommon, particularly with those ages between adolescence and adulthood (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). Harms categorized the variety of expressions in the individualistic stage into three subgroups, one of which reflects those who tend "to live within a prevailing dogma" (Harms, 1944, p. 118), and whose religious imagination is expressed in accordance with the prevailing conventional and conservative religious forms of those in their environment. A second subgroup showed more originality and imagination, reflecting a "basic individualistic character of religious experience . . . in this experience of their inner world they are all alone . . . have started to think for themselves and to feel

independently about sin and virtue, death and eternity, joy and grief, hope, faith, and greed" (Harms, 1944, p. 118). A third subgroup showed that religious individualism can strike its own path away from the ones defined by parents, upbringing, and environment. These groupings showed a large range of representations of religious expression outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Harms does not provide sufficient detail about the demographic characteristics of his sample to allow for direct comparisons with other studies and theories.

Based on his qualitative research, Fowler's (1981, 2001) conception of faith development took a far deeper and broader account of the human experience than did Harms' study of religious experience. His theory went beyond faith as religion and belief to address faith as inclusive of other commonly cited characteristics of spirituality. Fowler presented faith as a fundamental and universal human characteristic shaped from birth by community, language, ritual, and nurturance. He described the dynamics of faith as "the ways we go about making and maintaining meaning in life" (Fowler, 1981, p.xii), and those ways have identifiable patterns. A maturation of faith (used synonymously with spirituality) involves a process of "greater connection to, interaction with, and belonging to the broader world . . . a recognition of one's interdependence and interconnectedness with communities and individuals beyond one's perceptual scope" (Love, 2002, p. 369). Meaning and interconnectedness are commonly identified as characteristics of spirituality (Emblen, 1992; Frankl, 1967; Howden, 1992; Meraviglia, 1999; Reed, 1992; Tanyi, 2002), and so Fowler's stages of faith also illustrated prominent aspects of spiritual development.

In his theory of faith development, Fowler contends that his stages are broad enough to be applicable to each individual's unique version of faith regardless of religious background. He does not define faith in terms of specific religious affiliation or beliefs, but rather as the way that one sees oneself in relation to others with whom meaning and purpose are shared. Each stage of faith is characterized by a "pattern of knowing, valuing, and interpreting experiences" (Fowler, 1981, p. 114), a pattern that helps in meeting the challenges of particular stages of life. Patterns are shaped within our internal construction of an ultimate environment, or ideal stage, that provide the context in which we live our lives.

Fowler's seven stages of faith development begin in infancy and extend over the life course. Although the stages are consecutive, not everyone progresses through each one and transitions to the next. Some, depending on their internal resources and life circumstances, may find equilibrium within one stage and remain there. The first stage, termed the Primal stage, occurs prior to age two and is characterized by bonding and other early cognitive and social processes (Fowler, 1996). The second Intuitive-Projective stage is from age two or three to six or seven. Meaning in this stage is shaped by imagination and imitation of significant others, by fusion of fantasy, fact, and feeling, and by egocentrism.

The third stage typically covers the majority of the adolescent age span, although the second, third, and fourth stages may all be experienced during this period. The Mythical-Lyrical third stage emerges in elementary and early middle school, and possibly adolescence, as the child learns to distinguish fact from fantasy and to produce a personal linear narrative of experiences, to build meaning into them, and to begin seeing others'

perspectives. Meaning is shaped by the literally interpreted symbols of belief and belonging to a community. The stories constructed around experience give it value, coherence, and unity with others, but are limited to the narrator's own experience. This stage is clearly reflected and supported in Coles' (1990) interviews of elementary and middle school children as they talk about their varied experiences of spirituality. The construction of meaning is directed by ideas of reciprocal fairness and justice, which lie at the heart of the ultimate environment, or ideal stage, for this age group.

Fowler's fourth stage of faith, developing typically during adolescence, is termed Synthetic-Conventional. It is synthetic due to its being a non-analytic, global, unified package of ideas and beliefs formed from one's environment. It is conventional in the sense of being the faith system of one's community and its norms. Community is that group to which one perceives oneself belonging, that matters and that has importance and significance to one. Norms are socially constructed and change over time, as shown by Western culture's recent history of changes in women's roles and expectations. The adolescent may conform to these norms and accept these values without analysis because he/she "does not yet have a sure enough grasp on its [sic] own identity and autonomous judgment to construct and maintain an independent perspective" (Fowler, 1981, p. 173).

Faith and identity are both characterized at this time by an acute awareness of the expectations and critiques of significant others. It is a time of mutual perspective taking, or seeing oneself as one thinks others see one. Adolescents use friends and others as mirrors to reflect and check their images of self in a process of mutual interpersonal perspective taking. As a sensitizing framework described in Chapter 1, Bronfenbrenner's (1994) bioecological theory is useful here for illustrating the multiple levels of an

adolescent's expanding spheres of influence and the larger perspectives of which he/she becomes aware. It also identifies the multiple mirrors in his/her world that are used to reflect an emerging identity and sense of values and meaning. Identity forms within the context of the things we are committed to and trust. The adolescent's environment is structured in terms of interpersonal relationships; faith synthesizes the values of one's environment and provides a basis for identity. In this Synthetic-Conventional stage, others who have different sets of values and meanings may be seen as different kinds of people, separate from oneself and one's known group.

Authority for conveying meaning and value resides either in traditional authority roles if still acceptable to the adolescent, or in group consensus of one's chosen and valued immediate group (e.g., peers). Although the adolescent is aware of meanings and values, can discuss and defend them and be committed to them, he/she may or may not have reflected on the systems themselves. However, in Engebretson's (2002) previously cited work with the students in Catholic middle schools, she reported that they did reflect on the meaning of the religious and social mores of their environment, and were still strongly concerned with justice (as illustrated by Fowler's Mythical-Lyrical stage).

The fifth stage of faith, called the Individuative-Reflective stage, typically does not happen until people are in their 20s if at all. Since it may develop in late adolescence for some people, it will be discussed briefly. This stage may be precipitated by circumstances such as leaving home, which separate the adolescent from the interpersonal circle and significant community norms that have defined him/her. Authority for assignment of meaning is transferred from other to self, and responsibility is taken for one's own beliefs and values. Other circumstances, such as contact with other

perspectives or new experiences, place doubt on one's existing beliefs and values and call for critical reflection and re-examination of self and identity. Lee (2002) supported these patterns in her study of changes in the religious self, based on interviews of four traditional-aged (ages not specified) college undergraduates of various ethnicities from a large public university.

The sixth stage, Conjunctive faith, may also be experienced by older adolescents. In this stage, multiple facets of an issue may be seen at once, and an inter-relatedness to all things may be sensed. Fowler's description of the ways in which meaning is found strongly resembles the method of discovering meaning and interpretation found in hermeneutic phenomenology. Lastly, in the seventh or Universalizing stage, one is able to shift to a transcendental perspective and to comprehend a cosmic solidarity and integration (Fowler, 1996). Many people may not reach this stage at all.

Critics have contended that faith development theory lacks attention to the development of self. Fowler (2001) responds by explaining the triadic structure of faith, which includes self, significant others in a relational matrix, and the Ultimate Other in which is centered the value and power of one's life structure. The structural aspects of the relational matrix are derived from the self's construction of meaning. Fowler describes current socio-cultural factors within the environment of youth today that negatively impact their development of Synthetic-Conventional and Individuative-Reflective faith. He cites the barrage of multiple fragmented and conflicting meanings and messages to which modern society is subjected, as well as strains on families and school systems which threaten the consistent presence of significant others.

Bronfenbrenner's (1994) concept of chronosystems, reflecting the effects of time on developmental outcomes, would certainly lead one to expect some differences in how the experience is expressed in different age groups. Interviewing 140 young persons from a medium-sized Midwest city, Arnett and Jensen (2002) reported results similar to Harms' and to the youth in Fowler's (1981) fifth stage of faith development. Arnett and Jensen explored the content of religious beliefs of young people in the transition between adolescence and young adulthood (ages 21-28), an age the authors refer to as emerging adulthood. This period is marked by striving for self-development and self-sufficiency, and the findings showed a wide range of individualized beliefs. Chi square analyses showed no association (significance not reported) between childhood religious socialization and current beliefs, which was attributed to the young adults' "individualism and . . . resolve to think for themselves and form their own beliefs" (p. 461).

Batten and Oltjenbruns (1999) used Fowler's stages of faith as a framework to identify mechanisms of spiritual development. They looked for links between grief and spirituality in 4 adolescents experiencing bereavement due to the death of a sibling within the previous two years. The researchers defined spirituality as the human quest for meaning, and religion as the expression of one's relationship to a higher force via belief systems or communal rituals. Questions about the meaning of life events and death (e.g., spirituality) were asked based on expectations of the adolescents' abilities for abstract thought, hypothetico-deductive reasoning, and relativistic viewpoints. They reported that the death of a sibling acted as a catalyst to grow spiritually through gaining new perspectives on self, others, the sibling relationship, life, death, and God or a higher power and thus changing their understanding of life's meaning.

Both Harms' and Fowler's stages outlined aspects of spiritual development, but caution is advised in applying them to populations that have very dissimilar socio-cultural and ethnic backgrounds from those on which they were developed. Harms briefly acknowledged the limitations of his findings due to the lack of representativeness of his sample, which was comprised of public and private school children from a poorer suburban area of New York and did not include any African American students. Little information is provided about the population on which Fowler based his findings, except that it included his students from Harvard. However, there is an even more fundamental issue to be considered in both Harms' and Fowler's work. Both are based on Western European assumptions, values, cultural traditions, and religious practices and fail to accommodate or account for those of other peoples. Wheeler, Ampadu, and Wangari (2002) noted that the value of individualism, foundational to Western theories of psychosocial development, is reflected in both Fowler's and Harms' adolescent stages. However, this value is incongruent with the communal values of some other cultures. They specifically noted the lack of fit with African cultural and spiritual traditions, which are manifested in varying degrees in African American faith and socio-cultural traditions today. Stage theories have also been criticized for being linear, which also conflicts with some other cultures' conceptions of development. For these reasons, stages of spiritual development may not be universally applicable unless they acknowledge and incorporate the spiritual traditions and experiences of those being studied.

Cognitive Development Theories and Research

In contrast to the stage theories of faith and/or spirituality noted above, Levine (1999) offered another theory based on children's cognitive abilities. Developmental

stage theories also may determine truth to be "conformity between thought, thing, and behaviour . . . termed the correspondence theory of truth" (Levine, 1999, p.127). Her theory diverged from widely accepted hierarchical, developmental stage theories of Piaget and others, which posit that increasing age allows abilities and capacities to develop with increasing superiority in a linear and progressive manner. Levine instead suggested that children's ability to use a metaphoric mode of cognition and logic provides in itself a basis for spiritual experience.

Levine agreed that children have the capacity to use schemas, or socially shared concepts, to intersubjectively interpret average daily interactions. However, they are also able to simultaneously suspend them while perceiving the lived experience exactly as it is lived without interpretation. Another cognitive characteristic of children, shown vividly through play, is the ability to comprehend dual realities, such as when they pretend one object is another. This capacity allows them to "make present to consciousness an entity that exists as 'absent' from the spatio-temporal dimensions of material reality . . . and to cognize this experience as offering 'truth'" (Levine, 1999, p.128), another ability necessary for spiritual experience.

Estep (2002) presented a holistic and ecological model of spiritual development taking into account multiple individual and social factors of human ecology similar to those of Bronfenbrenner. Estep's model described spiritual development within the context of cognitive development. Estep's model was based on a Christian perspective and gave more weight to the importance of social influences, a community of faith, and formal education and learning processes for spiritual formation. It was based on Vygotsky's (1997) theory of human cognitive development as a process that occurs in the

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context of socio-cultural influences. One main tenet of Estep's model of spiritual formation was that it begins outside the individual through acquisition from one's community of faith, and thus has a social dimension. Other tenets were that a community of faith is necessary for spiritual formation, so that faith is mediated through shared words, symbols, and images. Estep proposed that spiritual development is a holistic, multidirectional, nonlinear process representing the coalescence within the individual of multiple individual and social factors. Estep's (2002) and Levine's (1999) models contrasted with other theories that present any kind of human development as linear and unidirectional.

Although there was said to be a mutually dependent, bi-directional relationship between the spiritual dimension and the physical, mental, psychological, and emotional aspects of a person, the spiritual dimension was thought to be the integrative force (Ellison, 1983). Such aspects as cognition may not necessarily develop at the same rate as religious or spiritual development. Young, Cashwell, and Woolington (1998), conducted a correlational study of 152 college undergraduates, 54% of whom were ages 18 to 22, looking for relationships among spirituality, cognitive and moral development and spirituality. They used Wheat's (1992) Human Spirituality Scale and Crumbaugh's and Maholick's Purpose in Life Scale as measures of spirituality, the Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1990) as a measure of moral development, and an abbreviated version of the How Is Your Logic? instrument (Gray, 1973). They reported no significant correlation between spirituality and cognitive development. However, they did identify significant relationships between spirituality and purpose in life (r=.49, $p<.01$) and spirituality and moral development (r=.35, $p<.01$). Love (2002) also noted that cognitive and spiritual

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development are not necessarily parallel, but they cannot be too widely divergent because of the cognitive ability required to make meaning, which is a key characteristic of spirituality. Positive relationships were reported between scores on the Ellison and Paloutzian Spiritual Well Being Scale and retrospectively reported measures such as positive childhood relationship with parents ($r = .38$, $p<.001$), family togetherness during childhood ($r=.26$, $p<.001$), and childhood peer relations ($r=.32$, $p<.01$) (Ellison, 1983). Although sample sizes were not reported in the summary report, these findings on background influences support the case for a developmental aspect of spirituality.

Religiosity was frequently used as a proxy for spirituality. In examining developmental factors that contribute to religiosity, Gunnoe and Moore (2002) assessed religiosity in 1045 participants from the National Survey of Children who were 17-22 years of age. Religiosity in this study was defined as attendance at religious services, prayer, and ascribing value to one's beliefs. Stepwise regression analysis was used on data gathered when participants were 7-11 years old and 11-16 years old. Variables at these ages that were significant predictors of religiosity at ages 17-22 were as follows: childhood religious training (frequency of child's church attendance [$p \leq 0.01$] and importance mother places on religious training [$p \leq 0.05$]); attendance of religious schooling ($p \leq 0.001$); and role models (maternal religiosity [$p \leq 0.01$], friends attending church at age 16 [$p \leq 0.001$], and high maternal religiosity and support [$p \leq 0.05$]). Demographic variables contributing to religiosity in later adolescence included being from the South ($t = 3.50$, $p \leq 0.001$), being African American ($t = 5.52$, $p \leq 0.001$), being white ($t = 4.52$, $p \leq 0.001$), and being female ($t = 3.16$, $p \leq .01$).

Helminiak (1987) theorized that spirituality is a larger human dimension instead of solely a theological or psychological development. Based on such stage theories as Fowler's stages of faith, he proposes transcendence to be central to spiritual development, which he defined as "the ongoing integration that results in the self-responsible subject from openness to an intrinsic principle of authentic self-transcendence" (p. 41). Although describing it in the context of a developmental process, Helminiak began the description with an adolescent phase of development rather than earlier childhood. The conformist stage begins in adolescence, characterized by a worldview which is accepted from authorities outside oneself and is supported by one's significant others. Helminiak proposes that the adolescent in this stage does not reflect or critically question the beliefs although they are deeply felt and rationalized. Those in the conformist stage may be particularly vulnerable to undue influence from religious groups or cults. In the next stage, termed the conscientious conformist stage of late adolescence or possibly young adulthood, they start moving away from unthinking adherence to an accepted worldview and begin to take responsibility for their own opinions and thoughts about their life's concerns, values, and worldview.

WHY IS SPIRITUALITY IMPORTANT?

Spirituality has the potential to positively impact health conditions and behaviors in a variety of ways. It facilitates coping and responding in a healthy manner to stressful experiences through strengthening inner resources (Dyson, Cobb, & Forman, 1997; Heriot, 1992; Reed, 1987). It is the dimension through which meaning, purpose, and a sense of moral values are perceived and understood (Nolan & Crawford, 1997), and is a guide to behavior (Belcher, et. al., 1989). Many studies cite the positive influence of

spirituality on self-esteem, sense of belonging, ability to cope with stress, responses and adaptations to trauma, ability to transcend serious health conditions, satisfaction with life, and such physiological indices as lower blood pressure, increased immune function, decreased symptoms of depression, increased sense of psychological and physical health, and well-being (Constantine, Wilton, Gainor, & Lewis, 2002; Graham, Furr, Flowers, & Burke, 2001; Musgrave, Allen & Allen, 2002; Ryan, 1998; Williams, Reed, Nelson, & Brose, 2002).

Effects on Health and Health Behaviors

Positive effects of spirituality on health, attitude, and sense of well-being are reported by Lowry and Conco (2002) in adults ages 59-94 years in Appalachia, and also supported by Ryan's (1998) study of 50 women ages 19-67 years who have survived childhood violence. In African American adolescents, positive associations have been reported with health-promoting attitudes and behaviors of healthy living, emotional and psychological well-being, and subjective sense of satisfaction with life (Chase, 2001), and with internal attribution for success and failure (Miller, 2001). Daaleman, Cobb, and Frey (2001) examined spirituality and well-being experienced by two groups of adult female patients in health care settings, those with diabetes mellitus and those with no chronic health condition. Participants described a health-related spirituality that helped them find meaning in their situation and increased their level of subjective well-being.

Another study showed different associations between spirituality and responses to health conditions. A quantitative study by Williams, Reed, Nelson, and Brose (2002) indicated that persons with no medical condition had an increased spiritual experience compared to persons with acute or chronic medical or psychological conditions. Rather

than contradict other studies that show the positive effects of spirituality on coping with health problems, this would seem to support the interrelatedness of all human dimensions in that a more positive experience of the spiritual dimension could also positively affect another dimension.

Ramsey's and Blieszner's (1999) qualitative study of American and German Lutheran women over age 65 also showed positive effects of spirituality on health. Over the life span, resilience to spring back from loss and adversity was attributed to spirituality as practiced through their religious faith. In a population of college students and other adults (ages not given), other health-promoting behaviors such as health responsibility, regular exercise and eating, close relationships, and stress management have also been positively influenced by spiritual experiences and spiritual maturity, as indicated by measures of personal development, sense of purpose, self-awareness and satisfaction with self (Lett, 2002).

In aging and/or ill populations, spirituality has been shown to be an effective means of coping with and transcending adversity and maintaining or improving quality of life. In a concept analysis of African American spirituality, Newlin, Knafl, and Melkus (2002) reported that healthy spirituality was associated with altruism, decreased stress, a sense of peace, healthier coping skills, personal growth, positive interpretation of life events, and improved physical health. Studying the role of spirituality in the lives of African American and Hispanic adult women, Musgrave, Allen and Allen (2002) also reported that spirituality provides an avenue of support for health-promoting behaviors. A sense of unity of mind, body, and spirit in harmony with the environment was a basic component of spirituality among Hispanics and particularly Catholics, and is embedded

within the holistic health care practices of *curanderismo*, *Santeria*, and *espiritismo*. Spirituality provided comfort during stress and a resource for meeting daily needs, and belief in God and prayer were believed to have protective effects on overall health (Musgrave, Allen, & Allen, 2002).

Response to Negative Life Events

Spirituality provides a buffer between life events that are perceived as stressful and negative, and serves as a moderator between negative experiences, depression, and anxiety (Young, Cashwell, & Shcherbakova, 2000). Depression was measured by the Beck Depression Inventory -- Second Edition (Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996), anxiety by the State-Trait Anxiety Scale (Speilberger, 1983), negative experiences by the Life Experiences Survey (Sarason, Johnson, & Siegel, 1978), and spirituality by the Human Spirituality Scale (Wheat, 1992). Musgrave, Allen, and Allen (2002), in a review of the role of spirituality and health among women of color, cite the historical experience of African American women from slavery through subsequent years of racial oppression. Throughout these hardships, they found hope in personal and community relationships, and transcended and transformed their stressful experiences via their spirituality. Humphreys (2000) reported that in a sample of 50 ethnically diverse battered women, those with higher scores on a Spiritual Perspective Scale (Reed, 1986) also reported fewer or less distressing symptoms in response to the battering, including less obsessive-compulsive behaviors, less interpersonal sensitivity, fewer negative thoughts and fears, less critical attitudes, and less irritability.

Lowry and Conco (2002) explored the meaning of spirituality for aging Appalachian adults, many with chronic health conditions, and reported similar descriptors

as those cited above. The participants noted that it was experienced differently in various stages of life, gaining importance with age. The majority of their participants were Caucasian (*n*=37), and three were African American. Their responses reflect the predominant socio-cultural influences of their geographic area, where Judeo-Christian and particularly Protestant beliefs are firmly embedded. They identified a primary attribution and source of their spirituality as a sense of God's existence and action in their lives, helping them to cope with the stress and loss associated with aging. They communicated with, and were connected, to God through prayer, meditation, and Bible study, which compelled them to act toward others with love, compassion, care, respect, humility, and help. Like the external dimension described in studies with African Americans (Newlin et al., 2002), these practices were identified as outward dimensions and important aspects of the totality of the experience. Stress, loss, and adversity serve as a spur to activate their sense of spirituality, leading to coping, strength, comfort, consolation, and growth.

Weber and Cummings (2003) studied older college students (ages 21-43, mean age = 26 years) in upper level baccalaureate or graduate classes, who had a history of maltreatment in childhood. Their findings supported others' claims of the necessity of spirituality for healing by providing a transcendent framework and giving meaning to their experiences. Weber and Cummings used the Spiritual Well-Being (SWB) Scale (Ellison & Paloutzian, 1982; Ellison, 1983). The Existential Well Being subscale of the SWB scale particularly measures meaning and purpose in life independent of a religious belief in God. They noted that abuse was harmful to students' spirituality, yet spirituality,

especially existential well-being (i.e., having meaning and direction in life) was positively associated with less symptoms of distress.

