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Sermini, Tiffany M.
The Impact of Religious and/or
Spiritual Identity on the Parental
Experience: Self-Perceptions of
Parents

ABSTRACT

The rate at which American adults are changing religious affiliations and/or incorporating multiple religious/spiritual traditions at once to suit their individual needs is growing rapidly and changing the traditional religious landscape. Three new categories of religiosity/spirituality have been identified in the literature: being both religious and spiritual, spiritual but not religious, or religious but not spiritual. This qualitative study explored how parents that self identified as having a religious/spiritual identity made meaning of these identities and how these identities influenced their parents.

The majority of participants identified as being both religious and spiritual, followed by spiritual and religious and lastly religious but not spiritual. The majority of participants that self-identified as both religious and spiritual associated their religious identity with the religion of their childhood, e.g., shared beliefs, rituals and community. The spiritual identity for the majority was associated with an ongoing personal search for a connection with a higher power that retained what was valued from this childhood experience and incorporated ideas from other religious/spiritual belief systems. For a smaller subset in this group, spirituality was associated with what had to be taken on faith in their religion, e.g., the connection with a higher power.

Those who were spiritual and not religious and vice versa did not have a childhood religious tradition. Both their spiritual and religious identities were part of their search in adulthood for a connection with a higher power. All groups demonstrated a strong connection between their religiosity/spirituality and their parenting.

**THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS AND/OR SPIRITUAL IDENTITY ON THE PARENTAL
EXPERIENCE: SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS**

A project based upon an independent investigation,
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Social Work.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the impact of parents' religious and/or spiritual identity on their parenting. Most studies on this topic have been quantitative and by design in the voice of the so-called outside and objective observer (Mahoney, 2010). Thus, we know little about how parents understand and make meaning of the impact of spiritual and/or religious identity on their roles as parents. This qualitative study was designed to make a contribution to filling this gap by seeing what could be learned from parents about how they view the impact of their religious and/or spiritual identity on their parenting. This is a timely exploration, since the United States is one of the most religiously and spiritually diverse nations in the world (Pewforum, 2007).

The increasing number of people who identify as religious and/or spiritual in America is a contrasting trend to other wealthy, industrialized nations, that have overall seen a decrease in religious and spiritual participation (Campbell, 2011; Pewforum, 2007). In addition, the rate at which American adults are changing affiliations and/or incorporating multiple traditions at once to suit their individual needs is growing rapidly (Pewforum, 2007; Zinnbauer, Pargament & Scott, 1999). Pluralist families (e.g. having two or more family members who identify differently from one another religiously and/or spiritually) are becoming more common than ever before. McCarthy (2007) noted that parents of such families must develop strategies for managing such differences within the family context.

More than 90% of adults in the US identify as religious and/or spiritual (Pewforum, 2007; Walsh, 2010), with 7 in 10 Americans reporting a change in faith in their lifetimes (Pewforum, 2007). There is also an increase in non-western religious affiliations that appear to

be in part related to increased immigration from non-western countries, and include Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam (Pewforum, 2007). Plante (2008) notes that 40% of adults who do identify as spiritual, religious or both attend church or other services on a weekly basis, while it remains unclear what the other 60% of adults may be doing to express religion or spirituality. While religious service attendance is decreasing, the number of people who identify as religious, spiritual or both is increasing (Pewforum, 2007), essentially rendering the measure of religiosity by service attendance inaccurate (Moberg, 2002). While service attendance appears to be on a decline, this still makes the US one of the highest religious service attending populations, when compared to nations with similar industrialization (Campbell, 2011).

Although there are an increasing number of adults who identify as spiritual and not religious, it is unclear how such an identity is expressed and what communities adults may relate to their spiritual identities. In addition, more than half of Americans who are religious, spiritual or both, rate their beliefs as highly important to their everyday life (Pewforum, 2007). It remains unclear how adults who are unaffiliated with any particular religious group, but still identify as religious or spiritual, go about expressing their identities, as it has yet to be captured in survey data (Pewforum, 2007) beyond church attendance.

Meanings of religion and spirituality have been debated for centuries (Hill, Pargament, Hood, McCullough, Swyers, Larson & Zinnbauer, 2000). Context, including cultural factors and time period, has often influenced the structured meaning of the two terms (Hill et al., 2000; Myers, 1996; Roer-Strier & Sands, 2004). Few studies have explored with parents themselves how they make meaning of the two terms (Horwath & Lees, 2010). This has left much unknown about parenting experiences in the context of self-described religious and spiritual experience. In

addition, this provides little validity to analysis of parental spirituality and religiosity, which is often measured by service attendance in quantitative studies (Moberg, 2002).

