

Spring June 9th, 2017

# Predictors of Identified and Introjected Religiosity in Upper Elementary Age Children

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Predictors of Identified and Introjected Religiosity in Upper Elementary Age Children

by

Heather Nicole Ingersoll

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of Education at  
Seattle Pacific University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Doctor of Education Degree

Seattle Pacific University

April 2017

Predictors of Identified and Introjected Religiosity in Upper Elementary Age Children

by

Heather Nicole Ingersoll

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirement of the degree of

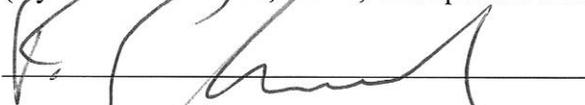
Doctor of Education

Seattle Pacific University

2017

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Date OCTOBER 2017



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Heather Russell

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## Acknowledgements

It is with humility and immense gratitude that I reflect upon the many people who helped me through this dissertation journey. I am grateful to have such a deep and wide web of support. I want to thank the leaders from the 15 churches who participated in this research project. Thank you for giving up your time to support this research.

I thank the SPU professors and staff who played a part in my educational journey: challenging, inspiring, pushing, and encouraging me. Thank you to librarian Cindy Strong for editing my references and encouraging me along the way. To Dr. Chris Sink, thank you for mentoring me, challenging my perceptions of Christianity and spirituality, and allowing me the opportunity to do research and teach alongside you. To Dr. Mike Langford, thank you for long conversations over coffee, and for engaging and challenging me in my quest to articulate a theological perspective of children's ministry. To Dr. Rick Eigenbrood, thank you for graciously welcoming me into the SOE community and always offering a word of encouragement. To Dr. Nyaradzo Mvududu, thank you for your willingness to chair my committee, your flexibility, advice, and support in the last several months.

I am grateful for the many classmates I met along the way. I have fond memories of late night emails about group projects, day long comp study sessions, and early morning classes together. A special thanks to Dr. Heidi Monroe and Dr. Nalline Baliram for helping me prepare for my defense.

Lastly, I want to thank my family. I would not be who I am today without you. To my brothers and sisters, thank you for reading my papers, consoling me when I was stressed, and reminding me of my strengths when I felt weak. To my parents, thank you

for giving me a childhood full of wonder, love, respect, and joy. You have been my inspiration. To my son, Theodore, you have grounded me and made me appreciate the world in a whole new way. You are my ultimate delight. Most importantly, to my husband, Ryan, thank you for truly being by my side every step along this journey. You experienced every pain and every joy alongside me, and for that I am incredibly grateful. Most of all, thank you for always reminding me that I am worthy not for what I accomplish, but for who I am. Words cannot express the deep sense of gratitude I feel because I have the privilege of doing life with you. You are my ultimate joy.

Seattle Pacific University

**Abstract**

Predictors of Identified and Introjected Religiosity in Upper Elementary Age Children

by

Heather Ingersoll

Chairperson of Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Nyaradzo Mvududu

The rise of research investigating children's spirituality along with the emerging view of children as social actors in their development provides the impetus to expand research investigating children's voices around their religious experiences. A significant number of children regularly attend Christian education in church and yet there is limited research investigating how those programs support children's faith (Bunge, 2006). The investigator designed this study to fill a gap in the literature by investigating the church as a context which supports children's religiosity. The study was guided by theological reflection on the human spirit and self-determination theory as the theoretical framework. The research specifically assessed children's perceived relatedness with adults and peers in church and children's perceived autonomy in Sunday school. There is significant empirical evidence showing that parent religiosity impacts the religiosity of their children, therefore perceived parent religiosity served as a control variable in the study (Benson, Donahue, & Erickson, 1989; Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006; Flor & Knapp, 2001; Veermer, 2010). Four hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to identify if the church variables were significant predictors of identified religiosity, introjected religiosity, or spiritual well-being in relation to God. Neither

perceived relatedness in church nor perceived autonomy in Sunday school were significant predictors of identified or introjected religiosity. However, perceived relatedness in church did significantly predict relationship with God. Furthermore, identified religiosity predicted relationship with God.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Childhood is changing. According to Bakke (2005), a recent rise in discourse surrounding issues related to children and childhood is unprecedented, particularly in the Western world. In his seminal work, *Centuries of Childhood* (1962), Aries introduced childhood as a socially constructed reality. While Aries' work is both highly regarded and heavily criticized, most scholars value his work for the recognition that constructions of childhood are historically and contextually situated (Dillen, 2008; James & James, 2001). When perceptions of childhood change, children's experiences change (Aries, 1960/1962; James & James, 2001).

The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), in 1989, marked a shift from the 19<sup>th</sup> century view of childhood as a state of fragility and dependence (Vandenbroeck & Bie, 2006) to the understanding of children as social agents with important opinions and rights (James & James, 2001). The contemporary perspective is signified by the recognition that children actively shape their own development. Children are "competent social actors" who engage in their world with valuable perspectives worthy of attention (James & James, 2001, p. 26). Freeman (1998) illustrated the notion of childhood agency stating that "children are persons, not property, subjects, not objects of social concern or control; participants in social processes, not social problems" (p. 236). Consequently, adults have a responsibility to not only care for and nurture children but to provide environments which allow children to participate as social agents (Dillen, 2008).

The field of childhood studies, a discipline with scholars investigating children's roles in society as competent social agents, emerged in congruence with the CRC (Freeman, 1998; James & James, 2001). Researchers in the field seek to understand the characteristics of social structures which best support children's agentic rights and abilities (Oswell, 2013; Wall, 2006). Scholars in childhood studies are cross-disciplinary, challenging traditional conceptualizations in various fields including anthropology (Leinaweaver, 2007), psychology, education, religion, and theology (Bunge, 2006; James & James, 2001; Wall, 2006).

The emerging focus on children's agency disrupts disciplines which traditionally perceive childhood through a future-oriented lens in which children are viewed as "adults-in-waiting" (Wyness, 1999, p. 235). Religious education is one field dominated by this future orientation where children "exist with reference to what they will become - competent, rational adults" (Wyness, 1999, p. 235). As Cooley (2010) argued, adults often view childhood as a "necessary way-station to adulthood" (p. 30) without valuing children's contributions to religious understanding. Recognizing children as social agents has significant implications for religious education (Cooley, 2010). Article 14 of the CRC addressed the child's right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and highlights the importance of allowing children to examine and express their beliefs (UNICEF, 2013). Regarding children as agents in their religious development provides a catalyst to examine theological, theoretical, and practical implications for Christian education.

Recent qualitative studies offer empirical evidence that children actively engage in spiritual and religious experiences (Bridges & Moore, 2002; Coles, 1990; Hood, 2004; Hyde, 2005; Thomson, 2009). Coles' landmark book, *The Spiritual Life of Children*

(1990), painted a picture of the human quest for meaning from one's experiences of the world as particularly salient in childhood. Reynaert (2014) described children's spirituality as "the capacity children initially possess to search for meaning in their lives" (p. 179). Researchers indicated that this search for meaning is a part of the child's everyday life and shapes the child's way of being and developing (Hay & Nye, 2006; Hyde, 2008; Reynaert, 2014).

There is ample empirical evidence to provide a holistic picture of how children engage with the world through spiritual experiences (Bridges & Moore, 2002; Coles, 1990; Hay & Nye, 2006; Hyde, 2008). However, there is a need for research examining key characteristics of environments which support children's spiritual formation, particularly in contexts where spirituality is most pertinent, such as Christian churches (Boyatzis, 2008). Scholars interested in children's spirituality have argued that in traditional Christian education programs, children do not have opportunities to integrate the Christian tradition and language with their individual spiritual quest (Bellous & Csinos, 2009; Berryman, 1995; Nye, 2004). Nye (2004) argued that children's capacity for deep reflection is often ignored and neglected in these programs where the priority is instilling religious knowledge and morals. Evidence from church observations and interviews with children lead to the conjecture that there is generally a disconnect in the Christian church between children's spiritual lives and programs designed to support children's religious beliefs (Bellous & Csinos, 2009; Nye, 2004; Yust, 2002).

Christian education in the United States is rooted in a conception of childhood popularized during the Renaissance, particularly Locke's (1690/1995 version) description of the child's mind as a *tabula rasa* or blank slate, implying that knowledge develops

through experience and observation (Dillen, 2007). This future orientation of childhood is further embedded in Christian education as a result of the reliance on developmental stage theories for guidance (Miller-McLemore, 2006; Wyness, 1999). A focus on developmental stage theories as the primary guiding framework leads to the perception that experiences, particularly educational experiences, are primarily responsible for shaping who a child becomes and what a child believes (May, Posteski, Stonehouse, & Cannell, 2005). Consequently, in many Christian education programs, children's spiritual reflection is "stifled, ignored, or rejected" due to the adult's commitment to ensuring children know "the right answers" (Cram, 1996, p. 66). "Big-box" Christian education curricula, with prewritten lessons, drive the propensity to focus on factual content and teaching a Biblical or moral lesson (Csinos & Beckwith, 2013). Children participate in classes void of opportunities to explore and wrestle with the ways in which the Biblical lessons or stories relate to their everyday lives (Csinos & Beckwith, 2013). When children attempt to ask deeper questions, teachers often provide simplistic answers or ignore the questions (Yust, 2002). Church-based programs for children are generally underfunded, lack quality materials, and rely on leadership from poorly equipped teachers (Bunge, 2006).

Christian educators and scholars have demonstrated a sense of urgency to address these challenges and adjust practices in order to better support children's religious and spiritual formation (Bunge, 2006; Mercer, 2006; Miller-McLemore, 2006). Bunge (2006) stated there is a "clear and urgent need" to articulate theological perspectives and improve Christian education practices for children based on burgeoning conceptions of childhood agency (p. 552). Beste (2012) highlighted the value in acknowledging how

children's agentic abilities impact their religious experiences and faith formation. Research showing the important role children have in their development should lead Christian educators to "reexamine our view of the child that undergirds our methods of religious education" (Beste, 2012, p. 303). There is a limited empirical base to provide guidance for Christian educators eager to adapt educational models to better support children's religious and spiritual lives (Roehlkepartain & Patel, 2006).

One reason for the limited research is the scarcity of reliable and valid measures to capture the extent to which children internalize religious beliefs and practices. Researchers measuring children's religiosity, or the extent to which a child is religious, often rely on one or two variables, such as church attendance or frequency of prayer (Ovwigbo & Cole, 2010). In 1950, Allport distinguished two types of religiosity: intrinsic and extrinsic. Scholars developed measurements to identify religious orientation based on Allport's theoretical framework (Allport & Ross, 1967; Batson & Ventis, 1982; Maltby, 1999), but those measures are primarily used with adults.

Recently, scholars have used self-determination theory (SDT) as a basis for understanding religiosity and the extent to which an individual engages in religious beliefs and practices due to external pressures or internal values (Assor, Cohen-Malayev, Kaplan, & Friedman, 2005; Flor & Knapp, 2001; Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993). Self-determination theory explores social conditions that foster healthy human development in the areas of motivation, self-regulation, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). A key component of research in SDT is examining how social institutions support or repress an individual's motivational orientation. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), "social contexts catalyze both within-and between-person differences in motivation and personal

growth, resulting in people being more self-motivated, energized, and integrated in some situations, domains, and cultures than others” (p. 68). Self-determination theory posits that humans have three psychological needs: autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Individuals who feel a sense of competence, autonomy, and relatedness in a social context are more likely to experience autonomous motivation related to the values and practices espoused in that context (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Autonomous motivation relates to the degree to which an individual internalizes and identifies behaviors and beliefs as central to his or her personhood (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Studies have indicated that SDT theory provides a plausible framework for measuring religious internalization in adults and youth (Assor et al., 2005; Brambilla, Assor, Manzi, & Regalia, 2015; Flor & Knapp, 2001). Ryan et al. (1993) developed the Christian Religious Internalization Scale to measure religious motivation based on two variables: identified and introjected religiosity. Identified faith includes autonomously held beliefs and practices that individuals integrate into their value systems (Ryan et al., 1993). Introjected faith refers to externally oriented beliefs that individuals practice due to internal or external pressures. Assor et al. (2005) and Flor and Knapp (2001) offered compelling evidence for the value of using SDT as a framework for exploring characteristics of social contexts which correlate with the faith integration of children and youth. Assor et al. (2005) investigated relationships with parents, relationships with peers at church, and autonomy-supportive youth leaders as predictors of identified and introjected faith in adolescents. Flor and Knapp (2001) investigated which types of parent-child dialogue correlated with internalized faith. This current study extended the research in children’s religious internalization by investigating the relationships between

children's experiences in Sunday school and church and their level of identified versus introjected motivation for praying, believing in God, and attending church. Additionally, the study explored the connection between children's identified religiosity and relationship to God.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this current study was to examine the potential for Christian churches to support children's integration of Christian beliefs and practices as central to their being. A theological view of children as human spirits shaped by an inherent longing for connection, autonomy, and grounding in the Holy Spirit guided the study. While many studies show children's religiosity relates positively to their parents' religiosity (Bridges & Moore, 2002; Bunge, 2006; Flor & Knapp, 2001; Gunnoe & Moore, 2002), there is a scarcity of research investigating the relationship between children's religiosity and experience in church. The findings from this study fill a gap in the literature by providing empirical evidence regarding the relationship between children's experiences in Sunday school and church, and their identified versus introjected faith. A key component of SDT is the recognition that individuals are more likely to identify with the beliefs and practices in a social context which meets their psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competency (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Studies investigating religiosity from a SDT perspective have focused primarily on autonomy and relatedness (Assor et al., 2005; Flor & Knapp, 2001). In order to ensure strong empirical support and narrow the scope of the study, the researcher designed this current study to explore the needs of autonomy and relatedness in a church context. The researcher assessed if perceived levels of relatedness in church and perceived autonomy

support in Sunday school relate to a child's internalization of religious practices and beliefs. The study answers these questions:

**Research Question One:** Do perceived autonomy in Sunday school and perceived relatedness in church predict degree of identified religiosity among upper elementary age children when controlling for the perceived parent religious intrinsic value demonstration (IVD)?

**Null hypothesis:** Perceived autonomy support in Sunday school and perceived relatedness in church do not predict degree of identified religiosity among upper elementary age children when controlling for the perceived parent religious IVD.

**Alternative hypothesis:** Perceived autonomy support in Sunday school and perceived relatedness in church do predict degree of identified religiosity among upper elementary age children when controlling for the perceived parent religious IVD.

**Research Question Two:** If perceived autonomy support in Sunday school and perceived relatedness in church do predict identified religiosity, which variable is a stronger predictor?

**Null hypothesis:** Perceived autonomy support in Sunday school is a stronger predictor of identified religiosity than perceived relatedness in church.

**Alternative hypothesis:** Perceived relatedness in church is a stronger predictor of identified religiosity than perceived autonomy in Sunday school.

**Research Question Three:** Do perceived autonomy support in Sunday school and perceived relatedness in church predict degree of introjected religiosity among upper elementary age children when controlling for the perceived parent religious IVD?

**Null hypothesis:** Perceived autonomy support in Sunday school and perceived relatedness in church do not predict degree of introjected religiosity among upper elementary age children when controlling for the perceived parent religious IVD.

**Alternative hypothesis:** Perceived autonomy support in Sunday school and perceived relatedness in church do predict degree of introjected religiosity among upper elementary age children when controlling for the perceived parent religious IVD.

**Research Question Four:** Does degree of identified religiosity predict relationship to God among upper elementary age children when controlling for perceived parent religious IVD?

**Null hypothesis:** Degree of identified religiosity does not predict spiritual well-being in relation to God among upper elementary age children when controlling for perceived parent religious IVD.

**Alternative hypothesis:** Degree of identified religiosity does predict spiritual well-being in relation to God among upper elementary age children when controlling for perceived parent religious IVD.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

The researcher designed this study based on the assumption that research related to Christian education is valuable and necessary and requires a theological and conceptual framework for understanding the faith development of children. This chapter is divided into five sections to provide a holistic approach to the theological and theoretical basis for this study: 1) definitions, 2) historical overview, 3) theological foundations, 4) theoretical framework, and 5) empirical support.

#### **Introduction**

James and Prout (2015) described the focus on childhood agency over the past 40 years as an “emerging paradigm” (p. 7). A marker of this “emerging paradigm” is the view of childhood as a social construction, the value of childhood as worthy of empirical research, the understanding of children as actively constructing their worlds, and the importance of the voice of the child in research pertaining to childhood. The image of children as capable social actors and active participants in their development is garnering attention in various fields including sociology, psychology, education, and theology (James & James, 2001). The academic discourse concerning childhood includes scholars from the realm of theology and religious studies (Bunge, 2006; Dillen, 2007; Miller-McLemore, 2003). These scholars have acknowledged childhood as worthy of study and have highlighted the need for more comprehensive articulations of the religious perspectives of children (Bunge, 2006).

## Definitions

**Spirituality.** Scholars from various disciplines including psychology, theology, and education have defined religion and spirituality differently, making it difficult to characterize the two constructs (Zinnebauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). The terms *religion* and *spirituality* describe “complex phenomena” so that any clear definition “is likely to reflect a limited perspective” (Hill et al, 2000). May and Ratcliff (2004) described religion and spirituality as two overlapping circles, noting the similarity in relation to “ultimate meanings of life and the quest for transcendence” (p. 11). They defined doctrines and creeds as unique to religion, and awe and wonder as unique to spirituality (May & Ratcliff, 2004). According to Westgate (1996), spirituality represents beliefs and values, while religion refers to behaviors. Holder, Coleman, and Wallace (2010) offered the distinction that “[s]pirituality refers to an inner belief system that a person relies on for strength and comfort whereas religion refers to institutional religious rituals, practices, and beliefs” (p. 132). Scholars and practitioners in education often understand spirituality as a way to explore the “deepest self and the ultimate purpose of life” outside of religion (Sheldrake, 2012, p. 6). An overview of the literature particularly from psychological and educational perspectives reflects a conceptualization of religion as a commitment to a belief system held by institutions or group of people, and a view of spirituality as “the interior world of personal experience” (McGrath, 1999, p. 25).

While many scholars view religion and spirituality as separate but overlapping constructs, Christian scholars seek to define spirituality through a distinctively Christian lens (McGrath, 1999). According to McGrath, “Christian spirituality” refers to an intersection between spirituality and Christian beliefs “fostering and encouraging certain

approaches to the spiritual life and rejecting or criticizing others” (p. 25). McGrath offered a simple definition: “Christian spirituality concerns the quest for a fulfilled and authentic Christian existence” (p. 13). Allen (2009) asserted that a definition of Christian spirituality must encompass a Trinitarian perspective Principe (2000) included a Trinitarian perspective in his definition of Christian spirituality as a relationship with God that involves “striving for an ever more intense union with faith through Jesus Christ by living in the Spirit” (p. 51).

**Spiritual well-being.** Fisher’s (2011) conceptualization of spirituality from a relational framework provided the foundational definition for spiritual well-being in this paper. He described spiritual well-being as “a dynamic state of being, shown by the extent to which people live in harmony within relationships” (Fisher, 2011, p. 21). He conceptualized spiritual well-being as the health of relationships in four domains: personal, communal, environmental, and transcendental. The personal domain refers to the degree to which one finds meaning, purpose, and value that leads to an integrated “search for identity and self-worth” (Fisher, 2011, p. 21). The communal domain refers to relationships with others expressed through “love, forgiveness, trust, hope, and faith in humanity” (Fisher, 2011, p. 22). Fisher described the environmental domain as the extent to which a person finds a sense of awe and wonder in the natural world. The transcendental domain includes “faith, adoration and worship” of a transcendent reality or God (Fisher, 2011, p. 22). This paper focused specifically on the transcendental domain, assessing children’s spiritual well-being in relationship to God.

**Christian education.** Similar to the challenge in defining spirituality, the diversity of perspectives of Christian education make identifying a comprehensive

definition difficult (Johnson, 2001; Prevost, 2001). Pazmiño (2010) considers the field of Christian education “preparadigmatic” because it lacks a dominant framework to guide theory and practice. He argued that due to this preparadigmatic nature of the field, Christian educators must continually explore and assess their philosophical framework. Anthony (2001) stated, “Christian education is steeped in misunderstanding and misconception” (p. 13) due to the multidisciplinary reality of the field. Theological and Biblical studies integrate with educational and psychological studies to create an aggregation of theoretical foundations for Christian education. The strength of this multidisciplinary perspective is the potential for a holistic approach to Christian education. However, the vast array of disciplinary perspectives has the potential for a disjunctive approach to practice, leading Christian educators to adopt contemporary models without critical reflection.

It is both important and necessary that researchers state the underlying assumptions of their work in order to encourage readers to critically analyze the information (Anthony, 2008). The following description of Christian education is not a comprehensive review but rather what Anthony (2008) called “a starting point for interaction” (p. 6). Though Christian education is a lifelong endeavor that occurs both inside and outside the congregational setting, the definition below focuses on the frame of this study: Christian education for children in a church context. Additionally, the study relies on Johnson’s (1989) foundational understanding of “spiritual formation as the key organizing concept for Christian education” (p. 13). The section begins with a description of Johnson’s (1989, 2001) perspective of Christian education as spiritual formation

followed by a description of Christian education by reviewing important elements: goals, context, content, teacher, and learner.

***Spiritual formation.*** The term “spiritual formation” is quickly becoming common nomenclature for describing the process of Christian education in the church (Johnson, 2001). While some see the shift in language as pandering to a more foundationless system of beliefs, Johnson (2001) argued that the new verbiage provides the impetus for a more holistic understanding of education in the church. Willard (2014) described spiritual formation from both religious and non-religious traditions as “the process by which the human spirit or will is given a definite ‘form’ or character” (p. 19). Spiritual formation is not just an aspect of human development; it is the crux of human development (Loder, 1998; Willard, 2002).

Johnson (2001) argued the most common divide in Christian education exists between those who focus on Christian education as *orthodoxy* or “right knowing” and those who focus on *orthopraxy* or “right living” (Johnson, 2001, p. 312). Johnson (2001) highlighted a third focus, *orthokardia*, referring to a “right heart”. She described *orthokardia* as relating to the perspective that “what people need most is not objective knowledge of Christian doctrine; rather, they need a clear and immediate sense of their own inner spiritual experience with God” (p. 312). A holistic approach to Christian education as spiritual formation is a balance of all three: *orthodoxy*, *orthopraxy*, and *orthokardia*. Intentional practice meant to guide spiritual formation should provide elements aiming to inspire right knowing, right living, and personal religious experience (Johnson, 2001).

Traditionally, research with children in the church focuses on right knowing, related to how children learn and remember the content of the Christian faith (Ratcliff, 2007). Recent research with children and religion investigates right living by examining how involvement in Christian education relates to prosocial behaviors in children (Crosby & Smith, 2016). This current study added to the literature by exploring Christian education from an *orthokardia* framework. The investigator explored potential for Christian education to engage the learner in a way that connects with their inner experience of God. The researcher examined both Sunday school and relationships with peers and adults in church as contexts for Christian education. Furthermore, the research was grounded in the assumption that transformational Christian education must rely on a theological understanding of the human spirit as inherently designed by God for relationality with the Holy Spirit.

**Goals.** The aim of Christian education is often referred to as transformation of the individual (Loder, 1989; Mulholland, 2016; Willard, 2014). Wright (2014) explained the goal of Christian education from practical theologian James Loder's perspective as transformation in which the "corrupt being" is transformed "into the image of the New Creation in Christ" (p. 195). According to Mulholland (2016), the goal of Christian education is "the process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others" (p. 12). Willard (2006) considered the ultimate goal of life to be "genuine transformation of the whole person into the goodness and power seen in Jesus and his 'Abba' Father" (p. 20). In his description of spirituality, Groome (1997) offered what could be used as a broad perspective on the goal of Christian education as:

our conscious attending to God's loving initiative and presence in our lives and to

the movement of God's spirit to commit ourselves to wholeness for ourselves and for all human-kind by living in right relationship with God, ourselves, and others in every dimension and activity of our lives. (p. 10)

Groome's (1997) definition is congruous with the four-domain relational model of spiritual well-being developed by Fisher (2011) and a helpful guide for this current study.

**Context.** Christian education settings include congregations, K-12 Christian schools, and Christian colleges and universities. The local congregation offers a unique educational setting for Christian education. According to Galindo (2001), an important aspect of Christian education is the "personal integration of the individual" within a community of faith (p. 415). Brock (2001) argued that "ongoing participation in the shared life of the congregation is the primary context" for Christian education (p. 389). The entire faith community is responsible for Christian education; congregants should provide one another freedom, openness, and acceptance in the process of formation (Galindo, 2001). Johnson (1989) argued that in this faith community, formation is a process that develops out of sharing a life of faith, not through an educational program.

Anthony (2008) posited that learning occurs in three areas: formal educational settings, nonformal educational settings, and informal social settings. He argued that education in the church transpires at all levels. The most common formal Christian education setting in Protestant churches is Sunday school in which teachers often use set curriculum focused on instruction of predetermined content (Bunge, 2006). Since Sunday school was adopted by churches in the United States in the 1800s, it has remained a primary context for intentional Christian education for children in the majority of Protestant churches in the country (Lynn & Wright, 1980). Many church leaders are

seeking to adopt more informal educational models for children in light of the changing role of religion in culture. Informal models of education in the church include summer camps, service projects, family events, retreats, and intergenerational worship experiences. Beyond formal and information education, the church is a social context in which socialization plays a role in the learning process (Westerhoff, 2012). Children are formed and influenced by the culture, practices, and role models in the congregational setting (Westerhoff, 2012). Christian education occurs in all three learning contexts in the congregation, and each context uniquely contributes to spiritual formation. This study specifically analyzed the formal context, Sunday school, and the informal social context, relationships with other church participants.

**Content.** The word “story” provides a unifying term for describing the content of Christian education. According to Galindo (2001), “Living a story, whether it be the ‘old, old story’ of Christian hymnody that grasps us, or some new image of truth that reveals itself to us, is the way we experience meaning and value in our lives” (p. 422). Galindo (2001) went on to say, “Stories are essential for describing the Christian experience” (p. 422). Brock (2001) argued, “to be formed, a person must participate in the Christian story” (p. 370). The content of Christian education includes the narrative as presented in the Bible, and the smaller narratives, the stories of the faith community and the stories of the learners.

As a source of revelation, the Bible is the central story which shapes all of the content of Christian education. Galindo (2001) considered Scripture “the compass that keeps the conversion journey of the believer on course as the spiritual learning experiences continue” (p. 415). The stories of the faith community also provide important

content for spiritual formation. Galindo (2001) considered “the religious life experiences of learners” as valuable for Christian education. However, he argued there must be a rational dimension and reliance on content for deeper reflection and understanding. Johnson (2001) suggested personal experience, communal practice, and Biblical reflection are key components for Christian education as spiritual formation. Furthermore, guidance through and development of Christian practices such as discernment, prayer, worship, and contemplation are important foci for Christian education (Dykstra, 1987; Galindo, 2001).

***The learner.*** If the goal of Christian education is transformation into the likeness of Christ, the person must be involved in the process. For transformation to occur, the learner must be engaged in the learning process through wonder, reflection, openness to conflict, engagement, and celebration (Loder, 1989). According to Galindo (2001), “A highly developed affective consciousness is essential to the spiritual life” and therefore Christian education must provide a context for the learner to experience “affective spiritual autonomy, awareness, and development” (p. 416). Johnson (2001) argued that an environment where children are inherently involved in the life of the congregation where “participation in practices occurs naturally” (p. 329) is most important for children’s spiritual formation.

***The teacher.*** According to Loder (1989) the ultimate teacher is the Holy Spirit, working in every context for transformation. The human teacher is “the provocateur of the human spirit” (Loder, n.d., p. 27) as it engages the Holy Spirit. Teachers, filled with the Spirit, “practice wonder, play with language and symbol, suffer with others in learning, celebrate the presence of Christ, learn themselves in the act of teaching, and

trust the meditation of Christ” (Wright, 2014, p. 195). Potential for growth happens in relationship between people, therefore “meaningful interaction” should be the primary goal of the teacher in Christian education (Galindo, 2001, p. 420). The Christian educator should focus on mutuality and respect, recognizing the individual experience as central to the knowing process (Galindo, 2001). Johnson (2001) argued that those who support spiritual formation in others should not be viewed as teachers in the traditional sense, but as “people competent in Christian practices who are willing to pass on the value of the Christian faith to others” (p. 329).