Spirituality has been shown to have positive effects on coping mechanisms during illness, although much less has been written about this effect in adolescents than in adults. Lyon, Townsend-Akpan, and Thompson (2001) provided a case report (*n*=1) of an adolescent dying of AIDS, and observed that declining health spurred an interest in things of a spiritual nature such as seeking and questioning feelings about life and death. This search led to spiritual growth which in turn helped the adolescent to make sense of life, illness, and dying. The case study illustrated how spiritual growth (primarily through adoption of religious beliefs, rituals, and a supportive church community) helped the adolescent to be happier, more accepting of her circumstances, more interested in her estranged family, and more peaceful about her death.

Spirituality, measured by a questionnaire developed as part of the study, along with formal and informal kinship, served as coping mechanisms to moderate the effects of violence on 71 African American children ages 9-11 years in a high-crime, high-poverty urban neighborhood (Saunders, 2000). Saunders' findings are similar to those of Walker (2000). Using a spiritual support scale developed as part of the study, Walker who reported that in 131 youth, spiritual support moderated the effects of violence exposure on self-esteem and aggressive beliefs. Walker Both Saunders' and Walker's studies were supported in part by Clarke's (2001) study of spirituality and resilience. Clarke reported that in 236 persons ages 18-65 years old, spirituality, (measured by the Childhood Spiritual Well-Being Scale, an adaptation of the Spiritual Well-Being Scale [Ellison & Paloutzian, 1991]), promotes resilience, which in turn serves as a protective

factor for children at risk due to such adverse factors as poverty, loss, separation, abuse, neglect, violence, and parental substance abuse or mental illness. Calvert (1997) noted that for African American adolescents living with chronic exposure to violence, resilience can be promoted by family characteristics such as caring and support, high expectations, and participation and involvement. Clarke (2001) notes that:

> It seems likely that the development of a personal relationship with a spiritual other, or higher power, may stand in the place of an otherwise missing, meaningful relationship, and offer guidance where none has been forthcoming. In essence, the functions of spirituality or religion are to provide meaning, hope, esteem, and belonging, all of which have the potential to promote resilience in children at risk due to parental or environmental dysfunction (p. 6).

Substance Use and Addiction

The importance of spirituality to recovery from substance abuse is well-documented, and is a foundational principle of programs with higher rates of effectiveness such as Alcoholics Anonymous (Moos, 2004). It has been suggested that the isolation of addiction can be damaging to the spirit, and lack of spiritual well-being may be the connector between addiction and child abuse or neglect (DiLorenzo, Johnson, & Bussey, 2001). Better outcomes in substance abuse education, prevention, and treatment have also been linked to spirituality. Navarro, Wilson, Berger, and Taylor (1997) implemented a substance abuse prevention program for Native American youth by promoting traditional values, cultural history, and spirituality to enhance self-esteem. Oler (1996) used the Age Universal Religious Orientation Scale – Revised (Gorsuch and McPherson, 1989) to measure spirituality in a sample of 249 African American

elementary students (grades 4-6). He reported that those with a stronger sense of spirituality and higher racial identity had more disapproving attitudes toward and greater intentions not to use alcohol and drugs. Belgrave, Townsend, Cherry, and Cunningham (1997) measured spirituality in 189 African American 4th and 5th graders by students' reported frequency of family attendance at religious services and discussion of religious topics. They reported that the presence of spirituality and collective work/responsibility were significant predictors of attitudes about drug harmfulness. However, Smithline (2000) reported a positive relationship between reported spirituality and substance abuse among adolescents with no religious background. She explained this as the possibility that, in the absence of any formal religious structure, they may be seeking spiritual experience via use of consciousness-altering substances.

Suicide Prevention

A commonly cited characteristic of spirituality is a sense of connectedness to others. Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) from a nationally representative sample of 13,110 students in 7th through 12th grade, Borowsky, Ireland, and Resnick (2001) reported connectedness to school and family to be a significant protective factor against suicide attempts in adolescents. Odds ratios were significant across ethnic groups and genders for connectedness to family. The connectedness to family results included African American girls (OR= .32, *p*<.05) and boys (OR = .17, *p*<.01), Hispanic girls (OR = .18, *p*<.001) and boys (OR = .12, *p*<.001), and White girls (OR = .06, *p*<.001) and boys (OR = .08, *p*<.001). The school connectedness was not a significant protective factor for African American adolescents, but it was for Hispanic girls (OR = .23, *p*<.01) and boys (OR = .12, *p*<.001), and White

girls (OR = .20, $p<.001$) and boys (OR = .10, $p<.001$). Connectedness to school and family, as a possible characteristic of spirituality, was thus shown to protect against suicide attempts in different groups.

SUMMARY

To summarize, the literature review on spirituality in adolescents conducted at the beginning of this research was fragmented and inconsistent. The examples of literature reviewed in this chapter presented frequently cited characteristics of spirituality reported mostly in adults and how it has been studied in different populations. Several theories were offered about how it is thought to develop. Spirituality is thought to positively affect the adolescent through developmental phases as they transition into adulthood. Like violence and other high risk behaviors, spirituality is thought to also have developmental trajectories influenced by multiple factors within each bioecological system, such as cognitive capacities, parental nurturing, family functioning, and community support.

Numerous studies show spirituality's positive effects on various aspects of adult functioning and behavior, but studies in children and adolescents were more limited. There are links between spirituality and various factors associated with both positive and negative health outcomes, including risk behaviors that are of particular concern for an adolescent population. While the impact of risk behaviors on adolescents and on society is negative, the potential impact of spirituality on their lives creates a positive counterbalance. Positive associations with better health and coping outcomes in adults would hopefully be transferable to adolescents.

Although the value of studying spirituality in adolescents may be apparent, the literature cited few examples of appropriate tools with which to do it. Quantitative

measures of spirituality have been developed for adolescents, but are limited in scope. There was not one that was representative of a wide socioeconomic and cultural range, appropriate for those with and without a religious background, and that measured the broadest scope of the dimension.

In comparison to qualitative research with adults, fewer studies used qualitative methods to study spirituality in adolescents. Coles' (1990) and Mize's (1995) work with children and adolescents demonstrated that much information can be obtained about their experience of spirituality through qualitative interviews. His and others' qualitative studies did not specifically focus on the questions to be asked in this research, such as the specific mechanisms by which spirituality is used in managing problems. However, they demonstrate that qualitative methods are an effective means of inquiring about complex topics such as spirituality and its relation to high risk behaviors.

What was missing in the literature was a comprehensive description, using a qualitative approach, of how spirituality was experienced by adolescents and the specific processes by which it was used by them to affect their behavior and coping. It was also not known how spirituality contributes to positive outcomes, and under what circumstances. A deeper understanding of what adolescents think about spirituality, how they experience it, and how they say it influences them in their lives has much potential benefit.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The literature review illustrated the knowledge gaps about adolescent spirituality that provided focus for the research questions that were asked in this study, namely, how spirituality is conceived and experienced in adolescents' lives. These questions in turn provided direction for the most appropriate research approach to expand that knowledge base. This chapter will present the research design and methodology that was used, the rationale for choosing first the qualitative approach, and then specifically the grounded theory method. Specific methodological issues relevant to the study are discussed as well as details about the study population, recruitment and consent procedures, and sampling methods. Procedures used for data collection, data analysis and interpretation will also be presented in detail.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design was based on grounded theory, a qualitative methodology developed initially by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and used by Hutchinson (1993) and Hutchinson and Wilson (2001), among many others. Data collection included basic self-reported demographic data (i.e., age, school grade, and family structure) followed by semi-structured interviews, successively guided by ongoing analysis in accordance with grounded theory methods.

Qualitative Methodology

As Chapter 2 illustrated, spirituality has been studied in a variety of contexts, for multiple purposes, and with a range of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Unfortunately, much of the research literature leaves the reader unsure which specific

qualitative methodology was used. Moberg (2002) describes the problems and complications of studying spirituality, due to its complex, abstract, and multidimensional nature and overlap with related concepts. He theorizes that spirituality has a central core that is universal across all people, although differences may modify certain details. Qualitative methods allow a deeper exploration of the variations in those differences and a more comprehensive understanding of how the core is experienced. Grounded theory also has the potential to expand what is known about spirituality by explaining the basic psychosocial processes involved in its relationship to various aspects of life, such as high risk behaviors that have the potential to disrupt adolescents' lives.

As noted above, the choice of research method was guided by the question to be answered and the nature of the data necessary to answer it (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Rich & Ginsburg, 1999; Strauss, 1987; Wiklund, Lindholm, & Lindstrom, 2002; Wolfer, 1993). The research questions guiding this study ask about adolescents' conceptions of spirituality, how it is experienced, and what role it plays in their lives. The essence and complexity of the spiritual dimension can be explored most fully through methods designed to gauge the depths of subjective human experience. Qualitative research methods are designed for this purpose and provide a means to more fully understand contextual factors that contribute to different experiences and dimensions of a construct. Rich and Ginsburg (1999) noted about adolescents that "…adolescence has social ordering, values, cultures, and languages of its own . . . [adolescents] best understand the prose and the poetry of their lives" (p.376-377). Entering into this study, the researcher thought that the experience of spirituality for adolescents may not be the same as for

adults because of the differences in the life contexts of each group, even when they live side by side.

Humans are able to communicate through language and other behaviors to describe what they experience through intuition and contemplation, and to do so in ways that make them sufficiently recognizable by others. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) noted, we live in the world within our bodies, and our experience of anything spiritual cannot be separated from our body, through which we sense, interpret, and communicate experience. This is supported by Maslow (1970), who stated that "spiritual values have naturalistic meaning . . . they do not need supernatural concepts to validate them, that they are well within the jurisdiction of a suitably enlarged science" (p. 33). Therefore, although the dimension is not directly observable, qualitative approaches that elicit descriptions of its experience make spirituality amenable to study through qualitative methods.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is built upon the philosophical traditions that are concerned with actions and methods of problem solving, and on social anthropology methods of field observations and intensive interviews (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). Grounded theory structures those methods of dealing with qualitative material through the use of comparative analysis, which is used for evaluating the accuracy of evidence, making empirical generalizations, and generating and verifying theory. Theories describe, explain, and predict, but are considered to be processes in that they are never set or complete but are continually developing as new evidence is evaluated.

The grounded theory method constructs a theory about a social phenomenon, or basic social process, in a manner that provides for a discovery of its complexity. Because of the complexity of social phenomena, grounded theory methods allow for the development of "many concepts and their linkages in order to capture a great deal of the variation that characterizes the central phenomena studied during any particular research project" (Strauss, 1987, p. 7). The method does not begin the process of analysis or interpretation with a theory, but rather the theory "is gradually developed from, evolves with, and is tested against the data collected" (Rich & Ginsburg, 1999, p.374). This occurs through a continuous process of conceiving provisional and conditional hypotheses inducted from the data, deductively drawing implications from the hypotheses, and verifying those by returning to the data (Strauss, 1987). Similar to a hermeneutic approach, grounded theory requires the researcher to recognize pre-existing beliefs, opinions, values, and expectations about what may be encountered in the data collection and analysis process (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Wiklund, et. al, 2002).

Although the adolescents' conception of spirituality was also a question to be answered in this study, grounded theory goes beyond an in-depth definition of the concept itself to explore how it 'plays out' in the life of an adolescent, particularly in dealing with difficult situations and challenges. That is, what are the basic social psychological processes involved in how spirituality is experienced? How does the quality of one characteristic of spirituality relate to other characteristics or to the life experiences of which they are a part? What effects does spirituality have on phenomena that affect an adolescent's life? How does spirituality help in living and coping with

every day life and problems? How does spirituality affect the way one relates to others and the world? How does spirituality relate to and affect other dimensions of the person? How does the adolescent see the relationship between spirituality and behavior, emotions, and interpersonal relations?

Grounded theory lends itself to an in-depth study of such abstract human constructs and the contexts in which they occur. It has been used to study elements of spirituality in women (Burkhardt, 1994), to identify the defining characteristics of spiritual well-being in elderly persons (Hungelmann, Kenkel-Rossi, Klassen, & Stollenwerk, 1996), and to study adolescent hopefulness in illness and health (Hinds, 1988). Hopefulness is commonly identified as either a characteristic or a consequence of spirituality. Grounded theory has also been used to study spirituality in groups other than physically healthy adolescents. However, few qualitative approaches and no grounded theory studies of adolescent spirituality were found; there is a need to expand our understanding of the role that spirituality plays in their lives and to develop a theory about its relationship to the problems they face in their lives.

Grounded theory was selected for this research based on what is currently known about the spiritual dimension in adolescents and the nature of the research questions to be answered. Grounded theory methods are best suited to fill the knowledge gaps and answer the questions of how this dimension is experienced, in what contexts, what are the basic social processes in the experience, and how do they relate to specific behaviors and methods of coping with difficulty.

Methodology Issues with Adolescents

Deatrick and Faux (1991) describe issues to consider when conducting qualitative research with adolescents. Because of their increasing cognitive and intellectual capacity, they can produce richer descriptions of their lives through interview techniques than can younger children. Data collection for both hermeneutic phenomenology and grounded theory usually involve interviews that occur within a social interaction context, and the concept of intersubjectivity comes into play. This is an important factor in the dynamics of communicating with adolescents and can affect the quality of the data. The researcher's attitude, style of communication, and method of relating can engender either distrust or resistance to perceived intrusion or unwanted control, which can then change the structure and content of the interview. Due to the struggle for independence common among adolescents, the researcher may find it more productive to build trust through the roles of friend and observer rather than of leader and authority. However, over-identification can also undermine trust and rapport, as adolescents are sensitive to authenticity. This calls for a delicate balance and sensitivity when planning the degrees of structure, control, and direction to use in the data collection (Deatrick & Faux, 1991; Fontana & Frey, 1998). This researcher attempted to convey to participants the importance of their input simply as it came from them, with no expectations that it should meet any sort of evaluative criteria, and also tried to convey an understanding of how difficult the subject matter is to articulate for a person of any age. All participants were told that whatever they had to offer was valuable information and there were no wrong answers.

POPULATION AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

Sample Population

The sample of 12 participants were between the ages of 13 and 17 years. The literature review in Chapter 2 illustrated gaps in a comprehensive knowledge of the experience of spirituality by both younger and pre-college older adolescents, compared to what has been studied in older (i.e., college age) adolescents and adults. Therefore, efforts were made to include participants from across the entire age range of 13-17 years. Efforts also were made to recruit participants from each year of age across the range, and each year but age 16 was represented. Both genders were represented equally and also spanned the age range except for the absence of a 14-year-old male. Each grade from seventh through twelfth was represented by at least one participant. Fifteen-year-old tenth graders had the largest representation, with three girls and two boys. Since involvement in religious activities is strongly associated with spirituality (Hill, et. al., 2000), adolescents actively involved in church youth groups were targeted for recruitment. Because of the belief that spirituality is a universal human dimension regardless of religious involvement, it was expected that those without any particular religious beliefs or affiliations would also be able to describe their experiences. This sampling was done to confirm this assumption about the universality of the spiritual dimension and to explore variations in beliefs about a Higher Power. Of the four youth groups actively attended by seven of the participants at the time of the interviews, two were sponsored by two   Christian Reformed churches, one by a Baptist church, and one by a nondenominational Christian church. One 17-year-old boy still attended church services

but was no longer involved in a church youth group. The sample characteristics are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

		M		F	
Grade	Age	Religious belief	No religious belief	Religious Belief	No religious Belief
7th	13			Elise	
8th	13	Frank			
9th	14			Anne	
	15	Aaron			
10th	15	Eli	Danny		Beth Cari Dina
11th	17			Felicity	
12th	17	Brian Carl			

N=12

Note: All Names Are Pseudonyms

Recruitment and Sampling Procedures

Four churches in the far northwest, south, north central, and east sides of a major metropolitan area of central Texas were approached for assistance in recruitment. One of the churches was a predominantly African American congregation, and the other three were predominantly white with a smaller number of African American and Hispanic youth. The ministers and/or youth directors of each church were contacted either by email, in person, or by telephone to explain the study. Although initial interest was

expressed by all four, one youth director left the position and another youth director was new to the position and did not return follow-up phone calls. After three unsuccessful attempts to contact the latter two via telephone and/or email, no further efforts were made. The researcher had a face-to-face meeting with leaders from the other two churches, and they were provided a copy of the proposal and all materials to be used, including consents. They each provided letters of permission to recruit participants, and these were submitted with the research proposal to the University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board (I.R.B.) for approval. A template of the site permission letters is found in Appendix 1.

Following organizational and I.R.B. approval, arrangements were made for the youth leader of one church to introduce the researcher to the youth group prior to a scheduled event. The researcher made a brief (approximately fifteen minutes) presentation about the study to the group before their activity began and extended an invitation to participate. There were approximately eight to ten expected to be present, but only four attended the activity. Of those, two expressed interest and were given introductory materials (an introductory letter and consent), and they each provided contact telephone numbers. One of the two who expressed interest had brought her mother to the presentation, and the mother was willing to provide consent at that time. A parent of the other adolescent was contacted by telephone and given a verbal explanation of the project. Written consent was obtained from that parent by the researcher at the time of the interview, and written assents were obtained by both participants prior to their interviews.

The third through eighth and eleventh participants were recruited through referral by persons known to the researcher who were parents or friends of the adolescents, or were known to the researcher herself and contacted directly by her. Three of these attended the youth group of one of the churches that assisted in recruitment. A brief explanation of the research was provided to the referral source and then to the adolescent, either in person or by telephone. Informed consent materials were provided to the parent and adolescent in person at the time of each interview, followed by an opportunity to ask additional questions before beginning the interview. Written consent was obtained either prior to or at the time of the interview. The signature pages were kept by the researcher and the consent materials were left with the participants and their parents.

Ten adolescents who were invited to participate either directly or through a parent either declined or their parents declined to give consent, or they did not return telephone calls after expressing verbal consent to participate. Of the decliners, one was white and Jewish, four were white and Christian, one African American Christian, and one Hispanic Christian, but none of these were actively involved in a youth group at their church or synagogue. Three others who declined had no specific religious beliefs. One girl initially expressed interest in participating but then changed her mind because after giving it further thought she realized she did not feel comfortable talking to a stranger. The others who actively declined did not give specific reasons and were not asked for them, although the parent of one 14-year-old boy said he would participate but only if the researcher could pull him out of class for the interview. The researcher and the parent declined.

After eight interviews had been conducted, recruitment was begun at the second church. Participants were recruited based on the previous sample characteristics. The preference of the church leadership at the second church was to have the youth director recommend a participant after consulting with the researcher about sampling needs. He then directly introduced the researcher to the prospective participant. All three participants invited in this manner agreed to take part. The second church also requested that interviews be conducted at the church in a private room but with others present in the building.

All participants in the study were white, from lower to upper middle class neighborhoods. Two participants lived with their mothers who were divorced from their fathers, and ten lived in two-parent households. Of those ten, one was adopted and two mentioned that they lived with their mother and stepfather. This information was anecdotal and not deliberately collected, so it is not known whether any of the parents of the other seven two-parent households were stepparents. Attempts were made without success to recruit from other ethnic populations, specifically African-American and Hispanic. Contacts were made with African-American and Hispanic adolescents or their representatives (i.e., parents, adult friends, or youth group leaders) but did not result in any participants from these groups. One participant attended a private Christian school, and all others attended public schools.

Although it would have been interesting to note any differences by ethnicity, there would not have been sufficient numbers of participants to make a generalizable statement about them. The goal of sampling in qualitative research is not to gauge statistical significance or to generalize to other diverse populations, but is to identify participants

most likely to provide the densest, most detailed descriptions of their experience. Polit and Hungler (1999) note that qualitative sample sizes vary, with phenomenological studies having as few as ten or less participants and grounded theory studies possibly requiring over twenty. Sample size in this study was prescribed by the data that emerged during the simultaneous ongoing processes of collection, interpretation, analysis, and validation. With grounded theory, the sampling continues until data saturation is reached, that is, when this methodology applied to successive participants' interviews no longer revealed any new information. Although the absolute sample size could not be determined prior to data collection, a minimum sample of ten participants was proposed and accepted by the I.R.B. Saturation on some codes and categories was reached by the fifth interview, and the last three interviews were conducted primarily to confirm relationships and to clarify processes in the proposed grounded theory.

PROCEDURES FOR DATA COLLECTION

Protection of Human Subjects

The research proposal was approved first by the School of Nursing Departmental Review Committee and then by the University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board (I.R.B.). The conditions under which confidentiality would no longer be protected were explained during the procedure for obtaining informed consent prior to the interview (e.g., if participants disclosed reportable abuse or specific threats to harm self or others). Participants were instructed beforehand that responses would be confidential. Interview materials were coded for confidentiality, with a master list and the coded audiotapes kept in a secure, locked location until after they were transcribed. All

participant-identifying paper documents and electronic materials will be kept for three years following the conclusion of this research; after that time they will be destroyed.

Consent

The participants and their parents were given written informed consent materials explaining the purpose and methods of the study. The consent forms, research purpose and methods, and potential risks and benefits were also explained in person by the researcher to each participant and parent/guardian, and they were given an opportunity to ask questions. Youth group participants were told that participation in the church youth group activities would not be affected by taking part in the study or by not completing it. Written assent to participate was obtained from each adolescent, and written permission was obtained from their parent or legal guardian prior to interviews. Consent materials are found in Appendices 2-4 .

There was a provision in the consent for any participants who became upset by the interview process to stop the interview and be referred to the pastoral care providers at the church, or have the researcher who is a master's-prepared psychiatric nurse help them to process their feelings, or to refer them to their parents. If any participant had threatened to harm themselves or others, they would have been referred to a psychiatric emergency screening provider. None of these situations arose during the interviews.

Pilot Study of Interview Guide

A semi-structured interview helps the researcher to cover some basic areas that theory and research indicate may be important components of the issue being studied. There is greater flexibility in this type of interview rather than one with a more rigid structure, as it helps the participant to focus on the topic at the same time the open-ended

questions elicit more information. No interview questions were found in the literature that were constructed to elicit responses from adolescents about what they think spirituality is, how they experience it, and how it affects their life. Drawing on what was found in the literature, an interview guide was constructed based on what the researcher thought would be appropriate questions.