The beginnings of the American social work profession coincided with major European immigration patterns of the turn of the 19th century. This essentially led to many agencies and community resources providing services under sectarian leadership and funding that was by and large Catholic and Protestant (Koenig, 2005). Today, such agencies (e.g. the YMCA and Salvation Army) receive their funding from primarily public sources and provide and design services to and for an increasingly diverse population (Pewforum, 2007). In the modern mental health treatment frame, many models of recovery use theistic, faith-based, 12 step programs (Koenig, 2005). The use of mindfulness practice in psychotherapy has been adapted from eastern spiritual practices and has made a significant impact on postmodern practice with anxiety disorders, depression and somatic symptoms (Germer, Siegel & Fulton, 2005; Koenig, 2005). Recent changes in the economic and social climate appear to make seeking services from such organizations more common than ever before (News Batch, 2011; The Urban League, 2001).

It has become evident that social workers and other mental health practitioners, particularly clinical therapists, lack needed preparation to engage with religious and/or spiritual parents and their families (Plante, 2007). Overall, clinical therapists tend to be less religious and/or spiritual than the overall population, with 52% reporting no religious and/or spiritual affiliation whatsoever (Hill et al., 2000). Most importantly it is clear that if research with religious and spiritual parents are to move forward, clearer understandings of what religion and spirituality mean to parents from the parental perspective are needed (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005). Such knowledge may help to deepen conceptualizations of the two terms, which would aid social workers and other mental health professionals in achieving more culturally competent

practice standards. McCarthy (2007) notes that more qualitative research is needed to gain a clearer understanding of the dynamic processes that occur within modern families that often share multiple religious and/or spiritual identities.

While mental health professionals appear to lack a personal understanding of what it means to be religious and/or spiritual (Hill et al., 2000), this has been matched by a lack of requirements for the mental health professions to come to deeper, more meaningful understandings of what religion and spirituality mean for parents. Additionally, there is a lack of research literature on the topic of how parents make meaning of religion and spirituality in their lives (Horwath & Lees, 2010). This lack of requirements for cultural competency training with regards to religion and spirituality (NASW, 2001), combined with a lacking spiritual and religious identification amongst therapists (Plante, 2008), leaves mental health professionals at a disadvantage when addressing spiritual and religious issues with clients in general. Due to the significance of religion and spirituality to the lives of American adults and parents, particularly those in crisis, psychological and social work education and research have a gaining interest in the topic. This has been notable, with an increase in course offerings, certificate programs and trainings on the topic, and with the relatively new adoption of cultural competency standards by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2001).

Despite efforts to enliven research that promotes education and cultural competency (NASW, 2001), some newer studies show that many mental health professionals, religious, spiritual or neither, remain uncomfortable addressing topics of religion and spirituality in session (Hodge & Limb, 2009; Plante, 2008). Some areas of needed study have been clarified over the past decade, and may shed light on why religion and spirituality are so common in the lives of parents, and yet so rare in the clinical relationship (Erickson, Hecker, Kirkpatrick, Killmer &

James, 2002; Morningstar, 2010). Today, more than ever, it has become clear that research efforts must aim to explicate how parents make meaning of religion and spirituality and carry out multiple roles in such contexts.

Most studies have been quantitative, and outnumber qualitative studies on the topic of religion and/or spirituality and families three to one (Mahoney, 2010). Religious and spiritual parents have been studied, mostly in ways that have aimed to find relationships between parent religiosity and particular outcomes. These include positive correlations between religiosity and: the discipline of children (Reinert & Edwards, 2009); the sanctification of parenting (e.g. parenting according to God's word) (Volling, Mahoney & Rauer, 2009); parental effectiveness (Duriez, Soenens, Neyrinck & Vansteenkiste, 2009); parent involvement with children (Bartowski & Xu, 2000; Wilcox, 2002); various child outcomes (e.g. school performance and social skills attainment) (Brody, Stoneman & Flor, 1996; Ebstyne, King & Furrow, 2008; Gunnoe, Hetherington & Reiss, 1999; Myers, 2003); parental resiliency (McAdoo, 1995; Pargament, Ano & Waccholtz, 2005; Poston & Turnbull, 2004); and object relations (Finn & Gartner, 1992; Hall, Brokaw, Edwards & Pike, 2000; McNamara Barry & Nelson, 2008). Unfortunately, we continue to know little about the parental experience in a religious and/or spiritual environment as it relates to various parenting roles (Bartowski & Xu, 2000; Boyatzis, 2006). In addition, the quantitative studies in the literature have lacked explorations with diverse populations, and tend to be skewed in terms of religious and spiritual affiliations of participants (Mahoney, 2010).