***Summary.*** In this study, Christian education is viewed as a process of spiritual formation. The goal of this process is for participants to be transformed through the Holy Spirit’s initiation, and from that transformation to develop greater wholeness in relationship with God, oneself, and others. Education is an important aspect of congregational ministry and happens in formal and informal settings. A holistic approach to Christian education is grounded in the perspective that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate teacher. Other teachers, mentors, and friends have the opportunity to provide a space for the Holy Spirit to connect with the human spirit.

### **Modern History of Religious Research of Children**

Throughout the last century, the study of children and religion has taken a variety of forms. Ratcliff (2007) identified four phases of research on children’s spirituality and religion beginning in the late 1800s going on through the early 2000s. The first phase, “Early Holism” (1892-1930), was dominated by an integrated approach to childhood in which religion was viewed as a subsection of the child’s experience alongside other aspects of life. Research related to children and religion was published in mainstream

educational and psychological journals. Ratcliff (2007) identified the next phase, “Declining Emphasis on Religious Experience” (p. 221) (1928-1961), as defined by a more rationalistic framework for understanding children’s religious experiences. Research regarding children’s religious experiences was increasingly separated from the mainstream and moved to the margins of psychology and religion. Beginning in the 1960s, “Cognitive Religious Development” (the name of Ratcliff’s third phase, 1961-1990) became the dominant theoretical framework for education and psychology, and, subsequently, religion and childhood. Researchers during this phase relied on a cognitive stage framework to understand and identify the faith development of children. Elkind (1978) and Goldman (1968) argued that children under age 11 or 12 were incapable of understanding complex religious concepts. Fowler (1981) identified “stages of faith,” a perspective for understanding how faith develops through the lifespan. Coles’ (1990) seminal study on children’s spirituality coincided with the beginning of Ratcliff’s fourth phase, “Children’s Spirituality,” in which research on children’s spirituality increased, including the conception of the *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality*. Research in children’s spirituality marked a shift congruent with the emerging paradigm of childhood studies in which children were viewed as social actors capable of spiritual experiences (Schweitzer, 2013).

### **Contemporary Perspectives on Children and Religion**

Furthermore, recent movements exemplify attempts by scholars and practitioners to meet the need for a greater articulation of views related to children and religion. In 2003, the *Childhood Studies and Religion* interest group was formed at the American Academy of Religion (AAR), demonstrating the incorporation of childhood studies into

religious discourse (Childhood Studies and Religion, n.d.). Members of the AAR developed the group due to increased interest in religion and childhood studies and the belief that religious studies should serve as a thought leader in the childhood studies field (Childhood Studies and Religion, n.d.).

In addition to the formation of an interest group in the AAR, the last 20 years have included a surge in publications pertaining to children and religion. The *Journal of Childhood and Religion*, developed in 2010, offers a free, peer-reviewed, online forum for scholars from a variety of disciplines to present research and theoretical perspectives on children and religion. Recent publications including *The Church and Childhood* (Wood, 1994), *The Child in Christian Thought* (Bunge, 2001), *Let the Children Come: Rethinking Child from a Christian Perspective* (Miller-McLemore, 2003), and *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (Mercer, 2005) place children at the center of Christian discourse.

The development of the Child Theology Movement in 2002 represented a specifically Christian-based effort to support dialogue around children and theology. The mission of the group is “[d]oing theology with a child in the midst” (Child Theology Movement, 2010) with a primary objective being “[t]he advancement of the Christian Religion, primarily but not exclusively by the carrying out of research on the nature and significance of children” (Child Theology Movement, 2010). Scholars are engaged in the “theological endeavor of rethinking Christian doctrine and practice in light of the child and childhood” (Child Theology Movement, 2010).

As evidenced in the examples above, there are burgeoning opportunities for deeper reflection on issues surrounding children and religion in regards to changing

notions of childhood. Despite recent advances in scholarship pertaining to religious experiences and the spirituality of children, Christian education in a congregational context is lagging behind (Yust, 2002). Current Christian educational practice with children in the church remains tied to the cognitive developmental framework.

**Developmental stage theories.** Since the 1960s, when cognitive development theories became the dominant psychological perspective, developmental stage theories have undergone significant scrutiny. However, stage theories still have considerable influence on how children are perceived by Christian educators (Estep & Breckenridge, 2004; Hay, Nye, & Murphy, 1996, Ward, 1995). Using a Piagetian framework, Elkind (1978) interviewed 800 Jewish and Protestant children to investigate their cognitive understanding of faith. He concluded that children cannot grasp abstract religious concepts until age 10 or 11. Goldman (1968) identified three stages of faith and is most notably known for his conclusion that children under age 12 are incapable of religious thought. Fowler's (1981) theory of faith stages is the most widely known and understood in the United States. Influenced by Piaget's cognitive development theory, Kohlberg's stages of moral development (1981), and Erickson's (1950) theory of psychosocial development, psychologist James Fowler (1981) proposed a theory of six faith stages. Fowler's theory described the evolution of faith throughout the human life cycle. Many Christian educational programs since the 1960s have relied heavily on Fowler's stages of faith for guidance (Ratcliff, 2007; Ward, 1995).

Fowler's stages of faith include one pre-stage and six stages, beginning in infancy and extending through the lifetime (Fowler, 1981). The pre-stage, called *undifferentiated faith*, refers to infancy when "seeds of trust, courage, hope and love are fused" (p. 121)

for future faith development. Stage one, called *intuitive-projective faith*, begins around age two when a child grasps language and the use of symbols. In this phase, children's lives are fantasy-filled and rich with imagination. Children in this stage are strongly influenced by others and self-aware, but they are egocentric, not able to understand perceptions of other individuals (Fowler, 1981). About age six or seven, children move into stage two, *mythical-literal faith*, where story and narrative play are central in helping them make sense of their experiences (Fowler, 1981). Their world is characterized by concrete operations in which imaginative propensities from stage one begins to be more ordered and realistic. Stage three begins with a child's emerging transition out of formal operational to abstract thought, typically around 12 years of age. In this *synthetic-conventional faith* stage, adolescents experience a reordering of faith beyond the context of family, which has been the locus of the child's world, toward a more personal identity. This is followed by the last three stages that focus on adulthood: *individuated-reflective faith*, *conjunctive faith*, and *universalizing faith* (Fowler, 1981).

Developmental stage theories, particularly Fowler's faith stages, have guided positive movements in Christian education, especially by encouraging the use of more age-appropriate practices with children (Dettoni & Wilhoit, 1995). Roehlkepartain and Patel (2006) acknowledged Fowler's work as providing a strong basis for more meaningful reflection on childhood religion and spirituality. However, researchers of children's religion and spirituality identified weaknesses in the faith stages theory and argued that models of Christian education related to that theory are lacking (Ratcliff, 2007).

An in-depth look at church practices, based primarily on Fowler's stages of faith,

indicated that developmental faith stage theories limit the perception of children as spiritual beings by elevating the “final frame” of adult faith (Miller-McLemore, 2010). Reliance on Fowler’s development stage theory leads to the inference that children are incapable of “genuine spirituality” until adolescence or adulthood when they are understood to have the capacity for meaningful reflection (Hart, 2006, p. 163). Fowler’s theory is blamed for the implication that a person is not capable of deriving substantial meaning from religion until gaining the ability for abstract thinking which emerges in adolescence (Bridges & Moore, 2002). Hay and Nye (2006) argued that developmental theory does not adequately account for children’s spirituality due to an “intellectual bias” which “com[es] near to dissolving religion into reason and therefore childhood spirituality into nothing more than a form of immaturity or inadequacy” (Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 57). Critics have pointed out that from a stage theory perspective, children’s capabilities for genuine spiritual and religious experience remains unnoticed because children are viewed as lacking cognitive structures which allow for such experiences (Boyatzis, 2008; Hay et al., 1996; May & Ratcliff, 2004; Roehlkepartain & Patel, 2006).

Developmental stage theories are not inherently false. They offer important perspectives on how we understand and interact with the world in a variety of life stages (Ratcliff, 2007). Yeatts (1997) called developmental stage theories “helpful, but inadequate” as a framework for Christian education. Estep (2010) acknowledged that Christian educators should use developmental stage theories to guide their understanding of what constitutes age-appropriate environments, knowing that children develop various capacities as they grow. Espinoza and Johnson-Miller (2014) credited developmental stage theories with benefiting Christian education by increasing “awareness of human

growth” and “insight into the teaching-learning process” (p. 11). However, it is “inadequate” to rely almost exclusively on developmental stage theories as the primary guiding framework for Christian education (Yeatts, 1997). Christian educational programs guided by a developmental stage paradigm are generally devoid of connections to children’s lives (Berryman, 1995). These programs are often weak and uninteresting to children who have deeply embedded spiritual experiences that are disregarded or unconnected from their experience in church (Bunge, 2006; Yust, 2002). Kang (2011) argued that “[b]y following these theories of human development as a set of prescriptions for teaching, we might be inadvertently precluding much of what God wants to do in teaching and transforming his people” (p. 120).

**Schooling-instructional paradigm.** Christian education programs are further limited by their reliance on a schooling-instructional paradigm (Westerhoff, 1987). According to Westerhoff, “Protestants, functionally if not theoretically, envision education as instruction in a schooling context” (p. 579). Sunday school remains the primary Christian education program for children in the church (Benson, 1943; Fant & French, 1947; Lynn & Wright, 1980). It originated in England as an organization for educating and containing children who spent the weeks working and the weekends making mischief (Lynn & Wright, 1980). Biblical literature was used for teaching reading (Lynn & Wright, 1980). The instruction-based DNA of the original Sunday schools can still be seen today. The influence of public education on Christian education is evidenced in the majority of Sunday school programs which are divided by age and rely heavily on teacher-centered curriculum. Furthermore, curriculum developers for Sunday school in the United States typically reflect the trends of public education,

particularly the focus on pre-determined guidelines for the knowledge that children should acquire during a lesson (Yust, 2011).

Christian education is also influenced by the epistemological framework most salient in contemporary public education. According to Yust (2011), “the Enlightenment concern for empirical evidence of objective ideals” is embedded in contemporary public education in the United States. This Cartesian epistemology endorses the detachment of the person from the knowing process, born from the perspective that the senses deceive the knower, and therefore detachment from the world is necessary for obtaining “pure and undistorted knowledge” (Warner, 1998, p. 192). Yust (2011) argued that this epistemological framework disregards the role of revelation in knowing for public and Christian education. She went on to direct religious educators to diligently “mine our own history for epistemologies that encourage a more balanced approach to formation in faith” (p. 25).

Content acquisition is certainly a valuable element of Christian education. As Osmer (1997) argued, “Unless explicit attention is given to the acquisition of Biblical and theological knowledge, the members of the church will not be capable of using the faith to interpret their lives of their world” (para. 29). The importance of the transmission of knowledge in Christian education cannot be ignored. However, a schooling-instructional paradigm is an inadequate guide for understanding how to transmit knowledge in a Christian context (Westerhoff, 1987; Yust, 2011).

**Summary.** Critics highlight the weaknesses of Christian education models shaped by developmental stage theories, the schooling-instructional paradigm, and Cartesian epistemology. In light of these influences, classes for children are often boring and

disconnected from the childrens' personal experiences. Christian educators often adopt cultural influences without reflecting critically on their implications in light of theological convictions. The following section will examine other epistemological and theological frameworks that provide an alternative guide for the practice of Christian education.

### **Theological Framework**

DeVries (2001) offered two perspectives on childhood: instrumental and intrinsic valuation. *Instrumental valuation* is a future-oriented perspective of childhood in which children are regarded in light of the person they will become. The goal of education, from this perspective, is to prepare children for adulthood. Developmental stage theories elicit an instrumental valuation of childhood (DeVries, 2001). An *intrinsic valuation* holds that children are worthy as active participants in their present-day reality. An intrinsic perspective of childhood upholds the inherent value of children, regardless of their future orientation. DeVries (2001) argued that churches “must resist the instrumental valuation of childhood” and incorporate children’s “insight into our understanding of the Christian faith” (p. 173). A theological understanding of the child as human spirit provides a starting place for the intrinsic valuation of childhood.

**Human spirit.** Ryan and Deci (2000) described the human spirit from a self-determination theory (SDT) lens as agentic, inspired, curious, and creative. The human spirit can be “diminished” or “crushed” which leads to “non-optimal functioning” (p. 68). As psychologists, Ryan and Deci described the environmental factors which lead humans toward optimal and non-optimal functioning. This reflects what Loder (1998) called a “view from below” of the human spirit within the context of social sciences (p. 13). The

“view from below” provides a partial picture of reality, however, devoid of theological understanding, the human sciences lack the ability to truly capture human nature.

Therefore, a theological lens is important for understanding the nature of the human spirit in greater depth. Loder (1998) described the human spirit as a “regularly ignored” and “uninvited guest” in empirical research (p. xii). It could be argued that the spirit of the child is often a “regularly ignored” and “uninvited guest” in the field of Christian education.

From a theological perspective, the human spirit is the central nature of one’s personhood. Willard (2014) described the human spirit as an “inescapable, fundamental aspect of every human being” (p. 13). The human spirit is indeed agentic, inspired, curious, and creative, but from a Biblical and theological perspective, the human spirit is also inherently connected to the Holy Spirit. The life-force of the human spirit is a longing for transformation, creativity, and self-transcendence (Loder, 1998). Apart from God, this creative energy is misguided and foundationless (Willard, 2002).

The Hebrew word used in the Old Testament for spirit is *ruach* and the Greek word used in the New Testament is *pneuma*. When used in Scripture these words represent a vast array of images such as breath, a strong force, wind, angel, demon, and spirit (Levison, 2012). Levison wrote, “English simply cannot shoulder the bread of meaning” of *ruach* and *pneuma* (p. 35). To capture the depth of these words, Levison used the term *spirit-breath*, describing it as an “amazing amalgamation of human breath and divine spirit” (p. 35). He went on to discuss the spirit as the very breath of God which animates life from the birth to death, from dust to dust. This spirit-breath, which is in everyone who breathes, is the source of wisdom, holiness, and understanding (Levison,

2012). Baldwin (2012) called this human spirit a “special creation made of flesh that can relate to God and in this relationship finds its fulfillment in the divine” (p. 30). It is through this human-divine interaction that “the human *pneuma* loses itself in the *pneuma* of God, but not at the loss of personal identity, but as one becoming an enhanced identity” (Baldwin, 2012, p. 50).

It is difficult to define the human spirit without discussion of the Holy Spirit because they are “made for each other” (Loder, 1998, p. 17). The human spirit is inherently driven beyond itself in a dynamic ontological quest. Apart from the Holy Spirit, the ontological quest remains groundless, and the human spirit compensates by searching for meaning – for example, through achievement and advancement. This misguided searching leads to a human spirit which ultimately lacks nourishment and wholeness. The human spirit finds wholeness when it yields to the inherent “magnificent obsession” with the Spirit of God (Loder, 1998, p. 12). According to Loder (1998), the quest of the human spirit is:

...a wandering in cosmic emptiness or, at best, a circumambulation of the human spirit around the center, who is the One triune God. In this God resides the ultimate coherence from whom each passion for understanding, each new insight, new stage, new vision of the universe, derives its ultimate intelligibility and toward which all such phenomena point. (p. 74).

Loder (1989) described the dynamic engagement between the human spirit and the Holy Spirit as an *asymmetrical bipolar relational unity*. *Relational unity* conveys the inseparable connection between the human spirit and the Holy Spirit. Despite this unity, the human spirit and Holy Spirit are two distinct entities (*bipolar*), “different in origin,

destiny, and magnitude” (Loder, 1998, p. 17). Loder (1998) used Barth’s term “indestructible order” in describing the *asymmetrical* relationship of the human spirit to the Holy Spirit. In this “indestructible order” the Holy Spirit relates to the human spirit with “marginal control” (Loder, 1998, p. 194).

Loder (1989) outlined a five-step transformational paradigm to describe the pattern of engagement between the human spirit and the Holy Spirit. The paradigm begins with conflict in which one is confronted with an experience beyond one’s frame of reference. This is followed by an interlude for scanning where the individual searches for a solution that makes sense of his or her new experience of the world. The third step is a constructive act of imagination in which the individual reaches a turning point marked by new insight or vision. A release of energy – the “aha moment” – is the fourth step where the individual is open to a new way of understanding. Lastly comes interpretation in which the individual reframes the past and future to create a new lens. This five-step pattern of transformation does not always begin with step one. Individuals can enter the pattern in any step, but the experience of the five steps leads to transformation (Loder, 1989).

The human spirit experiences the transformational pattern throughout the lifespan, beginning in infancy (Loder, 1998). Loder painted a dynamic picture of the role of the human spirit as actively searching for meaning and transcendence, looking for ultimate grounding in the Holy Spirit. The view of childhood in light of a theological understanding of the human spirit provides a unique framework for understanding the spiritual experiences of children. Christian education, grounded in an understanding of children as human spirits who are engaged by the Holy Spirit as described by the

transformational pattern, may look very different than traditional models of Christian education. This theological perspective provides the impetus for understanding the importance of involving the child's entire being in the knowing and learning process. The concept of autonomy support provides a framework for practical implications for involving children in such a way.

**Autonomy.** Humans have an innate desire for autonomy, from their earliest moments when young children realize a personal sense of freedom (Loder, 1998). The desire for autonomy stems from an inherent longing to assert personhood in environments where one's sense of freedom is threatened (Loder, 1998). From a young age, children test the boundaries of their adult-controlled environments. The human spirit acts out of a deeply-held desire for autonomy, seeking to find, "my own way," "my own voice," "my world" (Loder, 1998 p. 130). This inherent longing for autonomy reveals the importance of autonomy-supportive environments for children's internalization of faith. Freedom in the context of Christian education can allow a connection between the human spirit and the Holy Spirit.

**Epistemological framework.** Christian education is currently dominated by contemporary epistemological frameworks in which knowledge is reduced to objective truth to be grasped (Yust, 2011). This approach to education devalues the role of revelation, intuition, and personal experience in the process of knowing (Meek, 2011; Yust, 2011). Educational practice in light of this instrumentalist view creates a separation between the knower and the known. However, knowing requires active participation (Polanyi, 1962). Palmer (1993) argued that "[t]o know something is to have a living relationship with it – influencing and being influenced by the object known" (p. xv).

Philosopher Esther Meek's (2011) "covenant epistemology" offers an understanding of epistemology broader than Cartesian epistemology as highlighted in the previous section. In contrast to Cartesian epistemology, in which the knower is disconnected from the known, covenant epistemology recognizes the connection between the knower and the known. The experiences and senses of the individual are integral to the knowing process. Knower and known are intimately connected through covenantal mutuality and reciprocity; the knower is engaged in a relational dance of co-creation of knowledge with the known.

Exploring Christian education in light of Loder's work, Wright (2014) argued that "knowing depends upon the self-involvement of the knower" (p. 162). The role of the knower in learning has implications for deepening Christian education beyond a schooling-instructional paradigm to a transformational paradigm. In such a perspective, Christian education with children would change from a focus on imparting Biblical knowledge or inspiring moral living to what Root (2007) calls the core of ministry, "human action that participates in divine action" (loc. 2682).

*Autonomy-supportive environments.* Environments which provide autonomy support allow for the individual to actively participate in the knowing process. Children in upper-elementary school have a unique desire for autonomy-supportive environments. Children deeply experience the desire to actively participate in the learning process. Loder (1998) argued children are uniquely drawn toward meaningful work. In an achievement-based society, school-age children are coming to the realization that worth is tied to achievement in work. Redeeming one's sense of worth means transforming the understanding of work as focused on achievement to being focused on "participation in

creation in responses to God's initiative" (loc. 2517). The contemporary schooling paradigm, and subsequently many Christian education models, socialize children into an achievement-oriented sense of worth (Dykstra, 1987). When programs for children in the church are grounded primarily in the Western schooling paradigm, the propensity to perpetuate an achievement-oriented culture is difficult to escape. According to Loder (1998), "This returns us to the necessity for focusing on the spirit of the developing person and the deeply embedded longing of that spirit for its ground in the Creator Spirit of God" (p. 175). In achievement-oriented contexts, children are motivated by external controls such as praise, success, or gratification. In an autonomy-supportive environment, there is more potential for individuals to recognize or envision their part of God's work in the world because the human spirit is an invited participant in the process of knowing and being in that context.

**Relatedness.** Ryan and Deci (2000) defined relatedness as "the need to feel belongingness and connectedness with others" (p. 73), and central to SDT. Relatedness involves attachment, reassurance of worth, guidance, and social integration (Crosby & Smith, 2016). Relatedness as a basic psychological need is measured in this current study by the degree to which children feel "loved, valued, and supported by (non-family member) peers and adults in his or her church community" (Crosby & Smith, 2016). Relatedness, as defined by SDT, represents a "view from below" and therefore only reflects a piece of the reality of human nature (Loder, 1998, p. 13). The concept of relatedness as defined by this psychological framework is distinct from a theological concept of relationality which offers a "view from above" (Loder, 1998, p. 13). A

theological perspective of relationality provides an important foundation for understanding why relatedness is a valuable component of Christian education.

Relationality is a core component of the human spirit. Boyd-MacMillan (2006) defined relationality as a “relationship that takes on a life of its own” (p. 13). In the relationality between two entities, something new is created. This unique dynamic occurs between individuals and God, individuals and others, and individuals and subject matter. Meek’s (2011) covenant epistemology described the potential for relationality between human and subject matter. When the knower is connected with the known, a transformation occurs in which the knower is changed by the encounter and something new is born. Loder’s (1998) five step transformational paradigm illuminates the way in which the human spirit and the Holy Spirit are drawn into relationality that transforms the human spirit. Through this experience, “a person remains herself, but she is also deeply changed . . . drawn more deeply into life” (Boyd-MacMillan, 2006, p. 15). A life-enhancing relationality can also occur between individuals. The SDT concept of relatedness is enhanced by an understanding of the potential for deep relational connection between people. The remainder of this section highlights theological perspectives on the value of relationship between people.

A human’s first perceptions of self are embedded in experience of the other (MacMurray, 1999). Along with their proclivity for meaningful work, school-age children begin to repress the personal need to be loved merely for being, not for achievement (Loder, 1998). However, the need to be connected to others remains a deeply felt desire of the human spirit. MacMurray (1995) argued that we are meaningless

as ourselves without relationships; “Our human being is our relations to other human being and our value lies in the quality of these relationships” (p. 72).

Bonhoeffer (1939/1954) offered a theological grounding for the value of relatedness in Christian education. Our relationship to the other, through Christ, is central to our humanity. According to Bonhoeffer, “The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer” (Bonhoeffer, 1939/1954, p. 19). He argued humans are designed to engage in God’s “living Word” through mutual relationship with others (p. 23). In other words, humans are mediators of God’s self-expression to one another, enabling a response: “Faith comes forth in the encounter with other people” (Loder & Fowler, 1982, p. 138).

Balswick, King, and Reimer (2005) spoke about the “reciprocating self,” defining one’s ability to “fully and securely relate to others and to God” as the goal of development (p. 9). A reciprocating self “engages fully in relationship with another in all its particularity” (Balswick et al., 2005, p. 21). They argued that reciprocal relationships defined by unconditional commitment, empowerment of one another’s giftedness, and mutual respect and openness, modeled after the Trinitarian relationship, are crucial for individual development, particularly in relationship to faith. From a theological perspective, humans are relational beings created for relationship with God and others. Providing opportunities for children to establish supportive, caring relationships in which they feel a sense of belonging is imperative for Christian education that seeks to support a child’s faith development. Thus, the value of relatedness in Christian education is grounded not only in social science research, but also from a perspective of theological anthropology that identifies a deep human longing for connection with God and others.

## **Summary**

This study was designed to explore the ways in which the Christian church supports the internalization of religious beliefs and behaviors in children. Unfortunately, the faith presented in church or by parents sometimes “has little to do with the more powerful and present God that the child has experienced directly” (Berryman, 1990, p. 515). Several weaknesses in the current Christian educational framework lead to experiences for children devoid of profound connections between faith and life. The first weakness is the reliance on developmental stage theories of faith which lead to the inference that children are incapable of deep theological reflection and religious understanding. The second weakness is a schooling-instructional paradigm in which the focus becomes downloading content into the minds of students. Lastly, the dominance of a Cartesian epistemology is a weakness because it limits perceptions of how children engage in the knowing process with their whole being. A theological perspective of the human spirit provides the framework for understanding the human propensity toward agency and creativity. Children, as human spirit, are drawn to autonomy-supportive environments in which they feel a sense of freedom to engage with their world in ways relevant to their personhood. Relationships are core to the human experience of life and faith. God’s Word is mediated through human connection. Therefore, opportunities to build close relationships are central to the faith of individuals.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Self-determination theory (SDT), a theory of motivation, explores catalysts for human action and the process by which human behavior becomes increasingly internalized (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Most theories of motivation primarily explore

amotivation and two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Self-determination theory offers a unique perspective of motivation by delineating extrinsic motivation into four levels. The type and quality of motivation provides important information about why and how people engage with various activities, behaviors, and beliefs (Deci & Ryan, 2008). There are two basic categories of motivation in SDT: autonomous and controlled. Autonomous motivation includes intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation which is integrated and internalized into one's personhood. Inversely, controlled motivation describes behavior that is regulated by outside, or external forces, and internal forces such as feelings of shame or guilt (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Activity born from intrinsic motivation engages an individual's "inquisitive, curious, and playful" tendencies (Ryan & Deci, 2000). There are four levels of extrinsic motivation, each level increasing in degree of autonomous orientation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The least autonomous, externalized extrinsic motivation, includes behavior motivated by outside rewards, punishments, or contingencies. In this case, behavior is performed with the intention of compliance to external expectations, to receive rewards, or to avoid punishments (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The next level, introjected extrinsic motivation, refers to behavior motivated by an inner concern for self-control, ego-satisfaction, or internal rewards and punishments. Individuals experience introjected motivation when they feel internal pressure to perform an action (Ryan & Connell, 1989). Identified motivation, while still a subsection of external motivation, is the first level of autonomous motivation. Identified motivation refers to those behaviors and beliefs which are endorsed by the person as having value. Finally, integrated motivation is the most

autonomous type of extrinsic motivation. An integrated behavior or belief is fully assimilated into an individual's sense of self. At all four levels of extrinsic motivation, people engage in behaviors instrumentally, contrasted to intrinsically motivated behavior which is performed for the sheer pleasure of the act (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Self-determination theory posits that humans have a natural inclination to move toward well-being and internalization (Van den Broeck, Ferris, Chang, & Rosen, 2016). Ryan and Connell (1989) argued "The more internalized a value or regulation, the more it is experienced as autonomous or as subjectively located closer to the self" (p. 750). Internalization is the process by which previously held extrinsic behaviors are increasingly integrated into an individual's value system and personhood. Chandler and Connell (1987) described it as "a process by which an individual acquires an attitude, belief, or behavioral regulation from external sources and progressively transforms it into a personal value" (p. 385). Internalization is bolstered when individuals experience satisfaction of psychological needs.

Based on evidence from research around the world, SDT theorists identified three universal psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Chirkov, 2009). Optimal human functioning requires satisfaction of all three needs. Cross-cultural research confirms the universal nature of these needs, indicating that needs satisfaction can predict psychological well-being in both collectivist and individualistic cultures (Church et al., 2013; Deci & Ryan, 2008). Self-determination theorists have proposed that individuals seek environments which "fulfill their fundamental needs and identities" (Wang & Eccles, 2013, p. 12). Therefore, a central focus of SDT research is to identify contextual variables which support the human quest for needs satisfaction. Needs

satisfaction is theorized to lead to increasing levels of autonomous motivation.