Prior to using the interview guide in this research, I.R.B. approval was obtained to conduct a pilot study of the proposed questions. A focus group of six adolescents, four boys and two girls ages 13-15 years old, was conducted to get feedback about the most appropriate wording of the proposed questions. Participants in both the junior and senior high school youth groups from a local Protestant church were invited to participate. Written permission from the church pastor, parental permission, and student assent were obtained prior to conducting the focus group. The participants were each given a copy of the proposed interview questions, which were also written on a whiteboard for the group. The researcher led them in a review of the questions as a group, and they provided verbal feedback via group discussion about whether the questions would be easily understood by their peers. They were asked what alternate wording or additional questions would be more appropriate to get the most complete responses. Their feedback was used to revise the proposed interview questions, and the revisions were checked by each one to be sure it was what he/she meant to say.

At the time the focus group was conducted, the sample population of the dissertation research was to include adolescents with a history of interpersonal violence, so one of the questions was related to this. Since the final research proposal did not include this population in its focus, that question was dropped from the guide. Another

question was added related to belief about a Higher Power. Because of the co-occurrence of religion and spirituality, participants were asked to differentiate their experience of spirituality from religiosity if they saw their participation in church or religious activities as a separate experience. The final interview guide that was used to start this study was revised and made simpler and more age-appropriate based on the focus group's input. The original and revised interview questions are found in Appendix 5.

Interview Procedures

Interviews began after written parental permission and adolescent assent were obtained. Demographic information (i.e., age, grade) was collected either prior to or at the beginning of the interview. Individual, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, in order to elicit a full description in their own words about their experience of spirituality in the context of their life. Interviews were initially scheduled for 90 minutes, although none lasted over 45 minutes. The shortest interview was 23 minutes, and the average time was 31 minutes, so they were scheduled for approximately an hour after the seventh interview. Although by that time they were not expected to take that long, it allowed for any extra time any participant may need to talk or ask questions without being rushed. Hutchinson and Wilson (1992) recommend allowing enough time for the interviewer to begin by greeting the participant and answering any additional questions, and to end the interview naturally rather than abruptly, clarifying any points and again answering any final questions about the interview content or process.

To ensure confidentiality, interviews were conducted in a room or other area where the conversation would not be overheard, and were audio-taped for later

transcription. Two audio recorders were used so one could be a backup in the event the other malfunctioned. Provision for taping was included in the assent and permission information. Each interview was transcribed by the researcher in Microsoft Word document, and checked at least once for accuracy against the recorded interview. Although time consuming, the transcription process was very useful in that it provided a second and sometimes third and fourth opportunity to analyze the data as it was spoken. It allowed for corrections to be made to statements that were initially misinterpreted in the interview itself or in the first replay. A pseudonym was assigned for references to each participant in the written dissertation, and each audiotape and transcript was identified only as a number according to interview order. A master list of pseudonyms, interview numbers, and actual names were maintained separately in a lockable space. The interviews were scheduled at a time that was convenient to the participant, after school hours and before 9:00 p.m., and were done either at the church or participant's home, provided another adult was in the building or immediate vicinity. Each participant was offered a non-alcoholic drink and small snack of their choice for the interview, which was held outside school hours.

DATA MANAGEMENT

Taped interviews were transcribed as soon as possible, usually within a day of the interview, and were printed with wide margins and double spacing for written notes and codes, and line numbers for comparative references. The first four interviews were also entered into the N6 software program for qualitative analysis, but further into the analysis the researcher found Microsoft Word and Excel tables to be more useful. As the codes multiplied, it was necessary to work with them on pieces of paper so they could be sorted,

managed, and rearranged visually in folders and on large cardboard. This cruder method was resorted to because of the researcher's need to actually see the whole structure laid out as it developed and to be able to manually move codes around and rearrange them on a board under different categories as indicated, refining the definitions through the process of constantly comparing data within and across interview transcripts. Another way codes were tracked to see the flow of new ideas was to keep a comprehensive list of them on a table in order of the interview where they first appeared. There are repetitions of data on the table because some pieces (single words or phrases or paragraphs) were coded as many ways as possible, then assigned later to the one that fit best. For quicker references in constant comparative analyses, each piece of data that was arranged in a document or printed in hard copy was labeled with its original interview and line number.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Grounded theory methods described by Hutchinson (1993) and Hutchinson and Wilson (2001) were used to analyze the data. Each transcribed interview was read using an open coding method to first break the data into small pieces, identifying first, second, and third level codes as well as memos and questions to ask in the next interview. Level I, or substantive, coding concretely described the action taking place. In open coding, each word, sentence, and incident was assigned as many codes as possible. Level II coding then identified more abstract categories to show what each incident meant. Level III codes were still more abstract theoretical constructs that explained how the three levels relate. An example of this progressive level of coding illustrated in Figure 2 in Chapter 4 is that "your spirit is like you are" was an example of 'essence of self,' which is a part of *wholeness*, which is a defining characteristic of spirituality and related to

'*anchored self*.' Another example from the process of *finding safe passage*, illustrated in Figure 4 in Chapter 5, is that "how you see things" and "looking past" were Level I examples of 'perspective,' which was an consequence of spirituality and also a strategy of *having an inner dialogue*, found in the second phase of *finding safe passage*. Memos and an analysis diary documented the detailed analytic thought processes, questions, and decisions that the researcher made in the process of data analysis. Each interview was analyzed before beginning the next one. Additional first level codes were created with subsequent interviews.

As new codes are identified, data from earlier interviews were recoded when the new codes provided a more accurate description. Codes and categories were also merged when differences in meaning were not significant enough to be meaningful or useful. For example, 'feelings' and 'emotions' were essentially the same thing, and 'intangible' was coded under 'incorporeal' rather than as a separate property of the *felt awareness* characteristic of spirituality. In another example, 'transcendent' as used by the participants was really 'immortal' and not the broader meaning of the term. Because the terms 'transcendent' and 'transcendence' are cited frequently in literature related to spirituality in adults, the researcher was looking for their appearance in the adolescents' data and so probably used the code prematurely in anticipation, but the adolescents did not actually use it in the way it is used about adults. Categories were also merged or moved around as relationships and meanings became clearer. 'Encompassing and integrated' was initially a defining characteristic of spirituality. However, after further analysis of interviews indicated that 'meaning and purpose' were really a part of spirituality rather than a consequence of spirituality, as it was originally categorized,

'encompassing and integrated' appeared to be more a property of *wholeness*, which replaced it as the defining characteristic.

Constant comparisons were made within an interview and between interviews, and indicators were clustered around emerging categories or concepts that represented the dimensions of the construct and the social processes that were associated with it. Second and third level codes were organized as they emerged through data analysis. As the data in this study underwent different levels of coding and recoding, early analyses pointed to an appropriate coding paradigm that asked what are the defining characteristics, antecedents, contexts, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences of participants' experiences of spirituality and its role in difficult situations. Coding paradigms aid in organizing and analyzing data by providing a structure that is relevant to the purpose of the research and the stories being told, which in turn guides the progression of subsequent data collection and analysis (Glaser, 1978; Hutchinson & Wilson, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Although this coding paradigm is described in texts in a linear fashion, the process of *finding safe passage* involves a circular relationship between consequences and facilitators of the experience of the spiritual dimension. That is, facilitators of a stronger sense of spirituality are in turn reinforced by its consequences, so that they are mutually reflective and reinforcing.

The initial list of basic questions in Appendix 5 were included in the first few interviews, but when they were no longer producing any new material, some of them were skipped or reworded in the interest of efficiency and to decrease the burden on the participants of having to answer an increasingly long list of questions. Because ongoing

theoretical sampling is part of the theory-building process, questions for each new interview were revised as needed to answer questions arising from previous interviews. As basic social processes began to emerge after the fifth interview, they were verified or revised in subsequent interviews, and theoretical sampling for relevant data helped further expand the codes to explain how they fit in the developing theory. In the process of sorting, relationships between these basic social processes and different levels of codes were examined as the structure of the theory was developed. The simultaneous coding, memoing, sampling, and sorting process continued throughout the data collection and analysis, until saturation was reached. Recoding occurred also after the interviews were completed as some codes were merged into others.

TRUSTWORTHINESS OF DATA AND FINDINGS

Trustworthiness refers to the degree to which qualitative data collection and interpretive methods reflect the truth of what is being studied (Polit & Hungler, 1999). Trustworthiness of the data and findings of this study was enhanced by methods that ensure credibility and dependability and evaluate transferability.

Credibility

The degree of confidence in the data and findings, or credibility, was improved through control of researcher bias and member checks. A concurrent process of controlling bias during the data analysis was paying close attention to and documenting the researcher's subjective reactions to the data and participant, noting any thoughts, beliefs, and values that might interfere with or distort interpretation of the data. This is similar to the phenomenologic technique of bracketing one's preconceptions and opinions and setting them aside, but it differs in that in grounded

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theory their influence is brought to awareness and may or may not play a conscious part of the data analysis. Researcher bias was noted by the supervisor and the consultant early in the process, and thus was controlled in subsequent interviews. The researcher's own values, beliefs, and worldviews are influenced by Judeo-Christian beliefs and had the potential to negatively interpret or discount any ideas or experiences that conflict with those. These potential biases were kept in awareness to prevent this, but also provided a framework in which to interpret the data. For example, the researcher had to put aside her beliefs in order for them to not interfere with what was said by participants with no religious faith beliefs. She also had to use care to not jump to early conclusions about what Christian participants said on the assumption that their interpretations matched her own simply on the basis of a shared faith background.

The research interpretations, analysis, and findings were validated by participants in successive interviews as the theory emerged, and the final findings were validated by member checks. Participants were presented a summary of the findings and asked to what extent the data interpretations were a valid representation of what they had conveyed during the interviews. The researcher was not able to reach the first two participants, and the third and fourth participants had both turned 18 and moved before the findings were ready to be checked. The findings were reviewed by five participants, two aged 13 and three aged 15. Two of the participants were among the four with no religious faith beliefs, and the other three were Christians. They all said it represented what they had tried to convey and the process

they used when confronted by difficulty. Two commented that it was "perfect", and that it was "all there".

Dependability

Although replicability is not necessarily the goal of grounded theory research (Hutchinson & Wilson, 2001), certain activities such as having a second person analyze the same data, review the interpretive processes, and support the findings enhance trustworthiness and also increase credibility as noted above by objectively identifying the effect of the researcher's preconceptions and biases. The dependability of the analysis and interpretation process was checked by ongoing consultation with the dissertation supervisor, who had experience in grounded theory methods. She reviewed initial interviews and provided valuable feedback and observations of researcher bias, consulted on data management techniques and analysis processes throughout the course of the data collection, and helped the researcher think through the labeling and sorting processes and assign more appropriate meanings to the data. She also suggested improvements for interviewing techniques, reviewed the assignment of codes beginning with open coding and continuing through the higher levels as the analysis progressed, and provided feedback about the major decisions in the analysis.

In addition to the input of the supervisor, additional consultation was provided by another University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing faculty member with experience in grounded theory. She reviewed transcripts and analyzed the second and third interviews to validate the researcher's coding, and provided consultation on the coding, analysis, and overall methodology process. She and the dissertation

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supervisor provided valuable feedback on ways the questions and responses might potentially be either leading or conveying unintentional judgments on the participants' responses. This helped heighten the researcher's awareness of bias in subsequent interviews.

Transferability

While the findings of a qualitative research approach are not generalizable to other groups, there are methods to evaluate the extent to which the findings may be applicable to others. This criteria, also referred to as fittingness (Chiovitti & Piran, 2003), is evaluated by identifying relevant literature that demonstrates similar concepts or constructs, and supports relationships consistent with those in the grounded theory. Research findings that reflect the fittingness of the findings of this study are discussed in Chapter 6.

SUMMARY

The questions to be answered by this research were most amenable to qualitative inquiry, and most specifically to a grounded theory methodology. The design of the research was based upon the nature of the questions and the population that was to provide the data. Methodological considerations related to qualitative research with adolescents were addressed before and during the design and data collection phases of this study. A description of the sample population provided a background for reference to the findings to be presented in the following chapters. Methods of sampling participants and data were explained as they were an integral part of the emergence of a theory. Procedures that protect research subjects were described and carefully followed in order to observe ethical standards of research. Use of external reviewers, ongoing supervision

of the data collection and analysis processes, monitoring of bias, and member checks leant trustworthiness to the findings.

Grounded theory does not establish causal relationships or control for variables as in quantitative methodology. However, questions about various factors contributing to different experiences were incorporated into the interviews and analyses. These analyses were based on a systematic process of reading and interpreting data and making constant comparisons with all previous data until categories began to emerge and relate to each other. These relationships were then identified as biopsychosocial processes of a theory grounded in the data.

The research findings of this study are presented separately in the next two sections, according to the research questions to which they relate. The findings related to the first two research questions, which were participants' descriptions of spirituality and how it is experienced in their lives, is presented in Chapter 4. The findings related to the third research question, which asked what is the role of spirituality in the lives of adolescents, is presented as a substantive theory of *finding safe passage*. This theory is presented in detail in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS (Part 1).

DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS, FACILITATORS,

CONSEQUENCES, AND INTERVENING CONDITIONS OF

SPIRITUALITY

To lay a foundation for discussion about how spirituality is experienced, it was necessary to first ask each participant to describe what spirituality meant to them, what conditions increased their ability to sense it, and what difference it made in them. Their responses established at the outset whether they had any beliefs about the existence of a spiritual dimension, and then provided a background for discussing its role in the difficult situations they faced. The initial part of the research process described in this chapter focused on understanding adolescents' conceptions of spirituality, and was thus a necessary prelude to the subsequent research process of searching for the actual substantive grounded theory described in Chapter 5.

This chapter first presents the defining characteristics of spirituality as conceived by the participants. These are the essential elements of what they thought of as the spiritual dimension and how they envisioned it to exist in its strongest state. Presented next are the facilitating conditions that help them to be more aware of their spirituality, followed by the consequences of that awareness. Relationship to a higher power, or God, was an important intervening condition that affected the way Christian participants in this study perceived spirituality, and that is presented last. Bracketed words or phrases within a quote are used to clarify the topic of the quoted material if it would otherwise be unclear when taken out of context. When a bracket

contains "R" before words or phrases, this is to indicate that they are the researcher's words taken directly from the interview transcript. Each section in this chapter is followed by a brief summary, ending the chapter with a more comprehensive summary of all the sections at the end. The illustration of spirituality as experienced by adolescents is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Spirituality as Experienced by Adolescents

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                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
                    │  Intervening Condition:  │
                    │   Relationship to God    │
                    └─────────────────────────┘
                     ↙          ↓          ↘

┌──────────────────────┐              ┌──────────────────┐
│ Facilitating Conditions │           │   Consequences   │
└──────────────────────┘              └──────────────────┘

┌──────────────┐      ╱          ╲      ┌─────────────────────┐
│  Supportive  │     ╱  Spirituality ╲   │ Perspective –       │
│  Environment │    │                 │  │    Optimism         │
├──────────────┤    │ Felt Awareness –│  │    Hope             │
│  Creating    │ ⟹  │   Supernatural  │⟹ │    Safety           │
├──────────────┤    │   Physical      │  ├─────────────────────┤
│  Connecting  │    │   Presence      │  │ Positive behaviors  │
├──────────────┤    │                 │  ├─────────────────────┤
│ Helping and  │    │ Wholeness -     │  │ Relating to others  │
│ being helped │    │  Encompassing & │  ├─────────────────────┤
└──────────────┘    │  integrated parts│ │ Anchored self –     │
                    │  Meaning & purpose│ │   Self-knowledge    │
                    │  Essence of self │  │   Self-esteem,      │
                     ╲               ╱   │   Self- acceptance  │
                      ╲             ╱    │   Self-confidence   │
                                         │   Independence      │
                          strengthens    └─────────────────────┘
              reinforces
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SECTION 1. DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

Although there were variations among participants' descriptions, particularly between those with and without a religious belief system, there were more similarities than differences in their descriptions of the spiritual dimension. The interview guide used the term 'spirit' in the core set of questions, and the interviewer used the term 'spirituality' to introduce participants to the goals of the study. However, in the course of the interviews, participants used the terms 'spirit', 'soul', 'spiritualism', and 'spirituality' interchangeably in their responses. It did not seem productive to try to force them to discriminate between the various terms or to ask that they stick with only one term, and their words are presented here as they were used in the interviews. Participants' descriptions were very consistent across the sample and were coded into two categories regardless of their religious background or beliefs. These categories are *felt awareness* and *wholeness*, and are described below with their properties.

Felt Awareness

As a defining characteristic of spirituality, the category of *felt awareness* describes the ways the spirit is perceived by a person. One is able to perceive the spiritual dimension due to one or more of its different properties, which include *supernatural*, *physical,* and *presence*. These properties were each derived from clusters of codes identified from participants' descriptions of spirituality.

Supernatural

Although spirituality is said to have a connection with the living physical body, it is not contained within its physical boundary. Some aspects of this are described in part by the quotes describing *relation to body*, but additional codes relate

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specifically to the supernatural property of *felt awareness* that is independent of the body's relationship to the spiritual dimension. These include the codes *not visualized*, *incorporeal*, and *immortal*.

Not visualized. Participants were offered the opportunity to use drawing as a means of communicating their ideas about the spiritual dimension. Their responses were coded as *not visualized* because none of the participants could think of a way to draw their conception of spirituality.

> It's not really anything you can draw… I mean, it's really such an expansive thing that you can't really draw it…. I guess you could draw like certain periods of it, like how it's feeling at that moment, but I really can't think of any way to draw it. It's such a large thing" (Dina).

Anne's comment was, "I don't really have a visual picture; I have more of an explanation." Although three participants did draw stick figures as references to help them talk about differences between a stronger and a weaker awareness of spirituality, the pictures did not depict the spirit itself but rather the thoughts, feelings, or actions of the stick figure persons whose awareness was stronger or weaker.

Incorporeal. The code *incorporeal*, or having no material body or form, described the inability to touch or feel the spiritual dimension. Incorporeal came from their descriptions of what spirituality is not, such as "…not this human body form" (Aaron), "not your body or your mind" (Brian), and "… not like physically you" (Carl). Beth also used the terms "non-tangible" and "intangible" to describe spirit in several different ways, likening its property to that of hope. For example, "like hope

is not tangible . . . you can't touch your spirit . . . that non-tangible thing that helps with, that goes along with your heart and feelings."

Immortal. Regardless of specific religious affiliation, participants believed the spiritual dimension to be immortal, that it continues to exist after the life of the physical body ends. Those with Christian beliefs understood immortality according to Christian teachings about an afterlife when the spirit of a person continues to live with God after the body dies. As Brian saw it, "your body's just here temporary while we're living in this world . . . your body will die eventually . . . when you die it'll [spirit] probably go with you." Others with no religious beliefs also had an expectation that the spiritual dimension lives on after death.

> But it's [spirituality] not really based on religion, it's just how you think on
> what's going to happen after you die . . . once you die, that . . . intangible
> thing within your body will rise up to the great abyss. (Beth)

Physical

The physical property of *felt awareness* is defined in two ways, as both physical energy and as the spirit's relation to the physical body. Energy is both external and internal. Having a relation to the body means that while the spirit may be supernatural and not bounded by the physical, it is still experienced or conceptualized in relation to one's physical body.

Energy. Participants used the terms 'light', 'bright', and 'glowing' to describe spirituality as energy. It can be sensed within oneself but may also be perceived in others. For instance, in persons with a strong positive outlook, "you can almost see a glowing light coming . . . like the positive energy is radiating from them" (Dina). Energy is

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directly related to the spirit, such that a higher degree of energy "makes the spirit more brighter" (Aaron).

Another way the energy of spirit is perceived is as a life-seeking, driving, and motivating force in one's life, as an internal "force or energy that drives you" (Carl) and sustains life despite adversity. Dina described this force of energy as "something else inside of me I could feel definitely, that was like the one thing that would . . . not let me go. And no matter what, there was always something there saying 'you've gotta go'."

Relation to body. The spiritual dimension has at least a transitory connection to the living physical body, and is described in various ways. For example, for Dina, "it's . . . in your body and so it doesn't leave," and for Brian, "it's more in your body. It's where your heart is." Carl saw it "more as separate that's just currently residing in your body," and Aaron had a similar idea about it as "the human form is like a transport, and . . . this is like our suit, we're just using it."

Presence

When awareness of spirituality is stronger, it is described as a constant presence that can be felt as an inner force or energy that, although centered within oneself, also transcends the inner self to connect one person to another. It's "nothing you can prove, it's just there" (Brian), it's "just that thing that's there that you think is there but you don't really know" (Beth). Several codes clustered to define different aspects of presence. These were *internal*, *dynamic*, and *constant*.

Internal. The sense of the spirit having a location within oneself (i.e., internal) was common to all participants. This is similar to *relation to body*, but has more to do with the concept of "self" or "person" than with the physical body. This was clarified

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by Anne, who said her spirit "is kind of my inner self…what I have on the inside that shows on the outside." Brian indicated "you can feel it inside you . . . it's just something you can tell." To Beth it was the "soul or spirit, or what people believe is inside them . . . you can feel it there . . . your soul . . . your inner self is a person's last and most secret sanctuary." Dina stated it was "something inside me, I could just feel it, something coming out more and more from the inside, something else inside of me I could feel definitely."

Dynamic. The spiritual dimension was perceived as dynamic rather than static, with varying degrees of strength or *felt awareness* depending on internal or external circumstances. For instance, compliments, successes, and positive interactions can strengthen the spirit whereas depressed states can weaken it. For Dina, this fluctuation was described as "shrinking down" or "contracting" in a weaker state, and as "coming forth" or "springing up" in a stronger state. It can become brighter or lighter when one is feeling really happy or excited, and darker or lower when one is depressed. Dina described her spirit during a period of depression as "just really bottled up inside, like I couldn't think . . . I didn't have any emotions, like I was just flat lined." Aaron likened his spirit's reaction to being depressed to being in the dark, and he, Brian and Carl also described the fluctuations as going back and forth between light and dark.