In recent years, there has been an increased interest by the mental health professions in qualitative studies of adults and parents who are religious and/or spiritual (Horwath & Lees, 2010; Mahoney, 2010). Studies that have sought to gain better understanding of spirituality and

parenting have been uncommon. Such studies provide information about the meaning-making processes of the growing religious and/or spiritual population of individuals in this country (Morningstar, 2010). Studies with adults who identify as spiritual and/or religious have generally found that religion and spirituality can provide opportunities for coping (Ankrah, 2002), developing morals (Tisdell, 2002), and developing a sense of self (Kiesling, Sorrell, Montgomery & Colwell, 2008; Levenson, Aldwin & D'Mello, 2005; Saroglou & Fiasse, 2003). Spirituality and religion can also provide adults with opportunities for community participation (Garrison, 2005), and increased mental and physical well being as perceived by participants (Leak, DeNeve & Greteman, 2007).

Studies with parents and grandparents have been less common, but have explored the following topics: Interviews with minority families about spirituality and parental roles (King, Burgess, Akinyela, Counts-Spriggs & Parker, 2006; Norton, 2006); The role of spirituality and religion in coping with hardship, difficult children and loss of a child (Brotherson & Soderquist, 2002; Coulthard, & Fitzgerald, 1999; Evans, Boustead & Owens, 2008; Speraw, 2006); The influence of cultural context (Tisdell, 2002;); The role of religion and spirituality in building strong families (Roer-Strier & Sands, 2004; Gay Vela, 1996), and the strategies parents use to do so (Gay Vela, 1996; McCarthy, 2007)

Generally, these studies have found that parents utilize religious and spiritual beliefs to cope with loss (Brotherson & Soderquist, 2002) and hardship (Coulthard & Fitzgerlad, 1999; Hexem, Mollen, Carroll, Lanctot & Feudtner, 2011). Parents and grandparents also take on roles of teaching, facilitating and contextualizing religious and spiritual practice for their children and grandchildren (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008, King et al., 2006). Other studies found that familial and cultural context are influential to religious and spiritual parent behavior and communication

patterns in families (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008; Evans, Boustead & Owens, 2008; McCarthy, 2007). Religious and spiritual identity were also important to parents who sought to build strong families (Gay Vela, 1996) and such identities and knowledge appeared to provide such families with tools to strive toward loving familial relationships (Gay Vela, 1996; McCarthy, 2007)

Much of the research on adult populations that involves religious and spiritual attributes has focused less on parenting and more on overall functioning (primarily health) or resiliency of adults who have faced crisis or trauma (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005). However, these studies have included the experiences of parents who have lost a child (Brotherson & Soderquist, 2002), have children with pervasive disabilities (Coulthard & Fitzgerald, 1999; Poston & Turnbull, 2004) or who are caring for an ill child (Hexem, Mollen, Carroll, Lanctot & Feudtner, 2011). These amongst other studies have found that religious and spiritual coping can be both positive and negative (Pargament et al., 2005). While religion and spirituality appear to provide supportive and resilient functions to many parents and adults (Evans, Boustead & Owens, 2008), this has not been true for all, with some parents reporting a loss of faith due to traumatic or life changing events (Brotherson & Soderquist, 2002).

Spirituality and religious development have been compared to and likened to human development models, but with little evidence to support such relationships (Levenson et al., 2005), due to a lack of longitudinal developmental studies (Pargament et al., 2005) that aim to understand spiritual and religious development of adults and parents. This dearth of information is striking considering that most Americans, including children (Hyde, 2008), have spiritual and religious inclinations. In addition, there is a surprising lack of qualitative studies with mothers and less surprisingly, with non-heterosexual parents and immigrant populations (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005; Pewforum, 2007). With a trend of increased diversity in the US across topics

of sexuality (CNN wire staff, 2011), immigration trends (Pewforum, 2011; US Department of Homeland Security, 2011), race and ethnicity and socioeconomic status (US Census Bureau, 2011), with a lack of representative qualitative samples; the risk remains high for clinicians to be ill-prepared and more westernized in their views of religious and spiritual clients (Hodge & Limb, 2010).