Consequently, SDT provides a helpful framework for understanding how and why social conditions support or inhibit psychological well-being and autonomous motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Individuals thrive in social situations which provide the necessary mechanisms to support their sense of autonomy, competency, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). A significant amount of SDT research seeks to identify contextual elements which support needs satisfaction. Scholars are investigating domain specific characteristics for needs satisfaction in a variety of fields including education (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001; Jang, Kim, & Reeve, 2016; Reeve, Bolt, & Cai, 1999; Ryan & Connell, 1989), health and nutrition (McSpadden et al., 2016), sport and physical activity (De Meester, Aelterman, Cardon, De Bourdeaudhuij, & Haerens, 2014; Erdvik, Overby, & Haugen, 2014), parenting (Duriez, Soenens, Neyrinck, & Vansteenkiste, 2009; Grolnick, 2015; Jungert & Koestner, 2015; Wong, 2008), and religion (Duriez, et al., 2009; Ryan et al., 1993). Research with children indicates perceived autonomy, competence, and relatedness in education and family life relates to self-regulation (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994; Grolnick & Ryan, 1987), school performance and engagement (Cordova & Lepper, 1996; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Furrer & Skinner, 2003), and prosocial behaviors (Connell & Ryan, 1984; Crosby & Smith, 2015).

Self-determination theory provides a framework to understand how individuals can adopt values and beliefs upheld within a social context. Some scholars have used SDT for expanding research in the area of religiosity (Duriez et al., 2009; Flor & Knapp, 2001; Ryan et al., 1993) and understanding how individuals internalize religious beliefs

and values. Before going more in-depth into the research, the following section will explain autonomy and relatedness as they serve a central role in this study.

**Autonomy.** The terms agency and autonomy are often used interchangeably by practitioners but have distinct definitions. Alkire (2008) described autonomy as a subset of agency. There are two different functions of agency: autonomy and ability (Alkire, 2008). According to Bandura (2006), “To be an agent is to influence intentionally one’s functioning and life circumstances” (p. 164). Alkire (2008) described autonomy as people’s ability to act on behalf of what they value. Autonomy “probes the person’s own self-understanding of their situation; it reflects the assessment of valuation of goals and activities” (p. 18). In contrast, ability refers to the capability of acting on one’s behalf related to culturally perceived basic rights, such as voting, or receiving medical care (p. 19). While ability is an important aspect of discourse about children’s rights as social agents, this paper focuses on autonomy as a basic need for self-determination in all domains of life.

Within SDT, autonomy is viewed as one of the three universal psychological needs along with relatedness and competency (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The importance of autonomy in the SDT model is consistent across different societies (Chirkov, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2016). Researchers identified autonomy as a universal need based on evidence showing a positive association between autonomy, well-being and self-efficacy, as well as negative associations between externally controlled (less autonomous) behavior and measures of well-being (Chirkov, 2009).

According to SDT, a person experiences autonomy when engaged in behavior that is fully endorsed by the individual. This includes behavior that is “willingly enacted” and

authentically integrated into the values and desires of the individual (Ryan et al., 1993, p. 19). Autonomy is frequently confused with detachment, independence, and separation (Chirkov & Ryan, 2001). However, detachment, independence, and separation relate to an individual's ability or desire to act outside of relationship with another, whereas autonomy is most salient when viewed through one's dependence on a social context and others in that context (Chirkov & Ryan, 2001). Autonomy is marked by an individual's perceived internal locus of control, versus a perceived external locus of control, within a dependent relationship or social context (deCharms, 1981).

A number of studies have investigated autonomy support in formal and informal educational environments for children (Ryan & Deci, 2016). Educational leaders are sometimes alarmed by a push for autonomy support because they assume it requires providing children free rein to do anything they please (Deci & Flaste, 1995). Autonomy support does not require allowing participants complete freedom of action and behavior, but rather, it requires a balance of offering choice, inviting opinions, and enhancing feelings of relevance, so individuals are able to develop a sense of an internal locus of control (Deci & Flaste, 1995).

***Control vs. autonomy support.*** A domain of SDT focused research explores the distinctive characteristics of autonomy-supportive environments (Koestner, Ryan, Bernieri, & Holt, 1984). People in positions of authority in social contexts have the ability to directly create a controlling environment. However, because autonomy emanates from one's personhood, persons in position of power can only create environments that will foster opportunities for individuals to feel a sense of autonomy.

Therefore, an important distinction in SDT posits that social contexts are either controlling or autonomy-supportive (Deci & Ryan, 1987).

Controlling environments are shown to negatively correlate with self-esteem and perceived competence (Deci, Schwartz, Sheinman, & Ryan, 1981; Ryan & Grolnick, 1986) and positively correlate with aggressive behaviors (Ryan & Grolnick, 1986). Other research has indicated a connection between autonomy-supportive contexts and creativity (Koestner et al., 1984). These results should be interpreted with caution because the nature of correlation research limits the ability to identify a clear cause and effect between the different variables. For example, classrooms with more aggressive children may elicit a more controlling response from teachers.

Research investigating the role teachers play in developing autonomy-supportive environments provides insight into meeting children's needs in relation to autonomy. A teacher's style of motivating others can be viewed on a continuum "that ranges from highly controlling to highly autonomy-supportive" (Reeve, 2006, p. 228). Reeve (2006) described autonomy-supportive teachers as "facilitators" and controlling teachers as "interfering with the congruence between students' self-determined inner guides and their day-to-day classroom activity" (p. 228). Where controlling teachers inhibit children's "inner guides," autonomy-supportive teachers support or bring out the "inner guides" by recognizing and providing space for the needs and interests of students in the classroom. Reeve (2006) described autonomy-supportive teachers as embracing four instructional strategies (a) nurturing inner motivational resources; (b) relying on informational, noncontrolling language; (c) communicating value and providing rationales; (d) acknowledging and accepting students' expressions of negative affect. In a later study,

Reeve et al. (2014) investigated teachers in eight countries and found that those teachers who believed autonomy was effective and felt at ease implementing autonomy supports were more likely to provide an autonomy-supportive classroom.

Black and Deci (2000) argued that people in positions of authority in autonomy-supportive environments acknowledge the feelings and perspectives of others and offer participants choices in a non-threatening and accepting context. In their research with preservice teachers, elementary teachers, and high school teachers, Reeve et al. (1999) identified several behaviors to distinguish between autonomy-supportive and controlling teachers. Autonomy-supportive teachers responded to questions, listened, and used perspective-taking statements. Controlling teachers used commands, withheld materials, and revealed solutions without opportunities for individual reflection (Reeve et al., 1999).

Assor, Kaplan, and Roth (2002) identified three characteristics of autonomy-supportive teachers: (a) explicitly stating the goal of the learning activity in relation to student's personal experience; (b) providing space for students to express concern over a learning activity; (c) providing opportunities for students to choose learning tasks that fit their individual goals. According to Black and Deci (2000), autonomy support requires that the person in a position of power acknowledges the ideas and feelings of the other, provides options, and minimizes pressure and demands. The Teacher as Social Context Questionnaire was designed to explore teacher behavior and student experience in the classroom related to self-determination theory (Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990; TASC, 1992). The autonomy support subscale of the measure divides autonomy support into four domains: teacher controlling behavior, respect for each individual student, student choice, and rationale for relevance of learning activities.

*Autonomy support and choice.* When working to develop an autonomy-supportive classroom, teachers regularly put their effort toward offering more choices, primarily simplistic types of choice (Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, & Turner, 2004). Stefanou et al. (2004) argued that there are other behaviors as, or more, important than choice in an autonomy-supportive environment. They proposed three categories of autonomy support: organizational, cognitive, and procedural (p. 97). Organization autonomy support encapsulates opportunities teachers give students to take ownership of the learning environments by making decisions around aspects of the classroom, like rules. Procedural autonomy support includes shared ownership of the form of learning activities, where students have voice about the mode of the learning. Lastly, cognitive autonomy support refers to the teacher's responsibility to provide a space for students to argue their views, develop their own processes for solutions, and assess their learning and the learning of their peers. Stefanou et al. (2004) argued that cognitive autonomy support is the most holistic and meaningful approach to enhance self-determination in students and should be included in any effort to provide an autonomy-supportive classroom.

Wang and Eccles (2013) found that opportunities for choice did not predict higher academic understanding in adolescents. This was particularly apparent when choices were related to tasks that were uninteresting or irrelevant to the students. The type of choices offered are important and choices adopted to increase autonomous motivation should be related to a student's interests and values. According to Wang and Eccles (2013) "There is evidence that the benefits of choice-provision for student motivation are likely to be limited if the choices involve tasks that are not deemed interesting or relevant to a student's personal goals and interests" (p. 20). They found, however, that all types of

choice positively predicated behavioral engagement in those students with high academic achievement. This indicated that lower achieving students many not have adequate capacities or confidence to make choices when offered. Choices need to be appropriate for the age and ability of the student. This research involved secondary students so is not generalizable to elementary students. However, a valuable implication of this research is the importance of offering an autonomy-supportive environment that is age appropriate. Palmer, Wehmeyer, and Shogren (2017) suggested children are developing agentic capabilities; therefore, teachers need to take into consideration the age of the students when applying elements of autonomy support into the classroom.

*Autonomy support and rewards.* The impact of rewards on motivation is one of the more contested arguments in motivational theory (Cameron & Pierce, 1994; Deci et al., 1994, 2001). Research has indicated that environments which include threats, deadlines, evaluation, and observation are typically perceived as more controlling and appear to undermine autonomous behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2016). Self-determination theory posits that a system of external rewards is distinctive of a controlling setting. Rewards generally support externalized motivation; however, the negative impacts of rewards can be mitigated if other aspects of the environment are more autonomy-supportive (Deci & Ryan, 1987).

A meta-analysis of 128 studies indicated that rewards given for enjoyable behaviors negatively impacted intrinsic motivation to perform that behavior, whereas rewards for uninteresting tasks were slightly beneficial for motivation (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999). Self-determination theory discourages the use of rewards because, while they may at times increase motivation, they interfere with development of more

autonomous motivation toward behavior (Joussement, Koestner, Lokes, & Houliort, 2004). Joussement et al. (2004) investigated the value of rewards in autonomy-supportive and controlling environments. The autonomy-supportive environments included instructions to complete an uninteresting task. The instructions conveyed choices in words such as “if you choose” and “the proposed activity” (p. 148). They also used a rationale and statement of empathy about the boringness of the activity. Those in controlling groups heard words like “you should” and “what you have to do” without any rationale or statement of empathy (p. 148). The most notable finding from their research was that those students who were offered rewards showed a disconnection between actions and feelings. Furthermore, students in the autonomy-supportive environment with no rewards showed congruency between their thoughts and their feelings, indicating a greater level of autonomy (Joussement et al., 2004).

***Autonomy and education.*** Skinner and Belmont (1993) investigated teacher behavior related to student engagement with third to fifth graders. They found the level of children’s perceived autonomy related to the amount of freedom given to the child, the variety of options in their learning activities, and the connections made between school and the children’s interests. Skinner and Belmont stated “Autonomy support refers to the amount of freedom a child is given to determine his or her own behavior; the opposite of being supported is being coerced” (p. 573). They found that teacher involvement and autonomy support, measured with teacher and student reports on items like choice, relevancy, respect, teacher affection and dedication, correlated positively with students’ engagement in school.

Cordova and Lepper (1996) used an experimental design to investigate the power of choice and personalization to increase intrinsic motivation for a math-based computer program among fourth and fifth grade students. They found those students with increased levels of personalization in the game (for example, their name being used) showed statistically significantly higher levels of enjoyment and learning from the experience. Those students who subsequently had choices in the game (even simple choices like what icons to use) showed slightly higher levels of enjoyment in the activities. The authors claimed the personalization and choice led to intrinsic motivation though there was no measure to truly assess intrinsic motivation. However, there was indication from their research of the value of personalizing and offering choice in instruction, particularly for this age of students, to increase enjoyment, engagement, and learning.

In a cross-sectional study with 1,600 elementary and high school students, Gillet, Vallerand, and Lafrenière (2012) investigated relationships between age, school motivation, and perceived autonomy support from their teachers. They found that intrinsic motivation toward school decreases between 9 years of age to 15 years of age. However, students' perceived level of autonomy support from the teacher mediated the age impacts on decline in intrinsic motivation. Findings from the cross-sectional design could be bolstered with the use of longitudinal data.

**Relatedness.** Relatedness, along with autonomy, is one of three main universal psychological needs that connect to human flourishing. Relatedness has often been misconstrued as antithetical to autonomy, making this three-dimensional approach to psychological needs confusing (Kagitcibasi, 2005). Research in attachment theory suggests a positive relationship between attachment and autonomy, particularly in young

children. Grossman, Grossmann, Kindler, and Zimmermann (2008) found a relationship between children's positive attachment with parents and their "secure exploration" described as "confident, attentive, eager, and resourceful exploration" (p. 857). Individuals are more likely to feel related to others who value the individual's expressions of autonomy (Ryan & Powelson, 1991).

Several theories of motivation recognize that basic human need for connectedness to others (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). One of the most prominent theories of human connection is attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973). Attachment theory posits that children are born with an innate need to connect. Infants' experiences of responsive, consistent contact with adults, leads to secure attachment, a necessary foundation for social and emotional well-being throughout one's lifetime (Bowlby, 1973). Childrens' earliest developments of attachment to their primary caregivers are foundation for their social and emotional lives (Grossman & Grossman, 2009). Infants thrive when caregivers are responsive to "initiation, signals, and needs" (La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000, p. 368).

According to Ryan, Brown, and Creswell (2007) attachment theories address just one aspect of relational experience. Other theories which examine the importance of relationships for various areas of life include Weiss' (1974) framework of social provision and Goldstein's (1999) concept of the *relational zone*. The social provision framework developed by Weiss (1974) provides an understanding of the various types of support found in relationships. He described six "social provisions" that must be fulfilled, through a variety of relationships, in order for individuals to feel a sense of relatedness. The six are (a) guidance; (b) reliable alliance; (c) reassurance of worth; (d) attachment;

(e) social integration; (f) opportunity for nurturance (Crosby & Smith, 2015; Weiss, 1974). Goldstein (1999) coined the term *relational zone*, suggesting that the connectedness between teacher and student is a crucial element to understand the learning process that takes place in Vygotsky's *zone of proximal development*.

The concept of relatedness in SDT is based on a human's innate and abiding desire and psychological need for connection (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This need involves the feeling of contact, support, and belonging (Ryan & Powelson, 1991). People of all ages need "sensitive relational partners" who provide a sense of caring and connectedness (p. 368). Moller, Deci and Elliot (2010) posited that social encounters which cultivate trust and intimacy fulfill psychological needs of relatedness. Whereas, contexts in which people feel deprived of relatedness leave individuals feeling alienated or ostracized (Sheldon & Filak, 2008). Deci and Ryan (2000) suggested that in contrast to autonomy and competency, relatedness may be less central for the process of internalized motivation because many activities (e.g., hiking, swimming, painting) are performed in isolation but are intrinsically motivating. However, there is indication that a secure relational base is crucial for individuals to experience volition in action or intrinsically motivated behaviors (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 235).

The perspectives on what elements are most crucial to support feelings of relatedness varies among scholars. Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, and Ryan (2000) developed a list of seven social activities that could contribute to a perception of relatedness: (a) communication about relevant matters; (b) shared activities; (c) informal time spent together; (d) understanding and appreciation; (e) shared participation in fun activities; (f) avoidance of insecure feelings. They particularly found that "talking about

meaningful matters and feeling understood” and shared enjoyable activities positively correlated with relatedness (Reis et al., 2000, p. 424).

While a large body of experimental, correlational, and intervention studies show the value of autonomy support in a variety of contexts, research on relatedness is slimmer and dominated by correlational research (Sheldon & Filak, 2008). Correlational research has indicated a clear connection between perceived autonomy, connectedness, and relatedness and several prosocial behaviors including overall well-being (Reeve & Jang, 2006), daily positive experiences (Reis et al., 2000), positive emotions (Tong et al., 2009), and prosocial behaviors (Gange, 2003; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010).

***Relatedness and education.*** Goldstein’s (1999) concept of the *relational zone* highlights the value of the student-teacher relationship in the learning process. Research has supported the importance for the learning to feel a sense of relatedness to the teacher in an educational context. While most research on relatedness is correlational, in a unique experimental investigation, Sheldon and Filak (2008) explored the value of autonomy, relatedness, and competency for adults learning and enjoyment of the game Boggle. Participants were assigned to a variety of experimental groups, one with a high level of relatedness and one with a low level of relatedness. The group with a high level of relatedness included teachers who were caring, supportive, and encouraging. Those in the low level of relatedness group were told the researchers were not interested in them as individuals, and the teachers showed a lack of concern for their individual differences. Results showed that relatedness uniquely supported main effects including intrinsic motivation, positive mood, interest in recommending the game to others, and game performance (Sheldon & Filak, 2008).

In a similar lab-based experimental study, Reeve and Jang (2006) found the value of relatedness in an experiment investigating which teacher behaviors relate to a student's experience of autonomy in a learning activity. A group of preservice teachers were invited to participate and randomly assigned as teachers or students. The teachers were given an activity and asked to develop an instructional process for the activity. They then taught that activity to a preservice teacher randomly assigned to be the student. After engaging in the activity, the students took several questionnaires. Results showed a positive correlation between students who felt their teacher cared and showed interest in them and the student's sense of autonomy. Those behaviors included listening, praising signs of improvement, encouraging effort, responsiveness, and acknowledging the student's perspective (p. 216). While there are several limitations to the study including the use of a laboratory versus a classroom context, the one-on-one nature of the teaching, the use of inexperienced teachers, and the limited timeframe (10 minutes), the findings did highlight the value of further investigation into the relatedness between student and teacher in the autonomy-supportive classrooms. Reeve and Jang (2006) argued that the findings invite a broader question, "How [do] teachers' positive interpersonal relationships produce academic and developmental benefits for their students?" (p. 216). While the controlled context of these experiments limits the generalizability to regular more nuanced educational contexts, these two experiments indicated the salience of relatedness for learning activities for adults. Beyond these experimental designs, correlational studies have supported the value of relatedness in educational activities for children.

Furrer and Skinner (2003) investigated the correlation between relatedness to teachers, parents, and peers, with third to sixth graders' engagement and motivation in school. They found relatedness to teachers, parents, and peers uniquely contributed to student's sense of engagement and motivation for school. Furthermore, Ryan, Stiller, and Lynch (1994) found the degree of relatedness to friends, peers, and teachers, correlated positively with school functioning, positive coping, and self-esteem. Ryan and Powelson (1991) determined that children are more actively engaged and confident when they perceive stronger relatedness to adults around them.

Ryan and Powelson (1991) argued that interpersonal relationships provide the social context to support the psychological process of internalization, one of the mechanisms hypothesized to account for an individual's adoption of values and behaviors (p. 62). Transmission of cultural values is bolstered in contexts where individuals feel a sense of relatedness (Ryan & Powelson, 1991). Therefore, relatedness should be explored as an important component for the transmission of religious values (Ryan & Powelson, 1991). Christian education scholars recognize the value of connectedness for supporting the faith lives of children. Based on their research with longitudinal data from the National Survey of Children, Gunnoe and Moore (2002) posited that close relationships are significant predictors of religious socialization. Through sets of interviews with 21 parents and adult children, McClintock (1997) found "warm, supportive relations at home, church, and school" impact the likelihood of children adopting their parent's faith (p. 5). The Effective Christian Education study highlighted the valuable role of family religiosity, friend religiosity, and participation in a caring church, as significant factors in youth and adult's faith maturity (Benson & Eklin, 1990). A number of scholars have

argued that building caring intergenerational relationships should be a significant piece of Christian educational programs for children (Allen & Ross, 2012; Bunge, 2006; Crosby & Smith, 2015; Csinos & Beckwith, 2013).

### **Review of Research**

**Children's spirituality.** Crosby and Smith (2015) defined spirituality as “the dynamic personal, and experiential relationship between God and child, distinct from one's religious identity or religious development, which is more so concerned with shared specific practices and teachings” (p. 244). Empirical research designed to investigate children's spirituality has primarily focused on describing children's ability for “spiritual processing” (Nye, 2004, p. 90). Nye wrote:

It turns out that children, partly by virtue of their distinctive psychological characteristics, have an intriguing rich capacity for spirituality, for a kind of religious knowing and being which is neither contingent on their religious knowledge nor moral accountability. (p. 93)

The following brief overview of literature on children's spirituality provides an account of the spiritual lives of children as described by scholars in the field.

In his book, *The Spiritual Life of the Child*, child psychiatrist Robert Coles (1990) outlined findings from interviews with 500 children between 6 and 13 years of age from all over the world and varied religious backgrounds. Through extensive descriptions of interactions with several of these children, the reader is provided with an intimate look into the inner lives of the children who share deeply meaningful life stories and wrestle with spirituality, faith, the afterlife, and God or Allah. Coles explored the dynamic inner lives of children as a source of significant meaning for each child. He was cautious in

making large generalizations based on his interpretation of the children's experiences; however, Coles recognized children as "seekers" or "young pilgrims, well aware that life is a finite journey" who are eager to make sense of it (p. xvi). Coles noticed an overlap in children's religious and spiritual lives and observed children critically analyzing organized religion (p. xvii). He wrote that his focus was not on children as students of religion, but as sentient beings who are "profane as can be one minute, but the next, spiritual" (p. xvii).

Hyde (2005) used hermeneutic phenomenological reflection on transcripts from interviews and observations with 8- and 10-year-olds from Catholic primary schools in Australia to explore their spirituality. From this research, he identified four characteristics of children's spirituality: "felt sense, integrating awareness, weaving the threads of meaning, and spiritual questing" (p. 150). Hyde described felt sense as a "physical bodily awareness" where children draw on their physical experiences for knowledge (p. 156). Integrating awareness entails what Hyde called "a second wave of consciousness" observed as free-flowing conversation which develops soon after the "initial level of consciousness" or particular focus on a tactile activity (p. 159). Hyde found that children used wondering as a tool to weave threads of meaning in response to stimuli or conversation starters (p. 159). Spiritual questing is the child's "searching for authentic ways in which to relate with Self and Other" (p. 177).

Hay and Nye (2006) developed a theoretical perspective of children's spirituality based on conversations with six through 11-year-olds from two state schools in England. They began their research with a map of spiritual sensitivity in three domains: awareness sensing, mystery sensing, and value sensing, to provide an initial guide for analyzing the

transcripts (Hay & Nye, 2006). Using a grounded theory approach to analyze the interview data, Hay and Nye developed the construct “relational consciousness” described as “a distinctive property of mental activity profound and intricate enough to be termed ‘consciousness’, and remarkable for its confinement in a broadly relationship, inter- and intro-personal domain” (p. 109). Hay and Nye found the relational aspect of spirituality in the children they interviewed in the children’s awareness of their connectedness with self, others, God, and the world. As Nye (2011) asserted, the “relational consciousness” possessed by the children illustrates how spirituality is lived out as innate and integral to a child’s very being. Nye (2011) conceptualized children’s Christian spirituality as childlike in that it is sometimes nonconforming, pervading all aspects of life, fleeting, and vulnerable. She added that a child’s spirituality is not always easy to identify because children from Christian backgrounds do not rely primarily on explicit Christian language or images to describe their spirituality.

In congruence with Hay and Nye’s (2006) theory of relational consciousness, Fisher (2004) developed a concept of spiritual well-being based on the quality of four salient relationships: relationship with self, others, God, and the world. From this framework he initially developed SHALOM, a measurement of spiritual health designed for adolescents. Later, he developed the Feeling Good, Living Life measure to assess spiritual well-being in children. Each of these measurements explores spirituality in the four relational domains: personal, communal, environmental, and transcendental (Fisher, 2004).

Descriptions of children’s spirituality based on the research by Coles (1990), Hay and Nye (2006), Hyde (2005), and Fisher (2008) provide a framework for exploring how

children act as agents and participants in their spiritual lives while acknowledging the adult's role in providing wisdom and guidance to the child's experience. It is important to recognize the spiritual lives of children to better understanding their religious internalization.

**Approaches to religious orientation.** Allport (1950) provided a seminal theory of religiosity in which he described mature or intrinsic religiosity and immature or extrinsic religiosity. Immature religiosity is that which has “not evolved beyond the level of impulsive self-gratification” and “fails to provide a context of meaning in which the individual can locate himself” (p. 54). He described intrinsic religiosity as “less of a servant, and more of a master” because “it tends rather to control and to direct these motives toward a goal that is no longer determined by mere self-interest” (p. 62). In his framework, intrinsic religious orientation is defined by people's striving for meaning and value from their religious beliefs and practices. Extrinsic religious orientation involves a utilitarian approach to religious values. Allport and Ross (1967) later used this groundwork to develop the Religious Orientation Scale. The 20-item scale measures individuals' level of intrinsic (nine items) and extrinsic religiosity (11 items). Those scoring high on the intrinsic subscale ascribe more value and importance to religion and are viewed as more orthodox in their beliefs, as opposed to those scoring high on extrinsic who exhibit a more dogmatic prejudiced approach to religion. The scale was used to identify differences in religiosity among eighth graders from public and Christian schools. Results indicated those students from Christian schools had more intrinsic religious orientation (Tjart & Boersma, 1978).

This scale provided the catalyst for scholars to explore other approaches to measuring religious orientation. In the Religious Orientation Scale, intrinsic motivation is connected to orthodoxy. Batson and Ventis (1982) criticized the scale for missing any measurement to address those with a more fluid, open approach to religion. They developed the Religious Life Inventory as an alternative approach. Their inventory includes three subscales to measure religion as a means, religion as an end, and religion as a quest. The first subscale, Religion as a Means, is similar to Allport and Ross's (1967) extrinsic orientation. The Religion as an End subscale most closely aligns with the focus on orthodoxy in the intrinsic religiosity of the Religious Orientation Scale. Religion as Quest adds a third dimension to assess a more open approach to religion, that is a self-critical, reflective religiosity. Religion as Quest identifies the individual's willingness to "openly face complex, existential questions" and resist "clear-cut, pat answers" (Batson & Ventis, 1982, p. 430).

The language and question structure are such that neither of the above referenced scales of religious orientation are appropriate for children or young adolescents. Gorsuch and Venable (1983) recognized the value of having a measurement that could be used with both children and adults. Based on the Religious Orientation scale, they developed the Age Universal Intrinsic-Extrinsic Scale (AUIES) to be used with ages fifth grade and above. They simplified the language of the Religious Orientation Scale and began by identifying correlations between the simplified version and the original version in a sample of adults. They found medium to high correlations between the items in the two scales. Based on the initial study, they made changes to the items and explored the reliability of the scale among a group of 11<sup>th</sup> graders. They landed on a measurement

considered parallel to the original form but simplified enough for all ages. They tested the final measurement among fifth and seventh graders. The measurement was problematic with students in fifth grade who scored low on the Information Inventory, a measure of verbal ability, so the authors suggest using the measurement with caution among fifth graders. Analysis indicated a high reliability for the extrinsic orientation subscale ( $\alpha = .75$ ) and for the intrinsic orientation subscale ( $\alpha = .68$ ). Scholars have since made further adjustments to this scale (Banister, 2011; Maltby, 1999, 2002; Maltby & Lewis, 1996). Based on his research with 3,090 adults and children from the USA, England, and Ireland, Maltby (1999) determined the extrinsic orientation really measured two variables: extrinsic social and extrinsic personal. He developed a new measurement to reflect the two variables called AUIES-12. Banister (2011) then adjusted the AUIES-12 by adding an additional ten items to measure extrinsic rule keeping.

Neyrinck, Lens, Vansteenkiste, and Soenens (2010) investigated Allport's religiosity scale and Batson and Ventis' (1982) Religious Orientation Scale in light of self-determination theory. They administered several surveys to 144 adult participants: the AUSIES-12 (Maltby, 1999), the Quest Orientation scale (Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993), the Religious Motivation Scale (Neyrinck, Vansteenkiste, Lens, Duriez, & Hutsebaut, 2006), and the Postcritical Belief Scale (Duriez, Soenens, & Hutsebaut, 2005). There was no correlation between intrinsically motivated religiosity from the SDT framework and intrinsic motivation from the AUSIE-12. The authors expected this because there is only one item on Allport's IR scale that relates to enjoyment of religious activity, whereas the remainder focus on endorsement of religious values. They found the strongest statistically significant relationship between Allport's intrinsic religiosity and

internalized motivation in the Religious Motivation Scale ( $\alpha = .45, p < .001$ ). In Allport's ER scales, religion is lightly valued and behaviors are shown to be unimportant to the individual. This is different than the SDT externalized motivation perspective where external or internal social pressure exists even for behaviors that are important to the person. The findings solidified the researcher's hypothesis that Allport's extrinsic orientation relates more to goal pursuits than motivations and, therefore, does not fit within a SDT framework (Neyrinck et al., 2006). They further argued that Allport's intrinsic orientation is parallel to autonomous motivation, whereas Allport's extrinsic-social and extrinsic-personal are both measures of goal pursuits outside the realm of SDT. None of the motivational regulations correlated with the Quest Scale. Neyrinck, Lens, and Vansteenkiste (2005) argued that based on their research, SDT provides an understanding of religious orientation unique to Allport's theory and measurements developed based on that theory. Therefore, SDT provides a unique perspective for understanding religious motivation.