The spirit not only fluctuates in the moment but was also said to have a developmental property, in that it continues to grow and change over time.

It's [spirituality] the same pretty much as adults, it's just more, it's just so younger it's still learning. . . . Chiefly I think that in teenagers we have a more

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broader mind because we are still learning, and . . . it [spirituality] seems more open because we haven't gone through everything yet. (Anne)

And so I guess you could definitely define that as when it was just helping me grow. It was expanding from the inside so it just kept on making me grow. Even though I might not have wanted to, it was like 'you're going to grow'. . . . And it builds up while you get older, because you have more experience and you get to know right from wrong. And so I definitely think that while you grow, your spirit also grows, and it helps you go farther. [R – "So it's a growing thing, something that's continually growing and developing?"] Yes . . . and like that's why you don't, with . . . like young children like 5-yr-olds, they're still saplings and you cannot put them in a situation that you can put a 60-yr-old person. (Dina)

Constant. Spirituality was said to be constant, in that it's "always there . . . it doesn't leave" (Dina), and it's "like your best friend that you will always have" (Beth). Those who equated or linked their spirituality with their relationship with God described it as a constant presence because of that relationship. As Aaron stated, "I just go by like day-to-day with God." Felicity had a similar perception, "I constantly actually am kind of thinking about my spirit and where I am." Anne likened the constant awareness of her spirituality in its connection to God to the relationship some have with their parents, regardless of their physical presence.

God did technically make me, which made my spirit. And so that connection there is kind of that, it's like with a parent. You'll always have a certain connection with your mother or your father just because they are your mother or your father, even if you turn out to be someone completely different as

them. You still have a certain connection that, it's like they're always there in the back of your mind. (Anne)

Although they were able to speak about what absence of spirit might be like, it was always in reference to other real or hypothetical people or to a "what if" scenario for themselves. None described a time when they thought their spirit had actually been totally absent, only weaker or less apparent to them.

Participants were able to describe their conceptualization of spirituality because of their experiencing it as a *felt awareness*. The category of *felt awareness* includes all the ways that a person is aware of and attaches symbolic meanings to the dimension of spirituality. They are aware of it through its physical properties as energy that has a relation to their body. They believe in its supernatural properties, which are incorporeal and immortal but not visualized. It is also felt as a constant and dynamic inner presence. Because they had a *felt awareness* of the various properties of their spirit, they were able to relate them to the life experiences that were the context of the grounded theory.

Wholeness

As another defining characteristic of spirituality, the category of *wholeness* is the degree to which a conscious human is able to interact with and relate to his/her world and know him/herself. *Wholeness* is the state in which all aspects of a person are in optimal working order and available as needed in everyday experiences. As Eli said, "your spirit is . . . not just something that's inside of you, it's like your whole . . . it's who you are." Properties of *wholeness* that contribute to interacting, relating, and

knowing are *encompassing and integrated parts*, *meaning and purpose,* and *essence of self.*

Encompassing and Integrated Parts

The two terms *encompassing* and *integrated* are used together to describe a single property of *wholeness* because their coexistence contributes most fully to the experience of spirituality. Carl illustrated this coexistence as "your feelings, all the things you say and do, and your personality and stuff is all part of your spirit . . . like it resides in your whole body and it's part of, connected to everything." To be encompassing means that the spiritual dimension incorporates all aspects of the self. Aspects of self identified by participants as part of their spirituality included morals, beliefs, heart, conscience, personality, identity, mind, feelings, and thoughts. To be integrated means that these aspects are interconnected and mutually interactive, so that feelings are affected by thoughts, thoughts and beliefs influence morals, conscience guides thoughts and actions, actions affect feelings, and so on. Beth described the interplay between feelings and actions within the spirit as "that non-tangible thing that helps with that, goes along with your heart and feelings, whether you do good or bad." Thus a change in one aspect affects the whole.

> How you think is how you feel. . . . Your spirit has your thoughts and it has that ability to kind of sway them, then it sways your feelings too because mostly what I think is what I feel. (Anne)

One's personality is reflected in the spirit, as in Dina's "very out there" personality being reflected in her "very coming out" spirit that was evident to others. Others described how a "dark" personality would be reflected similarly in the spirit, or a

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very "energetic" spirit would translate to one's outward personality. Participants reported both an inextricable relationship between spirit and feelings and also as various combinations of thoughts and feelings. For Brian, it was "more of in your mind, how you think. . . . It is your mind but it's a combination of both . . . it's where your heart is." Whereas Carl saw it "more of like the higher level thinking and stuff . . . like the part of your brain that actually is you." Cari thought of them as "interconnected, but for me it's mostly emotional." The spirit was said to reflect emotions so that if one is depressed, the spirit grows darker, shrinks, or sinks down. On the other hand, 15-year-old Aaron says that just being happy and having fun makes his spirit "brighter or shinier."

> Your spirit is like you are, is like how you feel. You're happy, you're sad. . . . If you're like outgoing and stuff, your spirit is going to be like more outgoing and brighter, but if you're like in the dark [depressed] or something, it's going to be not that light. (Aaron)

Many participants thought spirituality to be the dimension through which their beliefs, morals, and conscience are formed, activated, or experienced, and these in turn guide behaviors and decisions. For example, "you have to have a spirit to believe in things" (Danny). Conscience was consistently associated with spirituality and an important factor in having an inner driving force or a sense of being guided, which is then evident in actions. It was "kind of like your conscience, how it shows on the outside, it's the same way that your spirit kind of does" (Anne). As conscience or an inner guide, Eli noted that his spirit was "more than just you and your mind, because you can tell right from wrong with your mind and stuff," rather it is a construct that expands beyond the mind. There is another element of spirit that is more directive,

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described by Danny as a "shoulder angel" and by Elise as the voice by her shoulder, telling them what actions are right and wrong and advising them of consequences to their actions.

Meaning and Purpose

An important property of *wholeness* is having a sense of meaning and purpose for one's life. To have a sense of meaning is to believe in one's significance in relation to others and/or God; to have a sense of purpose is to live with intention and to actually have or to at least believe in the possibility of finding goals worth achieving. This property was illustrated most clearly when participants were asked to describe what they imagined absence of spirit might mean. Examples of lack of meaning and purpose were "if there's no spirit, then . . . it's really just you being a body, doing what you're doing with your hands . . . just going along with life" (Brian), and "everything would be the same, no thoughts, no creativity, no . . . everything just . . . [R - robotic?] yeah" (Beth). The Christian participants derived their sense of meaning and purpose from their faith-based beliefs and their ongoing relationship with God. Anne related that through her spirit's connection to God, she knows that "there always is a purpose in this life and in this whole world," and that gives her hope. "The main meaning is doing what you can for God" (Carl). Felicity saw spirituality as a purpose in itself, because it is:

Pursuing God. That's all . . . that's my goal . . . that's like my life pursuit . . . my reason . . . my motivation . . . it's everything to me, so . . . moving forward, just moving closer, getting to know Him in different ways.

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Participants who did not follow any faith beliefs or have a belief in a higher power also thought that meaning and purpose were important aspects of a stronger sense of spirituality. Beth related awareness of spirit to discovering and following her talents and gifts, by "following your heart and what you're good at," and thus knowing what one is supposed to do with one's life. Dina thought that without this awareness, people would be "like . . . zombies . . . running around with their heads almost half off, like 'help me, what am I doing here'?"

Essence of Self

Another property of *wholeness* was *essence of self*. Essence is "the individual, real, or ultimate nature of a thing especially as opposed to its existence" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2005); this was reflected consistently in participants' descriptions of their spirit. The participants shared the same concept regardless of their religious belief systems: that one simply could not exist as a person without a spirit. Without the spirit, it would not be possible to live as a functioning, consciously interacting human being, because "you need your spirit just to be alive, really . . . it's definitely one of your main essences" (Dina). In its absence, one would "probably feel kind of dead. I wouldn't . . . be able to feel any emotions of any range or spectrum or whatever. I couldn't feel happy or sad or anything in between" (Cari). It was seen primarily as their personality or as the core of their being or identity as a person, or simply who they are. It was condensed by Anne as "my inner self . . . what causes me to be myself on the outside," and by Carl as "what makes you 'you'." For those with Christian beliefs, this essence of self included an element of being created

by God, such as "it's who God made you to be" (Eli), and as a reflection of God within them.

> It's part of me but then it's part of something else . . . part of God, like me myself is technically part of God but not like my human self and so I see my spirit as connected more with God [points up] than my self outward [points around her]. (Anne)

While the category of *felt awareness* defines the ways that a person is aware of and conceptualizes the spiritual dimension, the category of *wholeness* defines their sense of spirituality as their existence as a complete, significant, and unique individual in their world. *Wholeness* is the characteristic of spirituality wherein all the aspects of a conscious human are encompassed and integrated into a complete person capable of interacting with others, knowing themselves fully, and believing that they matter. This category of *wholeness* provided the basis for defining the core variable of an *anchored self*, described more fully in the following sections as a consequence of spirituality.

Summary of Defining Characteristics

In order to develop a grounded theory of how spirituality is experienced by adolescents and what role it plays in their dealing with difficult situations, it was important to first understand how they conceived its defining characteristics. Because grounded theory methodology is based on symbolic interactionism, these characteristics were a key component in understanding and relating their spirituality to their life experiences. As the categories of *felt awareness* and *wholeness* began to take a clearer shape as defining characteristics of spirituality, participants were able to

talk about how a stronger awareness of spirituality helped them to experience beneficial consequences, and then to talk about how those consequences played a role in the way they got through difficulty.

<div align="center">SECTION 2. FACILITATING CONDITIONS</div>

Facilitating conditions are circumstances, actions, or events that help a person to contemplate and become more aware of the spiritual dimension. These facilitators are categorized in this analysis as a *supportive environment*, *creating*, *connecting*, and *helping and being helped*. Some of these conditions can be deliberately sought out or created in a conscious pursuit of spirituality; others are more simply the circumstances in which the adolescents find themselves.

<div align="center">*Supportive Environment*</div>

The adolescent's environment includes both their natural surroundings and physical climate. Environmental influences can strongly affect the quality of one's experience of spirituality and/or the ease with which it can be perceived. These influences include natural surroundings found outdoors in nature, and a calm and quiet physical environment.

Natural Environment

Although some participants were neutral about the effects of nature, others said that being outdoors and surrounded by nature rather than man-made structures helped them to get in touch with their spirit. Being surrounded by such things as trees, grass, water, open sky, and animals, and being removed from urban noises, sights, and smells can have a calming and centering effect. These surroundings can be sought out for escape. As Carl, a 17-year-old boy, commented, "You can always look around

in nature. There's a lot of things in nature that are really beautiful and that kind of uplifts you for a while." Cari, a 15-year-old girl, indicated she could "just be outside and feel the breeze and like look at, see something just natural and, I don't know, that's when it [awareness of spirituality] clicks."

Physical Environment

Quiet surroundings and finding time alone is helpful in raising awareness of the spirit. In contrast, chaotic environments at school or at home made it more difficult to get in touch with or develop a stronger sense of spirituality. Examples included peers with loud, disruptive, and distracting behaviors at school or family members creating constant tensions, arguing, being intrusive, or picking on each other at home. Some participants found that being in a church setting facilitated an awareness of spirituality, where others made efforts to block out distractions, or when not possible, to physically remove themselves to a quieter environment. When faced with chaotic surroundings at school, putting on earphones to listen to music and to connect with herself provided an escape for one 10th-grader.

<center>*Creating*</center>

Participants described several ways of feeling more deeply connected to themselves and thus to their spirituality. Creative expression such as drawing, writing, or playing music activated some adolescents' awareness of self and spirituality. Creative outlets also helped them manage their environments toward this end. Playing an instrument and creating music were ways that some found to be aware of and express their spirituality. "Like when I play my mandolin or my guitar, I really feel like I'm connecting with myself in that way, and that's when I feel my spirit" (Cari).

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Another girl used her imagination to escape family chaos by writing, drawing, and creating herself as different *anime* characters. Finding what they like to do and doing those things well and having a sense of accomplishment and success in their creative efforts helped them define their meaning and purpose and thus contributed to a greater sense of spirituality.

<center>*Connecting*</center>

Connecting means being conscious of the presence of and knowing and interacting with another. This could also apply to connecting to oneself. Participants described connecting on three different levels: to oneself, to others who were a positive and supporting influence, and to God.

Connecting with Self.

Participants said that one way to increase their awareness of their spirit was to connect with themselves ("connecting with myself . . . feeling a bond with myself" [Cari]). Some connected with themselves through creative activities, as described by Cari above, and others found time to be alone or to mentally withdraw from stressful situations. For Felicity, she connected with her spirit "pretty much any time anything is silent and I have to think to myself or I have to talk to myself."

Connecting to God

Participants with Christian religious beliefs saw the connection to God as a primary and necessary prerequisite to their awareness of spirituality. For example, the strength of spirit may be determined by "how connected to God I feel and it's how much I feel He's a part of my life. . . . Your connection to God helps you know your spirit" (Carl). In addition to meditation and having quiet time, they also sought this

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connection through practices such as communicating and being alone with God, solitary and corporate prayer, church attendance, and religious practices.

Connecting to Others

A loving and calm family life provided an atmosphere more conducive to accessing and developing the spiritual dimension. Carl attributed his deeper spiritual experiences to the caring relations among his family members that created a home environment where they enjoyed being with each other and where he felt safe. Cari said that because she has a peaceful and loving home environment where she knows her parents care for her, she can retreat and regroup after a stressful day at school.

A supportive social network includes ones' peers and the types of interactions one has with them on a regular basis. Positive peers can be a supportive influence, and events and feedback from others can make awareness of the spirit either stronger or weaker. For instance, compliments and positive feedback from others can be uplifting and "raise the spirit," whereas negative feedback can be diminishing.

> If they say something mean to you or criticize you or something, you kind of shrink down into yourself. . . . I guess you could say kind of breaks off a little piece of your spirit, you know, puts it somewhere and you just, it shrinks and it bottles up inside you. (Dina)

A supportive social network can be actively sought out or constructed through deliberate selection of peers. Some participants made efforts to connect with another person, either a peer or an adult, who had a positive influence ("try to find people I connect easily with" [Beth]). Nearly all participants agreed that surrounding

themselves with positive peer role models helped them. "You can hang around with the wrong crowd and people affect you. . . . People just influence you" (Brian).

Positive peers did not necessarily mean that the peer was not experiencing their own difficulties, such as depression, but they were peers who cared for them, were supportive, and also shared their intent to try and stay out of trouble. One girl attributed her connections to positive and encouraging adult role models with helping her stay within safe bounds and away from destructive influences like drugs and other risky behaviors. Deliberately seeking out positive peer and adult role models helped them counteract some of the influences of more negative peers. Others also cited the support of adults such as parents, teachers, and youth group leaders.

Helping and Being Helped

All participants said that helping others, positive rather than negative behaviors, and being kind to others directly affected their spirit. They described a positive relationship between their awareness of spirituality and helping others. As Beth explained, "you do something bad, your soul becomes darker or you get like bad chi or bad energy. If you do something good, your soul will become lighter. . . . It makes your heart or your soul lighter." One girl (Dina) said that when she had done something bad and her spirit "shrinks down," she could reverse it by doing something good for someone. Another found that acting as a mediator to help her friends through conflicts gave her a stronger awareness of her spirituality.

Adolescents described being helped by others through both proactively seeking positive peers and role models, and being the more passive recipient of help from others who are making an effort to reach out to them. In the latter process, the

one in need of a helping connection is uplifted by someone else with a stronger spirit. One girl described a period of depression that she likened to a weaker spirit, recalling that "my mom started to help me and do different things with me and I started to notice that I started to become more alive again. And like, I started to have emotion again" (Dina). Brian, a 12th-grader, noted that when you "hang around with good people then they help you out." Danny also thought that friends with a greater sense of spirituality would be more likely to lend him a helping hand.

Being helped by others can happen several ways. Cari described how "having someone to talk to . . . and hearing their words of wisdom" helped her work her way out of a period of depression. Dina saw a similar way of being helped by "listening to people who you think . . . who are, you know you can just see they're in a better situation than you are and listening to them and kind of do what they do." Several explained that the benefit of being around others who are positive and helpful was that they gave them a different perspective on a difficult situation or imparted confidence in their ability to deal with the situation. Participants described a transmission of positive energy through connecting with other people who have a strong spirit and who want to help. That energy then strengthens one's own spirituality.

> I think you can definitely even just feel the power coming from them. . . . If you think about it later in your mind you can almost see a glowing light coming . . . like the positive energy is radiating from them and they're more upright. I think when there's a really positive person around you who's always trying to look at the best of things, you know, they'll take the bad but they're going to try and

make everything better and they're not going to go like 'oh, woe is me' and stuff

like that. (Dina)

Participants described what it would be like for those who have not had any

experience of the helping aspect of spirituality either in themselves or in others.

They've never seen anything different, they've never known . . . any person

who's ever been able to conquer that [inability to cope with difficulty].

They've seen others' spirits just shrivel up and die and I think that's the only

way they know it. They don't know how to bring themselves back up and out

of that. (Dina)

Therefore, when faced with working through a hard situation, they had no model of

successful coping. Some explained this through drawn stick figures, but none of the

examples were based directly on themselves.

Summary of Facilitating Conditions

Factors that contribute to a stronger awareness of spirituality are found within

oneself through creative outlets, and between oneself and others through a sense of

connecting to self, others, or God, being helped, and helping others. Factors outside

oneself, such as quiet surroundings, natural environments, and supportive and calm

social atmospheres support and strengthen the ability to sense the spiritual dimension.

Some factors that increase awareness and experience of spirituality are in turn

reinforced by the consequences of that awareness, to be explained further in the

following sections.

SECTION 3. CONSEQUENCES

Consequences of a stronger awareness of spirituality are the changes that occur in thoughts, feelings and actions in relation to self, others, and circumstances. These consequences were categorized as *perspective*, *positive behaviors*, *relating to others*, and *an anchored self.* Participants described these consequences as the differences that spirituality makes in them, which they clarified at times by contrasting what they would be like in the absence of or with a weaker sense of spirituality.

Perspective

A stronger awareness of spirituality commonly produced a change in perspective, or the lens through which participants viewed life. This lens allowed them to see events in a positive rather than a negative light, which changed the way they thought about and reacted to them. A positive perspective produced a sense of optimism, hope for a positive outcome either immediately or in the future, and a sense of safety. Safety was noted particularly by participants who had a belief in God. Perspective, or "how you look at things . . . at life" (Brian, Beth), determines how well you get through it. The properties of optimism, hope, and safety are interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

Optimism

A common change participants ascribed to spirituality was a more positive worldview that helps to broaden their mind and not be limited to only what is immediately apparent. They then can approach difficulty with more expectation of a positive outcome. This is congruent with the definition of optimism as "an

inclination to put the most favorable construction upon actions and events or to anticipate the best possible outcome" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, accessed 12/1/05). Thoughts that reflect a positive attitude and an optimistic perspective also positively affect feelings. Because of the integrating property of *wholeness*, more positive thoughts and feelings contribute in turn to strengthening the spirit. The reverse is also true, in that a weaker awareness of spirituality is associated with pessimism, which serves to weaken it further.

> Any little thing is going to be like you're going to just turn it around to a completely negative thought, and you're just going to keep on shrinking inside of yourself because you can't really think of a positive outlook. But if you know, I guess you could say your spirit is real bright and out there, then your mind is also more able to think outside the box and be able to just, you know, not always say the glass is half empty. . . . It probably has a lot to do with optimism and negativity. (Dina)

Hope

Similar to but not identical to optimism, hope was another property of a changed perspective. When participants talked about hope as an outcome of a stronger awareness of spirituality, it was consistent with the dictionary definition of an ability to "desire with expectation of obtainment" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, accessed 12/1/05). Hope is a necessary part of coping successfully with difficulty because it allows one to see beyond the moment to a future positive outcome. Anne noted that "hope and my spirit is the part of the connection that connects with God. Because . . . it gives me a lot of hope to know that I always have

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someone watching over me." It will "give you like the confidence and the strength to think that 'I can make it through this, I'm going to do good, times are going to change'" (Eli). This was expressed by Carl's faith belief as:

> If you have a strong and good spirit you're really going to know that even if life brings you trouble that there's things outside of you that are really going to help you through and . . . that . . . you'll eventually get through and it will be for the better. (Carl)

Safety

Safety, another property of a changed perspective, is the idea that a situation is manageable and that one can act without being harmed. For Christian participants, it means that their circumstances are ultimately under the control of a benevolent and omnipotent God who accepts, cares for, and protects them. It makes them less fearful of hardship to know that they have help from a Higher Power outside themselves to overcome hardships. This provides a sense of calm and confidence in dealing with difficulty, "where you just feel safe not because of anything you do but something that something beyond you [God] did" (Carl). There was also safety in being able to retreat within oneself, to one's "last and most secret sanctuary" (Beth) and to trust oneself to handle situations. This sense of safety is directly related to the consequence of having an *anchored self*, as defined further in this section.

Optimism, hope, and safety result in a person being less sensitive to the negative around them, which in turn helps them not to react to negativity. Brian noted that negative influences or feedback from others could be mediated by the way he looked at things and the ability to "just let things go." Optimism, hope, and safety

were also important precursors to confidence, which in turn helped them deal proactively with difficulty and also to reach out to others. Carl contrasted this process with that of a weaker awareness of spirit:

> If your spirit's weak, a lot of the times you're much more pessimistic and you just don't see the brighter side of things. You don't know that confidence that you'll be safe and so . . . you're not as caring for others because you're just looking out for yourself to make sure you get by, and you . . . worry and stress a lot more. (Carl)

Positive Behaviors

A stronger awareness of spirituality results in positive behaviors both toward others and for one's own benefit. The Christian participants ascribed much of their positive behavior to their connection to God, but participants agreed that it was a consequence of spirituality. Positive behaviors included helping others and showing them kindness, making efforts to not harm them, having more concern for others, taking responsibility to attend to such things as completing chores or homework, and avoiding negative behaviors. For Anne, positive behaviors included "when I help my friends with mediating" (Anne), and for Carl, they included choices to "try to help others out, try to not do anything that will get you in trouble or harm others. . . . more positive actions, and…staying out of trouble and stuff like that" (Carl).