Few quantitative studies have asked parents themselves to provide their own subjective meanings of religion and spirituality (Horwath & Lees, 2010), or to explain what parents find influential about their religion and spirituality with regards to their parenting. Quantitative studies on religiosity and parenting have indicated that religion and spirituality are important to the lives of parents in the United States, but have failed to provide a clear understanding of how parents make meaning of religion and spirituality in their lives. Qualitative studies have been limited, but do suggest that religion and spirituality have an influence on parenting behavior, beliefs and relationships.

However, it still remains unclear how parents make sense of such behavior, beliefs and relationships, or how parents make meaning of their religious and/or spiritual identities in the context of modern society. This lack of information necessitates research about how parents in particular understand and apply the meanings of religion and spirituality to their lives and to their roles as parents. This will help to establish a clearer point of exploration on the topic, where there remains a gap in the literature where the subjective, nuanced responses of parents have failed to be captured. In addition, knowledge about what events, milestones and experiences parents may attribute to their religious and/or spiritual identities is lacking. In effect, this study sought to deepen social workers' understandings of self-identified spiritual and/or religious adults' in roles

as parents by exploring parents' own perceptions of how their religious and/or spiritual identities impact their parenting.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Current Religious and Spiritual Landscape of the United States for Parents

According to a recent review of the literature (Mahoney, 2010), 65% of Americans label themselves as religious *and* spiritual; 15-20% spiritual but *not* religious; and 5-10% religious but *not* spiritual. This means that over 90% of American adults interviewed between 1999 and 2009 reported some affiliation with spirituality and/or religion. Because religion and spirituality not only describe belief systems, but places and activities, both contribute to the cultural context and the experiences of most parents in the United States (Hill et al., 2000; Walsh, 2010).

Religious environments and religious participation have been studied in an effort to quantify the positive and negative impact such environments have on parents (McAdoo, 1995). Forty percent of adults who do identify as spiritual, religious or both attend church or other services on a weekly basis (Boyatzis, 2006; Plante, 2008), and this is a declining trend (Weems, 2010), particularly for parents with children at home (Bruce, 2010). This trend has become an increasing area of interest when it come to understanding what the other 60% of adults may be doing to express religion or spirituality. Although religious service attendance is decreasing, the number of people who identify as religious, spiritual or both is increasing (Pewforum, 2007), essentially rendering the measure of religiosity by service attendance inaccurate (Moberg, 2002) and raising questions about how much information can be obtained about religious and/or spiritual parents from such studies (Moberg, 2002).

It is unclear how spiritual and religious identity are expressed, despite the fact that more than 90% of parents want their children to receive religious education (Boyatzis, 2006) and 75% of American teens are trying to follow the teachings of their religion (Boyatzis, 2006). One reason for this may be that the way adults in the United States today report their religious affiliations, shows that a growing number of Americans identify with more than one religious denomination or tradition at once (Pewforum, 2007; Zinnbauer et al., 1999), and that 7 in 10 adults will change their affiliation within their lifetimes (Pewforum, 2007). With this trend's growing commonality, choosing to honor what one finds most applicable has been coined "religion a la carte" (Pewforum, 2007; Walsh, 2010). Despite an increase in the literature on religious and/or spiritual families (Duriez et al., 2009; Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005) there remain questions about how parents choose to participate in religious and/or spiritual communities in modern society that may be due to a state of flux in adult religious and spiritual affiliation and a lack of suitable measurement techniques.

As a country, the United States is one of the most religiously diverse and most religiously tolerant, which is of interest, considering the individual importance that adults say their beliefs have (Campbell, 2011). While it was once believed that religious and spiritual participation decreased with age, particularly in the years when parenting might take place (Benson et al., 2005; Gallup, 1992); it would now appear that adults are becoming increasingly involved with spirituality and religion during their parenting years (Boyatzis, 2006; Pewforum, 2007; US Census Bureau, 2011). A recent study by Dollahite & Thatcher (2008), notes that highly religious parents utilize their faith to contextualize family conversations and engage with their adolescent children on a daily basis.