O'Conner and Vallerand (1990) used SDT as a guide for evaluating religious motivation in elderly men and women. They argued that motivation toward religion is "a more precise indication of religiosity than actual behavior" (p. 54). The study explored motivation for religious behavior in French-Canadian men and women. They used a religious subscale of the Motivation in Elderly scale to investigate participant's motivation behind going to church, praying, and practicing religion. The scale identified amotivation, non-self-determined extrinsic, self-determined extrinsic, and intrinsic motivation. Depression significantly correlated with amotivation toward religious behavior ( $r = .61, p < .001$ ) and non-self-determined extrinsic religious motivation ( $r =$

.40,  $p < .001$ ). Intrinsic motivation was positively correlated with life satisfaction ( $r = .25, p < .001$ ), meaning in life ( $r = .30, p < .001$ ) and self-esteem ( $r = .31, p < .001$ ).

This study provided the groundwork for understanding the value in research investigating religiosity from a SDT framework.

Ryan et al. (1993) further explored the process of internalization of religious beliefs and values using the SDT. They described internalization as “the process through which an individual transforms a formerly externally prescribed regulation or value into an internal one” (p. 586). They posited that “regulations or beliefs associated with identification are those that the individual feels are personally chosen and valued” (p. 587). They wanted to design a scale of religious motivation focused on the concepts of introjected and identified motivational orientation. The new measure is “not antithetical” to previous religious orientation scales, primarily the Religious Life Inventory (Batson & Ventis, 1982) and the Religious Orientations scale (Allport & Ross, 1967) but “more specific in what they measure” and based on a different theoretical framework (p. 588). Over four studies, they investigated religious internalization in undergraduate students at secular, Protestant and Catholic universities, adults from an independent Protestant church, and youth, ages 13-23, who participated in summer evangelical projects. The study included questionnaires to assess self-esteem, self-actualization, general health, and social-desirability. It also included religious orientation measures: the Religious Life Inventory (Batson & Ventis, 1982) and the Religious Orientation Scale (Allport & Ross, 1967) to measure agreement with statements concerning Christian orthodoxy. The researchers developed and assessed the Christian Religious Internalization Scale. Analysis on the Christian Religious Internalization Scale consistently revealed a two-

factor model, introjection (controlled motivation) and identification (more autonomous motivation), both of which related to previously developed measures of religious orientation. Questions in the introjected subscale included “When I turn to God, I most often do it because I would feel guilty if I didn’t” (Ryan et al., 1993, p. 590). An example item from the identified scale is “God is important to me and I’d like other people to know about him too” (Ryan et al., 1993, p. 590). Identification orientation is related to Allport and Ross’s (1967) intrinsic religiosity and Batson and Ventis’ (1982) Religion as an End orientation. Introjection was only mildly related to extrinsic religiosity (Allport & Ross, 1967) and Religion as a Means (Batson & Ventis, 1982). The fourth study, with 342 Christian youths ages 13 through 23, showed a significant negative correlation between identified religious motivation and depression ( $r = .33, p < .05$ ) and anxiety, ( $r = .39, p < .05$ ). Whereas, there was a significant positive correlation between identified religious motivation and self-actualization ( $r = .43, p < .001$ ) and identity integration, ( $r = .33, p < .05$ ). They argued that self-determination is particularly salient for understanding religious motivation because it addresses social-environmental elements that promote internalization.

Neyrinck et al. (2006) also explored religious motivation in adults within a self-determination theory framework. They asked participants to share which religious activities were most central to expressing their beliefs and asked them to report the motivation behind those activities. They found that identified and internalized religious motivation formed one factor due to the difficulty in quantifying the difference between the two types of motivation. Findings also indicated that those with a more identified orientation showed a more open-minded, flexible approach to religious practices. The

authors argued it appears that those who place more personal value in their religious behavior are more comfortable to “flexibly adopt his or her religion and perceive it as one possible meaning-endowing framework” (p. 331). They also confirmed findings from Ryan et al. (1993) that internalized religious motivation positively predicts overall well-being (self-actualization, identity integration, and global self-esteem).

Soenens, Perencevich, DiCintio, and Turner (2012) developed a 24-item measurement to measure views of God as controlling or autonomy-supportive, called the God Perception Scale. They investigated views of God in relation to religious motivation using the measurement used by Neyrinck et al. (2006). They found a significant positive relationship between view of God as autonomy-supportive and integrated religious motivation ( $\beta = .32, p < .001$ ). They also found that controlling perceptions of God showed a small but statistically significant positive relationship with introjected religiosity ( $\beta = .12, p < .05$ ).

Assor et al. (2005) investigated parental conditional regard and parental religious intrinsic value demonstration (IVD) as antecedents of Jewish adolescents’ religious orientation. Parental conditional regard refers to the degree to which parents provide affection to their children based on the child’s level of compliance with certain expectations. Intrinsic value demonstration refers to the extent to which an individual provides a “convincing model” for a behavior which “naturally conveys the sense of satisfaction and growth that accompanies engagement in a behavior” (Assor et al., 2005, p. 111). Results indicated that parental conditional regard is an antecedent of religious introjection, and parent religious IVD is an antecedent of religious identification.

Brambilla et al. (2015) extended the research investigating antecedents in adolescents' religious internalization with Catholic youth. They investigated the potential for religious groups and leaders to influence adolescents' religious internalization beyond perceived parental conditional regard and perceived parental religious IVD. Brambilla et al. (2015) hypothesized that religious IVD of peers and group leader autonomy support would predict identified religious orientation in youth who participated regularly in religious groups. They used the Christian Religious Internalization Scale (Ryan et al., 1993) to measure identified and introjected motivation. This study confirmed the previous study from Assor et al. (2005) that perceived parental autonomy support and perceived parental religious IVD predicted religious identification, while perceived parent conditional regard predicted religious introjection. Furthermore, peer group IVD and religious leader autonomy support predicted religious identification when controlling for parental IVD and conditional regard. Therefore, religious groups may uniquely contribute to identified religion. They also found a significant relationship between group IVD and religious introjection. The authors speculated that within religious based groups, peers who are perceived to be highly engaged with their beliefs and practices might be experienced by others as pressuring.

Using a SDT framework, Flor and Knapp (2001) explored how parents pass on deeply held religious values to their children. They investigated how discussions of faith between parents and children support children's internalizing of the religious beliefs and practices valued by their parents. They described internalization as "the socialization process by which children come to learn, value, and acquire the beliefs and behaviors of their parents" (p. 627). They used an Inventory of Religious Internalization based on the

Christian Religious Internalization Scale developed by Ryan et al. (1993) to assess children's internalization of religious practices, belief in God, attendance at religious services, and prayer. Children answered a 28-item survey based on their religious practice, motivation for religious behavior, and dyadic discussions about faith with parents. Mothers and fathers participated by filling out a similar 50-item survey, which included questions related to their level of desire for their child to be religious. Flor and Knapp (1994) found a statistically significant positive relationship between intrinsic religiosity and dyadic discussion of faith with mothers ( $\beta = .40, t = 5.59, p < .0001$ ) and dyadic discussion of faith with fathers ( $\beta = .24, t = 4.46, p < .0001$ ). There was no statistically significant relationship with introjected religiosity. They concluded that "parent-child transactions significantly impact adolescent internalization of parental motivations for religious behavior" (p. 4).

**Spirituality and religious orientation.** Religion and spirituality are two overlapping concepts which share the human search for meaning and sacred but embody different experiences and practices (May & Ratcliff, 2004; McGrath, 1999; Sheldrake, 2012). James (1985) identified two types of religion: institutional and personal. Institutional religion is defined by a communal search for meaning through doctrine, practice, and ritual. Tamminen and Nurmi (1995) related James' (1985) institutional religion to Allport and Ross' (1967) extrinsic religiosity. Whereas, he compares James' (1985) concept of personal religion as a "very direct and intimate experience of the divinity" (p. 2) to Allport and Ross' (1967) intrinsic religiosity. Bridges and Moore (2002) made a similar distinction arguing that religion may involve a collective search for spiritual meaning guided and supported by practices and beliefs of the various religious

traditions. There appears to be a significant body of literature that concedes spirituality is not synonymous with religiosity, but spirituality can be expressed within a religious belief system. Ranson (2002) argued that spirituality is enhanced through religious experience. He wrote, “When the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘religious’ moments do work together in harmony, there is every possibility for spiritual vitality” (p. 32).

**Parent and child religiosity.** Self-determination theory offers a contextual perspective on the process of internalization of behaviors, beliefs, and values. The family serves as the primary socialization context for young children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and therefore provides a crucial context for understanding salient elements for supporting children’s self-regulation in a variety of realms including education (Grolnick, 2015; Wong, 2008), prosocial behaviors (Wong, 2008), and religion (Boyatzis, 2008; Duriez et al., 2009). Parents are “crucial for the intergenerational transmission of religious beliefs and practices” (Vermeer, 2010, p. 403). Parent religiosity is recognized as a central influence for children’s religiosity (Benson, Donahue, & Erickson, 1989; Boyatzis et al., 2006; Flor & Knapp, 2001). Parents support children’s religiosity in a variety of ways through discussions about faith (Flor & Knapp, 2001; Okagaki & Bevis, 1999), shared religious practices (Desrosiers, Kelley, & Miller, 2011; Francis, 1993), and religious role modeling (Dollahite & Marks, 2005; Myers, 1996). As identified earlier, Assor et al. (2005) found parental religious IVD is an important variable for children’s religiosity. Any research focused on children’s religiosity should take into account the overwhelming evidence that families play a significant role in supporting or hindering children’s religious internalization.

**Research with children in the church.** This current study aimed to explore the

role of perceived autonomy and relatedness in church in supporting religious internalization in children, controlling for parent religiosity considering the significant impact of families' transmission of behaviors and values. The following research provided a background for empirical evidence that supports the value of autonomy and relatedness in church for children.

*Adult perspective on children's autonomy.* In a 1976 study, Bohrnstedt, Freeman, and Smith (1981) administered face-to-face surveys to 1,002 adults in Los Angeles to identify adult views on children's autonomy. The survey used vignettes based on 10 key themes that may reflect conflicting opinions between adults and children: education, family living arrangements, privacy, appearance and personal freedom, religion, economics and work, sexual conduct, access to the media, political participation and public responsibility, and social participation (Bohrnstedt et al., 1981, p. 445). Each vignette included a question asking the participant the minimum age at which a child should be able to independently make the decision for themselves related to that vignette. Mean scores indicated that adults leaned more toward respecting children's opinion in the areas of privacy, political participation, public responsibility, and social responsibility. Mean scores showed a bias toward stronger parental control in areas of media exposure, sexual conduct, appearance, and religious behavior (Bohrnstedt et al., 1981, p. 454). Bohrnstedt et al. (1981) reported that the participants' religious affiliation indicated a biased result. Those with no religious affiliation were more likely to support the children's right to autonomy in relation to religion. Jewish respondents were more likely than Catholics and Protestants to side with the child in all areas. Protestants were slightly biased toward the rights of the children. Unfortunately, the authors did not divulge the

statistical information in the research report, making it difficult to identify the statistical significance of the study.

*Adult perspectives of children in the church.* As a part of the *Faith Formation in Children's Ministries* project, Yust (2002) used qualitative evaluation of 11 churches to "identify what impedes a richer and fuller understanding of Christian faith formation of children" (p. 1). She spent several days observing worship and children's ministry programs in each church. The churches represented seven different denominations and a variety of sizes from less than 150 members to 2,000 members. Yust (2002) found that most Christian education programs focus on children as passive recipients of content. She argued that current Christian education curricula geared toward children is primarily built upon a future orientation of children, based on a view of children as vessels needed to be filled with the right religious understanding. She found "little pedagogical value" placed on children's experiences (p. 8). Adults in the programs appeared uncomfortable with children's initiative to discuss difficult questions. She wrote, "I heard widespread ambivalence about the usefulness of permitting the 'stuff' of children's lives to have space in children's ministry programs" (p. 3). Adults tended to categorize children's conversations about daily life as distracting from the real learning, and they reacted by ignoring or redirecting those conversations. According to Yust (2002), "Most lesson plans provide little time or direction for encouraging children to reflect on their relationship with God apart from prescribed truths" (p. 3). She found a general lack of recognition of children as innately spiritual and capable of experiences with God. As an implication of the research she suggested that children need opportunities to directly encounter God. The observational nature of this research limits the ability to determine

how these experiences shape children's religiosity; however, the description provided a helpful picture of areas for potential research and growth in children's ministry.

Gallagher (2007) investigated two churches, a Presbyterian and Baptist church in the Pacific Northwest. She used participant observation to investigate the ways in which children are religious resources for adult religious identity formation. In both congregations, she found children were commonly referred to as "the future of the church" (p. 181). Members expressed gaining encouragement from the active participation of young people as a sign that the local church would continue into the future. She found the children were viewed as important for a sense of "history and continuity" of the church traditions (p. 181). The programs for children, particularly educational programs such as Sunday school, are "symbolically" important to the church "contributing to the subcultural ideas about resisting 'the world' and strengthening family values" (p. 181). Gallagher (2007) concluded that "children themselves are a religious resource whose presence in worship, service, and discourse help to create and maintain a sense of identity, place, and meaning in the lives of worshiping adults" (p. 169). The research reflects another example of the future-oriented perspectives of children in the church. The article did not show any indication that the adults valued their relationships with children, the perspectives of the children, or the ability children had to point adults to a new and fresh way of viewing their religious traditions. Rather, children were portrayed as objects of religious continuation and somewhat manipulated into a way of being in the church that adhered to adults needs.

Gibson (2001) examined the difference between a traditional classroom approach and Sofia Cavaletti's *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* as contrasting models for Sunday

school. In the traditional approach, used widely among Protestant churches, children are separated by grade level and taught lessons based primarily on major events in the Bible (Gibson, 2001). Emphasis is placed on scripture memorization and correctly answering questions (p. 48). Children in traditional approaches are primarily viewed through a developmental stages lens. The *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* is defined by a belief that children should be able to learn and discover on their own (Cavaletti, 1979/1983). Children are given space to learn based on their own needs. Instead of directing the learning, the teacher is facilitating the environment. Children in this approach are viewed as spiritual agents, capable of experiencing God without adult instruction.

In two churches over a semester, Gibson (2001) used various methods to evaluate first graders in both models of Christian education. In conclusion, Gibson found strengths but, most notably, insufficiencies in both approaches. He found the teachers in the traditional model relied too heavily on assumptions that correct answers or knowledge lead to deeper faith. While in the *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*, he observed so much freedom that the children were not introduced to basic scriptural principles that could have added depth to their faith. Gibson called for an educational model that is developed out of the strengths of various models, including the traditional and *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* (Gibson, 2001). While the conclusions reported from this research were beneficial in providing a clear understanding of the difference between the two classrooms, Gibson failed explain the criteria used to determine any specific strengths or deficiencies in the two curricula, as opposed to the instructional methods, making it difficult to embrace and utilize the researcher's findings. The traditional model relies heavily on adult guidance with a lack of autonomy support. In contrast, the *Catechesis of*

*the Good Shepherd* may rely too heavily on children's spiritual agency, leaving little room for adult guidance. This may further indicate the need to more closely explore the balance of autonomy support and adult guidance in Sunday school.

***Autonomy with children in the church.*** Ridgley (2006) engaged in an ethnographic project to investigate eight- and nine-year-old's experiences of the Sacrament of First Communion in a Catholic church. She used participant observation, interviews with adults most integral to children's experiences of the sacrament, and interviews and conversations with children in their classrooms. She found children had an agentic perspective that shaped the way they interpreted and analyzed the sacrament (Ridgley, 2006). She found that children would find ways in the classroom environment to exert their autonomy in regards to their participation in the sacrament.

Similarly, Beste (2011) used interviews with 73 second graders to investigate their experience of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in Catholic churches. She divided children's responses to the sacrament into three groups. The first group reported mixed feelings of nervousness and excitement around participating in the sacrament for the first time. The second group placed emphasis on the positive feelings they experienced following participation in the sacrament. They reported sensing a shift in self-perception and relationship with God as a result of the experience. The last group was delineated by their exceptionally positive perspective of the sacrament. She argued that this group's "enthusiasm and joy was substantially greater and more intense" (p. 333). They offered particularly deep reflections on the experience, and the majority of children in this category expressed a significant change in feelings of closeness to God following the participation in the sacrament.

Beste (2011) assessed children's sense of agency in choosing to participate in the sacrament. She found that children who perceived a greater sense of choice to participate in the sacrament tended to have more positive responses related to the experience. She wrote, "Such data demonstrate that the higher degree of agency, the greater likelihood that children will experience a positive impact on their relationship with God" (Beste, 2011, p. 339). She reported children's sense of autonomy in the opportunity to choose to participate in the sacrament was a "significant variable affecting their attitude, the sacrament's meaningfulness, and Reconciliation's impact on their relationship with God and others" (p. 295). Additionally, Beste (2011) found a disparity between children's propensity for spiritual reflection and adults' perceptions of children's abilities for religious reflection. As reported by Beste (2011), the most significant contribution of her research is the recognition of a relationship between children's sense of autonomy and their relationship with God and meaning making from religious practices.

"Godly Play" is a Montessori-based approach to Christian education used with children in Sunday school programs, hospital chaplaincy, and Christian day schools (Minor, 2012). Berryman (1995) designed Godly Play as a method to support the spiritual lives of children by providing a structure for them to address their existential questions. Godly Play engages the whole child through a multi-sensory experience of the Biblical narrative. The child-centered method provides an autonomy-supportive structure that integrates key components of autonomy support: choice, control, respect, and relevancy. The element of choice is a key feature of a Godly Play, as children have choice from the very beginning when they are invited to come into the classroom when ready. The adult leaders, called "doorpersons" in this case, are instructed to offer children the invitation to

come in but let the child choose when he or she is ready to enter. From there, the second adult leader, the storyteller, presents a Biblical story using a variety of natural materials. A period of group wondering follows the storytelling. The group wondering time, unlike a typical question and answer session in a classroom, provides the opportunity for storyteller and children to “engage playfully with the lesson of the day” (Hyde, 2010, p. 508). Stonehouse (2001) stated, “In Godly Play, we want the children to approach Scripture reflectively so that its insights can unfold for a lifetime, in step with the child’s readiness” (p. 39). Following the group wondering, children enter a time of work, in which they choose how to respond to the story. Choices include reflecting on the lesson through art using various materials provided in the classroom or using the materials from previously-told stories to reimagine the story in their own way. A number of researchers have investigated the role of Godly Play in the spiritual lives of children in a number of settings including preschools (Helm, Berg, & Scranton, 2007), religious schools (Worsley, 2004), healthcare settings (Farrell, Cope, Cooper, & Mathias, 2008), and churches (Hyde, 2010; Minor, 2012; Stonehouse, 2001). The following paragraphs highlight the research surrounding Godly Play with children in churches.

Hyde (2010) argued that, unlike many Christian curricula for children, Godly Play provides an approach to Christian education that helps teachers honor the voices and experiences of the children in the classroom. Through a case study, Hyde (2010) observed three-year-old Daniel in a Godly Play classroom. During the work time, Daniel chose to work with the materials from the Parable of the Good Shepherd. Daniel “seemed absorbed” in the activity of taking the sheep one by one and placing them on the shoulder of the Good Shepherd (Hyde, 2010, p. 5090). Hyde learned that Daniel chose to work with

the same materials the prior week. Daniel appeared to be making meaning from the materials and searching for the significance of the parable. The findings from this case study cannot be used to draw any inferences into the value of Godly Play for Christian education. It should also be noted that Hyde did not develop his theory of what Daniel experienced from Daniel's own voice. Making assumptions about the child's experience, without the child's direct input, in some way violates the notion of honoring the child's voice in research. However, this case study is valuable in showing how a three-year-old may engage in an autonomy-supportive environment. In this context, the Godly Play model provided autonomy support to the children by giving the children choice in their activity. Furthermore, children have the freedom to experience and explore the Bible story in their own way without an adult telling the child what to glean from the story.

Stonehouse (2001) investigated elements of children's spirituality in 40 elementary-age children; 20 children participated in Godly Play Sunday school, and 20 participated in a different Sunday morning program. She asked children to draw pictures of God, Jesus, and their favorite Bible stories. She also asked them to use materials to retell Biblical stories. Common elements in both groups included elements of light used to describe God and reports of feeling close to God. She found children in the Godly Play group were more likely to retell the stories with greater thoroughness, to express greater pleasure in the retelling of stories, and to use the term "wonder" more often. The author noted that some of the group differences can be attributed to the different materials provided to each group. Stonehouse (2001) concluded the findings suggested that "Godly Play helps children creatively engage the stories and discover most of them" (p. 39).

Minor (2012) assessed the spiritual well-being of children engaged in a Godly Play program. She noted ethical concerns around assigning children to a control group and providing them with an experience that is hypothesized by the researcher to be less supportive of the participants' spiritual well-being. Therefore, Minor (2012) used length of time in the Godly Play in one sample and length of time since ending participation in the program in another sample as the independent variables. She used the Feeling Good, Living Life (Fisher, 2004) instrument to examine the extent to which length of enrollment in a Godly Play program contributed to children's overall spiritual well-being. Results of the study revealed no significant relationship between length of exposure and spiritual well-being. Minor (2012) noted that findings should be read with caution because length of exposure was based on a self-report measure due to lack of accurate attendance records. The study did show a positive relationship between spiritual well-being and length of time since ending participation in the program. Minor (2012) highlighted the possibility that the results indicate a long-term effect of exposure to the program that mitigates the repression of spirituality which typically occurs in adolescence.

***Relatedness with children in the church.*** Research indicates the value of relatedness in children's lives (Grossman & Grossman, 2009; Ryan et al., 1991; Ryan & Powelson, 1991; Furrer & Skinner, 2003), but the church remains a fairly unexplored context for social support for children (Crosby, Smith, & Frederick, 2015). Crosby et al. (2015) argued "Churches may be uniquely positioned to provide children with long-term positive adult and peer relationships because they strongly promote prosocial norms and can sustain individual social connections over an extended period of time" (p. 88). The

following investigations further support the value of social support in church, particularly for support of children's religious internalization.

After a transformative experience in an intergenerational small group, Allen (2004) wanted to explore the relationship between intergenerational experiences in Christian settings and children's faith development. Allen (2004) interviewed 9- to 11-year-olds from six churches. Group one consisted of three churches in which children were engaged in the life of the community through intentional intergenerational activities. Children in the second group, from the three remaining churches, spent most of their time at church separated from the adults in age-segregated activities. Allen's questions were designed to identify attributes of children's prayer lives and their awareness of God.

Allen (2004) gathered the interview data and identified similarities and differences between the two groups. Conclusions about children's awareness of their relationship with God were based on the number of times they spoke about that relationship or prayer. For example, she tabulated the number of times children mentioned prayer in the interview before they were asked specific questions about prayer, did a statistical comparison of the two groups, and found a significant statistical difference between the two groups. In her findings, Allen concluded that although all the children provided "eloquent testimony to their relationships with God," the children from the intergenerational group were "more aware of their relationship with God" (p. 281). This study provided a starting point for Allen to further identify how relatedness in church through intergenerational relationships can support children's religiosity (Allen & Ross, 2012).

In her dissertation, Fogt (2007) designed and implemented four intergenerational worship services where children were treated as active participants. She used phenomenological interviewing to test her hypothesis that “authentic Christian worship” occurs when the entire community, including children, worships together and from that experience “children will value the worship of God because they are connected to the faith community” (p. 63).

There were 20 participants: 10 children, five adults with children, and five adults without children (Fogt, 2007). Each participant was interviewed three times directly following one of the four worship experiences. Through categorizing and reviewing the data, Fogt (2007) concluded that participation in worship leadership and the formation of special relationships with adults were the primary factors impacting a child’s decision to continue to participate in a worship when they were given the choice. She found the children in the study were happier and more engaged in worship than the adults perceived (Fogt, 2007).

Fogt acknowledged that the second part of her hypothesis, “that children will value the worship of God because they are connected to the faith community” (2007, p. 102), could not be adequately addressed without a longitudinal study that included interviews of the children five to ten years from the initial interview. While children in these interviews indicated a desire to worship God, many factors can impact desire. This study confirmed the researcher’s beliefs, supported by literature, that intergenerational worship experiences can be a positive experience for children and adults alike.

Crosby et al. (2015) defined social support as a feeling of belonging, being cared for, and loved. They used an exploratory qualitative study including interviews with 20

Protestant Christian children ages 6 to 13 to explore children's experiences of social support in church. They developed an a priori coding frame which included three categories of social support: (a) feeling loved and cared for; (b) feeling esteemed and valued; (c) feeling part of a supportive community. The children reported feeling loved when adults were attentive, and provided physical affection, provision for choices, and listened to children's opinions in Sunday school. The children felt loved when peers gave them gifts, took time to talk with them, and found ways to help. Children reported feeling valued when they were noticed and affirmed by adults and peers. Lastly, children shared that opportunities to connect with peers and adults outside of regular programming helped them feel a part of a supportive community. Listening, being acknowledged, and heard were common themes from the children's answers related to what made them feel loved, valued, and special. One girl explained conflicting experiences of support from adults:

Sometimes when we're doing the talks in [Sunday school] and you're trying to tell [the adults] something, they'll say 'not now' so you can't talk right now.

You're trying to say your opinion and they won't let you, but sometimes they will let you say your opinion (p. 100).

This confirms Yust's (2002) findings that Sunday school teachers may ignore or redirect children's responses in order to get through all the content of the curriculum. Crosby et al. (2015) provided helpful implications of their finding for ministry leaders: "In the event that the teacher's instructional goals and the needs of individual children reach an impasse, one must consider whether the ultimate objective is for children to learn about love or to experience love for themselves" (p. 100). This research indicated that

experiencing love and belonging requires attentive listening, verbal acknowledgment and affirmation, and long-term relationships that grow outside of Sunday morning programming.

Crosby and Smith (2015) investigated if church participation significantly correlated with children's prosocial development when controlling for parenting practices. The research included 279 children 6- to 13-years-old from Protestant churches. Participants responded to a 19-item survey investigating spirituality, family religious practices, church support, and prosocial behavior (5-items per subscale). They found church support significantly predicted prosocial behavior and spirituality when controlling for family religious practices. They also found that spirituality mediated the relationship between church support and prosocial behavior. Crosby and Smith (2015) stated, "When children experience their church as friendly, responsive, and loving, they are more likely to perceive God as being close and responsive as well" (p. 251). This view of an attentive and close God could be representative of "an internalization of the religious teachings of their parents and church leaders" (p. 250). Their research presents a strong case for the value of SDT for understanding how social support, or relatedness, can enhance opportunities for religious internalization. Crosby and Smith (2015) suggested, "Children who receive from their church the provision of love, empathy, caring, trust, a sense of community, and the feeling of family are more likely to internalize the church's values regarding prosocial behavior" (p. 251).

In another investigation exploring relationships between children's self-esteem, God image, family religious practices, and church support, Smith and Crosby (2017) confirmed findings that adult support at church related to children's perceptions of God.

Children's perception that they receive support from adults and connectedness with adults at church positively correlated with a view of God as supportive and caring. The researchers highlighted the importance of religious contexts for shaping children's images of God.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided theoretical and empirical support for the basis of this research. It demonstrated a theological foundation for the value of autonomy and relatedness in Christian contexts. Furthermore, SDT is highlighted as a theoretical framework for understanding religious internalization in children. Empirical evidence indicates that autonomy support in Sunday school could be a predictor of religious internalization in children. Kneezel and Emmons (2006) hypothesized that "Children who experience a warm, autonomy-supportive church environment may be more likely to be religiously identified than children who experience a cold, controlling religious environment" (2001, p. 272). Relatedness in church is also a potential predictor of children's religiosity. Crosby and Smith (2015) posited that leaders hoping to "promote a transformative kind of spirituality" should strongly consider the social support within the congregation and "be intentional about providing relational— rather than just instructional — opportunities for children in their care" (p. 252).