Several factors associated with a stronger awareness of spirituality contributed to having positive behaviors. These include the ability to avoid negative influences from peers and to think through a situation rather than act on impulse. They also include a greater ability to resist temptations. Surrounding themselves with positive peers decreases

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the chance of being tempted into trouble. The spirit not only helped to overcome the temptation to do something bad, and it also provided an inspiration to do something good. Another contributor to positive behaviors was being responsive to the guidance of one's conscience. Strength of conscience was an important determinant is allowing oneself to be led, directed, or guided toward more positive behaviors. There were definite and immediate negative consequences for not responding to the promptings of one's conscience, defined further in the section on the basic psychosocial process.

Relating to Others

With a stronger awareness of spirituality, participants reported a difference in their relations to others. They found it easier to relate to, get along with, and be nicer to others because they could be more sensitive and have greater empathy for them. Anne thought that it broadened her thoughts and feelings, heightened her awareness of others' needs, and made her both appreciate and want to take care of them. Others shared similar experiences.

> When it's strong you tend to get through things better. Get along with others a lot better, for me at least. . . . Try to be nice towards family, get along, not fight with them. . . . Try to get along with others and not backtalk them at all. (Brian)

> When I know myself better, I can relate to others and care more for them. Knowing about how things make me feel, like, I can think about how it makes me feel and relate to them, so I can ask them if they're ok or what's going on. (Cari)

So if you have a strong feeling of your spirit you can really, you can be more

attuned with other spiritual forces. . . . You're generally a lot more empathetic,

sympathetic . . . and you're not really suspicious of people and you're really

trusting and caring. (Carl)

In contrast, when participants were less aware of their spirituality, they were less

likely to care as much for others, more apt to have more trouble getting along with them,

or to withdraw in a negative way (e.g., isolate and avoid) rather than a positive way (e.g.,

re-center themselves and regroup). Carl described the difference in relating to others as

being less caring "because you're just looking out for yourself to make sure you get by."

He explained this further:

It's a lot harder to relate to others. Because you're too busy worrying about

yourself to care about their problems. I mean, you might go for them because you

need help because you don't feel like you can do it on your own, you don't have

help. But … [R – "You would go to others if you thought they might be able to

help you?"] Yeah. [R – "But otherwise?"] I don't think you would care as much.

(Carl)

Anchored Self

During the fifth interview, a core variable began to emerge more definitely

from the participant's reference to the soul and inner self as being a person's "last

and most secret sanctuary" (Beth), or a place to withdraw to safety. This core variable

was initially categorized as 'self' in earlier interviews, and further sampling for its

properties produced what came to be labeled an *anchored self*. When participants

were more aware of their spirituality, the term 'anchored' refers to their descriptions

of their inner self remaining intact and protected as they found their way through difficulty. This variable was identified as core because of its frequent recurrence and ability to link other categories and explain variations in the emerging basic social psychological process (BSPP). These are necessary characteristics for a variable or category to be considered a core in a biopsychosocial process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Hutchinson & Wilson, 2001).

Additional interviews attempted to explore in more detail an *anchored self* as a core variable, and to fill out its properties, its relationships with other categories, and its place in the processes of the emerging theory. These properties were identified as participants talked about how they felt and thought about themselves as a consequence of a stronger sense of spirituality, and how this affected the processes they used to get through difficulty. The sixth participant used the term "grounded" to describe her state of self, and the seventh used the term "stabilized," but those concepts were very similar and overlapping as they described them. The term *anchored* was later chosen by the researcher because it has a slightly broader meaning that more appropriately fits the role of self in relation to spirituality and life experiences and in the phases of *finding safe passage*. It also incorporated the variable concepts and terms used by the participants themselves. In addition to preventing the self from being damaged by the storms of difficult situations, the state of being anchored implies being reliably supported or held securely in place, and also being a source of reassurance to oneself. To continue the nautical analogy, one can dock safely within oneself without being blown around in storms. Properties of an

anchored self are self-knowledge, self-esteem, self-acceptance, self-confidence, and independence.

Self-knowledge

Participants relayed thoughts about themselves that matched the dictionary definition of self-knowledge as the "knowledge or understanding of one's own capabilities, character, feelings, or motivations" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2005, accessed 2/05/06). They also described having a clear sense of identity, or who they were as a person. Knowing oneself is directly linked to a sense of one's spirituality. For example, "if you're sensing it [spirituality] strongly, you'd have a real clear view of who you were" (Carl), because "your spirit kind of defines who you are" (Elise), therefore "when you know your spirit, you know yourself . . . when you know yourself, you can stabilize and . . . be able to just keep on going" (Dina).

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is having a high regard for oneself and considering oneself to be of value and worthy of respect. As Danny put it, if a person has a stronger sense of spirituality, "they think good about themselves." When asked who he thought he was as a person, Frank replied "I know I'm a good kid, like I don't do bad stuff or anything." When asked to relate his sense of spirit to his sense of self, Eli used the phrase "carrying oneself high" in relating his sense of self to a stronger awareness of his spiritual dimension. For instance, "people will carry themselves like high, they value themselves. And there's other people who don't really value themselves and think like no one cares about them" (Eli).

Self-acceptance

Self-acceptance means considering oneself adequate and acceptable as they are, without any expectations of perfection. Beth said it's like "they're thinking within themselves, 'I'm fine the way I am'." A benefit of self-acceptance is less pressure to act outside what is in one's nature. Cari's thought about this was "I don't have to pretend to be someone I'm not . . . just feeling at peace with myself and knowing that I'm ok with how I am." Self-acceptance also has the benefit of being more accepting of others or circumstances. For instance, "when people know themselves and what they're about, they're so much more content with themselves able to see the world around them and take it for what it is" (Dina).

For the participants with Christian faith beliefs, self-acceptance was tied to the belief that they are acceptable to God as they are. As Aaron noted, "I just act the same because God would want you to be yourself . . . so I just act like myself." Self-acceptance lends the ability to forgive oneself of known flaws without any damage to self-esteem. Frank explained this as "sometimes I can get disappointed in myself if I've messed up, but later on I can forgive myself and ask God for forgiveness."

Self-confidence

Self-confidence means to be certain of oneself and one's ability to competently interpret and deal with a situation. Self-confidence is manifested in numerous ways in the process of *finding safe passage*. For instance, a stronger sense of spirituality leads to greater self-confidence in knowing oneself (e.g.,. it "gives me more confidence in like who I am"[Eli and Frank]) and in one's ability to get through difficulty. For example, "if you carry yourself up high, you get through things with confidence . . . but if you're

carrying yourself low . . . you won't really have hardly . . . any confidence, so you'll probably do poorly and have to struggle for a lot of things" (Eli). Carl related the self-confidence of a stronger spirituality to the relationship with God, in that "you feel a lot more confident and you feel a lot stronger and less like worried about things . . . because you can know you'll be safe".

Participants' descriptions of a sense of security, another aspect of self-confidence, were consistent with a definition of security as "freedom from fear or anxiety" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2005, accessed 2/10/06). When a person is *anchored* within themselves, they feel more secure in multiple aspects of their lives, such as "thinking about myself, secure about my emotions, my relationships with people, my ability to do things" (Cari).

Independence

Another property of an anchored self is independence. Participants said that a greater awareness of their spirituality strengthened their ability to act in accordance with their own conscience, without feeling pressure to betray it even if it conflicted with the opinions or expectations of others. They discussed how a stronger awareness of spirituality enabled them to be their own persons, free to express themselves without undue influence from peers. These descriptions are congruent with the definition of independence as "not subject to control by others, not affiliated with a larger controlling unit, not requiring or relying on something else, and not looking to others for one's opinions or for guidance in conduct" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2005, accessed 2/10/06). Beth described it as:

I don't really care what other people think I look like . . . don't care what anybody else thinks, I'm going to dress and do whatever I want and be unique . . . not trying to follow a certain way of things, but doing your own thing the way you want to. (Beth)

Independence may also be thought of as a consequence of the preceding properties, in that self-knowledge, self-esteem, self-acceptance, and self-confidence free a person from the need to conform and allow them to be their unique and individual self.

The *anchored self* allows a person to avoid acting on impulse, to be connected to oneself so that thoughts arising from one's inner self, or conscience, can be more clearly heard. It is a place to safely retreat in the midst of chaos, to regroup and think through situations, to protect the self from negative influences, and to draw on inner resources. It provides courage to step to the beat of one's inner drummer rather than the band playing loudly around oneself. While Beth referred to it as a sanctuary or place of safety, Elise used the analogy of a bedroom as self. She said that an *anchored self* is "when you have your bedroom and you like the way it is and you're fine with it," whereas an *unanchored self* would be "like when you hate your bedroom and you can't stand being in there, that you don't have a place to go because you hate that place."

For the Christian participants, their sense of an *anchored self* was determined directly by their identification with and relation to God. They based their identity on the health of this relationship and when they sought sanctuary within themselves, God was part of the internal interaction and source of safety rather than just themselves alone.

Summary of Consequences

Consequences of a stronger sense of the spiritual dimension are felt internally and also observed in external actions. Internal consequences include changes in the perspective one has on life and circumstances. When participants felt less awareness of their spirituality, they also felt out of touch with or disconnected with themselves, and found it harder to relate to people, see beyond themselves, withstand negative influences, protect themselves from others' unkindness, and make it through difficulty with their sense of self intact. A stronger awareness of spirituality was associated with a changed perspective that enabled participants to approach life with an optimistic attitude, to hope for the best outcomes, and to have a sense of safety that allowed more freedom to explore choices as they faced difficulty. Other internal consequences include a sense of an *anchored self*, and the properties of an *anchored self* determine many of the ways that one negotiates difficulties. Consequences of spirituality that are evident in relations with others are observable through caring responses and less conflict. Other observable consequences included more positive, pro-social behavior patterns and less negative or risky behaviors.

SECTION 4. RELATIONSHIP TO GOD AS AN INTERVENING CONDITION

Eight participants described a belief in and relationship with a Higher Power that affects the depth, quality, or context of their experience of spirituality. For these adolescents, God was their Higher Power and their Creator who related to them on a personal level, and was inextricable from their spirit. "[God] is everything to your spirit, to me. Because without God, to me there is nothing, and without God we would not be here and this world, to me, is just . . . a place" (Brian). Although all

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eight adolescents were active to varying degrees in the religious practices and activities of their churches, they were unanimous in asserting that religion itself is not essential to the experience of spirituality. Carl noted that "religion seems to be more of like doctrines and rules and regulations that man has set up, like structured type things," and although religion may "affect your spirit but it's . . . not your spirit. . . . It just sways your beliefs and kind of how you feel about different things . . . it affects how you act but not who you are" (Anne).

The Christian participants' personal relationship with God is the central reference by which they describe the role of spirituality in their lives, and it shapes many aspects of that role. Their beliefs about God are the foundation of their beliefs about themselves: "I see your spirit as you connected with something else [God], and something else is what you come from" (Anne), and as such is the primary intervening condition affecting how their spirituality is experienced and lived out.

The defining characteristics of *felt awareness* and *wholeness* are both influenced by some aspect of these participants' relationship with God. A central tenet of their beliefs is that God protects and cares for them, and this in turn provides a sense of confidence in their actions and security in themselves and their identity. Frank reports that connecting with God through quiet time and worship gives him "like an overall general good feeling about yourself. . . . I'm looking to God for confidence and for answers, and the only way to talk to God and to connect to God is through your spirit." Beliefs in a benevolent God were expressed as "you have protection, you have believing that God will be there for you" (Brian), "I know that

He's our God, He wouldn't hurt us" (Aaron), and that He is "watching over us" (Anne).

As their Higher Power, God is an integral part of the strategies they use to *find safe passage*, to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. He is seen as a source of help, inner strength, and safety when they are faced with difficulty, and they seek Him for the experience of being cared for, for confidence, comfort, guidance, courage, meaning, and answers. Aaron's thoughts were representative of others, in saying that "God could help you out through tough times. . . . You have a higher power person to go to." He is also seen as a guiding force, providing a sense of direction which Carl described as "that connection that will make me feel like I'm being pulled or pushed to do one thing or another." Adolescents also ascribe to God the sense of hope and optimism with which they face difficult situations. Carl described his experience of this as "sometimes even though you might be in a fearful situation you just have sudden . . . confidence and know that you're safe and seems more like that somebody's coming, like, told you that you'll be safe" (Carl).

In contrast, four of the twelve participants did not at the time of the interviews have a belief in any higher power outside themselves that they said impacted their spirituality. Of these four, two were raised with religious belief systems (one Buddhist and one Christian) that they have now rejected or are no longer certain about, but they are still exploring various belief systems. Some comments include:

I'm one of the people who really doesn't even really believe in religion. I think of religion as a moral issue, and so I don't have a higher spirit. It's more

of just like, I guess I'm my higher spirit. I'm going to deal with myself, this is me, nobody else is going to help me. (Dina)

I don't necessarily believe in a God. I mean, I've grown up around people who have been certain that there is a God, a Higher Power or something, but for me, I'm just kind of neutral, I guess. (Cari)

I don't really know about religions right now. A lot of things have happened in my life that have made me kind of wonder, you know, why . . . you know, is there really a God, you know . . . and I sort of started thinking about other religions that I've been studying in school, like Hinduism. (Beth)

These participants reported most of the same characteristics and consequences of spirituality, with the exception of a sense of safety and connectedness to God. The major difference was that their frame of reference was only to themselves rather than a higher power.

SUMMARY

Participants were able to consistently describe their conception of the spiritual dimension, what makes it stronger, what changes as a result, and what other factors intervene in the way it is experienced. Spirituality is experienced essentially as a *felt awareness* and as *wholeness*. *Felt awareness* means that the human spirit can be perceived through its physical and supernatural properties as well as its inner, dynamic, and constant presence. The fullest experience of spirituality brings together and integrates all the facets of a person, including the essence of who they are, into

one whole entity. Participants also gave examples of what helps them more fully and easily access or connect with their spiritual dimension. These include being in a supportive natural and physical environment, being reached out to and helped by other people when their awareness of spirituality was weaker and they were having problems, finding opportunities to help others, and being creative. Connecting with themselves, with supportive others, and for the Christian participants, with God was also important. Some of these facilitating conditions were reinforced by consequences of a stronger awareness of spirituality, and thus demonstrated the entire experience as circular rather than linear.

Greater awareness of their spiritual dimension resulted in changes within themselves that were employed in going through life with others and getting through difficult situations with them. These included viewing life from a more positive perspective, thus having more optimism, hope, and a sense of safety. Positive behaviors, helping others, and being able to relate positively to others also resulted from a stronger awareness of spirituality. The core variable, an *anchored self*, reflected a positive, capable, secure sense of self that could more readily negotiate difficult situations and deal with adversity. For some participants, a belief in God changed the nature of their experience of spirituality in a positive way, impacting the facilitating conditions, defining characteristics, and consequences. These consequences in turn strengthen the awareness of spirituality, in particular the characteristic of *wholeness,* demonstrating another example of the circular nature of the relationships. The elements of spirituality explained in this chapter are the strategies used to negotiate painful or conflicted interactions with

others. These strategies are part of the process of *finding safe passage*, which is the substantive theory to be explained next in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS (Part 2).

GROUNDED THEORY OF *FINDING SAFE PASSAGE*

The third question asked in this study was how adolescents' experiences of spirituality help them deal with difficult situations and challenges. The theory presented in this chapter illustrates this process, and is grounded in the adolescents' descriptions of their experiences. Each description was analyzed, compared with previous data, and interpreted cumulatively and concurrently as it was collected. The preceding chapter detailed the characteristics, facilitating and intervening conditions, and consequences of spirituality; these then provided the foundation on which this substantive theory was constructed. This chapter first describes the basic psychosocial problem faced by the adolescents in this study. It then summarizes the meaning of the basic psychosocial process of *finding safe passage,* followed by a detailed description of the phases of the process. The sequential phases used to satisfactorily work through the problem each have a series of strategies that involve some aspect of the spiritual dimension. The phases of the process of *finding safe passage* are presented with an explanation of the different points in which spirituality plays a role.

BASIC PSYCHOSOCIAL PROBLEM

Participants were asked open-ended questions about what kinds of difficulty they had faced, how they had managed it, and what role their spiritual dimension played. Responses indicated that a stronger sense of spirituality sensitized participants to recognize certain situations as problematic.

Some participants noted that, in a time when they had little awareness of spirituality, they would not be *finding safe passage* because they were likely to not even recognize certain negative situations as problems requiring resolution. Felicity said that during a time when she was very confused about herself and life in general, and not aware of her spirituality, she would not have even been frustrated with a negative situation because she would not have noticed it, so would not have even dealt with it as a problem. Others said that, in a similar state earlier in their lives, they too would have already been making rash decisions without seeing a problem. A stronger awareness of one's spirituality, then, appeared to be a necessary precursor to being engaged with others or attuned to right and wrong well enough to perceive certain situations as a problem.

The basic psychosocial problem described consistently by participants in this study was a difficult relationship or interaction with other people that caused conflict or pain. The most common relationship difficulty involved peers, but others included family situations as well. This difficulty was seen in situations that necessitated protecting themselves from others' negative opinions and hurtful comments, and adapting to circumstances over which they have no control. These feelings of conflict or emotional pain presented an immediate choice to either impulsively react in kind to relieve the pain, or try to manage the negative feelings in a way that let them still feel alright about themselves.

Another type of difficulty was encountered when relationships with others place two different basic needs in conflict. One is a need to belong and have relationships with others. As Cari explained it, "a lot of teenagers feel like they have to surround

themselves with everyone else just so they'll be accepted into a group, somewhere where they feel like they belong." The other need is to develop and maintain an independent and unique identity, a sense of self in the world. For Cari, "it's the whole kind of identity search, I guess, trying to find themselves." It is also trying to find one's own unique purpose and path that may be different from peers, or as Beth put it, "Trying to have some control over your life and follow where you think you should go and not where everyone else is going." This conflict was apparent in situations such as resisting temptation to engage in risky behaviors, making choices about positive or negative behaviors, relating to others, avoiding the influence of negative peers, resisting peer pressure, and needing to fit in and have a place to belong. Elise illustrated this conflict as the feeling of being put "on the spot" and "torn in half" such as when friends made bad decisions either because they did not care about the consequences or they just needed to go along with the crowd. Participants were then forced to make a decision that was usually difficult, about whether to be a passive observer or an active intervener. There were a variety of similar conflict-producing scenarios involving peer pressure or difficult family relations. The basic psychosocial problem described by adolescents and the choices it forces are illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Basic Psychosocial Problem of Difficult Relationships
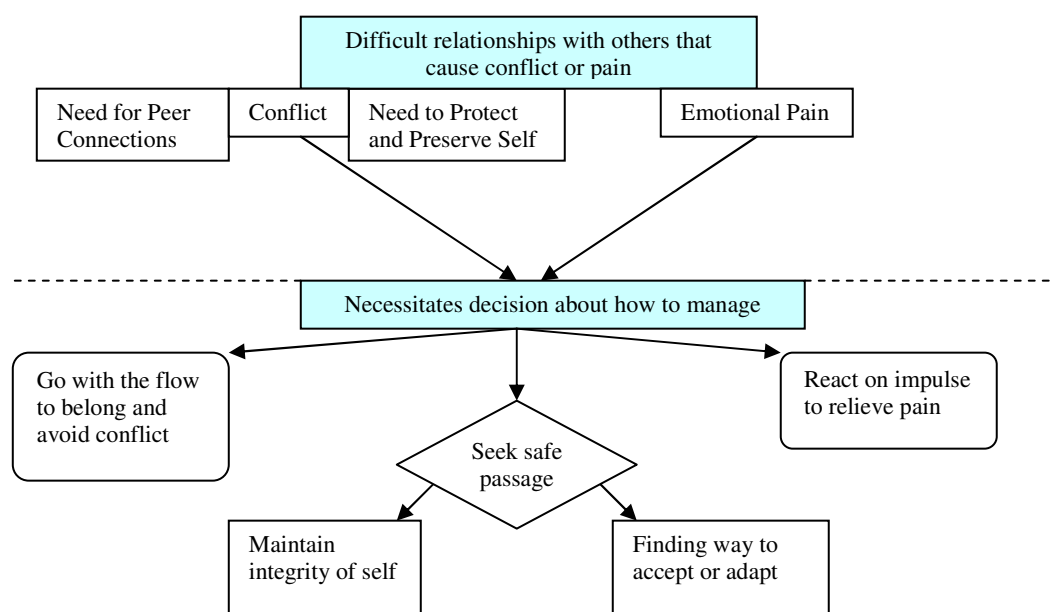
When participants had a stronger sense of *wholeness* and thus a strongly *anchored self* as defined in Chapter 4, they were less affected by others' opinions, less likely to be as affected by negative events, and found it easier to follow their own counsel and take their own path rather than surround themselves with others and be accepted into a group no matter what the circumstances, just to ensure they would be connected to peer group, to have a place of belonging among their peers. The conflict arose when the peer(s) in question were involved in negative rather than positive behaviors. The consequences of a stronger awareness of their spiritual dimension would more likely bring them to the decision to find a way safely through the situation in order not to harm others and to maintain a sense of integrity and protect themselves from losing any aspects of an *anchored self*. For example, the cost of disregarding what they knew to be the right behavior and going along with a peer's negative behaviors instead

would make them feel badly about themselves, feel dependent on peers' opinions, and lessen their confidence in themselves to make good decisions. Participants expressed this in a number of ways, such as a general "squeezing" (Dina) and feeling "unsettled" (Elise) or disappointed in themselves. They described self-recriminating thoughts such as "telling myself 'you're so stupid, you should have said otherwise' . . . kind of putting myself down" (Elise). With a more positive perspective that allowed them to see beyond the immediate situation, they had a greater ability to find more adaptive, positive ways to manage painful situations rather than responding impulsively. The process by which a stronger awareness of spirituality was used to resolve these conflicts is described in the next section.