With this change there is also an increase in pluralist families with at least two members that differ in religious and/or spiritual identity. McCarthy (2007) notes that this trend requires parents to evolve strategies for managing intra-familial differences. Worth noting is the data from the most recent US Census (2011) that show that the most common family composition is currently two adults and one child, perhaps increasing the amount of time parents spend with their children in pluralist families. Mahoney (2010, p. 180) notes that religious familism can provide “distinctive family roles” that create a home community and culture. These include more traditional family roles for some, and may enforce other cultural norms of the family (Bartowski & Xu, 2000). According to Gay Vela (1996) who studied a diverse group of religious families, these roles often represent the loving connections between family members.

The experience of becoming and being a parent is a unique, spiritual and variable experience that encompasses a variety of tasks and identities that are more often than not related to religion and spirituality (Walsh, 2010). The modern parenting context is saturated with issues such as “individuation, materialism, secularization, increasing occupational demands, work-oriented technological intrusions on family life, pervasive media influence” amongst others (Dollahite, Marks & Olson, 2002, pp. 260), including political matters (Pewforum, 2007). Duriez et al. (2009) notes that religious parents often remain the gatekeepers of political and social participation of their children, While other studies have indicated that religious behavior, above all else political or social, is a prime factor of influence between parents and children (Levenson et al., 2005; Horwath & Lees, 2010).

As a whole, Americans are not just simply claiming to believe, but are taking part in activities and actions that reflect the existence of religious and spiritual communities.

According to a Gallup poll in 1992: “Americans of all ages who say religion is the most important influence in their lives and...who receive a great deal of comfort from their beliefs, are far more likely than their counterparts to feel close to their family, to find their lives fulfilling and to be excited about the future.” (pp. 8). This prevalence of religious and/or spiritual thoughts, actions and participation are also evident in parenting practices and guides (Bartowski & Xu, 2000) that encourage a variety of parental behaviors.

An increase in familial religious and spiritual pluralism has led to a general trend of moving away from the polarization of the terms religion and spirituality. This gives way to an understanding of spiritual identities as possibly being related to religion or religious identity (Mahoney, 2010), which has been found to be influential to personality traits, social behavior and mental health status (Hill et al., 2000; Saroglou & Fiasse, 2003).

The current religious and spiritual context appears to not only shape how we as a society understand religion and spirituality (Starks & Robinson, 2005), but may also influence how we incorporate such aspects of our environments into ourselves (Levenson, 2005), providing contexts for our behavior (Morningstar, 2010; Pewforum, 2007). We now know that families provide a microcosm for religious and spiritual influence, with most adults who have had religious and/or spiritual parents also reporting religious and spiritual affiliations (Walsh, 2010). Some qualitative studies have indicated that the context of religious and/or spiritual communities is influential to parental development and behavior (McAdoo, 1995; Starks & Robinson, 2005). Others note that community members themselves, particularly parents, influence changes and accommodations in religious communities and environments (Bartowski & Xu, 2000; Hill et al., 2000; Walsh, 2010).

Spirituality, which can often be conceptualized as an inward condition, was understood by some women in a qualitative study as the journey to further developing self-awareness, the interconnectedness of all things and a relationship with a higher power (Tisdell, 2002). In this way, Spiritual connection was reportedly found in cultural icons and symbols, essentially raising questions about how the spiritual and/or religious environment influences one's identity and place in the world, and what roles parents take and what influence parents have in raising religious children (Horwath & Lees, 2010).

The Debated Meanings of Religion and Spirituality in a Changing World: A Lack of Parental Perspectives

Throughout the history of the study of religion and spirituality as it is related to psychological research, there have been debates as to how to appropriately define religion and spirituality and how much the two terms have in common (Hill et al., 2000). Still today, no universally accepted definitions of religion and spirituality have been agreed upon (Piedmont, 2005). This confusion about whether religion and spirituality are the same or different has led to a lack of inclusion of spirituality in the therapeutic process (Myers & Williard, 2003). Context, including culture, time period and other factors have often influenced the structured meaning of the two terms (Hill et al., 2000; Myers, 1996; Roer-Strier & Sands, 2004). According to Day (2010):

Empirical evidence tells us that for most human beings, across a wide variety of cultural settings, drawing on large and representative samples, religiousness and spirituality are experienced as something distinctive that cannot be reduced to other processes or phenomena; are viewed as something that can change and develop over time for

individuals and groups, and that depending on how they are lived out can have positive or negative effects. (p.216)

Strangely, few studies have asked parents themselves to provide their own subjective meanings of religion and spirituality to explore with parents themselves how they make meaning of the two terms (Horwath & Lees, 2010). This leaves much unknown about parental experience and construction of the two terms and limits the validity of studies that use traditional ways of measuring religiosity (Moberg, 2002). As a result we know little about parenting experiences in the context of self-described religious and spiritual experience, although it is clear that religion and spirituality have positive influence on meaning-making processes, relationships with others, well-being, health and overall quality of life (Day, 2010; Myers & Williard, 2003).