## Chapter Three

### Research Methods

This correlational study was designed to investigate the Christian congregation as a context to nurture the religious internalization of children in the church from a social-contextual perspective using self-determination theory (SDT). This study examined perceived autonomy in Sunday school and perceived relatedness in church as predictors of the internalization of religious practices in children when controlling for parent religiosity. Additionally, it explored the relationship between children's identified religiosity and relationship with God. This quantitative study was designed to answer the following research questions:

**Research Question One:** Do perceived autonomy in Sunday school and perceived relatedness in church predict degree of identified religiosity among upper elementary age children when controlling for the perceived parent religious intrinsic value demonstration (IVD)?

**Research Question Two:** If perceived autonomy support in Sunday school and perceived relatedness in church do predict identified religiosity, which variable is a stronger predictor?

**Research Question Three:** Do perceived autonomy support in Sunday school and perceived relatedness in church predict degree of introjected religiosity among upper elementary age children when controlling for the perceived parent religious IVD?

**Research Question Four:** Does degree of identified religiosity predict relationship to God among upper elementary age children, when controlling for perceived parent religious IVD?

The research hypotheses based on these research questions are:

- 1) Perceived autonomy support in Sunday school and perceived relatedness in church do predict degree of identified religiosity among upper elementary age children when controlling for the perceived parent religious IVD.
- 2) Perceived relatedness in church is a stronger predictor of identified religiosity than perceived autonomy in Sunday school.
- 3) Perceived autonomy support in Sunday school and perceived relatedness in church, do predict degree of introjected religiosity among upper elementary age children when controlling for the perceived parent religious IVD.
- 4) Degree of identified religiosity does significantly predict relationship to God among upper elementary age children, when controlling for perceived parent religious IVD.

These hypotheses are grounded in SDT research that indicates individuals are more likely to identify with the beliefs and behaviors espoused in environments supportive of individual needs for autonomy and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Parent religiosity is shown to be a significant predictor of children's religiosity (Assor et al., 2005; Benson et al., 1989; Boyatzis et al., 2006; Flor & Knapp, 2001). This current research was designed to examine the church as a supportive environment for religious identification above and beyond parent religiosity. Furthermore, children have intricate spiritual lives that frame their understanding of religion, relationships, and existential questions (Coles, 1990; Hay

& Nye, 2006; Hyde, 2005) which may be influenced by the degree to which children internalize their religious beliefs.

**Sampling procedures.** A convenience sample of children in third to sixth grade from various Protestant Christian churches participated in this study. De Leeuw (2011) indicated children seven-years-old and above are able to complete self-reports surveys, due to their ability to distinguish different points of view, along with sufficient language and reading abilities. A total of 15 Protestant churches from around the United States (11 from Washington, two from Oregon, one from Minnesota, and one from Kentucky) served as research sites. A research assistant at each church administered the survey to third to sixth grade participants in the children's ministry programs. The researcher used convenience sampling to invite churches to participate in the project. After obtaining permission from the Seattle Pacific University Institutional Review Board, the researcher used personal emails, Facebook posts, and online forums, to recruit churches to serve as research sites.

**Data collection.** The researcher sent an invitation packet to those church leaders who expressed interest in serving as a research site. The packet included an introduction to the researcher, an overview of the research and research questions, and samples of the parent/guardian consent form, child assent form, and survey. Church leaders indicated their commitment to participate by filling out a brief online registration form. Of the 19 churches which originally agreed to participate, 15 actually administered the survey.

Each church assigned a leader from the congregation to serve as the research assistant. The research assistants participated in an online training to streamline the survey administration process. The training included four modules: (a) an introduction to

the survey; (b) information on ethical recruiting including the process for advertising the survey, gathering parent consent and child assent forms, and ensuring participation was fully voluntary; (c) guidelines for survey administration particularly to ensure anonymity; and (d) directions for gathering and submitting completed surveys and forms. Research assistants chose survey administration dates between January 1, 2017 and February 12, 2017. Based on their preference, each research assistant received either electronic or paper copies of the surveys, parent/guardian consent forms, and child assent forms. Research assistants with electronic copies, printed the surveys, so all surveys were administered on paper. The finalized surveys, parent/guardian consent forms, and child assent forms were returned to the primary researcher by February 21, 2017.

### **Preparation of Measurements**

The full survey consisted of five demographic questions, followed by five questionnaires, for a total of 45-items. The survey consisted of preexisting instruments, with adjustments made to some items to ensure appropriateness for the church context and age of the participants. In order to assess the validity of the scales with third to sixth grade students in a church context, the researcher conducted a focus group with six children using the cognitive interviewing method, prior to collecting large scale data. The focus group consisted of two third graders, two fourth graders, one fifth grader, and one sixth grader. There were three boys and three girls. Focus groups are particularly beneficial for evaluating acceptability of topics because participants trigger ideas for discussion with one another (De Leeuw, Borgers, & Smits, 2004, De Leeuw, 2011). The group format allows individuals to “explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less accessible in a one-to-one interview” (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 299). According to De

Leeuw et al. (2004), a group of around five children is optimal to keep the attention and motivation of focus group participants. The focus group was facilitated by the researcher using a semi-structured design based on cognitive interviewing. Cognitive interviewing is typically done in one-to-one interviews where the interviewer presents a questionnaire item, and invites the interviewees to share their thought process behind answering the item (Lippman et al., 2014). This method helps researchers identify congruence between the participant's cognitive processes and the intended meaning of items. The children knew the researcher who led the focus group, but another adult, unknown to the children, was present during the focus group.

The researcher used the focus group information to identify any potentially confusing items in the perceived parent's religious IVD scale (Brambilla et al, 2015). Prior to this study, the scale was only used outside the United States with slightly older youth, so questions were altered to support the younger age group. The focus group also provided information about the appropriateness of the items in the Teacher as Autonomy Support scale (Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, & Kindermann, 2008), as those questions were modified from the original version to fit a Christian religious context.

The researcher transcribed the focus group conversation and identified consensus about items needing adjustment. Overall, the focus group participants understood the items, but they offered suggestions for slight changes to enhance the readability. The researcher made changes to two of the questions in the Teacher as Autonomy Support scale based on insight from the focus group. The focus group participants expressed the value of changing from a 4-point Likert scale to a 5-point Likert scale and adding "rarely" as an option. The researcher considered this suggestion, but decided to retain the

4-point Likert scale for all questionnaires, except the Feeling Good, Living Life questionnaire, based on literature that supports 4-point Likert scales as ideal for use with children in this age group (Bell, 2007; De Leeuw, 2011). Feeling Good, Living Life has a specific scale model that is shown to be reliable and therefore remained intact for this study (Fisher, 2004).

When the survey items were finalized (see Appendix A) the researcher emailed electronic copies and sent paper copies to participating churches. Four of the churches, with a total of 25 participants, who received electronic copies, ultimately printed off the original survey from the invitation packet instead of the finalized survey. The original survey did not include a question about ethnicity, so that item remained unanswered for those participants. Furthermore, the survey administered to these 25 participants, included the old language for two items from the Teacher as Autonomy Support scale. This could have been avoided by adding a watermark with “draft” so that research assistants didn’t assume it was the final survey.

The 45-item survey consisted of demographic questions and the following questionnaires: Feeling Good, Living Life Questionnaire Relationship with God subscale (8-items) (Fisher, 2004); the Inventory of Religious Internalization (12-items) (Flor & Knapp, 2001); the Kid’s Church Survey (8-items) (Crosby & Smith, 2016); the Teacher Provision of Autonomy Support Short Form (8-items) (TASC, 1992); and the perceived parents’ religious (IVD) questionnaire (Brambilla et al., 2015). Finalized questionnaires were placed in a sealed envelope and returned to the primary researcher. A parent or legal guardian of each participant signed an informed consent form (see Appendix B) because

the subjects were under the age of 18. Additionally, each participant filled out a child assent form (see Appendix C) prior to filling out the survey.

### **Instrumentation**

The full questionnaire included five previously developed instruments to measure the variables under study. The first questionnaire, Feeling Good, Living Life (Fisher, 2004) was measured with a 5-point Likert scale. The remaining four questionnaires used a 4-point Likert scale. The scale for these questionnaires was congruent with the scale used in the Kid's Church Survey (Crosby & Smith, 2015). Participants were asked to "Circle the answer that is most true for you" and given the following four choices, (a) 1- never, (b) 2- sometimes, (c) 3- most of the time, (d) 4- always. A 4-point Likert scale is shown to be the most reliable for use with upper elementary age children (Bell, 2007; Borgers, De Leeuw, & Hox, 2000).

**Feeling Good, Living Life Questionnaire.** Fisher (2004) developed the Feeling Good, Living Life Questionnaire using his framework of spiritual health to assess the spiritual well-being of children ages five to 12. He developed this model based on research indicating the importance of healthy relationship with self, others, God and the environment for spiritual well-being (Fisher, 2004). Fisher also used this model as the theoretical foundation for the development of the Spiritual Health and Life-Orientation Measure (SHALOM) (Fisher, 2010), used for a number of empirical studies with adults and adolescents (Fisher, 1999; Fisher, 2000; Gomez & Fisher, 2003). Fisher (2004) designed the Feeling Good, Living Life instrument to provide a quantitative method for measuring spiritual well-being in young children. It measures each child's spiritual ideals (Feeling Good) and lived experience (Living Life) in four domains: relationship with self,

relationship with others, relationship with God, and relationship with the environment (Fisher, 2004). Fisher (2015) cautioned that the questionnaire is not an “exhaustive measure” of spiritual well-being, but a good “thermometer” to indicate spiritual health (p. 3). Fisher (2004) examined the 32-item measurement by surveying 1,080 children ages 5 to 12-years-old in Australia. It was then used with 201 children to measure test-retest reliability showing high correlational values of .72 (Feeling Good) and .78 (Living Life) indicating adequate test-retest reliability (Field, 2009).

The full survey includes four subscales to measure: (a) relationship to self, (b) relationship to others, (c) relationship to the environment, and (d) relationship to God. Each subscale measures the felt experience and lived experience related to that domain. This current study used the 8-items in the felt and lived experience of the relationship to God subscale in order to assess the correlation between identified religiosity and spiritual well-being through a relationship with God. The alpha reliability coefficient was .84 for the relationships with God domain indicating good reliability (Fisher, 2004). Fisher used a linear regression analysis to identify which of the four factors (relation to self, family, God and nature) explained the greatest variance in overall spiritual well-being across three different studies. The  $\beta$ -values from the regression models for all three studies showed relationship to God explained the greatest variance in overall spiritual well-being (Fisher, 2015). Overall spiritual well-being is scored by subtracting the mean of the felt experience from the mean of the lived experience for each subscale. However, in this analysis, overall relationship with God was scored by adding the totals for each of the 8-items. This method was used by Minor (2012) to score total spiritual well-being. The

relationship to God scale was found to have good reliability (eight items;  $\alpha = .84$ ) (George & Mallery, 2003).

**Inventory of Religious Internalization.** Flor and Knapp (2001) developed the Inventory of Religious Internalization (IRI) to measure religious internalization in fourth to sixth graders and their parents. The child version includes a total of 29-items divided into four sections: (a) values and beliefs, (b) motivations for religiousness, (c) religious behavior, and (d) salience and family process (Flor & Knapp, 2001). The 15-items measuring religious motivation were derived from the Christian Religious Internalization Scale (Ryan et al., 1993). The Christian Religious Internalization scale is designed to assess the motivation behind primary religious behaviors (Ryan et al., 1993). Self-determination theory provides the theoretical framework for the scale. Using a Likert-scale, participants respond with the level to which they identify with four different reasons for each behavior: sharing faith with others, turning to God, praying, and attending church. The scale measures two factors; identified (six items) and introjected (six items) motivation for the religious behavior. Ryan et al. (1993) developed the scale using four samples including undergraduate students, adult Sunday school participants, and youth participants in summer evangelical projects. The fourth sample included 342 male and females ranging in ages from 13- to 23-years-old. Alpha coefficients were not reported for sample four. However, the alpha coefficients for the other three samples ranged from .62 to .82 for introjected and .69 to .82 for identified religious motivation (Ryan et al., 1993). Brambilla et al. (2015) validated the scale with 421 adolescents in Italy ages 15 to 30. They reported an alpha coefficient for the entire scale of .85, with a coefficient of .89 for identification and .79 for introjection, indicating good reliability for

the entire scale. This scale has not been used with children under age 13 (George & Mallery, 2003).

Flor and Knapp (2001) adopted the scale for use with fourth to sixth graders to measure motivation for church participation, prayer, and belief in God. The 15-items from the religious motivation section of the IRI showed three factors; intrinsic motivation, introjected motivation, and extrinsic motivation. While Flor and Knapp (2001) named the items measuring the most autonomous form of religiosity as “intrinsic”, the items appear to be more in line with identified religiosity as measured in the CRIS. Therefore, for this study, the items were considered to measure *identified* instead of *intrinsic* motivation. This study is focused on identified versus introjected motivation, so those items that make up the extrinsic motivation factor were excluded, resulting in a 12-item scale. The internal consistency of the identified scale was .79 and .80 for the introjected scale (Flor & Knapp, n.d.) indicating good reliability (George & Mallery, 2003).

In the current study, Cronbach’s alpha for the six identified and six introjected items were .69 and .87 respectively. Total identified religiosity and introjected religiosity were measured by the sum of the six items in each subscale, for a total possible score of 24 for each variable. The closer to 24 the greater the degree of identified or introjected religiosity.

**Kid’s Church Survey.** The Kids’ Church Survey was designed to measure a child’s perceived and received social support by both adults and peers in church (Crosby & Smith, 2016). Social support in this measurement is examined in four domains: attachment, reassurance of worth, guidance, and social integration (Crosby & Smith,

2016). Perceived church support is “a child’s perception that he or she is loved, valued, and supported by (non-family member) peers and adults in his or her church community” (p. 4). An initial 40-items were gathered from several existing social support scales and were pretested using cognitive interviews with 20 church attending children. A total of 24-items of the original 40-items were retained following the cognitive interviews. Results from the pilot study with 328 children ages six to 12, led the researchers to revise the instrument to 14-items. The instrument was validated with 505 children ages six through 12. Internal reliability was calculated with McDonald’s  $w$  for perceived peer support (.79), perceived adult support (.86), and received support (.78), indicating good reliability for each subscale (Field, 2009). The researchers assessed test-retest reliability with 74 children two weeks after the initial test. The reliability ranged from .88 to .95 for each subscale suggesting good stability overtime (Field, 2009).

The entire instrument measures perceived support from adults, perceived support from peers, and received support at church. The current study assessed perceived relatedness in church and therefore only used the perceived support from adults (four items) and perceived support from peers (four items) subscales. Received support is defined as “supportive functions which are actually provided by (non-family member) peers and adults in the child’s church community” (p. 4). The received support from church subscale is valuable for understanding social support from church, however, it measures actual support received which is beyond the scope of this present study. In this current study relatedness is defined as “the need to feel belongingness and connectedness with others” (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Relatedness is further described as the need for connection, support, and care from others (Ryan & Powelson, 1991). This aligns with the

definition of perceived support in the Kid's Church Survey as "a child's perception that he or she is loved, valued, and supported by (non-family member) peers and adults in his or her church community" (p. 4). The eight items of the perceived relatedness scale showed high reliability ( $\alpha = .81$ ) (George & Mallery, 2003). The items were totaled to create a sum score for perceived relatedness. The higher the score, up to 16, the greater level of perceived relatedness.

**Teacher Provision of Autonomy Support.** The Teacher Provision of Autonomy Support is a subscale of the Teacher as Social Context Questionnaire (TASC, 1992, p. 1). This questionnaire was designed to investigate student motivation in school. It examines teacher behavior (teacher report of teacher context) and student experience (student report of teacher context) in relation to the three psychological needs identified in SDT: competence, relationality, and autonomy. The long form of the teacher report section of teacher behavior includes 40 items, and the long form of the student report of teacher context consists of 54 items. Longitudinal research using the entire long form student report measure with fourth to seventh graders yielded an alpha coefficient of .96 in the fall, and .96 in the spring (Skinner et al., 2008). The autonomy-supportive long-form questionnaire with students in third to fifth grade yielded an alpha coefficient of .84 (Skinner & Belmont, 1993), indicating high reliability (George & Mallery, 2003). A short-form of the student report of teacher context consists of 24-items total. The reliability of the short form was analyzed with a sample of 500 children in third to sixth grade with alpha coefficients indicating good reliability for the involvement subscale (.80), structure scale (.76) and autonomy support scale (.79) (TASC, 1992, p. 3).

This current study employed the eight items from the short-form of the Teacher Provision of Autonomy Support subscale. The instrument is designed to assess several components of autonomy support: choice, control, respect, and relevance. Many measures of autonomy support rely heavily on items relating to student choice, but as indicated by research with eight to 14-year-olds, students are able to differentiate between different types of autonomy support (Assor et al., 2002). Assor et al. (2002) found that fostering relevance was the highest predictor of student engagement and affect in children and adolescents. They posited that while choice or “freedom of action” is important, the extent to which one’s actions support one’s individual values and interests is just as valuable (p. 273). Assor et al. (2002) argued that there is not one particular form of autonomy-supportive behavior that is most important, so when assessing autonomy support it is important to specify the type of support being measured. The Teacher Provision of Autonomy Support assess four types of autonomy support and addresses the multifaceted reality of the construct.

The researcher made some changes to the Teacher Provision of Autonomy Support scale to make it appropriate for the church context. The initial items were adjusted to account for the fact that most children do not have just one Sunday school teacher, but several. In each item “teacher” is replaced with “teachers”. The ability of students to answer the items based on experience with several different teachers is confirmed in other reliable measures with children which use broad based terms (such as teachers vs. teacher) to help assess the overall situation (Fredricks et al., 2011). For example, the Student Engagement Instrument has been used with sixth grade students and

indicates acceptable to excellent levels of reliability (between .72 and .92) (Fredricks et al., 2011).

De Leeuw (2011) suggested that negatively worded items are difficult for children to answer reliably because the meanings appear ambiguous. The original Teacher Provision of Autonomy Support had three negatively worded items. For example, the original item was “My teacher doesn’t give me much choice about how I do my schoolwork” (TASC, 1992, p. 20). This was adjusted for the study to say, “My Sunday school teachers give the class options of what we will do in Sunday school.” Another example from the original survey is, “My teacher doesn’t listen to my opinion” (TASC, 1992, p. 20). This was adjusted to, “If I have a question, my Sunday school teachers make time to listen.”

The focus group answered questions to explore the appropriateness of the changes for this age group. The focus group participants expressed difficulty in answering the item “My Sunday school teachers listen to my ideas.” One student reported “People have different interpretations of what listen means.” Another child replied “It’s like she’ll listen, but then it’s like their actual follow through on your ideas. Acknowledging that they heard you.” After discussion, the group determined the words “value” or “care for” made more sense. Therefore, the original item was adjusted to “My Sunday school teachers value my ideas.”

The group also had concerns about the original item “My Sunday school teachers explain why Sunday school is important to me.” One participant said, “Your teacher can’t say why this is important to you.” Another replied “How would they explain how it is important to you. I mean unless you’ve told them, how would they know? I mean, they

could say their idea of how it's important to you and they could be completely wrong.” One of the participants suggested “How about, ‘My Sunday school teachers help make Sunday school special to me.’ Does that make sense?” Several participants replied, “Yes!” Therefore, this item was adjusted to “My Sunday school teachers help make Sunday school special to me.”

As stated earlier, 25 participants were administered the draft survey with the original wording for these two items. The mean scores were analyzed to identify significant differences between the group answers on these two items. The mean for the participants who used the wording from the first survey for “My Sunday school teachers listen to my ideas” ( $M = 3.44$ ,  $SD = .71$ ,  $n = 25$ ) was similar to the mean for the group using the final wording of that item “My Sunday school teachers value my ideas” ( $M = 3.36$ ,  $SD = .62$ ,  $n = 70$ ). The mean score for the group using the initial survey for the second item “My Sunday school teachers explain why Sunday school is important to me” ( $M = 2.35$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ,  $n = 23$ ), was different than the mean for the group using the final wording of that item ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = .76$ ,  $n = 69$ ). The results should be interpreted with caution due to this error in data collection. The item was retained for the analysis, because it was one of two items measuring relevancy, an important aspect of autonomy support (Assor et al., 2002). The autonomy support scale was found to be adequately reliable (eight items;  $\alpha = .73$ ) (George & Mallery, 2003). The eight items were summed to identify a total score for perceived autonomy support. The highest possible score, 32, indicates the highest level of perceived autonomy support.

**Perceived parent religious intrinsic value demonstration (IVD).** This measure consisted of four items adapted from the perceived parent religious IVD measurement

used by Brambilla et al. (2015) and Assor et al. (2005). Parent religious IVD measures the degree to which a parent models not only religious behavior, but identification or a sense of satisfaction from that behavior. Assor et al. (2005) argued that the impact of parent modeling is bolstered when a child perceives the adult to fully identify with the behavior. Intrinsic value demonstration does not refer to a “deliberate attempt to show satisfaction” but rather a sense of authentic motivation that emanates from the individual (Assor et al., 2005, p. 111). They provided an example of IVD as the “inner peace and sense of purpose that some parents convey when praying or when saying grace after the meal” (Assor et al., 2005, p. 111). In their study with Jewish ninth to eleventh grade students in Israel, Assor et al. (2005), found positive correlations between perceived parent religious IVD and identified internalization of religious practice among the youth. Brambilla et al. (2015) found similar results using the scale with Catholic youth in Northern Italy. The original measurement included five questions about perceived mother’s religious IVD and five identical questions about perceived father’s religious IVD. The Cronbach’s alpha was .94 for mother’s religious IVD and .93 for father’s religious IVD (Brambilla et al., 2015). They found that IVD plays “a significant role in promoting autonomous internalization” (Brambilla et al., 2015, p. 204).

The items were adapted for the current study to be more appropriate for upper elementary age children. The original instrument used the terms mother and father. The instrument was adjusted to reflect a variety of family structures to accommodate children who do not have regular contact or close relationships with a mother and a father. Therefore, children were asked to choose the parent or adult they spend the most time with and answer the items about that person. Of the 95 total answers to this item, most

children ( $n = 93$ ) marked mother, father or both. The original measurement used a 7-point Likert scale. The measure was adjusted to a 4-point Likert scale for this study based on the indication that 4-point Likert-scale are ideal for upper elementary age children (Bell, 2007). The original item “My mother/father enjoys increasing her/his knowledge of religious matters” was adjusted to “This adult enjoys learning about the Christian faith.” The original item “My mother/father shows me what it means to be an authentic Christian” was adjusted to “This adult shows me how to be a Christian.” The original item “My mother/father shows his/her faith in Christ by how she/he talks and acts” was adjusted to “This adult shows faith in Christ through his or her actions.” Finally, “My mother/father invests time in religious activities” was adjusted to “This adult spend time doing church activities.” The focus group participants discussed these questions to ensure the language was appropriate for the third to sixth grade children and found the language to make sense. The Cronbach’s alpha for the four items was .77, indicating acceptable reliability (George & Mallery, 2003). The items were totaled to identify a sum score for perceived parental religious IVD. The closer to 16 the greater the level of perceived parental religious IVD.

### **Data Analysis**

Data from the respondents were entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24 computer program. Frequency outputs of the data helped identify the demographics of the participants. The following section provides an overview of the study participants.

**Demographics.** A total of 15 churches served as research sites for this study. Each church had between four and 10 participants for a total of 100 participants. A total

of 94 participants were retained for final analysis, because six cases were missing answers for entire questionnaires. Three cases were eliminated from the initial sample ( $N = 100$ ) due to missing data for all or most of the Inventory of Religious Internalization; two cases were eliminated due to missing data for the entire Teacher as Autonomy Support Scale; and one case was eliminated due to missing data for the entire perceived parent religious IVD and Teacher as Autonomy Support scale. An a priori power analysis for multivariate linear regression, fixed model, was performed using G\*Power for a two-tailed analysis, with an alpha set at 0.05, an estimated effect size of .15, and a power level of .80 with three predictor variables (parent religious IVD, perceived relatedness in Sunday school, perceived autonomy in Sunday school). An alpha level of 0.05 is considered the maximum acceptable rate to account for Type 1 error (Field, 2009). According to Field (2009) researchers should aim to achieve a power of .8, which indicates an 80% chance of detecting a genuine effect. The G\*Power analysis indicated a requirement of 55 participants in order to detect a small effect size, therefore the sample size was adequate for this study.

Of the 15 churches, 13 were from the Pacific Northwest, one from Minnesota, and one from Kentucky. Therefore, 88.7% ( $n = 84$ ) participants were from the Pacific Northwest, and 11.3% ( $n = 11$ ) were from outside the Pacific Northwest. To ensure that the location did not impact the results, the researcher performed ANOVAs to determine any between group differences in means for totals of all six subscales. Results from the ANOVAs indicated no statistically significant difference between participants from the Pacific Northwest and those outside the Pacific Northwest (see Appendix D).

The participants were from a variety of Protestant denominations, 42.1% ( $n = 40$ ) Presbyterian, 32.6% ( $n = 31$ ) Lutheran, 20% ( $n = 19$ ) Methodist, and 5.3% ( $n = 5$ ) non-denominational (Table 1). Additionally, 40% ( $n = 38$ ) of participants were male, and 52.6% ( $n = 50$ ) were female, with seven responses (7.4%) missing gender information. Some of the respondents ( $n = 25$ ) filled out a survey missing the item for reporting ethnicity. Of the participants who did report ethnicity ( $N = 72$ ), 77.8% ( $n = 56$ ) identified as European American/White, 11.1% ( $n = 8$ ) identified as other, and the remaining 8.3% ( $n = 8$ ) identified as Black, Asian, or Latinx. The majority of participants who reported grade ( $n = 91$ ) were in third to fifth grade: 34.1% ( $n = 31$ ) were in third grade, 29.7% ( $n = 27$ ) in fourth grade, 24.2% ( $n = 22$ ) in fifth grade, and 12.1% ( $n = 11$ ) in sixth grade.

Table 1

*Church Demographics*

Church	$n$	Denomination	Survey	Location
1	8	Lutheran	Revised	PNW
2	5	Presbyterian	Original	PNW
3	4	Presbyterian	Revised	PNW
4	4	Lutheran	Revised	PNW
5	9	Lutheran	Revised	PNW
6	7	Presbyterian	Revised	PNW
7	6	Free Methodist	Revised	Kentucky
8	10	Free Methodist	Revised	PNW
9	8	Presbyterian	Original	PNW
10	7	Lutheran	Revised	PNW
11	9	Presbyterian	Revised	PNW
12	3	Non-Denominational	Revised	PNW
13	7	Presbyterian	Original	PNW
14	5	Non-Denominational	Original	PNW
15	5	Lutheran	Revised	Minnesota

\*PNW=Pacific Northwest

Demographics included information on frequency of attendance at church and length of time participating in the church where they were taking the survey. The majority of participants were regular attenders, 84.1% ( $n = 74$ ) reported attending every or most weeks, 14.8% ( $n = 13$ ) reported attending some weeks, and only one participant reported attending only on special days with nine responses missing. Most of the participants 96.4% ( $n = 81$ ), who reported their church participation (11 were missing), reported attending the church for more than a year, only two participants reported attending the church for less than a year, and one participant reported being a visitor.