BASIC PSYCHOSOCIAL PROCESS OF *FINDING SAFE PASSAGE*

The basic psychosocial process of finding safe passage helped participants to solve the psychosocial problems encountered in relationships with others. In exploring their experiences of spirituality through interviews, constant comparative analysis produced a substantive theory of *finding safe passage*. *Finding safe passage* involves navigating through (finding) a difficult situation in a manner that preserves one's positive identity and positive sense of self (i.e., safe), without compromising the ability to interact and relate in a meaningful way with others as one goes through one's daily life (passage). The term 'passage' refers to the way adolescents view themselves as being on a journey through challenges and difficulties and toward self-discovery. The participants frequently referred to "getting through" their life and various uncomfortable or painful situations, and this theory was built upon the exploration of how they "get through", what motivates them, what challenges they encounter, and what is the goal of

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"getting through." As noted in Chapter 4, spirituality is cited as the primary motivating or driving force that provides the energy to move through difficulty, and face the challenges to their sense of themselves as unique, valued, well-defined persons. Having a clear sense of meaning and purpose and a strongly *anchored self* helped them to withstand these challenges. The goal of *finding safe passage* is to discover ways of interacting, relating, and behaving that result in preservation of a healthy self. Helping or not harming others is necessary for a healthy self. The situations that activate this process are both short-term, in-the-moment interactions with a quick resolution, and longer-term or recurring situations (e.g., ongoing peer conflicts or chronic family dysfunction) that require repeating the process numerous times.

The process of *finding safe passage* is marked by three sequential phases. These phases are *turning inward*, *having an inner dialogue*, and *navigating the course*. Each phase is moved through with a sequence of steps, or strategies, that employ different aspects of spirituality. While these aspects are evident in the strategies that produce successful resolutions, some instances of a weaker sense of spirituality are also presented to illustrate the contrast. The process of *finding safe passage* is activated by discomfort related to some difficult aspect of a relationship with another person. Participants were very patient with this interviewer as they were asked to think in slow motion and describe in detail processes that in reality often occur in seconds or minutes, with few clear or conscious breaking points between them. The process of *finding safe passage,* as described by participants, is illustrated in Figure 4. Each phase of the process and the strategies used to *find safe passage,* as well as the aspects of spirituality employed in each strategy, are described in more detail in the following section.

Figure 4. Role of Spirituality in *Finding Safe Passage* Through Difficulty

Stronger Awareness of Spirituality

Facing difficult situation

Finding Safe Passage

Phases

Strategies

Turning inward	Having an inner dialogue	Navigating the course
Reining self in (A,B) Retreating (A, P) Listening (A)	Taking perspective (A,P,R) Gathering information (A,P, R) Debating (A, P, R) Trusting self with conclusion (A)	Accepting conclusions (A) Summoning resources (A) Embarking on the course (A, B, R) Staying on the course (A, P, B, R)

(Consequences of Spirituality)
 A-*Anchored self*
 P-Perspective
 B-Positive behaviors
 R-Relating to others

Consequences of Finding Safe Passage

Positive behaviors
Self is preserved
Others helped or not harmed

Turning Inward

The first phase of *finding safe passage* involves *turning inward*. Instead of reacting to a situation impulsively in order to bring immediate relief from discomfort, it is necessary to first pause, turn away from it, and pay attention to internal directions. The strategies involved in *turning inward* occur in a sequence of *reining self in*, *retreating to safety*, and then *listening*.

Reining Self In

Participants report that one consequence of spirituality is to have greater impulse control. This is evident in positive behaviors and in the properties of an anchored self such as having the self-confidence to be able to manage a situation and not be as sensitive to negative events or feedback. It allows a person not to react immediately based on the initial response to a situation, and helps them to step away from the situation, to stop themselves rather than just going with the flow. Anne credits her spirituality with helping to "keep you in check." Others described the initial response as walking away, turning around, "just drop it" (Brian), or "put them [temptations]aside real quick." (Carl)

Retreating

After reining themselves in and stepping away from an impulsive reaction, they then seek a safe place within themselves from which to consider their next move. Conditions that facilitate a sense of spirituality are called into play and the consequence of an *anchored self* provides a safe place to retreat where they feel secure about their thoughts and their ability to deal with the situation. Beth's way to retreat is to "withdraw into your own mind . . . within your own self . . . your last and most secret

sanctuary" (Beth), and Felicity will just go "sit with myself" in order escape a negative environment, to consider the situation, and to regroup. Cari used music to retreat within herself:

> At school a lot of times if I find myself in a situation that I'm not comfortable with I'll just get out my Ipod and start listening to some music . . . something that makes me, that takes my mind off of what's going on around me . . . and I can focus on how I'm feeling and how the music makes me feel, as opposed to something bad that's happening around me that's stressful.

They may physically remove themselves from a chaotic situation to do things that refocus and calm them, such as having quiet times, reading the Bible, praying, or meditating. Others connect with themselves through nature or creative endeavors such as music, writing, and art. For the Christian participants, seeking a connection with themselves was simultaneous with seeking a connection with God, who they see as "a higher person to go to" (Aaron) with whom they have an assurance of safety.

Listening

Once they have withdrawn to a safe place where they can connect with themselves and/or God, this in turn allows them to listen for what is coming from their spirit because "it [spirit] will give you ideas how to get through the trouble you're having" (Dina). This is the point at which they can be receptive to the inner voice, conscience, "shoulder angel" (Frank), or "that back feeling inside of you which would be like your spirit just like telling you what to do and . . . almost a guide" (Eli). A stronger awareness of spirituality allows them to be more attuned, receptive, and sensitive to this

inner direction on how to get through a situation. They try to listen to what comes from the spiritual dimension:

[The] spirit could be like a guide showing you what you think you can do or what you can't do. It could be energy . . . sometimes acts like a conscience, telling you what is right or wrong . . . your soul would be there to guide you in what appears to be the right path. (Beth)

When Elise is on the verge of doing something that she knows is wrong, she listens to:

the little voice inside your head . . . that kind of prompts you to do what you do. . . You know how they always have that angel and devil on either side [points to shoulders]? It's like the angel saying 'ok, you can't do this, this is wrong.'

Felicity forces herself to "listen to the silence . . . to all those things that you hear that you know can't be you . . . to things that will come to me that I know is not me," paying attention to the feelings she gets about things and to the things other people say that she senses are from God. As Carl put it, "The connection to God, it's really that connection that will make me feel like I'm being pulled or pushed to do one thing or another." Knowing themselves also helps them to pay attention to how things make them feel.

If they hear or sense some direction or advice from within themselves but do not heed it, that is followed by negative consequences within their spirit. Anne notes that "it would be a two-way relationship because with the spirit affecting your thoughts and your feelings, if you reject some of the reasoning that it [spirit] gives you, then it's also affecting your spirit." These consequences can be a milder "little nagging feeling" (Elise) to a "shrinking down into yourself" (Dina).

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When I don't listen to my conscience and I do something wrong anyways, I notice that like my insides kind of hurt. Like my heart kind of hurts and I just feel like this squeezing. It's nothing physically's [wrong]with me, it's more just this feeling of you know, a breaking down. (Dina)

Having an Inner Dialogue

Once a person has turned inward, away from a situation, and has been receptive to directions from within themselves, they can take that inner council into the next phase and enter into an *inner dialogue.* An *anchored self* allows a person to have more confidence in themselves and thus to feel more secure in thinking about themselves, their emotions, their relationships with people, and their ability to do things well. The phase of thinking through a situation via an *inner dialogue* involves *taking perspective* and *gathering information* about a situation, *debating* various aspects of it, and *trusting* one's thought processes and judgments. As Anne says, this can be a complex process:

Your thoughts are going to be more elaborate and more out there than your actions because people say 'think before you act' and so you have to think about all the good and the bad, and with the bad you have to think [about] that, instead of acting on it.

Taking Perspective

An important consequence of spirituality is the more optimistic view one gains on negative situations and the hopefulness felt when considering possible decisions. The strategy of *taking perspective* involves deliberately evaluating the situation through a more optimistic worldview, allowing them then to be conscious of a more positive perspective. When there is an expectation of an ultimate positive outcome, there is less

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need for a guarantee of an immediate resolution if a longer-term solution would be better. The consequence of an *anchored self* gives a person the confidence to know that they will be able to manage a situation successfully. Anne says that connecting to God helps with reminding herself that "there's good going to come out of this somehow, even if I don't think it [at the moment]." Her belief in God reminds her of her purpose, which gives her hope "that bad things that come will go because I know that the Higher Power just letting them happen won't do anything that I can't handle." The hope she derives from the connection to God helps her think through her decisions because it gives her "a lot of hope that I know that I always have someone watching over me and that I'll always have something or someone loving me." It helps Eli to remind himself that "I can make it through this, I'm going to do good, times are going to change." It is helpful to approach problems with an optimistic perspective, to focus on the positive in the situation and in other people, and to think that not everything is going to be bad, but something good can come of bad situations.

> I always try to tell myself that time always moves on, I'm not going to be stuck in one instance for the rest of my life. Because time's always going to move on whether you want it to or not . . . so I just try to keep that in mind, that things can always get better, whether we see it presently or not. (Cari)

> Just the way you look at things. You can either look at the bad or you can look towards the good. . . . I don't like school, just trying to get through, but . . . just the way you look at it . . . [is] how you get through it. (Brian)

You're really going to know that even if life brings you trouble that there's things outside of you that are really going to help you through and you know that you can get . . . you'll eventually get through and it will be for the better and so you won't be as fearful when you know you can overcome it. (Carl)

Gathering Information

Another strategy in the phase of *having an inner dialogue* is to gather any relevant information that will help in choosing a safer course. *Gathering information* includes getting others' input and assessing all aspects of a situation. Participants sought out advice from others and listened to what they had to offer in a situation. One benefit of surrounding themselves with positive others is that it allowed them to be open to friends' and loved ones' ideas and input. It also allowed them to objectively assess and consider decisions that have already been made for them by others who care for them (e.g., parents). For example, Felicity was able to consider all the valid reasons for decisions that had been made about custody issues that were painful for her. Anne describes how relevant the constant property of her spiritual awareness was in this process, as she went back to things she learned from her parents, considering that "everything that they taught you, everything that you learned, everything that was given to you is always still there" to be used in making decisions.

In assessing all aspects of a situation, having a broader mind and awareness and being able to "think outside the box" (Dina) helped in identifying multiple factors that impact a situation. These might include one's own role in creating a negative situation.

You talk to yourself trying to decide when something has happened, like if you talk and you think about what have you done wrong about the situation, which

way to go and how to act . . . trying to understand and trying to look at it a different way, trying to work it out. (Beth)

The self-knowledge of an *anchored self* helps with being more introspective and testing thoughts and feelings against reality. Frank's example was to look at when he was depressed and ask "what's going on with me, I have nothing to be sad over. I've got great family, friends, a God who loves me."

Debating

Relevant information is then taken into an internal discussion or debate. Various choices are weighed against what one hears the conscience saying, for example, "I can do this but it will be the wrong thing" (Beth). This activity involves awareness of conscience, thoughts, feelings, and for some, their religious beliefs.

It (spirit) will . . . change your reasoning and your thoughts. Kind of like when you're debating or something, it's like the other thing on the other side debating against you . . . like telling you all the things in your mind of why this is bad, or something like that. It gives you more reasoning. . . . It [spirit] gives you . . . more strength to think more like what your spirit's connecting to, which is God. (Anne)

An example Anne gave of using this strategy was listening to her spirit's reasoning that she still should love and honor her father despite his continually disappointing her. Others employed it in deciding whether to intervene or be passive in situations with acting out friends, or to reach out to others.

Consideration of different aspects of a difficult situation is important to the outcome of this internal debate. Self is one such aspect to consider. If one's spirit were

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weak or absent, one would be more likely to "think bad about theirself (sic)" (Danny) and be less deserving of anything good from the situation. However, an *anchored self* is a key component of thinking through a difficult situation to arrive at a safe resolution. Valuing self is vital to thinking through all the aspects of a situation that help one arrive at a safe place. Valuing self makes one think about what is best for oneself now and in the long term.

> I guess it makes me think about my health as a person, mentally and physically, emotionally, all of that. I don't want to harm myself so I . . . it helps me think about what's better for myself. Like if I was given a choice between two things, I would think about what would probably be better for me in the long run. Thinking through stuff instead of just saying or doing whatever on impulse. (Cari)

Consideration of others is another important aspect of this strategy. One consequence of spirituality is an increased sensitivity to others' needs and caring for their welfare. In this *inner dialogue*, this sensitivity helps one also consider others' welfare in the debate about resolving the problem. One with a weaker spirit might be less able to sense others' pain or discomfort or to care about it.

Considering the consequences of actions is a key aspect of this strategy. Knowing the short-term and long-term consequences of actions is an important factor in an internal debate over solutions. When looking at negative behavior, one would realize that it would feel good in the short term but be destructive later on. Substance abuse was mentioned frequently as a point of conflict arising from peer pressure, and the awareness of the longer-term consequences was an element in the internal debate

involved in getting through that pressure. The ability to have a longer-term perspective, to value oneself enough to want to avoid the negative consequences of a behavior like substance abuse, and to have the self-confidence to act in one's own behalf are consequences of a greater awareness of spirituality, evident by a more positive perspective and an anchored self. The issue of whether to have sex presented a similar conflict that required this strategy.

> You would also have the ability to think the way that you should, the way that thinking sex is wrong at this time and age, and that all the things that could happen, all the consequences that it's not adding up to what you get from it. (Anne)

Trusting Self with Conclusions

Having confidence in one's ability to draw conclusions and make decisions based on assessments is attributed to having an *anchored self*. It helps a person to believe in his/her assessments of situations because of knowing and being in touch with the inner self, so that one can know "in my heart I can do this, I think this is what I need to do, and a lot of things come within you like your ideas, your feelings that you have" (Beth). Eli said that valuing oneself was evident when you could "carry yourself up high" to get through things with confidence. Feeling confident about one's ideas conveys the idea that they are worthy of consideration from others, or as Dina put it, "I'm here, get over it." This is the point at which one trusts oneself to accept or reject various conclusions.

Navigating the Course

For adolescents with a stronger awareness of their spiritual dimension, the final phase of *navigating the course* comes after *turning inward* to think through the situation via an *inner dialogue*. *Trusting oneself with the conclusions* of the *inner dialogue* is necessary before the first strategy of *navigating the course* is undertaken. For someone with a weaker sense of spirituality, insecurity and a greater tendency to be impulsive would likely cause the preceding phases to be skipped and thus increase the likelihood of making a quick but bad decision. When the spirit is guiding behaviors and choices, the actions chosen are the end result of a more thoughtful and introspective internal process. Strategies employed in this phase of the process of *finding safe passage* are accepting the conclusions of an *inner dialogue* and *summoning the inner resources* needed to actually set out on the course.

Accepting the Conclusions

There is a conscious choice made at this point to either accept or reject the conclusions arrived at by thinking through the situation. That is, does the person decide to continue in the search to find what they believe is the *safe course* (i.e., accepting the conclusion about what is most right), or do they take a quick exit from the work of seeing it through? They may choose what they have judged to be the right thing with some reluctance if they are also being pulled strongly toward the easier choice, or if they are a little anxious because they know what following through with the more difficult choice will entail. This is a point in the process at which a person who is

feeling better about him/herself (i.e., anchored) will accept the 'right' conclusion, which in turn reinforces their good feelings about themselves.

Also at this point, if the need to be accepted by peers overrides the need to maintain the integrity of self, the choice may be made to not accept the conclusion even though they know it would be wrong. This choice would result in a feeling of being unsettled, as described earlier in the *listening* strategy as a result of not listening to the inner voice, and would keep the situation in a difficult place of being unresolved. In describing a situation where she was with friends who were going to be mean to another girl, Elise got to this point of the process and made the decision to reject her conclusion of what would be right even though she knew it was wrong. "I was kind of torn in half. Part of me was like, 'ok, you need to do this' [act on right action], and the other part was like, 'no, let them get away with it this time'." This brings about the feeling of being unsettled.

> Unsettled is then [pointing to the stick figure before it makes a bad decision, in the *inner dialogue* phase] and also like when you're halfway through the decision. I mean, you have the decision but there's always like a road that's there with the decision that you have to walk on to make your decision final, I guess is the way you could put it. (Elise)

Summoning Inner Resources

Participants relayed that there is sometimes more work involved in coping with conflicts and making the right choices than there is in just not dealing with them. For someone with a weaker awareness of spirituality, "if it's too hard for them they will give up . . . and stop trying" (Beth). Elise pointed out that the right choice

is often not the easiest one; it may be easier to be a passive observer than an active participant, as "it's easier to go with the crowd than to stand alone." She gave examples from physics to illustrate this, saying that going with the crowd rather than standing alone is like swimming against the current; picking someone up is like defying gravity but letting someone bring you down is like going with gravity. For these reasons, when the choice has been made to accept the 'right' thing, it is often necessary to summon inner resources to see it through. This is again where knowing oneself (i.e., being *anchored*) and accepting the world as it is allows them to keep on going. As Dina noted, the spirit keeps one "pushing on through" and growing, motivating one to continue striving to grapple with difficult situations and to do things that are necessary but not always pleasurable. Drawing on an *anchored self* helps to overcome the fear of making a difficult decision that may mean resisting peer pressure and risking not belonging. For the Christian participants, this is a point at which their connection to God and access to the resources to a Higher Power are especially called upon to move them along in the process.

Embarking on the Course

Another strategy necessary for *navigating the course* involves actually acting on the decisions that have been determined to be the right ones for resolving a difficult situation. To actually set out, or embark upon, the chosen course requires them to be able to resist temptation and negative influences. Adolescents face numerous temptations toward negative behaviors, some of which place their safety or well being at risk. Behavioral consequences of spirituality come into play to help them avoid or overcome these. An *anchored self*, a more positive perspective, and a resistance to

negative behaviors help them to ignore it or to just "walk away from it" (Frank). For Carl, it helps to:

> Not think about all the different temptations and stuff like that there are. . . . Like temptations . . . anything that can get you in trouble or wouldn't be good. If you think about them you could probably cast them aside.

Negative influences also make it harder to *embark on the right course*, but a stronger sense of spirituality also helps to withstand them or shrug them off, as noted earlier, by being less sensitive to them or affected by them and focusing on the positive. Frank and Elise also said that praying for help in resisting negative peers and not needing to belong with them helped them embark on the right course.

There are negative consequences to not *embarking on the right course* with the right decision. These are similar to those described under *listening* and *accepting the conclusion*. They include self-reproach, lower self-esteem and confidence, and being angry at oneself. For Dina, "It's kind of like 'why did I do that,' and I think that your spirit kind of shrinks when you do something that you know you shouldn't do." One can again feel 'unsettled' after not *embarking on the right course*. "But also like as I'm seeing the results [of making the wrong choice] . . . I'm unsettled going 'no, this isn't the way it should be', and I also can get angry at myself because of it" (Elise).

Staying on the Course

Staying on the course that one chooses to take through a difficult situation requires balancing what is best for oneself with what will at least not harm others. Consequences of spirituality such as relating to others, as evident in being sensitive to

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others' needs, finding ways to get along with others, and being empathetic help with this balancing. Successfully resolving a conflict does not mean finding what's best for oneself at others' expense. Harming others (e.g., taking revenge, encouraging them to continue in something negative just to stop them from pressuring you, or allowing oneself to 'blow up' at others to relieve stress) would simply create another difficult situation. Sometimes a more neutral action such as just walking away is necessary. Some ways participants use to find this balance include using creative ways to release bad feelings, such as expressing themselves through music, art, or writing, making a choice to change an attitude toward a difficult situation beyond one's control from negative to positive, delaying short-term gratification because of long-term consequences, or reaching out to others by helping them or persuading them to avoid negative behaviors. These all allow them to feel good about themselves also.

Being able to stay on the *course* through these positive actions in turn has the effect of strengthening the spirit by protecting the *wholeness* or integrity of self. Participants described a feeling of relief at having made the right decision, whether it was avoiding trouble or doing something good for themselves or someone else. They were also pleased with themselves and had their confidence reinforced for managing the next situation.

CONSEQUENCES OF FINDING SAFE PASSAGE

The goal of *finding safe passage* is to come through a situation without negative consequences. All of the consequences of a stronger awareness of spirituality as defined in Chapter 4 contribute to a greater resilience to withstand difficulty and come through it with the self intact. Resilience is defined as "an

ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2005, accessed 1/31/06). Resilience is increased by a positive perspective that helps one see past current adversity. It is also strengthened by factors that contribute to positive behaviors, such as avoiding negative peers and resisting temptations, as well as being able to relate to others and to be less sensitive to negative events. Factors such as less sensitivity to the negative and the ability to let things such as petty disagreements or negative comments go rather than respond or be drawn into them also contribute to resilience. All participants had experience with at least some aspects of resilience, but Dina captured it most comprehensively. She likened it to trying to "root into the ground" so as to not be blown astray by difficult circumstances. She said that without the spirit, you would not be able to live "because we wouldn't be able to take the hardships that life is going to throw at us no matter what."