Zinnbauer, et al. (1999) found that in a review of research methods and understandings of the two terms religion and spirituality, various meanings provided by research professionals were often biased and could not capture the entirety of meanings (Zinnbauer et al., 1999). This may be due in part to limitations in the methods used to understand both terms. For example, Skogrand, et al. (2007) found that religious coping was more often measured by survey and quantitative methods rather than interviews, and yet was found by other studies to often be strongly related to diverse topics of social identity including class and race (Ebstyne et al., 2008; Greenfield & Marks, 2007; Garrison et al., 2005). In addition to measuring the functioning and behaviors of religious parents, quantitative studies have also sought to understand how religion is defined in terms of its transferability and meaning to the children of religious parents.

Fewer studies have attempted to quantify spirituality rather than religion. Those that have used inventories or scales to get a sense of “how” spiritual people were. Unfortunately, this measurement has failed to allow participants themselves to design the parameters for

measurement (Moberg, 2002), and have often been based upon one world-view over another (Hodge & Limb, 2010; Jacobs, 2010).

Few studies have allowed participants to self-define religion and spirituality for the purpose of their studies (Horwath & Lees, 2010). Even those meanings ascribed by professionals have been various and without uniformity (Hill et al., 2000). According to Pargament et al. (2005) religiousness has a complexity that lacks predictability or uniformity and is a process that involves learning, behavior and emotions in the interpersonal and physiological aspects of human life.

In an effort to illustrate the importance of the two terms of religion and spirituality with regards to their variability and multiplicity, a variety of definitions in the adult and parenting literature are explored here. They provide a context for the current climate of religious and spiritual parenting, while simultaneously demonstrating the lack of definite knowledge we have as professionals on the topic.

Spirituality

Few studies have attempted to quantify spirituality. However, spirituality has been defined by many qualitative studies as a striving towards greater connection with the sacred (Horwath & Lees, 2010) that may or may not need a religious context in order to take place. The theme of spirituality as a journey have been common (Horwath & Lees, 2010), and speak to its relatedness to development (Myers & Williard, 2003; Walsh, 2010). Spirituality becomes the goal of personal or outside religious search/inquiry and this search can illicit positive, negative and neutral happenings in a person's life. Consequently, this has been seen as impacting identity (Mahoney, 2010; Pargament et al., 2005).

Spirituality has also been described as a force in an individual's life that can provide healing and appears to be related to a person's perceived norms and culture. Use of spirituality to mean a belief in a higher power (Gockle, 2009; Kiser et al., 2008) and the interactions and relationship (Zinnbauer, Pargament & Scott, 1999) with such a higher power to achieve goals of transcendence (Leak, et al., 2007) have been common.

The experience of a higher power or force that can be described as personal or supernatural may also represent spiritual coping and these understandings have been tied to cultural norms and social justice orientations (Ankrah, 2002; Tisdell, 2002). It appears that one does not need to participate in a faith community in order to have spiritual experiences or spiritual coping. This indicates a psychological connection between spirituality and meaning-making processes (Tisdell, 2002). In this way, spirituality may be located in cultural icons and symbols, and everyday life situations (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008)

Meanings and construction of spirituality have evolved tremendously over the past 45 years (Pargament, 2007). Researchers' descriptions and understandings of spirituality have not always been congruent with the experiences of research participants, but include (Zinnbauer et al., 1999):

The human response to God's gracious call to a relationship with himself

- A way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension
- A relationship with values about self, life and whatever one considers to be the ultimate.

- Questioning the meaning of individual existence
- An attempt to place the self in a larger context
- A subjective experience of the sacred.

Spirituality has also been understood as a phenomenon of personal interconnections, particularly those in families, making the family a place for spiritual development and interchanges taking place in a unique family culture (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005; Walsh, 2010). This shines light on the theme of transcendence, which can also be common in people's experiences of spirituality (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005).

Religion

While religion has been traditionally viewed as a conservational force that is meant to sustain stability, major life changes can be opportunities to utilize religion in assisting the individual in mourning processes and finding new meanings and connections (Pargament et al., 2005). Therefore, religion is something that can be accessed outside of the self, that may aide in a spiritual journey and in developing an understanding of how the sacred interacts with the self (Mahoney, 2010).