**Statistical Analysis.** Responses to the 45-item questionnaire were entered into SPSS to statistically analyze the data. A sum score was calculated for the Kid's Church Survey, perceived parent religious IVD scale, Teacher as Autonomy Support Scale, Feeling Good, Living Life Scale and the identified and introjected subscales of the IRI. A hierarchical multiple linear regression was calculated for research question number one, three, and four. The first analysis was used to identify if relatedness in church and autonomy in Sunday school, predicted identified religiosity when controlling for parent religious IVD. A second hierarchical multiple linear regression was conducted to explore the potential for perceived relatedness and perceived autonomy to predict relationship with God, when controlling for perceived parent religious IVD. These analyses were also used to answer research question two to determine which independent variable was a stronger predictor of identified religiosity. The third analysis helped identify if relatedness in church and autonomy in Sunday school, predicted introjected religion when controlling for parent religious IVD. The fourth analysis was used to assess if identified religiosity predicted relationship with God when controlling for parent

religious IVD. The four hierarchical multiple regressions tested the null hypothesis that the multiple  $R^2$  was equal to 0 and that the regression coefficients were equal to 0. The data were analyzed to assess violation of assumptions. Descriptive statistics were analyzed to ensure assumptions for multiple regression and linear regression were met. Chapter Four provides details on the results of the analysis.

## Chapter Four

### Results

This chapter presents data and statistical analysis designed to answer the four research questions posed by the researcher. The researcher sought to identify the ability of perceived relatedness in church and perceived autonomy in Sunday school to predict either identified or introjected religiosity in upper elementary age children after controlling for perceived parental religious intrinsic value demonstration (IVD). Additionally, the research was designed to assess if identified religiosity predicted relationship to God in upper elementary age children when controlling for perceived parental religious IVD. The data from a 45-item survey were entered into SPSS version 24. The items for each of the six subscales were totaled together to create a sum score for each variable.

#### Data Screening

**Item and unit non-response.** Six participants were missing data for every item on at least one questionnaire in the survey, representing unit non-response. Those participants were dropped from the analysis, because retaining those cases could increase the bias in the analysis (Garson, 2015). Therefore, of the original participants ( $N = 100$ ), a total of 94 were retained for analysis. The dataset also included item non-response, or items that participants did not answer (De Leeuw & Hox, 2008). There were several reasons participants did not respond to an item including: confusion about the wording, difficulty identifying an answer, or unintentionally missing an item (Cheema, 2014). Item non-response, resulting in missing data, is hard to avoid in social science research and can be problematic for analytic procedures (Cheema, 2014). An overall summary of

missing values showed that 16 of the 39 questionnaire items, not including demographics, were missing data. Of the 94 total participants, 17 were missing data for at least one item. There were 27 missing items (.74%) in the total dataset. A dataset with less than 5% missing data is considered to have a low amount of overall missing data (Cheema, 2014).

There are three types of missing data; missing completely at random (MCAR), missing at random (MAR), and missing not at random (MNAR) (De Leeuw & Hox, 2008). MCAR and MAR refer to missing data that is randomly distributed throughout the variables. This primarily occurs when a participant inadvertently misses an item. MNAR refers to data that is missing due to some factor of the variable itself, for example a question that is too confusing which leads participants to skip that item (De Leeuw & Hox, 2008). Typical methods for dealing with missing data include listwise deletion, pairwise deletion, and mean imputation, all of which assume missing data is MCAR (Cheema, 2014; De Leeuw & Hox, 2008). According to Pigot (2001), “When researchers use missing data methods without carefully considering the assumptions required of that method, they run the risk of biased and misleading results” (p. 354). Replacing missing values through mean imputation is problematic because it changes the distribution and decreases variance (Pigot, 2001, p. 367).

Identifying the type of missing data is imperative to determining the most appropriate remedy for missing values, either deletion or a form of imputation. Little’s MCAR test assesses the null hypothesis that there is not an identifiable pattern to the missing data, so it is therefore MCAR. This chi-square test is commonly used to identify whether or not missing data is MCAR (Garson, 2015). The Little’s MCAR test obtained for this dataset resulted in a chi-square = 554.58 ( $df = 522$ , *ns*). It was not statistically

significant which indicated that the null hypothesis could not be rejected, and therefore the data was assumed to be MCAR. While imputation methods are often encouraged above deletion methods, listwise deletion is appropriate if the Little's MCAR test is non-significant and the number of missing values is small (De Leeuw & Hox, 2008; Garson, 2015). Furthermore, in her investigation of the most efficient options for handling missing data, Cheema (2014) found for multiple regression calculated on a small sample size ( $n < 50$ ) with a high portion of missing data (above 5%), listwise deletion was only 1% less accurate than multiple imputation. The loss in accuracy would only decrease with a larger sample size and lower number of missing values. Therefore, listwise deletion was determined to be appropriate for this data set and analysis.

**Descriptive statistics.** The item from the Teacher as Autonomy Support, "My Sunday school teachers tell me what to do" was reverse coded. The items for each instrument were tabulated to identify a sum score for each variable. The means and standard deviations are shown for the independent variables and the dependent variables (see Appendix E) for individual churches. Descriptive statistics on the total scores for each variable were calculated to screen for normality (Table 2).

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics*

	n	<i>M</i>	<i>SEM</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skew	SE Skew	Kurtosis	SE Kurtosis
Relatedness	90	26.13	.434	4.117	-.718	.254	-.047	.503
Parent IVD	95	14.07	.218	2.125	-2.354	.247	7.694	.490
Autonomy	91	23.40	.396	3.777	-.548	.253	.347	.500
Identified	86	20.85	.291	2.703	-1.194	.260	2.684	.514
Introjected	92	14.23	.514	4.928	-.105	.251	-.829	.498
Spiritual WB	95	34.88	.433	4.217	-.740	.247	-.117	.490

Histograms of each variable showed slight deviations from normality (see Appendix F). Skewness and kurtosis provide a numerical indicator of the normality of the distribution (Field, 2009). When the skewness and kurtosis are between 1 and -1 the variables are considered to be distributed normally (Osborne & Waters, 2002). Parent religious IVD was non-normally distributed, with skewness of -2.35 ( $SE = .25$ ) and kurtosis of 7.69 ( $SE = .49$ ). Identified religiosity was also non-normally distributed, with skewness of -1.19 ( $SE = .26$ ) and kurtosis of 2.68 ( $SE = .51$ ). The remaining variables were normally distributed based on the skewness and kurtosis (Table 2). There is controversy as to whether or not multiple regression requires normally distributed data for predictor and criterion variables (Osborne & Waters, 2002; Williams, Grajales, & Kurkiewicz, 2013). Williams et al. (2013) argued that the requirement of normal data distribution for multiple regression is a misconception, and the use of unnecessary transformations to fix non-normal data can impact the outcomes. Therefore, the non-normally distributed data remained untransformed.

## Factor Analysis

The perceived parent religious IVD measurement was previously used with adolescents in Italy and Israel. A principal component factor analysis was conducted on the four items of the perceived parent religious IVD measurement to confirm the instrument measures one factor in the sample for this current study. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis,  $KMO = .73$  (Field, 2009). Bartlett's test of sphericity  $\chi^2(6) = 112.02, p < .001$ , indicated that correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA. An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each component of the data. One component had an eigenvalue over Kaiser's criterion of one and in combination explained 59.5% of the variance (Field, 2009). The four items moderately to strongly loaded on the factor (see Appendix G).

## Research Question One Analysis

**Hierarchical Multiple Regression One.** A two-stage hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive power of the independent variables (perceived relatedness and perceived autonomy) on the dependent variable (identified religiosity), when controlling for perceived parent religious IVD.

**Assumptions.** The data were initially analyzed to ensure assumptions for multiple regression were met. The assumptions for multiple regression are: (a) adequate sample size, (b) no multicollinearity of independent variables, (c) linearity between independent and dependent variables (d) absence of outliers, (e) independence of errors, (f) homoscedasticity of errors, and (g) normal distribution of errors (Osborne & Waters, 2002; Williams et al., 2013).

**Sample size.** A sample size of 94 was deemed adequate for three independent variables in this analysis (Field, 2009). An a priori power analysis for multivariate linear regression, fixed model, was performed using G\*Power, for a two-tailed analysis, with an alpha set at 0.05, an estimated effect size of .15, and a power level of .8. The analysis indicated a requirement of 55 participants to detect a small effect size. An alpha level of 0.05 is considered the maximum acceptable rate to account of Type 1 error (Field, 2009). Field (2009) considers .8 an acceptable power level for educational research.

**Multicollinearity of independent variables.** Multicollinearity occurs when variables are highly correlated with one another (Field, 2009). Multiple regression assumes that independent variables are uncorrelated. An examination of correlations revealed small correlations between the independent variables, indicating the assumption for no multicollinearity of independent variables was met. Perceived parent religious IVD was moderately correlated with relatedness, Pearson's  $r(77) = .27$  ( $p = .01$ ) and weakly correlated with autonomy, Pearson's  $r(77) = .10$  ( $p = .19$ ) (Field, 2009). Relatedness and autonomy were weakly correlated, Pearson's  $r(77) = .15$  ( $p = .1$ ) (Field, 2009). The variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance were reviewed to further test for multicollinearity. A VIF close to one and a tolerance value greater than .01 indicates that the assumption for multicollinearity is met (Field, 2009). The VIF and tolerance for each independent variable indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern (Parent Religious IVD, Tolerance = .92, VIF = 1.08; Perceived Relationality, Tolerance = .91, VIF = 1.1; Perceived Autonomy, Tolerance = .98, VIF = 1.02).

**Outliers.** An analysis of standard residuals was carried out, which showed that the data contained one cases outside -3 indicating the presence of outliers (Std. Residual Min

= -3.26, Std. Residual Max = 1.55). Case 10 was identified as a slight outlier with a standard residual of -3.26. A Cook's distance below one is considered acceptable (Field, 2009). The Cook's distance for Case 10 ( $D_i = .14$ ) was below one and therefore was considered to have minimal influence on the model.

***Independence of residuals.*** The residuals are assumed to be independent and therefore uncorrelated. Violation of this assumption can lead to biased estimates of significance (Williams et al., 2013). A Durbin-Watson value between one and three indicates the assumption of independent errors was met (Field, 2009). Therefore, the data met the assumption of independent errors (Durbin-Watson value = 1.57).

***Normality and linearity of errors.*** The histogram of standardized residuals (see Appendix H) indicated that the data contained approximately normally distributed errors. The P-P plot of standardized residuals (see Appendix H), showed small deviations from the line, but generally the points followed the line. If plots on a scatterplot of standardized residuals create a pattern, that indicates violation of linearity (Field, 2009). The scatterplot of standardized residuals (see Appendix H) was randomly distributed and indicated the assumption of linearity was met.

***Homoscedasticity.*** The assumption of homoscedasticity requires homogeneity of variance across all independent variables. Slight deviation from homoscedasticity has little impact on significance tests, but large deviation can lead to increased possibility of Type 1 error (Osborne & Waters, 2002). Homoscedasticity is indicated on a scatterplot of standardized residuals by points which are scattered evenly around the horizontal line. Points which are more randomly distributed or which create a funnel indicate violations of homoscedasticity (Field, 2009). The scatterplot of standardized residuals (see

Appendix H) showed the data was slightly unevenly distributed, indicating a small deviation from the assumption of homoscedasticity. However, multiple regression is robust for slight violations of homoscedasticity (Osborne & Water, 2002).

**Hierarchical Multiple Regression Two.** After data were checked for assumptions, a two-stage hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the relationship between the independent variables (perceived relatedness and perceived autonomy) on the dependent variable (identified religiosity), when controlling for perceived parent religious IVD. Perceived parent religious IVD was entered into block one in order to establish baselines for this control variable. Perceived relatedness and perceived autonomy were entered into stage two. The independent variables were weakly correlated with the dependent variable (Table 3). Perceived parent religious IVD was moderately correlated with identified religiosity, Pearson's  $r(77) = .32$ .

Table 3

*Correlation Matrix*

	1	2	3
1. Identified	-		
2. Parent IVD	.320*	-	
3. Relatedness	.201*	.270*	-
4. Autonomy	.171	.102	.145

\*  $p < .05$

Table 4 displays the hierarchical regression model summary. Model 1 of the hierarchical multiple regression revealed that perceived parent religious IVD contributed to the regression model, ( $F(1,75) = 8.54, p < .01, R^2 = .10$ ). Perceived parent religious

IVD significantly predicted identified religiosity ( $\beta = .32, p < .01$ ), accounting for 10.2% of the variance.

Table 4

*Hierarchical Regression Model Summary*

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	Adjust ed <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>SE</i>	Change Statistics				
					$\Delta R^2$	$\Delta F$	<i>df</i> 1	<i>df</i> 2	Sig. $\Delta F$
1	.320 <sup>a</sup>	.102	.090	2.359	.102	8.548	1	75	.005
2	.364 <sup>b</sup>	.132	.097	2.351	.030	1.265	2	73	.288

a. Predictors: (Constant), Parent IVD

b. Predictors: (Constant), Parent IVD, Relatedness, Autonomy

c. Dependent Variable: Identified Religiosity

Introducing the perceived relatedness and perceived autonomy variables explained a further 3% of variation in identified religion. This change in  $R^2$  was nonsignificant ( $F(2,73) = 1.27, ns$ ). The value of  $R^2$  was .13. Beta coefficients for perceived relatedness ( $\beta = .11, ns$ ) and perceived autonomy ( $\beta = .12, ns$ ) showed that the additional variables did not significantly predict identified religiosity (Table 5). Based on this model, the null hypothesis that perceived relatedness and perceived autonomy are not significant predictors of identified religiosity, could not be rejected.

Table 5

*Coefficients<sup>a</sup>*

Variable	Model 1				Model 2			
	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	Sig.	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	Sig.
(Constant)	15.923		9.039	.000	12.873		4.951	.000
Parent IVD	.358	.320	2.924	.005	.311	.278	2.447	.017
Relatedness					.067	.108	.945	.348
Autonomy					.084	.127	1.154	.252

<sup>a</sup>Dependent Variable: Identified Religiosity

**Relationship with God.** A similar hierarchical multiple regression was performed using relationship with God measured through the Feeling Good, Living Life scale (Fisher, 2004) as the criterion variable in place of identified religious belief.

**Assumptions.** This set of variables included less missing data, so there were 85 total cases for this analysis. An examination of correlations revealed weak and moderate correlations between the independent variables. Perceived parent religious IVD was weakly correlated with identified relatedness, Pearson's  $r(85) = .28$  ( $p = .01$ ) and weakly correlated with autonomy, Pearson's  $r(85) = .16$  ( $p = .08$ ) (Field, 2009). Relatedness and autonomy were weakly correlated, Pearson's  $r(85) = .16$  ( $p = .07$ ) (Field, 2009). Tests to examine if the data met the assumption of collinearity indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern (Parent Religious IVD, Tolerance = .91, VIF = 1.09; Perceived Relationality, Tolerance = .91, VIF = 1.10; Perceived Autonomy, Tolerance = .96, VIF = 1.04). An analysis of standard residuals was carried out, which showed that the data contained no outliers (Std. Residual Min = -2.39, Std. Residual Max = 1.83).

The data met the assumption of independent errors (Durbin-Watson value = 1.74). The P-P plot (see Appendix I) showed that the data contained approximately normally distributed errors. The scatterplot of standardized residuals (see Appendix I), showed randomly distributed plots indicating the assumption of linearity was met. Furthermore, the scatterplot of standardized predicted values showed that the data had some clustering, indicating a slight deviation from the assumptions of homogeneity of variance. However, as stated earlier, multiple regression is robust to small violations to assumptions of homoscedasticity (Osborne & Water, 2002).

**Results.** A two-stage hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the relationship between the independent variables (perceived relatedness and perceived autonomy) on the dependent variable (relationship with God), when controlling for perceived parent religious IVD. Perceived parent religious IVD was entered in block one, in order to establish a baseline for this control variable. Perceived relatedness and perceived autonomy were entered in stage two. Table 6 shows the correlation matrix between the multiple regression variables. The independent variables were weakly to moderately correlated with the dependent variable. Perceived parent religious IVD was moderately correlated with relationship with God, Pearson's  $r(77) = .31$ . Perceived relatedness in church was also moderately correlated with relationship with God, Pearson's  $r(85) = .31$ .

Table 6

*Correlation Matrix*

	1	2	3
1. Relationship with God	-		
2. Parent IVD	.314*	-	
3. Relatedness	.307*	.279*	-
4. Autonomy	.236*	.156	.158

\*  $p < .05$ 

Table 7 displays the hierarchical regression model summary. Model 1 of the hierarchical regression revealed that parent religious IVD contributed significantly to the regression model, ( $F(1,83) = 9.05, p < .01$ )  $R^2 = .10$ . Perceived parent religious IVD significantly predicted relationship with God ( $\beta = .31, p < .01$ ) and accounted for 9.8% of the variance.

Table 7

*Hierarchical Regression Model Summary*

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted		Change Statistics				
			<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>SE</i>	$\Delta R^2$	$\Delta F$	<i>df</i> <sub>1</sub>	<i>df</i> <sub>2</sub>	Sig. $\Delta F$
1	.314 <sup>a</sup>	.098	.087	3.766	.098	9.048	1	83	.003
2	.421 <sup>b</sup>	.177	.147	3.641	.079	3.885	2	81	.024

a. Predictors: (Constant), Parent IVD

b. Predictors: (Constant), Parent IVD, Relatedness, Autonomy

c. Dependent Variable: Relationship to God

Introducing the perceived relatedness and perceived autonomy variables explained an additional 7.9% variation in relationship with God. The change in  $R^2$  was significant, ( $F(2,82) = 3.89, p < .05$ ) with a resulting  $R^2$  of .18. The beta coefficient for perceived relatedness was significant ( $\beta = .22, p < .05$ ) and the beta coefficient for perceived autonomy ( $\beta = .17, ns$ ) was nonsignificant (Table 8). The data partially supports the alternative hypothesis because only perceived relatedness was found to be a significant predictor of religious integration as measured by relationship with God.

Table 8

Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Variable	Model 1				Model 2			
	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	Sig.	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	Sig.
(Constant)	27.208		10.077	.000	19.641		5.188	.000
Parent IVD	.569	.314	3.008	.003	.412	.227	2.148	.035
Relatedness					.217	.218	2.060	.043
Autonomy					.175	.166	1.615	.110

<sup>a</sup>Dependent Variable: Relationship with God

### Research Question Two Analysis

Question two was designed to investigate if perceived relatedness in church or perceived autonomy in Sunday school were stronger predictors of identified religiosity. Neither was shown to be a significant predictor of identified religiosity as measured by the identified subscale of the IRI. However, a second hierarchical multiple regression indicated that perceived relatedness in church was a significant predictor of relationship with God. The coefficients table (Table 8) showed perceived relatedness significantly predicts a change in relationship with God ( $\beta = .22, p < .05$ ). Whereas the coefficient table (Table 8) shows that perceived autonomy in Sunday school will not provide a statistically significant change in the dependent variable ( $\beta = .17, ns$ ).

### Research Question Three Analysis

A third hierarchical multiple regression was performed to explore if perceived relatedness and perceived autonomy in Sunday school, predicted introjected religiosity, when controlling for perceived parental religious IVD.

**Assumptions.** The correlation tables showed small to moderate correlations between the independent variables, therefore the assumption for multicollinearity of independent variables was met. Perceived parent religious IVD was moderately correlated with relatedness, Pearson's  $r(84) = .16 (p = .00)$  and weakly correlated with autonomy, Pearson's  $r(84) = .16 (p = .08)$  (Field, 2009). Relatedness and autonomy were also weakly correlated, Pearson's  $r(84) = .16 (p = .07)$  (Field, 2009). Tests to identify collinearity indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern (Parent Religious IVD, Tolerance = .90, VIF = 1.11; Perceived Relatedness, Tolerance = .90, VIF = 1.11; Perceived Autonomy, Tolerance = .96, VIF = 1.04).

An analysis of standard residuals was carried out, which showed that the data contained no outliers (Std. Residual Min = -1.90, Std. Residual Max = 2.11). The data met the assumption of independent errors (Durbin-Watson value = 1.89). The histogram of standardized residuals (see Appendix J) indicated slight negative skew in the data. The P-P plot of standardized residuals (see Appendix J), showed plots were inconsistently scattered around the line, indicating that the data contained deviation from normality. A Shapiro-Wilk test on the standard residuals confirmed violation of normality (S-W = .97,  $df = 97$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, multiple regression is robust to violation of the assumption of normal distribution of residuals (Osborne & Waters, 2002), therefore the data were unchanged. The scatterplot of standardized predicted values (see Appendix J) showed no pattern. The plots were randomly distributed around the line and did not make an unusual shape so the data met the assumptions of homoscedasticity and linearity.

**Results.** A two-stage hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the relationship between the independent variables (perceived relatedness and perceived autonomy) and the dependent variable (introjected religiosity), when controlling for perceived parent religious IVD. Perceived parent religious IVD was entered into stage one in order to understand the relationship of the control variable. Perceived relatedness and perceived autonomy were entered into stage two. Table 9 shows the correlation matrix between the multiple regression variables. The independent variables were weakly correlated with the dependent variable.

Table 9

*Correlation Matrix*

	1	2	3
1. Introjected	-		
2. Parent IVD	.019	-	
3. Relatedness	-.125	.295*	-
4. Autonomy	.035	.158	.163

\*  $p < .05$ 

Table 10 shows the model summary for this hierarchical multiple regression.

Stage one of the hierarchical multiple regression revealed that perceived parent religious IVD did not contribute significantly to the regression model, ( $F(1, 82) = .03, ns$ )  $R^2 = .00$ . Therefore, perceived parent religious IVD did not significantly predict introjected religiosity ( $\beta = .08, ns$ ).

Table 10

*Hierarchical Regression Model Summary*

Model	$R$	$R^2$	Adjusted $R^2$	$SE$	Change Statistics				
					$\Delta R^2$	$\Delta F$	$df1$	$df2$	Sig. $\Delta F$
1	.019 <sup>a</sup>	.000	-.012	4.999	.000	.031	1	82	.861
2	.147 <sup>b</sup>	.022	-.015	5.007	.021	.869	2	80	.423

a. Predictors: (Constant), Parent IVD

b. Predictors: (Constant), Parent IVD, Relatedness, Autonomy

c. Dependent Variable: Introjected Religiosity

Model 2 included the perceived relatedness and perceived autonomy variables which explained 2.2% of variation in introjected religion, and this change in  $R^2$  was nonsignificant ( $F(3, 80) = .02, ns$ ). The  $R^2$  was .02. Beta coefficients for perceived

relatedness ( $\beta = -.14, ns$ ) and perceived autonomy ( $\beta = -.01, ns$ ) were nonsignificant (Table 11). Based on this analysis, the data did not support the predictive power of relatedness and autonomy for introjected religiosity. Therefore, the null hypothesis could not be rejected.

Table 11

*Coefficients*

Variable	Model 1				Model 2			
	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	Sig.	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	Sig.
(Constant)	13.771		3.841	.000	15.917		3.077	.003
Parent IVD	.044	.019	.176	.816	.127	.056	.478	.634
Relatedness					-.187	-.150	-1.286	.202
Autonomy					.067	.051	.449	.655

<sup>a</sup>Dependent Variable: Introjected Religiosity

**Research Question Four Analysis**

Finally, a hierarchical multiple regression was performed to examine if degree of identified religious belief is a significant predictor of relationship with God, when controlling for perceived parent religious IVD.

**Assumptions.** An examination of correlations revealed a moderate correlation between the control and the independent variable, perceived parent religiosity and identified religiosity, Pearson's  $r(85) = .34$  ( $p = .001$ ) (Field, 2009). Tests to examine the data for the assumption of collinearity indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern (Parent Religious IVD, Tolerance = .89, VIF= 1.13; Identified religiosity, Tolerance = .89, VIF = 1.13). The assumption of no multicollinearity was met.

An analysis of standard residuals was carried out (Std. Residual Min = -2.51, Std. Residual Max = 1.56). All the cases were between -3 and 3 indicating no outliers (Field,

2009). The data met the assumption of independent errors (Durbin-Watson value = 1.91). The P-P plot of standardized residuals (see Appendix K) showed a number of points deviated from the line, indicating a possible violation of the assumption normally distributed errors. A Shapiro-Wilk test on the standard residuals was non-significant ( $S-W = .97, df = 85, ns$ ) which indicated the residuals were normally distributed. The scatterplot of standardized predicted values (see Appendix K) showed that the plots were randomly situated around the zero point with undefinable pattern, and was therefore deemed to meet assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity.

**Results.** A two-stage hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the relationship between the independent variable, identified religiosity, and the dependent variable, relationship with God, when controlling for perceived parent religious IVD. Perceived parent religious IVD was entered in block one, in order to establish a baseline for this control variable. Identified religiosity was entered into block two. Table 12 shows the correlation matrix between the multiple regression variables. Perceived parent religious IVD was moderately correlated with identified religiosity, Pearson's  $r(85) = .34$ .

Table 12

*Correlation Matrix*

	1	2
1. Relationship with God	-	
2. Parent IVD	.338**	-
3. Identified	.516**	.337**

\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 13 displays the hierarchical regression model summary. Model 1 of the hierarchical multiple regression revealed that perceived parent religious IVD contributed to the regression model, ( $F(1,83) = 10.70, p < .01$ )  $R^2 = .11$ . Perceived parent religious IVD significantly predicted identified religiosity ( $\beta = .34, p < .01$ ), accounting for 11.4% of the variance. Introducing identified religiosity explained an additional 18.3% of variation in relationship with God, and this change in  $R^2$  was significant ( $F(1,82) = 21.25, p < .01$ ). The beta coefficient for identified religiosity ( $\beta = .45, p < .01$ ) (Table 14) indicates the model with this data supports identified religiosity as a significant predictor of relationship with God.

Table 13

*Hierarchical Regression Model Summary<sup>c</sup>*

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>SE</i>	Change Statistics				
					$\Delta R^2$	$\Delta F$	<i>df</i> 1	<i>df</i> 2	Sig. $\Delta F$
1	.338 <sup>a</sup>	.114	.104	4.999	.114	10.700	1	83	.002
2	.545 <sup>b</sup>	.297	.279	5.007	.182	21.252	2	82	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Parent IVD

b. Predictors: (Constant), Parent IVD, Identified Religiosity

c. Dependent Variable: Relationship with God

Table 14

*Coefficients*

Variable	Model 1				Model 2			
	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	Sig.	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	Sig.
(Constant)	25.577		8.778	.000	15.017		4.322	.000
Parent IVD	.664	.338	3.271	.002	.364	.185	1.882	.063
Identified					.712	.454	4.610	.000

<sup>a</sup>Dependent Variable: Relationships with God

## **Summary**

Four hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the predictive power of perceived relatedness in church and perceived autonomy in Sunday school for identified religiosity, introjected religiosity, and relationship to God, when controlling for perceived parent religious IVD. The analysis resulted in four statistically significant findings. As expected based on previous empirical research, perceived parent religiosity was a statistically significant predictor of identified religiosity and relationship with God. Perceived relatedness in church significantly predicted relationship with God beyond perceived parent religious IVD. Additionally, identified religiosity significantly predicted relationship with God when controlling for perceived parent religiosity. The results should be interpreted with caution due to several limitations of the study. The limitations, discussion of the analysis, implications of the results, and suggestions for future research are explored in Chapter Five.

## Chapter Five

### Discussion

#### Summary of Study

The development of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990) marked the emerging recognition of children as agents and active participants in shaping their experiences (Valentine, 2011). Research has indicated that children are more likely to experience internal motivation within social contexts which support their propensity toward agentic engagement (Bandura, 2006; deCharms, 1981). Self-determination theory (SDT) posits that autonomy-supportive and relationally comfortable environments are important for helping children develop internalized motivation toward valuable behaviors (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Self-determination theory research investigating social contexts with children has centered primarily on school, home, and sports teams (Deci & Flaste, 1995; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Reeve, 2006; Reeve & Jang, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2016; Wang & Eccles, 2013).

Data from parent reports in the 2004 U.S. Census Bureau Survey of Income and Program Participation indicated that 45% of children, ages six to 11, participated in a religious event, program or service approximately once a week. Furthermore, 68% of children participated in religious programs once a month. Unfortunately, there is a lack of scholarship investigating the impact of this religious participation on children's religiosity (Zonio, 2017). While overall church affiliation is declining in the United States, a significant number of children still participate in Sunday morning programs. The church is an important socializing environment for children who participate regularly. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of research investigating the Christian church as an

environment which supports children's internalized motivation toward religious beliefs and behaviors (Crosby & Smith, 2015; Kneezel & Emmons, 2006; Roehlkepartain & Patel, 2006; Zonio, 2017).