> And so I definitely think that when you really know yourself you can stabilize and just take, just take the world for what it is and be able to just keep on going. . . . I think that it definitely does have something to do with being grounded. It's because when your spirit . . . when you know your spirit, you know yourself, I think definitely. And I know that when people really know themselves and know what they're about, they're so much more content with themselves so they're a lot more able to see the world around them and take it for what it is. . . . And a lot of people who I know who either, you know, just don't seem to have much of a spirit or uh, you know, are so confused and out of it, their own body, they're just like not even with

themselves, they can't handle any hardship. They just say 'it's not there, I don't see anything, this is my happy little world,' you know, 'don't get in my way.' . . . So I think that the spirit definitely, I think for everyone you have a different form of, you know . . . stabilization. So you know, one person might not be as stabilized as the other, but their spirits are still trying to root into the ground. So I think that when you get older, it's kind of like a tree. You keep on growing and your roots get farther and farther down into the ground. I kind of think of that as your spirit, it's you know, stabilizing more and more to prepare you for harder and harder things in life. So I think that when you get older, it's kind of like a tree. You keep on growing and your roots get farther and farther down into the ground. [R – "What would the ground be here in your analogy?"] Life . . . and just the world around you. It, you're just grounding yourself farther and farther so you can just take. . . . If there's a big windstorm, you won't get blown over. . . . You can bend and you can dodge, but you're not going to get thrown across the county. (Dina)

SUMMARY

The substantive theory of *finding safe passage* is based on constant comparison of progressive interviews with adolescents as they describe their experiences of spirituality. *Finding safe passage* was the process by which participants in this study employed different aspects of their spiritual dimension in finding satisfactory resolutions to difficult situations in their circumstances and their relationships with others. A core variable in the substantive theory of *finding safe*

passage is an *anchored self*, which is a consequence of a stronger awareness of one's spiritual dimension. An *anchored self* is integral to each of the phases of the process of *finding safe passage* through difficulty. These phases are *turning inward* to a place of comfort within themselves and then listening to inner directions, *having an inner dialogue* that involves thinking through all relevant aspects of a situation, and *navigating a course* toward a resolution that preserves and protects self without harming others. As shown in Figures 2 and 4, many of the consequences of this process in turn strengthen awareness of the spiritual dimension as well as reinforce its facilitating conditions. For instance, making the right choices for themselves, avoiding temptation and negative influences, and helping others strengthens the sense of spirituality and thus anchors the self more securely. The entire process of *finding safe passage* helps one be resilient to difficulty, and contributes to a greater sense of spirituality through these circular strengthening and reinforcing actions. These phases of *finding safe passage* may happen in a brief exchange or occur over time, but are repeated throughout the adolescent's life, and resilient responses may be strengthened with repetition.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Answers to the research questions posed for this study will be reviewed in this chapter. A summary of the study findings will be presented and then discussed within the context of the current literature to clarify how these findings add to the body of knowledge on spirituality. Limitations of this study are identified. Finally, the researcher presents conclusions and makes recommendations for future research, nursing education, and nursing practice.

STUDY SUMMARY

To answer the research questions, the researcher sought to discover what adolescents understand to be the defining characteristics of spirituality, how they experience it in their lives, and what its role is in their dealing with difficult life situations. Twelve adolescents between ages 13-17 years were recruited from church youth groups and the community. The adolescents provided answers to the research questions through individual semi-structured interviews that were conducted in their home or church. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed through constant comparisons with analyses of preceding interviews to discover the substantive theory of *finding safe passage*.

Symbolic interactionism describes the mechanisms whereby human beings learn about themselves and others through the meanings that events have for them, the ways they interpret them, and the symbols they use to communicate those meanings. Adolescents discover how they view themselves through interactions with others in their world, how they assign meaning and purpose to their life and

incorporate it into their identity. Despite the abstract nature of the spiritual dimension, the adolescents in this study illustrated and explained through their narratives how they interpret the meaning of spirituality through their interactions with others and through the meanings they assign it within themselves.

The ability to comprehend and communicate more abstract concepts is increased throughout adolescence, but most of the adolescents in this study had the same difficulty many adults would have in getting started with descriptions of their spirit. A useful strategy that was employed in the interviews was to ask them to describe what absence of spirit would be like, which seemed to help them open the door to discuss what its presence meant for them. Participants were also asked to talk about how both a stronger and a weaker sense of spirituality would be experienced and evident in their life. Although one boy did not see that his spirit made any difference, he went on to describe how his life was impacted by how his 'self' is doing, which he saw as indistinguishable from his spirit. Another boy said at the beginning of the interview that he did not know anything about the spiritual dimension or spirituality, but then described the differences he thought a strong awareness of spirituality would create in hypothetical persons. Each participant was able to relay the effect of their spirituality (or spirituality as self) on multiple aspects of their lives.

Once they began talking about it, most of the participants in this study were able to describe abstract concepts related to spirituality, and to give wonderfully imaginative and detailed descriptions of it in relation to themselves and to their relationships with others. They had a grasp of its effect on their thought patterns,

feelings, and problem-solving processes, and there did not appear to be major differences in the underlying processes used by both genders.

The overall findings of this study were that adolescents do have an understanding of what their spirit is to them and how it affects their life, and they believe it has a role in the way they experience and work through difficult situations. For the adolescents in this study, the defining characteristics of spirituality were a *felt awareness* and a sense of *wholeness*. The properties of *felt awareness* primarily described their conception of what their spirit was like, while the properties of *wholeness* were related to what it meant for them internally. When they were most aware of their spirituality, they tended to have a more hopeful and optimistic perspective and feeling of safety about their circumstances, were able to engage in more positive and less risky behaviors, relate to others in a more sensitive manner, and had a greater sense of an *anchored self*. The consequences of a stronger sense of spirituality, such as having a different perspective of optimism, hope, and safety, engaging in more positive behaviors, relating more sensitively to others, and having an *anchored self*, all contributed to resilience in facing difficulty.

These consequences were evident in the process these adolescents use in working through conflicted or painful interactions with others. The process of *finding safe passage* is how they negotiate a conflict between a need for belonging and being connected with a peer group even in a situation when the peers were negative, and a need to maintain a sense of self and how they respond to a painful situation in a manner that allows them to not harm others and to maintain a positive sense of themselves. This process is enacted in sequential phases of first *turning*

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inward, then *having an inner dialogue*, and then *navigating the course* that they believe will provide them *safe passage* through the situation. The consequences of a stronger sense of spirituality are evident in the steps of these phases. The findings answered the research questions posed at the beginning of this study. These questions asked: what are the defining characteristics of spirituality in adolescents, how is spirituality experienced in the lives of adolescents, and what is the role of spirituality in the basic psychosocial processes of dealing with difficult situations and challenges in adolescents' lives? The following section relates these findings to selected theory and research.

COMPARISONS WITH CURRENT RESEARCH AND RELEVANT THEORY

Findings of a qualitative approach to research are not generalized to other populations, but similar research concepts can be compared across theories and across research methodologies regardless of the nature of the data collection and analysis. There is not any current literature that reflects as a whole all aspects and sequences of this basic psychosocial process of *finding safe passage*. *Finding safe passage* was grounded in the unique experiences of the adolescents in this study. However, numerous research findings from larger and/or more diverse populations support this study's findings of how spirituality is conceived and experienced. Support is also found for relationships between the phases, strategies, and outcomes of the process of *finding safe passage*. This support suggests that the experiences of these adolescents may also be common to others that are different from them in various ways. The following section discusses how key aspects of 'what it is', 'how is it experienced', and 'how is it used' relate to current research and theory.

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What Are the Defining Characteristics of Spirituality?

The terms and concepts used by these participants to describe spirituality were much the same as those described by others of different ages, as cited in Chapters 1 and 2. Quantitative scales constructed from responses of college students and adults have items that are the same as those defined by this group, such as meaning and purpose in life and connectedness with a Higher Power (Ellison & Paloutzian, 1982; Hall and Edwards, 1996). The Adolescent Lifestyle Profile (Hendricks, Pender, & Murdaugh, 2001) also shares similarities such as praying, meditating, and receiving guidance from a Higher Power. Similar characteristics of spirituality described by these study participants and by the high school students used to construct the Smithline Spiritual Inventory for Teens were connection to oneself, promoting one's own well-being, a relationship with a Higher Power, compassion, and belief in spirituality distinct from religiosity (Smithline, 2000).

The characteristic of *wholeness* with its properties, essence of self and encompassing and integrated parts, was also reported to be a key element of spirituality for 12 gay and lesbian undergraduate college students (Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005). Participants in that study described how their spiritual experiences and identity of self interacted in a process of reconciliation with their sexual identity. Similarly for the adolescents in this study, identity is embedded within the essence of self. The college students in the Love et. al. study, like the adolescents is this study, cited a strong relationship with God or a Higher Power, self-efficacy, self-awareness, self-acceptance, and spirituality as a source of strength as important factors in reconciling the self identity with the gay or lesbian

identity. Other similarities cited as contributing to a reconciled identity were developing a reflective self-analysis and having successful experiences of working through challenges, conflicts, and difficulties related to spiritual and sexual identity.

The defining characteristic of *wholeness* found in this study is similar to Antonovsky's (1993) sense of coherence, which is thought to promote mental health and adaptive coping behaviors. Meaning, motivation, and the self-confidence of an *anchored self* were also noted by participants in this study as defining characteristics and consequences of spirituality. These were particularly true of the participants who relied on a belief in God as their resource in any type of trouble, so that they did not worry about facing anything they could not handle. These findings reflect two components of Antonovsky's sense of coherence, identified as meaningfulness and manageability. Meaningfulness referred to the belief that one can play a role in shaping one's life, which Antonovsky considered to be a primary motivating force in life. It also referred to the ability to identify what is important and worth doing. Manageability referred to a belief that one will be able to summon the resources to handle whatever hardship may be encountered. These components of a sense of coherence were also described in various contexts by this study's participants.

How Is Spirituality Experienced?

A stronger awareness of spirituality is present in everyday life, and its consequences are experienced by the individual as beneficial outcomes. These consequences described by the adolescents in this study (i.e., perspective, positive behaviors, relating to others, and an *anchored self*) are supported by numerous research findings, and a few examples are cited here. The facilitators, defining

characteristics, and consequences of spirituality as conceived by the group of adolescents in this study are not dissimilar to those described by adults, as discussed in Chapter 2. These include a sense of connectedness to God, self, and others, meaning and purpose in life, and greater sensitivity to others.

The descriptions of the white, lower to upper middle class, suburban adolescents in this study also coincide with some of the survival factors reported by suicidal Native American youth (Arato-Bolivar, 2005). Young adults in the Arato-Bolivar study were asked to recall factors from periods in their youth that helped them survive when they were at risk for suicide. Factors recalled by Arato-Bolivar's study sample that mirror those of this study's participants included support, connection and love from others, responsibility to others, cognitive shifts, avoiding negative environments, connecting to nature, self-acceptance, self-love, self-care, a sense of purpose, and making a difference. Spirituality was defined as a belief in God or a Creator or higher power greater than themselves. While these factors were not presented in the structure and order of a construct of spirituality as shown in Chapter 4, Figure 2, they point to similar strategies used by the adolescents in this study to manage difficulty.

This study's findings suggested that a connection to a supportive social network and to God through religious practices and beliefs were facilitating factors to a stronger sense of spirituality, and that an optimistic perspective was a consequence. These relationships were based on constant comparative analysis of participants' narratives and were not meant to establish statistical significance. However, Salsman, Brown, Brechting, and Carlson (2005) used quantitative

measures of similar aspects of these constructs to search for relationships to satisfaction with life and to psychological adjustment. Salzman's et. al. sample was 217 college undergraduates with an age range of 18-46 years and mean age of 20.2 years. Satisfaction with life was not explored in this present study, but psychological adjustment is a positive outcome and those findings will be discussed here. They identified relationships between similar constructs that showed social support and optimism to be mediators between religion and spirituality and psychological adjustment and satisfaction with life. Specifically, optimism mediated the relationship between a measure of religiousness and psychological distress. This study showed social support to be a facilitator and optimism to be one of several consequences of spirituality that contributed to resilience.

While Salsman's et. al. (2005) findings would appear on the surface to contradict the relationships found in this study, the quantitative measures they used for religion actually reflected motivation derived from religious beliefs and practices; motivation was categorized in this study as part of *wholeness* but was not explored in depth as to its origins. Social support, in the form of a supportive environment, was labeled as a facilitator of spirituality in this present study based on participants' replies to the question of what helped them to be aware of their spirit and what made it feel stronger. It is not clear whether these questions are really more related to the statistical term of mediating effect, and the conceptual relationships found in this present qualitative study do not directly translate to statistical terms. Salzman et. al. tested optimism as a concept separate from spirituality, whereas the present study indicated it was a consequence of spirituality.

However, this may reflect a different conceptual perspective rather than a fundamental contradiction between findings.

The consequences of spirituality found in this study, such as positive behavior, relating to others, and an *anchored self*, and the positive outcomes of *finding safe passage,* are similar to the concept of thriving, or healthy and successful development and the absence of problem behaviors. Using structural equation modeling, Dowling, Gestsdottir, Anderson, von Eye, Almerigi, and Lerner (2004) reported an influence of spirituality on thriving, both mediated by religion and alone, in 1000 youth ages 9-15 years. Two first order factors in spirituality were identified that were also described by the present study's participants. These were orientation to do good work and to help others. First order factors of religiosity that were also reported in the present study were impact of religious beliefs and role of a faith institution in one's life. Additional first order factors of thriving common to the present study were presence of a moral compass, future orientation/ path to a hopeful future, and search for a positive identity.

The ability to deal successfully with difficulty that was found in this study is supported by a large body of research related to resilience. For example, a sufficient quality and quantity of positive assets, defined as compensatory effects (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984), or adaptive resources (Masten, Burt, Roisman, Obradovic, Long, & Tellegen, 2004), can counteract the negative effects of adverse circumstances in a child's life. Longitudinal studies (Garmezy et al.,1984; Rutter, 1985 & 1999; & Werner, 1992 & 2005) described personality and other characteristics seen in resilient children that distinguish them from those who have

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responded negatively to risk factors. The characteristics they describe that were also shared by participants in this study included an ability to actively problem solve, an optimistic and positive perspective and ability to find meaning in life, achievement of autonomy, and a tendency to respond proactively.

Factors contributing to positive outcomes in the present study, such as perspective and positively relating to others, are also seen in the results of a qualitative study by Greene, Galambos, and Lee (2003). They found professional concurrence that personal attitude, spirituality/religion, and multilevel attachments serve to buffer life stress and contribute to coping and resilience. Associating spirituality with resilience, or positive outcomes in the face of adversity, is supported by Williams' (2004) qualitative study of the ways runaway and homeless youth coped with adversity. His study identified a pathway to greater resilience through belief in and connecting with a helping, accepting God, participating in religious practices, and having a meaning and purpose in life. These factors were also mirrored by the findings in this study.

Blum (1998) cited several protective factors associated with resilience that are also reported in this study's findings about spirituality. In addition to spirituality as a whole, he cited positive social skills, positive self-concept, higher self-esteem, connectedness with at least one parent, family structure and cohesion, sibling closeness, involvement in school and community, other caring adults besides parents, and a network of friends.

The construct of spirituality described in this study also reflects aspects of a developmental assets framework (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998; Scales, 1999). According to this framework, developmental assets contribute to healthy

development and positive outcomes, including caring and responsibility. The developmental assets framework parallels the risk and protective factors described in most resilience theories, but expands it for application to all youth, not only those exposed to adversity. The eight types of developmental assets outlined by Benson et. al. (1998) used by youth to protect themselves and to thrive include: external support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competence, and positive identity. In the present study, participants descriptions yielded 22 codes that are consistent with developmental assets across each of the eight asset types. Examples include a supportive social environment, morals and conscience, sense of safety, meaning and purpose, caring for others, belonging to a religious community, and a sense of identity found within an *anchored self*.

In addition to the instances noted above, the concept of an *anchored self* is supported at least in part by other findings that associate spiritual well-being with self-esteem, sense of self, and meaning, noted in Chapter 2 (Mallick and Watts, 1999; Mohler, 1996). It is also congruent with Erikson's (1968) developmental theory in which the developmental task of adolescence is the establishment of an identity, or a sense of self that is uniquely one's own. This may explain the conflict engendered by wanting to belong to a group of peers that may threaten one's sense of an *anchored self,* and why having an *anchored self* with a firm identity would allow them to resist the need to belong if there would be negative consequences.

What is the Role of Spirituality in Dealing with Difficulty?

In this study, adolescents' experiences of spirituality employed in the phases of *finding safe passage* were congruent with Genia's (1990) third stage of faith development, that of transitional faith, in which they are able to apprehend others' perspectives. It is also congruent with elements of Fowler's (1981) fourth Synthetic-Conventional stage that stresses a search for identity and the importance of interpersonal relationships, and in which the values of one's community are synthesized. Some participants experienced aspects of Fowler's fifth Individuative-Reflective stage, such as openness to other perspectives, questioning and testing one's traditional beliefs, and reflection about self and identity.

As illustrated by Figure 4 in Chapter 5, findings of this present study suggested that being helped and having a supportive environment facilitated a greater awareness of spirituality. This in turn promoted a more positive perspective and self-confidence, which contributed to resilience. Blum (1998) cited an internal locus of control as a component of resilience, and the present study's phases of *turning inward* and *having an inner dialogue* suggest this also. As shown by Figure 4 in Chapter 5, the middle phase of the process of *finding safe passage* is *having an inner dialogue*. A positive perspective and self-confidence are employed in this phase. The strongest support for this phase of the process of *finding safe passage* is reported in Aronowitz's (2005) substantive theory of 28 at-risk youth ages 16-21 years who used the process of *envisioning the future* to develop resilience to their adverse circumstances. She reported two categories of this process to be *feeling competent* and *elevating expectations*. The youth in Aronowitz's study cited having

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positive adults to model decision-making and possible life choices, to be someone to lean on and believe in and care about them contributed to *feeling competent*. Having someone to coach them with encouragement, support, and motivation helped them to elevate their expectations. These all led to a more positive future orientation and less risk behaviors, consistent with how participants in this study described the role of a positive perspective.

Aronowitz's (2005) finding that having positive adults as role models to help them and to model successful coping and life skills was also reported by participants in this study. Another finding from Aronowitz's study, that monitoring and support from someone who cared provided a sense of security and room to develop autonomy, is consistent with what participants in this study said about their connection to God giving them a sense of being cared for and valued and kept safe. Like Aronowitz's sample, those in this study also derived increased self-confidence from others' support and having experiences of handling situations competently.

Interrelationships between consequences of spirituality in this study are supported by other studies. For example, self-value and self-confidence that were identified as properties of an *anchored self* were also cited by some participants in this study as the reason they were more likely to take care of themselves and make decisions that were for their benefit. These behaviors were congruent with Callaghan's (2005) study of an ethnically and economically diverse sample of 256 high school students ages 14-19. She reported a canonical correlation of .96 (p=.000) between self-care agency and spiritual growth and initiative and responsibility, measured respectively as subscales of the Health Promoting Lifestyle

Profile II and the Exercise of Self-Care Agency scales. Cotton, Larkin, Hoopes, Cromer, and Rosenthal (2005) had similar findings among 134 high school students (mean age 16.2) in whom they measured spirituality as meaning in life and a belief in a God who cared about them. Spirituality accounted for 29% of the variability in depressive symptoms from the Children's Depression Inventory-Short Form and 17% of the variability in risk behaviors from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Meaning in life was reported to be predictive of both less depressive symptoms and less risk behaviors.

The process of *finding safe passage* describes ways of employing spirituality to manage difficult situations. Several strategies that employ aspects of spirituality in the phases of this process are also reported to be strategies used by Taiwanese college students coping with trauma and stress (Heppner, Heppner, Lee, Wang, Park, & Wang, 2006). In a large multi-phase instrument development and validation study, they constructed the culturally sensitive Collectivist Coping Styles Inventory to gauge coping styles from an Asian perspective. Although Heppner et. al. did not propose sequential steps in coping with adversity, they identified five coping factors with items that were also identified as strategies in the process of *finding safe passage*. For example, they labeled one category of coping factors used by their Taiwanese student sample as 'acceptance, reframing, and striving'. Items in the coping category of 'acceptance, reframing, and striving' included maintaining interpersonal harmony by not venting negative feelings on others. In this present study, these items are mirrored by the strategy of *reining in*, the first strategy

employed in the phase of *turning inward*, and by preserving self and not harming others, which were the goals of *finding safe passage*.

Other items in the Heppner et. al. (2006) 'acceptance, reframing, and striving' category were searching for what might be gained from the trauma and believing that survival of a negative event would produce growth. These items are reflected by additional strategies used in *having an inner dialogue*, the second phase of *finding safe passage*. Inner dialogue strategies are *taking perspective, gathering information*, and *debating*, and this study's participants related the same thought processes as the Taiwanese students, which were looking for the positives in a situation and being hopeful of the outcomes.

Another coping category developed from the Heppner et. al. (2006) study was family support, which included items such as seeking family support and gaining self-confidence from knowing they could ask for help from their family. The religion-spirituality coping category included items such as involvement with a religious institution and its beliefs and rituals, finding comfort and guidance from their religion. These items were also reflected in this study by participants relying on connection to a supportive social network and to God to facilitate a stronger sense of spirituality, which in turn activated the process of *finding safe passage* when faced with difficulty. Although some properties of an *anchored self*, such as self-confidence and self-knowledge, were found in the items of Heppner's et. al. instrument, they were not all as clearly evident. This was probably due to the Asian cultural value of collectivism rather than individuality. These cultural variables would lead one to expect that, while some strategies might be very similar to those

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in *finding safe passage*, the events that would be perceived as a basic psychosocial problem that would trigger the process of *finding safe passag*e would depend on the cultural context in which they occur. In the more individualistic American culture, it is not surprising that preservation of self would be of primary importance over belonging to a group at the expense of self.

SUMMARY OF RELEVANT RESEARCH AND THEORY

Support for the findings of this study were found in numerous research findings with both similar and diverse populations. Many findings of this study were also congruent with several theories about spirituality and adolescent development, such as Fowler's (1981) and Genia's (1990) stages of spiritual development. This section, although not an exhaustive coverage of all relevant theory and current research congruent with this study, presented examples that support the findings related to each research question. Theories of thriving, identity development, sense of coherence, and resilience are particularly useful in understanding how spirituality is experienced and how it is employed in *finding safe passage* through a difficult situation. Research on similar concepts with a variety of populations suggests that the concepts and processes identified by the adolescents in this study may be applicable to others.

STUDY CONCLUSIONS

The sensitizing framework of ecological theory proved to be useful in organizing the different contexts in which spirituality is experienced. For the adolescents in this study, the interactions from where they found meaning and were confronted with difficulty occurred with family and friends, so the contexts of home

and school were of primary importance to them. For the Christian participants, church also provided another important context for a stronger awareness of their spirituality. These difficult situations then provided the context for the exercise of spirituality through the process of *finding safe passage*.