In this way, religion is a tool or a lens through which to explore the journey of spirituality. But religion may not be the only way that individuals understand their relationship with spirituality. A significant number of adults who were surveyed reported that they are religious but not spiritual or spiritual and not religious (Pewforum, 2007). This would appear to support the notion that for some people there is a polarity between the two terms. However, Hill et al. (2000), contends that there is a lack of polarity and more often an interaction between the two terms with each term serving the other in various functions. Indeed, a large part of the

population identifies as religious and spiritual (Pewforum, 2007), yet does not see the two terms as synonymous (Sargolou & Fiasse, 2003; Horwath & Lees, 2010).

Allowing participants to self-define religion has been used in some studies and serves to support the notion that religion is not easily defined (Horwath & Lees, 2010). Quantitative studies that have sought to assess religiosity while simultaneously assessing certain aspects of identity (Duriez et al., 2009; Mahoney, 2010) such as race (Brody et al., 1996; McAdoo, 1995), birth order (Sargolou & Fiasse, 2003), socioeconomic status (Brody et al., 1996; McAdoo, 1995) or single parenthood (McAdoo, 1995) have been done, but lack a deeper understanding of what religion means to people with such identities.

Research with diverse groups may also be challenging because how individuals define religion and spirituality appears to change over time with development (Walsh, 2010), although it is unclear how (Levenson et al., 2005). Despite a call for family research that utilizes parental age as a variable, few studies have looked at this as more than just demographic information (Boyatzis, 2006). Additionally, up until recently religion has often been measured by single items such as worship attendance or importance of religion, causing quantitative inquiries to lack depth in understanding the thoughts or behaviors of religious and/or spiritual parents (Boyatzis, 2006; Moberg, 2002).

In Zinnbauer et al. (1999) the following definitions (amongst others) of religion were found to have been developed over many years by the psychological research community:

- A system of beliefs in a divine or superhuman power
- A set of practices of worship or rituals directed towards a divine or superhuman power
- The inner experience of sensing a Beyond
- Active attempts to harmonize one's life with the Beyond

- An attempt to stand in relation with that which one holds as divine

Religion and spirituality remain factors that are rarely defined in qualitative studies with parents, by parents themselves (Horwath & Lees, 2010). This dearth of information is striking considering that most Americans including children (Hyde, 2008) have spiritual and religious inclinations (Pewforum, 2007). When definitions developed by psychologists of religion and spirituality are explored, it seems feasible that definitions provided by parents could be equally variable and diverse (Hill et al., 2000); with such meanings have malleability dependent on context and social expectations (Piedmont, 2005; Roer-Strier & Sands, 2004; Tisdell, 2002).

A Call to Duty: Cultural Competency for the Mental Health Professions in a Pluralistic and Fluidly Religious and Spiritual America

Since the early 1990's, scholars have been calling for increased education for mental health professionals on the topics of religion and spirituality for course content, experiential training and collaboration with other professionals from religious or spiritual backgrounds/orientations (Myers & Williard, 2003). McCarthy (2007) notes that more qualitative research is needed to gain a clearer understanding of the dynamic processes that occur within modern families that often share multiple religious and/or spiritual identities and in the lives of parents from a variety of age groups (Boyatzis, 2006). Due to the significance of religion and spirituality to the lives of American adults and parents, particularly those in crisis, psychological and social work education and research have a gaining interest in the topic (Colbert et al., 2008; Barker, 2007); evident in the increase of dissertations on the topic of religion and families (Boyatzis, 2006). However, continued efforts to offer satisfactory education to mental health professionals on the topics of spirituality and religion are desperately needed (Myers & Williard, 2003).

The beginnings of the American social work profession coincided with major European immigration patterns of the turn of the 19th century (Koenig, 2005). The religious and spiritual identities of those immigrants were reflected in the social services available to them, which were supported by sectarian church communities and wealthy community members. As a result, Americans have an inherent trend of seeking mental health and social services from organizations like the Red Cross, the Salvation Army and Good Will. Such organizations are supported by sectarian mission statements, but today are most often supported by public funds from individuals (Fritz, 2011) and provide services to an increasing diverse population (Pewforum, 2007). According to Wilcox (2002) religious institutions remain influential to fathers and provide them with support and modeling for positive parenting practices and have done so throughout American history with cultural influences having a major function in modern religious parenting for fathers.