Religious educators recognize the value of creating opportunities for children to build significant relationships, engage with the Bible and religious tradition in meaningful ways, and exercise their religious agency (Bunge, 2006; DeVries, 2001; Hyde, Yust, & Ota, 2010). The growing body of research investigating children's spirituality indicates children have an inherent propensity toward spirituality processing, meaningful relationships, and existential questions (Coles, 1990; Hay & Nye, 2006; Hyde, 2005; Nye, 2011). Children's programs in Christian churches often lack opportunities for religious wondering, exploration, and questioning which support children's spiritual lives (Bhagwan, 2009).

This study was designed to fill a gap in the literature using SDT as a framework for understanding how the church might support a child's process of integrating religious behavior and belief into their personhood. Research related to SDT has indicated that individuals situated in contexts which are relationally rich and autonomy-supportive are more likely to internalize the values and practices central to that context (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Internalization refers to the process by which individuals move from extrinsically motivated action to deeper levels of autonomously motivated action. Self-determination theory includes four levels of extrinsically motivated behavior, each increasing in level from external to internal motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This study focused on two of those levels of motivation toward religious belief and behavior: introjected and identified. Introjected motivation is action taken due to external or internal pressure. Identified

motivation refers to behavior valued as central to one's personhood. The investigator of this current project answered four research questions examining the Christian church as a social context which supports children's internalization of religious belief and behavior. The researcher investigated children's perceived experiences in church and how those relate to their identified and introjected religious motivation, as well as their relationship to God.

## **Results**

Data was collected from third to sixth graders through a 45-item survey consisting of five demographic questions and five existing questionnaires appropriate for this age group. A total of 100 children in third to sixth grade from 15 Protestant churches participated in the study. The researcher conducted four hierarchical multiple regressions to answer the research questions. The remainder of the chapter provides an overview of the results from the analysis, discussion of the findings for each question, limitations, suggestions for future research, and practical implications of the results.

**Part One of Research Question One and Two.** Do perceived autonomy in Sunday school and perceived relatedness in church predict degree of identified religiosity among upper elementary age children when controlling for the perceived parent religious intrinsic value demonstration (IVD)? If so, which variable is a stronger predictor of identified religiosity?

The researcher hypothesized that perceived relatedness in church and perceived autonomy in Sunday school would be significant predictors of identified religiosity among third to sixth graders when controlling for perceived parental religious IVD. Additionally, the researcher hypothesized that perceived relatedness would be a stronger

predictor of identified religiosity than perceived autonomy. The researcher used a two-stage hierarchical multiple regression to answer this question. Perceived parental religious IVD was entered into stage-one as the control variable. The results for stage-one showed that perceived parental religious IVD significantly predicted children's identified religiosity, accounting for just over ten percent of the variance.

Perceived relatedness and perceived autonomy were entered into stage-two. The results for the second stage of the hierarchical multiple regression indicated these two variables did not significantly predict identified religiosity. Therefore, there was insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. The researcher found no statistically significant relationship between the dependent variable (identified religiosity) and the independent variables (perceived relatedness in church and perceived autonomy in Sunday school).

***Comparing the results to previous studies.*** Flor and Knapp (2001) used the motivational section of the Inventory of Religious Internalization (IRI) to measure intrinsic, introjected, and externalized religiosity in children and their parents. They developed the IRI using the Christian Religious Internalization Scale as a guide. The current study used only the 12 items measuring intrinsic and introjected religiosity in the IRI, so the items measuring externalized religiosity were eliminated. In the Christian Religious Internalization Scale *identified* is used to describe the items which measure belief or behavior that is more autonomous in nature. Conversely, Flor and Knapp (2001) used the term *intrinsic* to describe the equivalent more autonomous items in the IRI. The researcher of the current study decided to use the term *identified* to replace *intrinsic* because it appears to best reflect the SDT definitions for the varying levels of motivation.

*Intrinsic motivation* refers to action taken because of the sheer pleasure of the act, whereas identified motivated behavior reflects action taken because an individual owns it as personally valuable (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Flor and Knapp (n.d.) found the mother's intrinsic motivation for religious behavior accounted for 15.6% of unique variance in the child's (fourth to sixth graders) intrinsic motivation (Flor & Knapp, n.d.). In a separate analysis, the father's religious motivation accounted for 10.5% of the variance in their children's intrinsic motivation (Flor & Knapp, n.d.). This aligns with findings in this current study showing perceived parent religious IVD is indeed an important variable in a child's identified religiosity.

A study with adolescents using the Christian Religious Internalization Scale to measure identified and introjected religiosity found church-related variables were significantly related to youth's identified religiosity (Brambilla et al., 2015). The participants were 160 Catholic youth ages 17 to 31 from Northern Italy. The researchers explored Catholic adolescents' identified and introjected religiosity in connection to their experience of autonomy-supportive youth leaders and the perceived religious IVD of peers (Brambilla et al., 2015). Additionally, Brambilla et al. (2015) explored the relationship of perceived parental religious IVD to identified religiosity in youth. The results of the study showed that perceived parental IVD was a strong predictor of identified religiosity suggesting that "parenting practice of IVD indeed has a significant role in promoting autonomous value internalization" (Brambilla et al., 2015, p. 204). Furthermore, the results of the study indicated that autonomy-supportive youth directors and peer religious IVD were significant predictors of identified religiosity, even after controlling for perceived parental religious IVD.

Differences between the current study and the previous study with Catholic youth can explain the discrepancy in results. A significant difference was age of participants. Participants in the previous study were 17 to 31 years old (Brambilla et al., 2015). Additionally, the participants involved in this study declared they had regularly participated in a religious youth group over the last five years. At this life stage, peers and adults in church likely play a greater role in the internalization process because as children age into adolescence, peers and adults outside the home have increasingly more influence on belief and behavior (Gunnoe & Moore, 2002). Children typically have less choice in church attendance and Sunday school participation, whereas, adolescents often choose to participate in church youth programs based on the value the program has in their life (Kelley & De Graaf, 1997). Therefore, the sample of adolescents may be more capable of understanding and have greater awareness of their religious motivation than children. Furthermore, Brambilla et al. (2015) studied the impact of one youth leader, whereas the current study analyzed children's perception of several Sunday school teachers.

**Discussion.** Several possible explanations for the non-significant results of this model are worthy of addressing. Two items for the Teacher as Autonomy Support Scale were worded differently for over one-fourth of the study participants because four churches used a draft questionnaire. While the wording changes appeared insignificant, it may have slightly impacted the results. Furthermore, this measurement was designed for use in a formal schooling setting and was adjusted by the researcher for a Sunday school morning program. The measurement has been shown to be reliable and valid for elementary age students in a formal educational classroom with a primary teacher

(Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Skinner et al., 2008; TASC, 1992). The teacher as social context scale includes a student report and teacher report component. Researchers measuring autonomy support in the classroom have used both the teacher and student reports together (Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Skinner et al., 2008). For example, Skinner and Belmont (1993) used both teacher and student reports to analyze teacher autonomy support in the fall and spring of the school year. The teacher and student reports were not significantly correlated in the fall, but moderately correlated in the spring. Skinner and Belmont (1993) found a reciprocal relationship between teacher behavior and student perceptions of their interaction with teachers. Skinner and Belmont (1993) argued, “These findings indicate that teachers’ liking for students is communicated to children and has pervasive effect on the way in which students experience their interactions with teachers” (p. 577). The instrument is valid for a formal schooling context, but the impact of the dynamics between teacher and student on student perception of autonomy support provides a more holistic understanding of the student experience. Due to lack of regular participation and a typical rotation of teachers for church based educational programs, students and teachers may not have the same reciprocal relationship that impacts student experience. This measure focuses on the autonomy support in the environment based on the teacher, rather than other aspects such as the curriculum. The researcher chose to use this questionnaire because of the lack of available questionnaires to measure autonomy support with children. Efforts were made to ensure the validity of the measure for Sunday school classrooms by soliciting feedback from professional children’s ministers and asking children in the focus group about the appropriateness and clarity of the items. However, the theoretical framework of the questionnaire may rely too heavily on a

schooling method which typically includes one main teacher and more frequent participation from students. An instrument designed to measure autonomy support of the whole experience, not just the teacher, will most likely provide a better picture of the child's experience of autonomy support in a church. Therefore, results should be interpreted with caution.

Flor and Knapp (n.d.) developed the motivational section of the IRI from a reliable and valid measure (the Christian Religious Internalization Scale). The IRI was shown to have good reliability with children (Flor & Knapp, 2001). Flor and Knapp (2001) designed the instrument to focus on motivation related specifically to belief in God, prayer, and church attendance. This instrument limits children's opportunity to express other religious beliefs or behaviors central to their faith lives and therefore provides a narrow perspective on their religiosity. There are potentially other religious behaviors or beliefs that are more appropriate for assessing children's religious internalization. A flexible measurement, such as the one used by Neyrink et al. (2006) in which adult participants were asked to share their motivation behind religious practices that were most central to their faith, might provide a more accurate perspective on children's overall religious motivation. This model allows participants to specifically indicate and evaluate the religious practices that are most important to them. The researcher chose to use the IRI because it was designed for use with children, and the instrument allowed for research assistants to administer the survey. The instrument used by Neyrink et al. (2006) has only been shown to be reliable with adults and creates a more complicated survey administration. Furthermore, as far as known to the researcher, Flor and Knapp (2001) conducted the only other study investigating religious motivation

in children from a self-determination theory framework. The use of the same instrument helps extend the research from Flor and Knapp (2001).

Due to the possibility that the IRI may not fully measure children's religious internalization, the researcher conducted an identical hierarchical multiple regression, using the God subscale of the Feeling Good, Living Life questionnaire as the dependent variable. Fisher (2004) designed The Feeling Good, Living Life instrument to explore spiritual health in children in four domains: relationship with God, others, themselves, and the world (Fisher, 2004). The current study used the relationship with God subscale, which directly relates to children's experiences in a Christian church. This instrument consists of items inviting participants to answer how much they experience an action or concept and how that makes them feel. Fisher (2015) constructed the instrument to measure the congruence between felt and lived experience by subtracting the mean of the four items for lived experience from the mean of the four items for felt experience (Fisher, 2015). However, the researcher decided to follow Minor and Grant (2014) who measured each subscale by adding the sum of the scores for all the items. By retaining an overall number for relationship with God, it establishes a measurement of the degree to which a child experiences a closeness to God and feels good about that experience. Engaging in more autonomously motivated behavior creates a positive feeling because it comes from the self out of a conscious valuing of the behavior. While this scale was not directly designed to measure religious motivation, it does assess the amount and degree to which a child connects with God, which could be argued to be an important part of a child's religiosity. Therefore, it offers a valuable perspective on the relationship between children's relatedness in church and their religiosity.

**Part Two of Research Question One and Two.** For this two-stage hierarchical multiple regression, perceived parental religious IVD was entered into stage-one as the control variable. The results of stage-one showed that perceived parental religious IVD significantly influenced the model, accounting for 9.8% of the variance in relationship to God. Stage-two showed that perceived relatedness and perceived autonomy accounted for an additional 7.8% of the variance in relationship to God. The beta values indicated that perceived relatedness in church contributed significantly to the model ( $\beta = .22, p < .05$ ), but perceived autonomy in Sunday school did not contribute significantly to the model ( $\beta = .17, ns$ ). Children's perceived relatedness in church was found to be a significant predictor of children's relationship to God, but children's perceived autonomy in Sunday school was not a significant predictor. Therefore, there was sufficient evidence to partially reject the null hypothesis in favor of the alternative hypothesis.

***Comparing the results to previous studies.*** Supportive relationships in church contribute to adult's religious meaning making (Krause, 2008) and feelings of gratitude toward God (Krause & Ellison, 2009). The results of this current research are consistent with studies indicating the value of relationships in church for children's greater awareness of God (Allen, 2004) and view of God as supportive and caring (Crosby & Smith, 2015). Crosby and Smith (2015) examined connections between family religious practices, church support, and spirituality among children ages six to 13 from evangelical churches in Southern California. They defined church support as "the expression of love, care, interest, and concern by fellow church members" (Crosby & Smith, 2015, p. 247). They adapted the Feeling Good, Living Life instrument to assess children's spirituality

(Fisher, 2004). Similar to the results from the current study, Crosby and Smith's (2015) study indicated church support was a significant predictor of spirituality.

An experiment assessing amount of time spent in a Sunday school program as a predictor of spiritual well-being in children showed nonsignificant results. Minor (2012) explored the spiritual well-being of children from various Protestant churches in relation to the amount of time they spent, based on years of participation and level of attendance, in a Sunday morning Godly Play program. Minor (2012) found a positive relationship between spiritual well-being and length of time since ending participation in the program. She offered the possibility that the results show a long-term effect of exposure to the program, indicating the potential that participation in Godly Play as a child mitigates repression of spirituality which typically occurs in adolescence (Minor, 2012).

Through interviews with parents and their adult children, McClintock (1997) investigated long term impacts of church participation in childhood and adolescents on later adherence to religion. He found a supportive church environment and presence of faith mentors enhanced faith transmission over and above parental impact. Supportive, warm relationships with adults in church were important to long term adherence to the religion of their childhood. Additionally, participants from churches that were perceived as "honest and open in intellectual matters" positively impacted faith transmission. According to McClintock (1997), "This study shows the value of accommodating individuals and being sensitive to personality styles and maturation processes" (p. 18).

**Discussion.** The indication that perceived relatedness in church predicts children's relation to God supports the value of supportive relationships with adults and peers in church for spiritual well-being. There are several possible explanations for the

finding that perceived autonomy in Sunday school did not predict either religious identification or relationship to God. The research by Minor (2012) indicated there could be long-term impacts of participants in Sunday school on spiritual well-being, but the impact will not surface until later in adolescence. Secondly, as previously stated, the Teacher as Autonomy Support may not accurately represent autonomy in an informal educational setting like Sunday school. A measurement designed specifically for the church environment would potentially elicit different results. Lastly, the results point to the potential that traditional Sunday school programs are inadequate models for supporting children's spiritual well-being or religiosity. However, more research is necessary to evaluate that claim.

**Research Question Three.** Do perceived autonomy support in Sunday school and perceived relatedness in church predict degree of introjected religiosity among upper elementary age children when controlling for the perceived parent religious IVD?

The researcher hypothesized that perceived relatedness in church and perceived autonomy in Sunday school, would predict introjected religiosity in third to sixth graders, after controlling for perceived parental religious IVD. The researcher employed a two-stage hierarchical multiple regression to answer this question. Perceived parental religious IVD was entered into stage-one as the control variable. The results for stage-one showed that perceived parental religious IVD did not predict children's introjected religiosity. Perceived relatedness and perceived autonomy were entered into stage-two. Neither of the independent variables were shown to influence children's introjected religiosity.

*Comparing the results to previous studies.* Flor and Knapp (n.d.) explored interactions between children's introjected religiosity and several variables relating to their mothers' and fathers' religious beliefs and behaviors. Introjected religiosity in children was not significantly related to any of the variables; the mother's religious beliefs and behaviors, the father's religious beliefs and behaviors, or conversations about faith between children and parents. Research indicates that adolescents whose parents show conditional love are more likely to exude introjected religiosity (Assor et al., 2005). In a study with Jewish adolescents, parent conditional regard positively correlated with introjected religiosity and was unrelated to identified religiosity (Assor et al., 2005). Perceived parental religious IVD was positively related to religious identification and negatively related to introjected religiosity (Assor et al., 2005). A similar study confirmed that parental religious IVD was unrelated to introjected religion, but parental conditional regard was positively associated with introjected religiosity in adolescents (Brambilla et al., 2015). The results of this current study extend the research by showing perceived parental religious IVD was not related to introjected religiosity in upper elementary age children.

*Discussion.* The previous studies confirm the findings that perceived parent religious IVD is not shown to significantly predict introjected religiosity. However, past investigations do not provide support to explain the nonsignificant results for perceived relatedness and perceived autonomy. Limitations of the Teacher as Autonomy Support Scale and IRI measurements, as indicated above, should be considered when interpreting these results. Additionally, the subscale measuring introjected religiosity may be particularly susceptible to social desirability bias. A research assistant reported one of the

participants in the study asked the question “Is that a good thing or a bad thing?” when referring to one of the items measuring introjected religiosity, “I attend church because I want others to think of me as a good Christian.” This highlights the potential that children answered the items, particularly those relating to religious motivation, by choosing what they considered to be the “right” results (De Leeuw, 2011). Due to the repetitive nature of the IRI instrument, children could guess the socially desirable approach to religious behaviors and score themselves high for those items and low for the other items. This could create positively skewed data for introjected religiosity. Lastly, the results indicate that other variables are worth investigating for predicting introjected religiosity such as parental conditional regard and perceived control in Sunday school.

**Research Question Four.** Does degree of identified religiosity predict relationship to God among upper elementary age children when controlling for perceived parent religious IVD?

The researcher hypothesized that degree of identified religiosity would predict relationship to God when controlling for perceived parent religious IVD. The researcher conducted a two-stage hierarchical multiple regression to answer this question. Perceived parental religious IVD was entered into stage-one as the control variable. The results for stage-one showed a significant relationship between perceived parental religious IVD and relationship to God. Perceived parental religious IVD accounted for over 11% of the variance in children’s relationship to God. The second stage of the analysis showed identified religiosity was a significant predictor of children’s relationship to God, accounting for over 18% of the variance in the model. Consequently, there was sufficient

evident to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that children's level of identified religiosity does predict children's relationship with God.

***Comparing the results to previous studies.*** Theoretical perspectives on religion and spirituality indicate a complex relationship between the two concepts (Bridges & Moore, 2002; Ranson, 2002; Tamminen & Nurmi, 1995). Most scholars have acknowledged a connection or overlap between conceptualizations of religion and spirituality, noting a search for meaning or sacred as common elements of the two (May & Ratcliff, 2004; McGrath, 1999; Sheldrake, 2012). Research on children's spirituality confirms children are capable of deep spiritual reflection (Coles, 1990; Hay & Nye, 2006; Hyde, 2005; Moore, Talwar, Bosacki, & Park-Saltzman, 2011). Children's spirituality can and often does exist outside of organized religion (Coles, 1990; Hay & Nye, 1998). However, children from religious backgrounds generally make meaning from their spiritual experiences using religious language and ideas (Hay & Nye, 1998; Hyde, 2005).

***Discussion.*** Based on literature indicating the complex relationship between religion and spirituality, the researcher expected results showing a positive relationship between identified religiosity and relationship to God. Researchers have identified connections between spiritual well-being and prosocial behaviors and overall well-being in children (Bridges & Moore, 2002; Crosby & Smith, 2015) and adolescents (Ryan et al., 1993). Unfortunately, there is little empirical evidence to understand how social environments best support children's spiritual well-being (Minor, 2012; Nye, 2004). Findings from this current study provide the impetus for exploring religious motivation as a factor in children's spiritual well-being. This finding highlights the value of

investigating the Christian congregation as a social context which provides support for children's relationship to God.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations of the current study include sampling procedures, the use of self-report measures, and the correlational design. Each of the limitations are discussed below and highlight the importance of interpreting the results with caution.

**Sampling.** The researcher used convenience sampling to identify Protestant churches willing to serve as research sites for the study. Many of the children's ministry leaders in the participating churches were part of a similar network as the researcher. Furthermore, purposeful sampling was used to identify children in third to sixth grade regularly engaged in an educational program in a Protestant Christian church. This method was chosen to meet the aims of the study. However, the sample is limited in geographical region (majority from the Pacific Northwest) and ethnicity (majority identified themselves as white). This method notably limits the generalizability of the results.

**Self-report Measures.** A key limitation of the study is the reliance on self-report measures. Advantages to using self-report measures with children include the opportunity to learn from children's voices, which are typically left out of research (Zill, 2001). Additionally, children are the best resources for information about issues relating to childhood (Zill, 2001). Disadvantages of self-report measures with children include shorter attention spans, lower cognitive and language abilities, and increased possibility of social desirability bias (Zill, 2001). Steps were taken to limit respondent fatigue by using short versions and subscales of instruments when available. Survey administration

typically lasted less than 20 minutes, which is appropriate for the attention spans of children in third to sixth grade (De Leeuw, 2011). The researcher adjusted for potential cognitive difficulties by rephrasing negatively formulated questions and checking for understanding with the focus group. Self-report measures are susceptible to social desirability bias particularly with children (Zill, 2001). Upper elementary age children often want to please teachers or peers and are particularly concerned about responding with the right answer (De Leeuw, 2011). Steps were taken to mitigate the potential for this bias by providing clear instructions that the survey is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers. Furthermore, research assistants were instructed to ensure survey administration took place in a setting where participants felt their answers were private by offering individual desks or privacy folders (De Leeuw, 2011). While the research was designed to decrease the disadvantages of self-report data, there remains inherent limitations.

**Correlational design.** The correlational nature of the study excludes the potential to make any causal inferences from the data. The results, for example, indicate that perceived relatedness predicts relationship to God. However, that does not confirm perceived relatedness causes an increase in spiritual well-being. An experimental or quasi-experimental design with random assignment and manipulation of a variable is required to make causal inferences (Field, 2009).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings from this study contribute to the exiguous body of research designed to investigate the internalization of religious beliefs and behaviors through the lens of SDT. This study fills a gap in the literature by investigating the role of Christian

education programs in supporting the degree to which children identify with their religious beliefs and behaviors. Furthermore, it highlights the potential for the church to provide an environment which supports children's spiritual well-being. Additional studies are needed to support and expand the results of this current study.

**Children's religious internalization.** Children are increasingly recognized as autonomous beings with agentic capability to shape their experiences and development (Bakke, 2005; James & James, 2001; James & Prout, 2015). There remains a paucity of research investigating children's experiences in the Christian church and how those experiences enhance their religious and spiritual lives. Despite the nonsignificant results of this study, the compelling research in SDT, which highlights the value of autonomy-supportive environments for internalization of beliefs and behaviors, provides an impetus for further investigation of this model for religious education. Future studies should employ an instrument designed specifically for children (instead of altered from a survey meant for adults, like the IRI) in which children can express the beliefs and behaviors which are most central to their faith. Researchers should use a variety of methods to measure autonomy support including observations, reports from teachers and ministry leaders, and self-report surveys and interviews with children designed specifically for the congregational environment. Additionally, Godly Play should be considered as a model program for examining the role of autonomy support in children's religiosity. Literature in this realm can also benefit from studies which investigate autonomy support in a variety of congregational experiences beyond a Sunday morning children's program.

The finding that perceived relatedness in church predicts spiritual well-being aligns with literature which reveals the value of relationships for helping individuals

make meaning from religious experiences (Crosby et al., 2015; Krause & Ellison, 2009). Further studies examining the connection between relatedness and religiosity should use larger sample sizes, representative of different demographics to better enable generalizability of results. Studies should expand on the current research by employing longitudinal designs to explore long term relationships between relatedness in church and religious identification and spiritual well-being. Furthermore, research using a variety of designs should investigate which children's ministry models best support the development of close caring relationships between children and adults, to better understand how and when those relationships are formed.

**Investigation of Sunday school.** The non-significant results between autonomy in Sunday school and identified religiosity, introjected religiosity, and relationship with God, highlight the need to continue to examine the effectiveness of traditional Sunday school. Unfortunately, there is not enough research to provide an understanding of the relationship between Sunday school and children's religiosity (Burton, Paroschi, Habenicht, & Hollingsead, 2006). There are qualitative studies investigating specific Sunday school models such as Godly Play (Berryman, 1995; Hyde, 2010; Stonehouse, 2001) and rotational Sunday school (Smith, 2001). These studies have provided insight into best practices for Christian education in the church, but have not provided results that are generalizable to larger populations. Researchers should consider large scale studies, similar to the Effective Christian Education Study (Benson & Elkin, 1990), investigating children's experiences in Sunday school from churches around the nation, to produce findings that are more generalizable. The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods should be employed to provide a comprehensive understanding of

children's experiences in church and how those experiences impact their religiosity and spiritual well-being. Furthermore, researchers should consider experimental and quasi-experiment designs in order to explore causal relationships between Christian education programs and individuals' religious internalization.

**Spiritual well-being.** While a significant body of research investigating children's spirituality exists, there remains a void of empirical evidence pointing to variables which support spiritual well-being (Minor, 2012). Research should evaluate Christian congregations as environments which benefit or hinder children's spiritual lives. Future research should employ the entire Feeling Good, Living Life instrument to explore relationships between church experiences and over all spiritual well-being.

### **Practical Implications**

This study extends the literature showing that parents have significant influence in the religiosity of their children. Previous research indicates that parents influence their children's religiosity through regular family religious practices (Desrosiers et al., 2010; Francis, 1993), discussions about faith (Flor & Knapp, 1994; Okagaki & Bevis, 1999), and religious role modeling (Dollahite & Marks, 2005; Myers, 1996). Assor et al. (2005) showed adolescents' perception of their parent's religious IVD correlated with the adolescents' religious internalization. The current study confirms the value of perceived parental religious IVD for religious integration in children. Christian education programs will benefit by supporting the way in which parents' model integrated faith to their children. Providing educational opportunities, materials for families to engage in discussion and activities around the value of faith in their lives, and opportunities for

children to participate in religious practices such as worship, service, and fellowship with their parents can support this endeavor.

Perceived relatedness with both peers and adults in church was shown to be a significant predictor of a child's relationship to God. Whereas, perceived autonomy in Sunday school did not predict relationship to God or identified religiosity. Christian education models should prioritize opportunities for children to develop supporting, caring relationships with adults and peers. Sunday school teachers often exhibit an urgency to get through the content of the lesson, missing opportunities for children to engage in deeper conversation about the topics most pertinent to their lives (Crosby et al., 2015; Yust, 2002). Teacher training should include strategies to make space for relationship building and opportunities for deeper reflection based on the children's interests. Volunteers should be reminded to "consider whether the ultimate objective is for children to learn about love or to experience love for themselves" (Crosby et al., 2015, p. 100).

Literature highlighted in this study underscores the importance of recognizing children as autonomous beings in social environments, particularly Christian churches. Theories of children as blank slates and developing beings have predominantly shaped the focus of practices designed to nurture children in the Christian church (Ward, 1995). These theories are criticized as providing future-oriented, instrumental views of children, particularly related to religion (Hay & Nye, 2006; May et al., 2005). Recently, scholars are beginning to acknowledge the value of more holistic perceptions of children in the church as agents in their religious experiences (Allen, 2009; Borgman, 2006; Estep & Breckenridge, 2004; Hood, 2004; Mercer, 2005; Westerhoff, 1976). With an increased

interest in the global understanding of children's rights, including the view of children as agents and participants, Christian leaders should consider enhancing autonomy support in programs with children in the church. This includes giving children choice about their experiences, providing opportunities to engage in meaningful service, supporting children's questions and struggles, and inviting children to identify how the church experience relates to their everyday lives.

Within the Christian church in the United States, significant effort in nurturing children's spiritual formation is relegated to the Sunday school (Benson, 1943; Fant & French, 1947; Lynn & Wright, 1980). As of 2005, over 90% of Protestant churches in the United States offered Sunday school programs and over 22 million children and youth participated in Sunday morning Christian education programs (Barna, 2005). Even with its widespread popularity, many church leaders recognize the need for change in the current Sunday school model (Bunge, 2006; Csinos & Beckwith, 2013; Nye, 2004; Yust, 2002). Sunday school teachers are typically volunteers with little training or experience in education, child development, or children's spirituality (Benson & Eklin, 1990; Bunge, 2006). It seems somewhat credulous to rely on this weekly program, led by volunteer teachers, to provide the adequate space to support a child's growth in any area—particularly spirituality. Benson and Elkin (1990) argued that “Christian education in a majority of congregations is a tired enterprise in need of reform” (p. 58). Almost 30 years later, the need for reform remains. This study was an attempt to provide empirical evidence to support such reform and inspire future research in this direction.