The characteristics of spirituality described by this group of adolescents were not dissimilar to those of other age groups, but their emphasis was on self and identity more than transcendence, as is more typically reported in the nursing literature on spirituality. This is not surprising considering that many nursing studies have focused on populations dealing with a variety of health and end of life issues, whereas this group had no apparent health problems and impending mortality was not in the forefront of their list of concerns. The physical body was also not emphasized as a necessary or important factor in the concept of *wholeness*, but this may be attributed to the fact that the participants were all young, healthy, and active, and had not experienced a need to get through difficulties related to physical infirmities. It was also not surprising that their focus centered more around self and identity, since they are working through the developmental task of establishing identity. They also reported no current major behavioral problems, although some did refer to past episodes of depression and poor behavioral choices, and one was currently dealing with a longstanding anxiety disorder that negatively impacted her daily life.

Because of the dynamic nature of spirituality, it was not necessary for all of these properties to be present at all times in their fullest intensity for the spiritual dimension to be considered to exist. The consequences described by participants

were in the context of the spirit being in a strong state, but it was not constantly in this state in their daily lives, meaning that their experiences and reactions to difficulty on any given day would vary depending on how they were feeling their spirit at the moment. The scope of this study did not fully explore all possible circumstances that might create variations in the experience and thus the reactions to difficulty.

It was not really clear what degree of contribution perspective, positive behaviors, relating to others, and an *anchored self* made to positive outcomes of *finding safe passage*. These positive outcomes may be seen as resilience, since resilience is a positive outcome in the presence of risk or adversity. It is defined variously as a "self-righting capacity, an ability to respond with resourcefulness and tenacity when confronted with untoward challenges. . . . a successful adaptational response to high risk . . . a transactional product of individual attributes and environmental contingencies…". (Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999, pp. 136-137). Since one research question asked about the role of the spiritual dimension in a difficult situation, that situation was assigned the role of risk or adversity in comparing the positive outcomes in this study to the concept of resilience. The difficult situations described by these participants may not reflect the same degree of ongoing hardship or risk factors referred to in the literature on resilience. Many studies of resilience reference populations exposed to such adverse conditions as neighborhood violence, extreme poverty, and poor schools, to none of which this study's participants were currently exposed. However, *finding safe passage* reflects a process that occurs in response to a situation that is perceived as difficult. The consequences of *finding safe passage* are positive behaviors, preservation

of an *anchored self*, and helping or not harming others, and these positive consequences in the face of difficulty may also be seen as resilience.

Within the process of *finding safe passage*, the phases and strategies were so tightly woven and seamless that it was difficult to tease one from another. It was also beyond the scope and methodology of this study to determine the extent of contribution made by each consequence of spirituality in each phase and strategy used in *finding safe passage*. However, the participants that reviewed the phases all agreed that the separations made sense to them and represented the steps that they went through in the process. This process of *finding safe passage* represents an adaptive response to difficulty that may illustrate how the protective factors or developmental assets that contribute to resilience are actually used in ongoing encounters with difficulty or adversity.

Although the experience of this small, homogeneous sample lacks many variables that would be present in other populations, the process itself may be applicable when population-specific variables are transferred into the construct as presented in this study. For example, an *anchored self* was the core variable in this population, and if characteristics of spirituality in other groups also produce a culture-specific version of an *anchored self*, that may provide the basis for determining how it is used in the process of dealing with difficulty. In *finding safe passage*, the definition of 'safe' may be contingent on the culturally defined definition of '*anchored self*', but the strategies may still be similar.

The smaller sample size in a qualitative study limits generalizing the findings to a larger group, and obtaining statistical significance is not the focus of qualitative designs (Polit & Hungler, 1999). The experiences of adolescents may be different depending on factors such as geography (e.g., urban, suburban, or rural settings), socioeconomic status, cultural and ethnic background, and religion, but large, broadly representative sample sizes are not feasible due to the nature of qualitative data collection and analysis.

It is difficult to capture the precise nature and effect of all the potential factors contributing to the experience of spirituality and to elements of positive and negative coping and problem solving. It may have been difficult for participants in this study to completely articulate their experiences of complex psychosocial mechanisms, particularly in one interview session on a topic they may not have thought through beforehand. Participants were also recalling past experiences and interpreting them through the context of different perspectives than when they were originally experienced. This may have caused their interpretation of their past experience and behaviors to be more a reflection of their current state of maturation than of their past state of being.

Efforts were made to identify and account for the researcher's own biases and preconceptions in order to decrease the potential for their influencing the content and direction of interviews and ongoing interpretation of information. For instance, this researcher has a belief system based on a Christian perspective, and my own experience of spirituality is completely defined and influenced by this. There was also the

expectation, arising from intuition and reinforced by the literature review, of a negative relationship between spirituality and negative coping or high risk behaviors. A conscious and ongoing effort was made to be aware of these biases and preconceptions at the outset and throughout data collection and analysis.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND PRACTICE

The health and well-being of a given population is a concern to numerous helping and serving disciplines. Education, criminal justice, pastoral care, public health, social work, medicine, psychology, and nursing, especially the areas of psychiatric, community, and pediatric nursing, are among those disciplines with a shared investment in adolescents. All have an obligation to join in the conversation with other disciplines concerned with the overall health and well-being of the adolescent population. This obligation does not necessarily mean that any one discipline carries the entire responsibility for ensuring actions are implemented to meet their needs, but each should at least attend to the areas for which it is responsible. The following section discusses implications for research, education, and practice, based on the findings of this study as they apply to the spiritual health and well-being of adolescents.

Research

The limited scope of this study prevented a full exploration of all aspects of relationships among the facilitators, characteristics, and consequences of spirituality, as well as other factors that might influence the process of *finding safe passage*. This study produces many more questions than it answered about the ways spirituality affects the lives of adolescents. For example, in regard to the spiritual dimension, what comparative degree of influence does it exert on different aspects

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of a person? How and to what degree can an *anchored self* be strengthened in order to overcome the need to sacrifice self to the need to belong, when belonging may have negative consequences?

This study did not explore the long-term ability to deal with difficulty and the durability of a sense of spirituality over time in the face of continued adversity. That is, what is the relationship between 'dose' of adversity (intensity and longevity) and degree of awareness of spirituality? At what point does adversity overcome the positive consequences of spirit? How strong do the spiritual dimension and its consequences have to be to overcome what level of adversity, and how can they develop in the midst of adverse conditions? Masten's (2001) models for studying main effects, indirect effects, and interactions in resilience would be useful in applying the variables identified in this study.

Other questions are what differences would be found between different populations in the characteristics of spirituality and the processes by which it is used to get through difficulty? What similarities would be identified? Would the findings be the same for youth contending with physical disabilities? How do affective states affect the whole of the spiritual dimension? The impact of the encompassing and integrating properties of *wholeness* were not fully explored, so their contribution to the consequences of spirituality and the strategies of *finding safe passage* is not clear. Since feelings are a large part of the spirit via the essence of self, how should they be addressed in terms of ways to strengthen the spirit? How many of the findings from this study are applicable to adolescents from different socioeconomic, cultural, religious, ethnic backgrounds? That is, how many of these facilitators,

defining characteristics, and consequences would be common across different populations? What other basic psychosocial problems might spirituality be employed in resolving? Would the process be the same?

The questions related to processes can be answered in part by additional qualitative research. The process of *finding safe passage* needs to be operationalized and tested with other adolescents. Quantitative research should more fully explore all the influences on the phases and strategies of *finding safe passage*. An obvious starting point to give quantified answers to the 'how much' questions would be construction and testing of instruments to measure all the aspects of spirituality and the strategies that are part of the process of *finding safe passage*. Statistical tests of variance should be applied to discover whether significant relationships exist among the different variables.

Given the appropriate measurement tools, the findings of this study suggest several initial hypotheses that can be subjected to quantitative evaluation, as follows:

1. Adolescents who have a stronger awareness of spirituality are more likely to avoid risky behaviors than adolescents with less awareness of spirituality.

2. Adolescents who have a stronger awareness of spirituality display fewer negative effects in response to adverse life circumstances than adolescents with less awareness of spirituality.

3. Adolescents with a stronger sense of spirituality are more likely to initiate the process of *finding safe passage* in response to conflict or emotional pain.

Each of the concepts in the hypotheses above have multiple variables, and there is a need for validated instruments with subscales to measure different aspects of spirituality, and to enable empirical testing on relationships among variables. The core variable of an *anchored self* needs to be further explored to gauge how the combination of factors (e.g., self-esteem, self-acceptance, self-knowledge, self-confidence, and independence) actually relate to each other and contribute to the process of *finding safe passage*.

Education

This study supports the inclusion of spirituality in basic nursing curricula so that novice nurses begin their career at least sensitized to its importance in the health of the persons to whom they will provide care. Because the spiritual dimension may encompass and integrate all parts of a person at each developmental stage of their life, there is reason to incorporate reference to it into each applicable clinical area of basic nursing curricula, such as pediatrics, mental health, maternity, and critical care. Findings from this study suggest that basic nursing education should address the ability to assess an adolescent's overall sense of self and *wholeness* and identify gaps that would signal the potential for problems within his/her spiritual dimension. Teaching of basic psychiatric nursing assessment skills with adolescents should include these as well as the ability to evaluate their problem-solving capacity and their patterns of response to adversity.

Practice

Findings of this study suggest that nurses having contact with adolescents, whether in clinics, hospitals, schools, juvenile justice settings, psychiatric treatment

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programs, or in the community, should be alert to patterns of symptoms that may indicate a diminished awareness of spirituality. These include expressions of pessimism about their future or current situation, hopelessness, negative or high-risk behaviors, inability to get along with others, or maladaptive reactions to stressful situations or circumstances. These may also parallel symptoms of some mental illnesses, and differentiating them would require training. An *anchored self* was identified in this study as the core variable in the process of *finding safe passage*, so nurses should also be aware of patterns indicating a sense of self that is not anchored. These indications could include a poorly defined identity, low self-esteem, poor self-image, making decisions that put oneself at risk, lack of caring for oneself, inability to act independently or trust one's own instincts, inability to take initiative, and vulnerability to peer pressure. There are many other possible contributing factors to these symptoms, particularly depression and other mental illnesses. These symptoms may also be indications of a host of other problems and it is beyond the scope of this study to propose an algorithm for differentiating the causes of these patterns, but an efficient, valid and reliable screening tool to assess spiritual health would be important for any practice setting.

In the community health setting, nurses can advocate for public policies and community programs that provide opportunities for adolescents to experience facilitating factors of spirituality. These can include programs that provide access to natural settings, volunteer programs that allow adolescents to help others, mentoring programs to help them through challenges, and access to a variety of programs for

development of creative skills. A strong referral network for psychiatric treatment is also important when evidence of mental illness is identified.

The dimension of spirituality is particularly relevant to psychiatric nursing practice because of its potential to positively affect thoughts, feelings, interactions, and coping strategies that are especially vulnerable to the effects of mental illness. As mentioned, the evidence of a weakened spiritual dimension may mirror some symptoms of various mental illnesses. Nevertheless, interventions in psychiatric treatment settings can focus on factors that facilitate or strengthen the spiritual dimension. These include encouraging or providing opportunities to be in natural surroundings, teaching appreciation for nature, and incorporating into family skills teaching or family therapy the importance of creating a supportive home environment. There is also a need to help adolescents learn strategies for *turning inward* and helping them become comfortable with themselves, gain confidence in their decision-making abilities, and learn about themselves. They need to be provided opportunities for self-exploration and developing conscience and practicing listening to it, encouraged to take risks in a safe manner, and provided outlets for safe risk-taking as they define themselves through narratives and experiences.

Teaching adolescents to have a deeper connection with their faith beliefs through prayer, meditation, and planned quiet time would help those with no experience with these skills. Building quiet time into structured settings provides an opportunity for reflection, as does offering outlets for developing and expressing their creativity. Conveying a caring and helping attitude should naturally be a part of

providing nursing care regardless of the setting, but creating opportunities for adolescents to help others is also important. Group and individual interventions that focus on exploring and identifying meaning and purpose, working through problems of poorly defined identity and low self-esteem, and building self-confidence would serve to strengthen the spiritual dimension as well as simultaneously address symptoms of depression.

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study provided an understanding of how a small group of adolescents conceive of and experience the dimension of spirituality and link it to their life experiences. The participants identified factors that help them get in touch with their spirit, and described their conceptions of it. They also relayed how it is actually experienced in their life and how those experiences help them deal with difficulty. From their narratives, a substantive theory of *finding safe passage* was discovered. This study identifies the core variable of an *anchored self* as the consequence of spirituality most important to the developmental task of defining self in the world and discovering how to act in the world employing the spiritual dimension. The findings also point to the more recent research emphases on developmental assets and positive attributes as more effective ways to promote the well-being of this population, rather than focusing exclusively on negative outcomes and their contributing factors.

Current research and existing theory provide support for various aspects of these findings, but there is a great deal of research that is still necessary before the experience of spirituality and its role in managing difficulty evolves into evidence-

based practices. This researcher is a realist and recognizes that the current environment of health care delivery in which nursing care is provided in the United States is structured by economics. Practices that are not supported by research-based evidence to be essential are unlikely to be reimbursed by payors. Further, economics drives health care practices to be as efficient and effective as possible without being negligent. If nursing and the many other disciplines that have studied spirituality believe, as the literature certainly indicates, that it is an important dimension in the overall health and well-being of a person, then they should provide evidence of its value through research-based practice so that it earns its way into the economic equation of health care.

APPENDICES

(Church letterhead)

October 10, 2004

Dr. Lisa Leiden, Ph.D.
Director, Office of Research Support and Compliance
P.O. Box 7426 Campus Mail
Austin, TX 78713
Lisa.leiden@mail.utexas.edu

Dear Dr. Leiden:

The purpose of this letter is to grant Helen Wright, a student at the University of Texas at Austin permission to conduct research at (name of church) . The project, "The Experience of Spirituality in Adolescents" entails Ms. Wright being present on our campus and being introduced by either me or (name), the youth program director, to adolescents ages 13-17 who are participants in our youth program. Ms. Wright will explain the purpose of her project, which is to explore how spirituality is experienced by adolescents. She will also explain that their participation will entail an individual taped interview conducted in a private setting either at this site, the adolescent's home, or other safe place convenient to the participant. The interview will last approximately 90 minutes, and will take place in the daytime or early evening hours on any day of the week that is convenient to the participants. If it is to be at this site, it will be at a time also convenient to the church staff. This may be followed by a similar follow-up interview if indicated to confirm the research conclusions. At least 10 adolescents will be recruited for participation. (Name of church) was selected because participants in a church youth program have an increased likelihood of being able to discuss spirituality. I am the Pastor at (name of church). Ms Wright will provide an electronic and hard copy of the research findings upon completion of the project. I, (pastor's name) do hereby grant permission for Helen Wright to conduct "The Experience of Spirituality in Adolescents" at (name of church).

Sincerely,

Pastor, (Name of church)

IRB# _____

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

The University of Texas at Austin

You are being asked to allow your son/daughter to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The Principal Investigator (the person in charge of this research) will also describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Title of Research Study:
The Experience of Spirituality in Adolescents

Principal Investigator:

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Faculty Sponsor:

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What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to explore how spirituality is experienced by adolescents and how it affects their lives. Between 10-20 adolescents will take part in this study.

What will be done if you take part in this research study?

If your son/daughter takes part in this study, the following will happen:

1. I will schedule a private interview with your son/daughter that may last approximately 90 minutes and will be audio tape recorded. The interview will take place either at home, at church, or at another convenient and safe area where the conversation will not be overheard but where other adults will be in the vicinity.
2. I will bring your son/daughter a non-alcoholic drink and a small snack to have during the interview or later as they wish.
3. I will ask your son/daughter questions about spirituality and I will bring drawing supplies and ask them to draw how they picture it.
4. I will also ask them how their experience has helped them manage difficult times.
5. I may schedule a follow-up interview, either in person or by telephone, of approximately 30 minutes if I need to check back with them to make sure I understood what they told me. I will also bring them a non-alcoholic drink and snack to this second interview, if it is in person.

What are the possible discomforts and risks?

The risks of taking part in this study are minimal. If your son/daughter becomes upset by any part of the interview, they will be allowed to stop the interview at any time. If they are participants of a church youth group, they will be helped to follow up with the church pastor at no additional charge. For participants not affiliated with a church youth group, I will assist them to process their feelings until they are no longer upset, or will help them to follow up with their parent or guardian if they prefer.

If you wish to discuss the information above or any other risks you may experience, you may ask questions now or call the Principal Investigator listed on the front page of this form.

What are the possible benefits to you or to others?

The potential benefit to you son's/daughter's participation in this research is that a discussion of spirituality may increase their own understanding of it. It is also possible that your son or daughter will receive no benefits from participating.

If you choose to take part in this study, will it cost you anything?

It will not cost you any money to take part in this study. It will take your child approximately 90 minutes for the first interview and if a second interview is conducted, it will take approximately 30 minutes.

Will you receive compensation for your participation in this study?

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

What if you are injured because of the study?

No treatment will be provided for research-related injury and no payment can be provided in the event of a medical problem.

If you do not want to take part in this study, what other options are available to you?

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You and your son/daughter are free to refuse to be in the study, and this refusal will not influence current or future relationships with The University of Texas at Austin or with a church-affiliated youth group.

How can you withdraw from this research study and who should I call if I have questions?

If you wish to stop your son's/daughter's participation in this research study for any reason, you should contact: Helen Wright at (512) 258-4937. You and/or your son/daughter are free to withdraw your consent and stop participation in this research study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits for which your son/daughter may be entitled. Throughout the study, the researcher will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

In addition, if you have questions about your son's/daughter's rights as a research participant, please contact Clarke A. Burnham, Ph.D., Chair, The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, 512/232-4383.

How will your privacy and the confidentiality of your research records be protected?

Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin and the Institutional Review Board have the legal right to review your research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. Otherwise, your research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order.

If the results of this research are published or presented at scientific meetings, your son's/daughter's identity will not be disclosed.

The interviews will be audio-taped, and the cassettes will be coded so that no personally identifying information is visible on them. The cassette tapes and written transcripts will be kept in a locked file in the investigator's home, and they will be accessible only for research purposes by the investigator and her associates. The audiotapes will be erased after they are transcribed or coded. All files in the data management program will also be assigned and labeled with a pseudonym (a made-up name). The master list with corresponding names and pseudonyms, as well as written consent/assent documents will be kept in a locked file maintained at the researcher's home and accessible only to the researcher. After the study is concluded, the audiotapes will be destroyed.

Although it is not the purpose of this study, there is a possibility that participants might incidentally disclose an experience of child abuse. If this occurs, I am required to notify Child and Family Protective Services at 1-800-252-5400. If your child discloses a threat to harm him/her self or someone else, I am required to make a referral to a psychiatric crisis screening service at 703-1395.

Will the researchers benefit from your participation in this *study*?

There is no direct benefit to the researcher beyond publishing or presenting the results of the research.

Signatures:

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

_____ **Helen Wright**_____

Signature and printed name of person obtaining consent

_____

Date

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this Form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

_____

Printed Name of Participant

_____

Signature of Participant's Parent/Legal Guardian   **Date**

_____

Signature of Principal Investigator   **Date**

ASSENT FORM FOR CHILD BETWEEN 13 AND 17 YEARS OF AGE

I have read the description of the study titled "The Experience of Spirituality in Adolescents" that is printed above, and I understand what the procedures are and what will happen to me in the study. I have received permission from my parent(s) or legal guardian to participate in the study, and I agree to participate in it. I know that I can quit the study at any time.

_____   _____

Signature of Minor   Date

_____

Signature of Principal Investigator or   Date
Representative

_____

Witness (if available)   Date

APPENDIX 3. PERMISSION TO CONTACT PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN

I would like to take part in this study and I would like my parent/legal guardian to be contacted to get their permission for me to participate.

_____
Signature

APPENDIX 4. LETTER SENT TO PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN VIA PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

Dear Mr./Ms.:

Your child (name) has said that they would like to take part in a study described in the attached consent form. I would like to call you in (10 days from date mailed) between now and two weeks from now to talk to you about whether you would be willing to allow your child to take part in this study and to answer any questions you have. If you wish to call me before then, you may reach me at (phone number).

Sincerely,

Helen Wright, R.N., M.S.N.

Original Interview Questions Submitted to Focus Group
1.   Describe what it is like for you to experience your spirituality.
2.   Draw a picture of how you think about it and tell me about the picture.
3.   Describe how you are aware of spirituality when it is strongest and weakest.
4.   How does it affect how you:
      a. act
      b. think
      c. feel
      d. relate to others
      e. way you think and feel about the world around you (e.g., family, friends, school, neighborhood, city)
      f. ability to handle any kind of difficult issues that you face (describe)
5.   What things in the world around you (e.g., family, friends, school, neighborhood, city) make the spiritual part of you feel better? Worse?
6.   If you have ever been violent toward another person (e.g., intentionally using or threatening to use physical force to cause harm or injury to another person)? This would include hitting or starting fights with the intent of hurting someone, using weapons to threaten or force someone, or causing physical harm. If so, describe what happened.

Focus Group Recommendations for Revisions to Interview Questions
1.   Describe in your own words what your spirit is to you.
2.   Keep question unchanged, but bring a variety of drawing supplies in addition to regular drawing pencils – e.g., colored pencils, pens, markers, crayons, etc.
3.   How can you tell if your spirit is strong or weak?
4.   Keep (a)-(e) as is, but change (f) to read: help you through difficult times (describe).
5.   What makes your spirit feel better (e.g., music, movies, friends, nature, etc)? Worse?
6.   Keep question unchanged.

Revised Interview Questions:

1. Describe in your own words what your spirit is to you.

2. Draw a picture of how you think about it and tell me about the picture.

3. How can you tell if your spirit is strong or weak?

4. How does it affect how you:

        a. act;

        b. think;

      c. feel;

      d. relate to others;

      e. way you think and feel about the world around you (e.g., family, friends, school, neighborhood, city);

5. How does your spirit help you through difficult times? (describe what happened)

6. What makes your spirit feel better? (e.g., music, movies, friends, nature, etc).

7. How is religion different from spirit?

8. What does the phrase "higher power" mean to you? Describe how you have experienced this in your life. How does it affect you?

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