Most importantly, research to support any reform efforts in Christian education must be guided by theological reflection. Christian educators should include reflection on

theological understandings of childhood and children's relationship with God. A solid understanding of the human spirit provides support for the way in which children connect with God from a young age (Loder, 1998). Covenant epistemology can shape a perspective of the need to involve children in the learning as integrally connected to the process of knowing (Meek, 2011). Loder's (1989) five-step pattern provides a theological model for understanding the process through which humans are transformed and drawn into deeper relationship with the Holy spirit. Scholars and practitioners should engage in deep theological reflection and critically analyze theories from social sciences to identify holistic understandings of how to best support children's religious internalization.

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## Appendix A

### Final Survey

#### Demographic Questions:

I am in:  3<sup>rd</sup> Grade  4<sup>th</sup> Grade  5<sup>th</sup> Grade  6<sup>th</sup> Grade

I am a:  Boy  Girl

I am:  Black  Asian  Latino/Latina  White  Other

How often do you come to church?  On special days  Some Weeks  Most Weeks  
 Every Week

How long have you been coming to this church?  I'm visiting  Less than a year   
More than a year

#### Kids' Church Survey

Think about the adults you know from church who are not in your family. Circle the answer that is most true for you.

**Always**- If this happens all the time.

**Most of the time**- if this happens often but not all the time.

**Sometimes**- If this happens every once in a while.

**Never**- If this does NOT happen at all.

1. Adults at church care about me.
2. An adult from church would try to help if I were sad or upset.
3. An adult from church makes me feel loved.
4. Adults at church make me feel special.

Think about the kids you know from church who are not in your family. Circle the answer that is most true for you.

1. The kids at church are friendly to me.
2. A friend from church cares about me a lot.
3. Kids at church say nice things about me.
4. Kids from church would help me if I had a problem.

### Parent or Important Adult Religion Survey

Think about the parent or adult you live with and spend the most time with.

Who is that person?

Mom  Dad  Grandma  Grandpa  Aunt  Uncle  Other

Circle the answer that you think is most true for that person.

You have four answers to choose from:

**Very true-** If you strongly agree

**Sort of true-** If you kind of agree

**Not very true-** If you kind of disagree

**Not true at all-** If you strongly disagree

1. This adult enjoys learning about the Christian faith.
2. This adult shows me how to be a Christian.
3. I feel like this adult shows faith through his or her actions.
4. This adult spends time doing church activities.

### Teacher Support Scale

Think about your Sunday school class. Circle the answer that is most true for you.

You have four answers to choose from:

**Very true-** If you strongly agree

**Sort of true-** If you kind of agree

**Not very true-** If you kind of disagree

**Not true at all-** If you strongly disagree

1. My Sunday school teachers give me choices in Sunday school.
2. My Sunday school teachers give the class options of what we will do during Sunday school.
3. My Sunday school teachers will let me talk about something different than the lesson if I want to.
4. My Sunday school teachers tell me what to do.
5. My Sunday school teachers value my ideas.
6. If I have a question, my Sunday school teachers make time to listen.
7. My Sunday school teachers talk about how I can use what we learn in Sunday school.
8. My Sunday school teachers help make Sunday school special to my life.

### Internalized Religious Inventory

Think about what you believe. Circle the answer that is most true for you.

You have four answers to choose from:

**Very true-** If you strongly agree

**Sort of true-** If you kind of agree

**Not very true-** If you kind of disagree

**Not true at all-** If you strongly disagree

1. I believe in God because I want others to think of me as a good Christian.
2. I believe in God because I would feel bad about myself if I didn't.
3. I believe in God because God is important to my life.
4. I believe in God because I feel better for believing in God.
5. I pray because I feel good after I pray.
6. I pray because I believe God hears me when I pray.
7. I pray because if I didn't I would feel bad about myself.
8. I pray so others will think I am a good Christian.
9. I attend church because I want others to think of me as a good Christian.
10. I attend church because I would feel bad about myself if I didn't attend church.
11. I attend church because I feel better after attending church.
12. I attend church because going to church is important to my life.

### Feeling Good, Living Life

Show how each of the following make you feel by circling your best answer for each question.

You have five answers to choose from:

**YES-** It makes you feel REALLY GOOD

**yes-** it makes you feel good just a bit

**?-** if you are not sure how good it makes you feel

**no-** if it does not make you feel good

**NO-** if it REALLY does NOT make you feel good

1. Knowing God is your friend
2. Talking with God
3. Knowing God cares for you
4. Thinking about God

Show how much you do each of the following by circling your best answer for each question.

You have five answers to choose from:

**YES-** If you do this ALL the TIME or very often

**yes-** if you do this fairly often

**?-** if you do this sometimes

**no-** if you hardly ever do this

**NO-** if you NEVER do this

1. Knowing God is your friend
2. Talking with God
3. Knowing God cares for you
4. Thinking about God

## Appendix B

### Parent Consent Form

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am a doctoral candidate in Seattle Pacific University's School of Education conducting research for my dissertation. The purpose of this study is to explore autonomy and social support in church as it relates to 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade children's religious internalization. The study will provide information about the value of relationships and autonomy in Sunday school for children's religious development. Your church agreed to host the study so we invited at 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> graders from your church to participate. We anticipate 200 participants from churches around the country. Your children's participation in this study is completely voluntary.

Children wishing to participate in this research will meet \_\_\_\_\_ to respond to a 46-item survey. The survey will measure the child's perceived level of autonomy in Sunday school, perceived social support from adults and peers in church, perceived parental religious internalization, personal religious internalization, and spiritual well-being related to God. Children should be able to finish the survey in approximately 30 minutes. The session is 30 minutes to allow for time for distribution, introduction, and collection of the surveys and a child consent form.

Your child's participation is important to this research and is greatly appreciated.

As this is a study on people, it is required to go through a rigorous process of being approved by Seattle Pacific University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). This process requires the following to be shared with you:

*Potential risk/discomfort:* There are no known risks of participation in this study. Some of the questions may be personally sensitive as they ask questions about one's spirituality. The research assistant, will instruct children they can choose to not answer any question that makes them feel uncomfortable. The research assistant is available to any children who feel the need to debrief from the survey.

*Potential benefits:* There are no direct benefits to your child for participation in the research. However, the results will provide information about Christian education practices that support the spiritual well-being of children.

*Voluntary participation:* Your child may refrain from participating without any impact. If the survey administration takes place during a Sunday school class and your child chooses to not participate, he or she can choose an alternate activity or leave the classroom before the research assistant, distributes the questionnaire.

*Anonymity/Confidentiality:* Your child's survey will be kept confidential. Authorized research personnel are the only ones with access to the completed student surveys. The

surveys are all anonymous and therefore there is no way for the researchers to identify an individual from the responses.

If you have any questions about this study or questionnaire, please contact the researcher, Heather Ingersoll at 971.344.2999 or by email at [ingersollh@spu.edu](mailto:ingersollh@spu.edu).

You may also contact the designated research assistant, [name], from [church name] at [phone] or by email at [email].

This Seattle Pacific University faculty member overseeing this dissertation research is Dr. Nyaradzo Mvududu. She can be reached at phone number 206.281.2551 or by email at [nyaradzo@spu.edu](mailto:nyaradzo@spu.edu).

This research study was reviewed and approved by the Seattle Pacific University's Institutional Review Board (IRB # 161706008). Questions or concerns about research participants' rights may be directed to the SPU IRB office. The phone number is 206.281.2201.

If you consent for your child to participate in the study, please fill out the below section. You will receive a copy of the consent form.

### **Permission**

I read the above description of the study and understand the conditions for participation. My signature below indicates that I give permission for my child to participate in the study.

Parent or Guardian Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent or Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Child(ren) name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Child Assent Form

Dear Student,

This form is asking if you want to participate in a study about your experience in Sunday school, in church, and your faith.

If you agree to be in the study, the researcher will use your answers to learn more about children's experience in church. It will take about 30 minutes to finish the survey. The questions are about your Sunday school teachers, your church, and your relationship with God.

You can ask questions about the study anytime. You can stop at any time. If there are any questions you do not want to answer, you do not have to answer them.

The questions will only ask you what you think. There are no right or wrong answers because this is not a test.

You won't write your name on the survey, so no one will know how you answered the questions.

If you sign this paper, it means that you read this letter and want to participate in the study. Do not sign if you do not want to participate in the study. It is your decision whether or not to participate in the study, and no one will be upset if you don't sign the paper or if you change your mind later.

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### ANOVAS

#### *Perceived Parent Religious IVD*

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Between Groups	5.10	1	5.11	1.10	.30
Within Groups	410.18	88	4.66		
Total	415.29	89			

#### *Kids Church Survey*

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Between Groups	.00	1	.00	.00	.99
Within Groups	1413.29	83	17.03		
Total	1413.29	84			

#### *Teacher as Social Support*

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Between Groups	.00	1	.00	.00	.99
Within Groups	892.93	84	10.63		
Total	892.93	85			

#### *Feeling Good, Living Life*

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Between Groups	107.75	1	107.75	2.37	.13
Within Groups	4006.70	88	45.53		
Total	4114.46	89			

#### *Introjected Religiosity*

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Between Groups	3.98	1	3.98	.17	.68
Within Groups	2025.70	85	23.83		
Total	2029.68	86			

#### *Identified Religiosity*

	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Between Groups	8.13	1	8.13	1.08	.30
Within Groups	607.90	81	7.51		
Total	616.02	82			

## Appendix E

### Church Descriptives

#### *Church Means for Independent Variables*

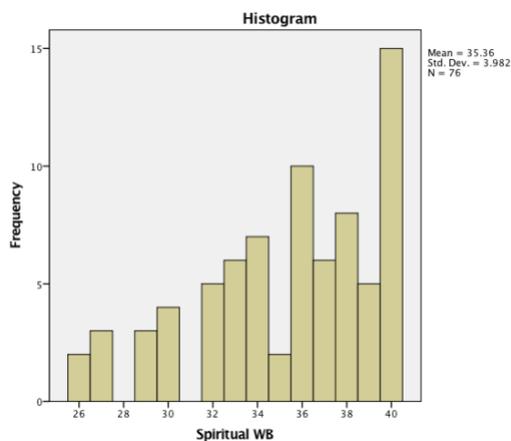
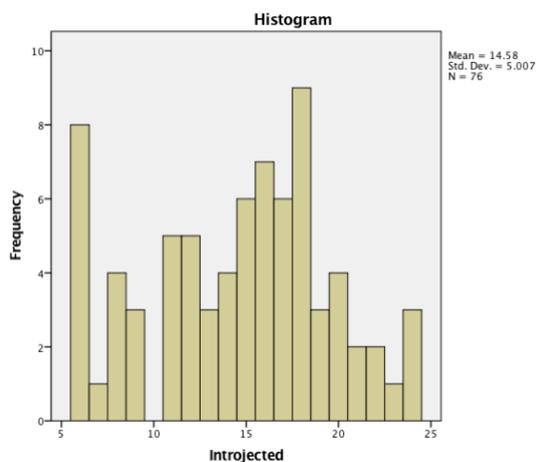
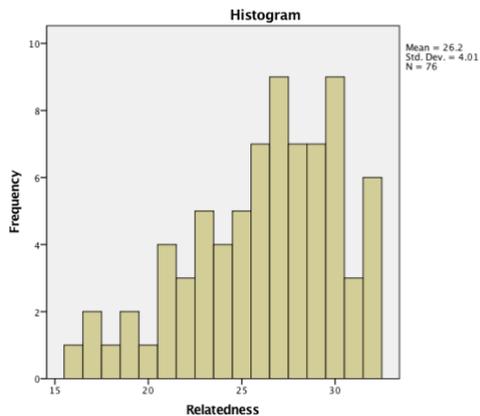
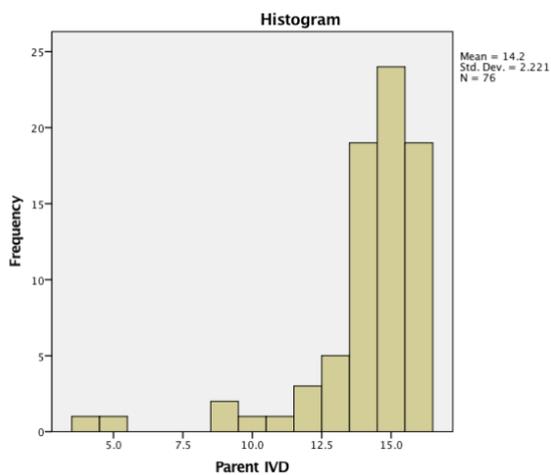
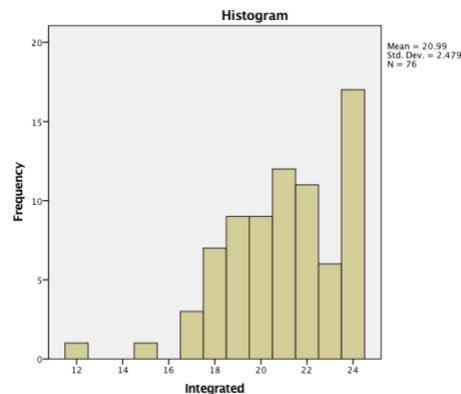
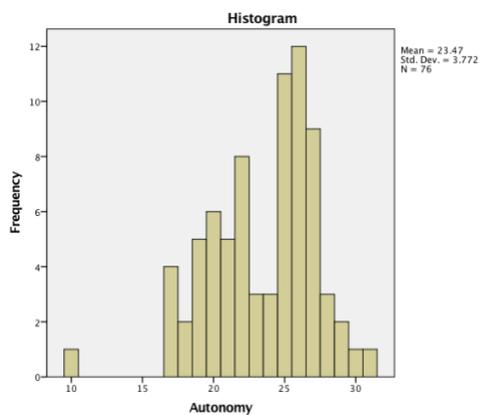
Church	<u>Relatedness</u>			<u>Parent IVD</u>			<u>Autonomy</u>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	25.38	8	5.449	13.50	8	3.505	22.57	7	6.828
2	26.75	4	4.031	14.00	4	2.309	21.50	4	1.291
3	27.50	4	1.915	13.00	4	2.449	23.25	4	4.646
4	26.67	3	4.041	14.75	4	1.258	25.00	3	3.000
5	26.33	9	3.742	14.33	9	1.000	24.38	8	3.662
6	24.33	6	4.367	13.86	7	2.193	24.29	7	3.729
7	26.60	5	6.542	15.17	6	.983	22.67	6	2.944
8	27.11	9	4.702	15.00	10	.816	24.60	10	2.221
9	30.29	7	1.496	14.75	8	1.488	22.13	8	4.190
10	22.29	7	3.904	12.86	7	2.545	23.00	7	4.123
11	25.67	9	3.536	14.11	9	1.269	24.67	9	3.571
12	23.67	3	5.033	14.67	3	1.155	20.00	3	5.196
13	27.14	7	3.078	13.00	6	4.561	24.33	6	3.141
14	25.80	5	3.114	13.40	5	.894	20.80	5	3.033
15	25.75	4	1.258	14.20	5	2.490	25.00	4	2.160
Total	26.13	90	4.117	14.07	95	2.125	23.40	91	3.777

*Church Means for Dependent Variables*

Church	<u>Identified</u>			<u>Introjected</u>			<u>Spiritual WB</u>		
	<i>M</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	19.88	8	1.959	12.88	8	6.334	34.88	8	5.139
2	16.00	3	3.464	11.33	3	2.517	34.00	4	2.828
3	20.25	4	2.062	12.75	4	5.560	33.25	4	2.986
4	22.33	3	1.528	14.50	4	5.686	36.50	4	3.416
5	21.89	9	2.315	17.00	9	3.640	35.78	9	3.598
6	21.57	7	1.902	14.20	5	3.962	35.86	7	3.132
7	20.50	6	1.761	12.67	6	4.367	31.67	6	4.082
8	20.80	10	2.486	13.60	10	6.275	36.70	10	2.869
9	22.14	7	1.864	12.50	8	4.690	36.75	8	2.435
10	22.33	6	1.366	15.29	7	2.870	36.14	7	3.716
11	21.43	7	2.440	17.78	9	2.728	34.13	8	5.643
12	19.67	3	.577	9.00	3	5.196	35.00	3	7.000
13	21.80	5	2.683	16.33	6	5.502	34.29	7	5.187
14	18.00	3	2.646	11.60	5	4.278	31.40	5	3.507
15	19.60	5	5.899	15.40	5	5.814	33.60	5	6.656
Total	20.85	86	2.703	14.23	92	4.928	34.88	95	4.217

## Appendix F

### Histograms



## Appendix G

### Factor Loading

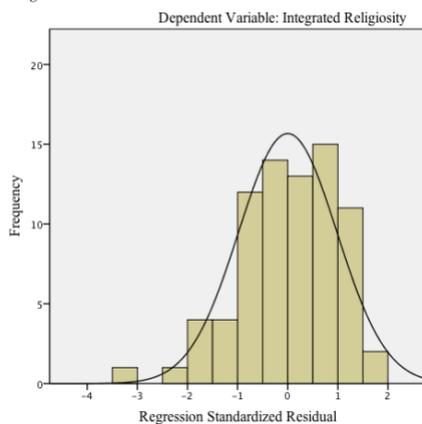
*Factor loading based on factor analysis for  
perceived parent religious IVD*

	Factor 1
ARS_Q1 Enjoys learning about faith	.838
ARS_Q2 Shows me how to be a Christian	.855
ARS_Q3 Shows faith through actions	.538
ARS_Q4 Spends time during church activities	.480

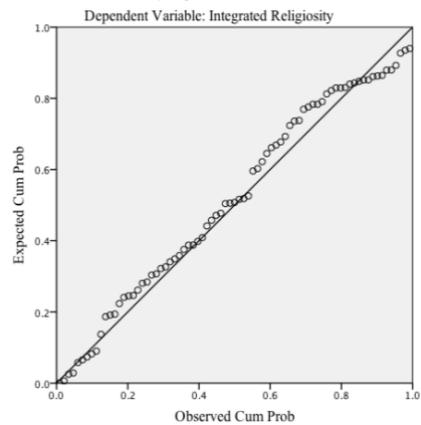
## Appendix H

### Question 1.A Plots

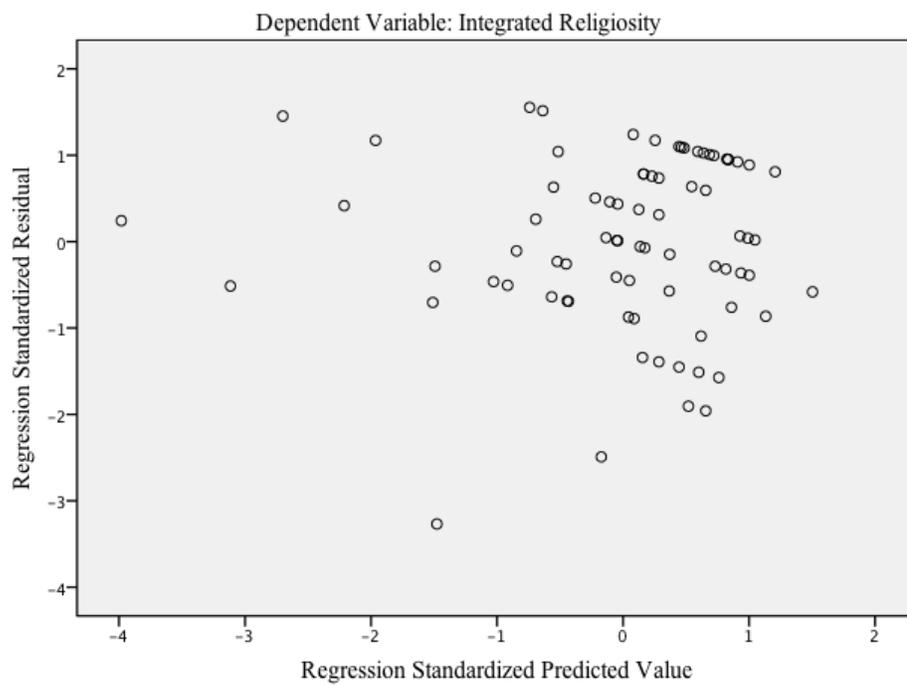
*Histogram*



*Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual*



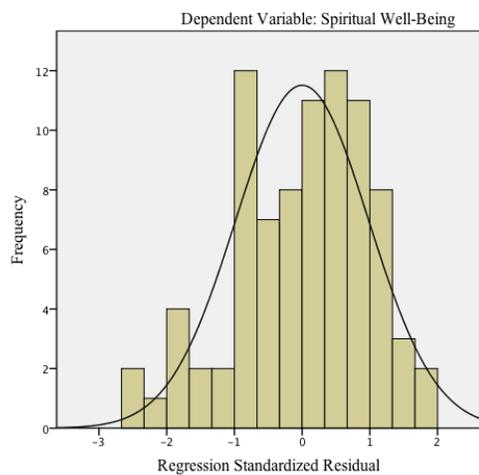
*Scatterplot*



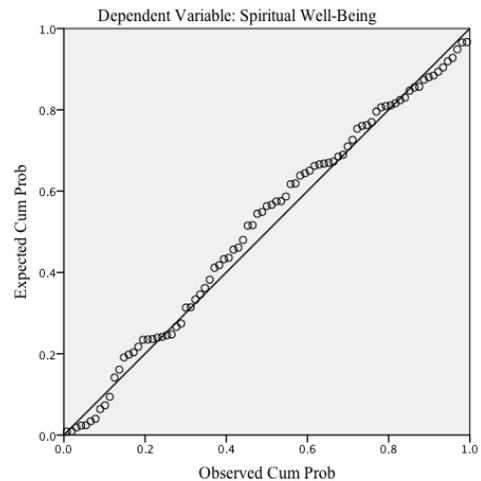
## Appendix I

## Question 1.B Plots

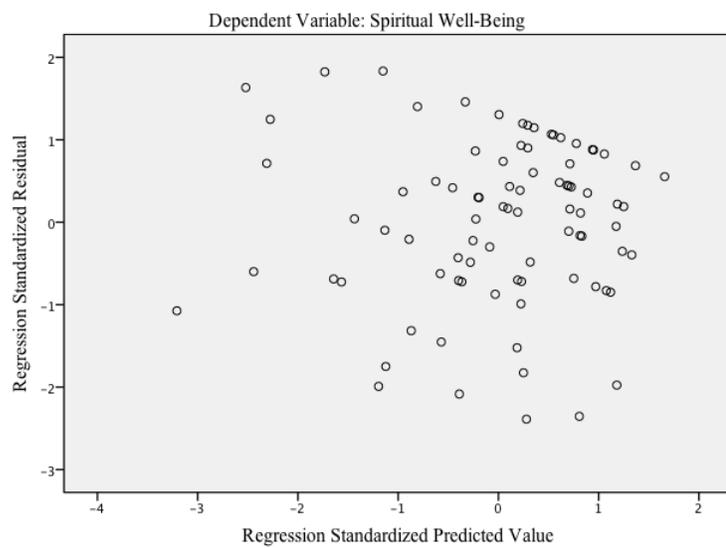
Histogram

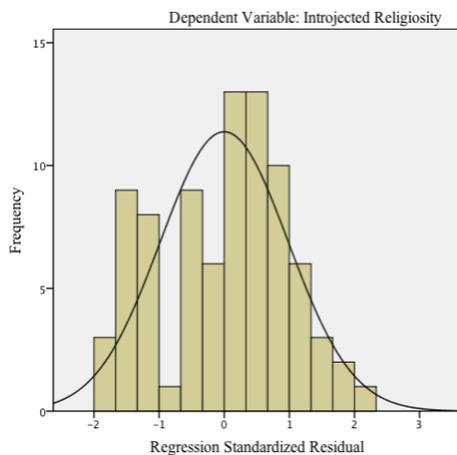
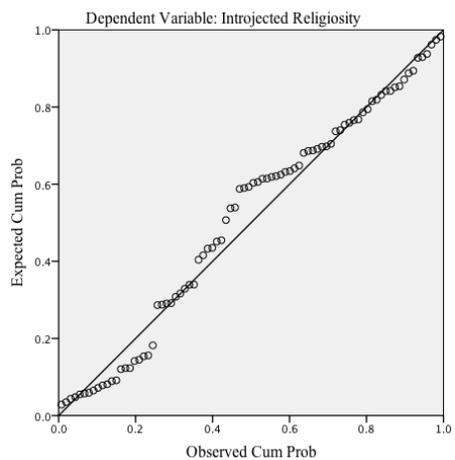
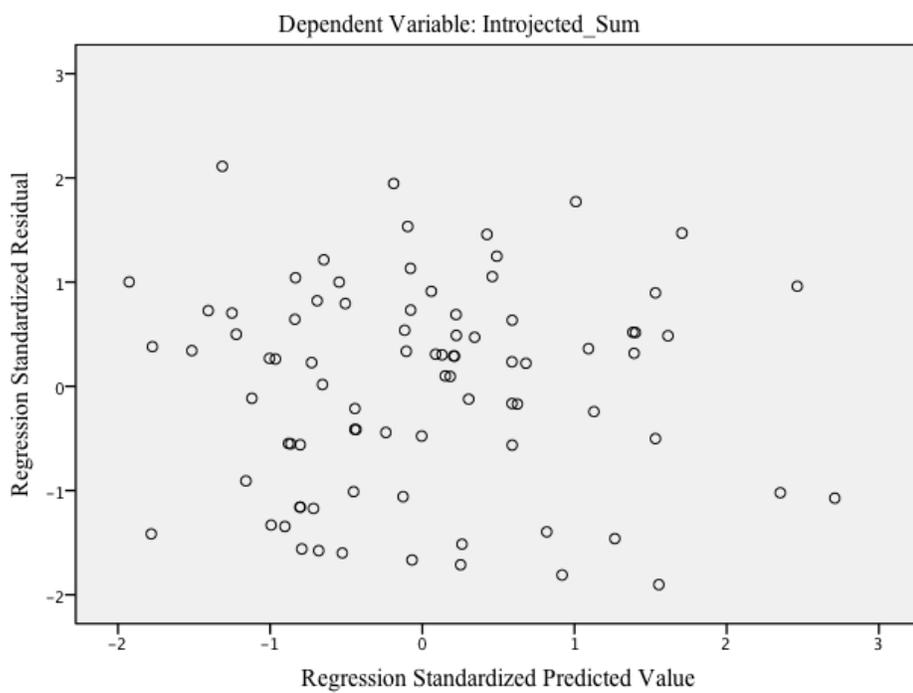


Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual



Scatterplot

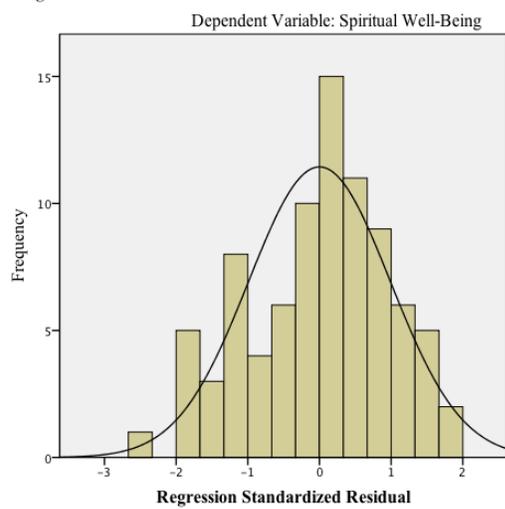


**Appendix J****Question 3 Plots***Histogram**Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual**Scatterplot*

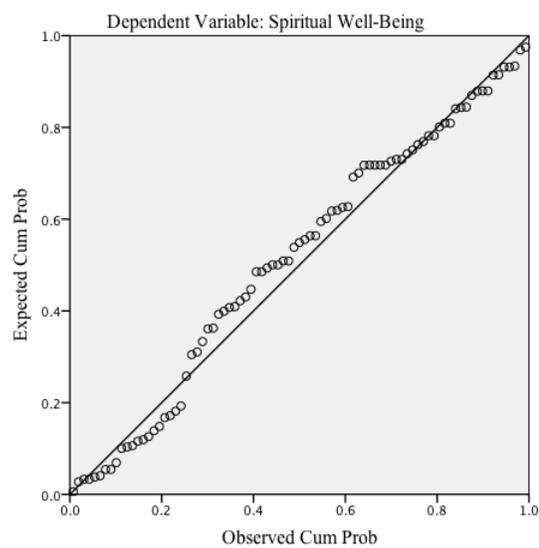
## Appendix K

### Question 4 Plots

*Histogram*



*Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual*



*Scatterplot*