In the modern mental health treatment frame, many models of recovery use theistic, faith-based, 12 step programs (Priester et al., 2009) and spiritual and religious communities continue to provide a variety of people with mental health support and services (Day, 2010). The use of mindfulness practice in psychotherapy has been adapted from Eastern spiritual practices and has made a significant impact on postmodern practice with anxiety disorders, depression and somatic symptoms (Germer, Siegel & Fulton, 2005; Koenig, 2005). A limited number of studies have focused on using spiritual and religious interventions with adult clients, and have found that clients facing challenges such as substance abuse may utilize prayer, meditation and holistic treatments (Priester et al., 2009; Day, 2010).

More broad studies have found spirituality to be a central factor in wellness and healthy adult development (Myers & Williard, 2003). Limits to such research are of interest, as recent

changes in the economic and social climate appear to make seeking services from such organizations more common than ever before (News Batch, 2011; The Urban League, 2001). Additionally, such history and a continuance of strong religious and spiritual affiliation in parents means that much of what is considered good parenting in the United States is inherently built of religious morals and values (Dollahite, Marks & Olson, 2002), influencing the implicit goals of social work interventions with such populations.

Religion has received more attention as of late in the social work profession, with an increase in course offerings, certificate programs and trainings on the topic and with the addition of religious and spiritual practices as a protected client attribute in the NASW code of ethics. Item 1.05 of the code, sections a, b and c, note religion (but not spirituality) as a topic of cultural competency that should be a necessary facet of social work practice and education, and that social workers should understand and have a knowledge of their clients' cultures and any possible conflicts or challenges that may arise. In addition, item 4.02, *Discrimination*, clearly states that social workers should not condone or collaborate in the discrimination of any individual based on religion. Indeed, holistic care is stressed in the helping professions, and yet the literature has found that many of the professionals social workers collaborate with continue to ignore spiritual assessment in their work (Speraw, 2006).

Psychotherapists and other mental health professionals have been and continue to be one of the least religious and/or spiritual groups as compared to the overall population, with 52% of such professionals reporting no religious and/or spiritual affiliation whatsoever (Hill et al., 2000). Because the NASW code of ethics and other cultural competency publications (NASW, 2001) lack of requirements for cultural competency training with regards to religion and spirituality (Colbert, Jefferson, Gallo & Davis, 2008), this combines with a lacking spiritual and

religious identification amongst therapists, to create a less than ideal environment for clients who identify as such (Erickson et al., 2002). It has become evident that social workers and other mental health practitioners, particularly clinical therapists, lack needed preparation to engage with religious and/or spiritual parents and their families (Plante, 2007).

Education and Research

Many religious and/or spiritual parents seek religious education for their children, including parents of children with pervasive disabilities (Speraw, 2006). It seems feasible then, that such parents would have the expectation for social workers and other helping professionals to also seek competence on such topics and to act as advocates in this vein. It is clear that if research with religious and spiritual parents are to move forward, clearer understandings of what religion and spirituality mean to parents from the parental perspective are needed (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005), and in a modern context (Starks & Robinson, 2005). Such knowledge may help to deepen conceptualizations of the two terms, which would aid social workers and other mental health professionals in achieving more culturally competent practice standards.

In Psychotherapy

Some newer studies show that many mental health professionals, religious, spiritual or neither, remain uncomfortable addressing topics of religion and spirituality in session (Hodge & Limb, 2010; Plante, 2008), and that educational opportunities and research efforts fall short of the level of need that modern clients have in the context of clinical work (Colbert et al., 2008).

Both religion and spirituality have been found to be important, non-exclusive factors that promote resiliency and transcendence of individuals (Kiser et al., 2008; Skogrand et al., 2007); particularly parents, with religious communities providing motivation and resources to encourage positive parenting, a sense of meaning and stability (Dollahite, Marks & Olson, 2002).

In a study of 131 rural, low income mothers, those who were the most depressed has the least religious beliefs and faith community involvement (Garrison, Marks, Lawrence & Braun, 2005).

According to Pargament (2007): Religious and spiritual beliefs have been strongly correlated by hundreds of studies with aspects of well being including:

- Hope
- Purpose and meaning
- Increased self esteem
- Less depression
- Less loneliness
- Less suicide
- Less psychosis
- Lower rates of alcohol and substance use
- Less criminal activity
- Increased mental stability

In the context of the clinical relationship, religion and spirituality may take on various meanings that can be different from meanings ascribed by individuals themselves (Horwath & Lees, 2010). When clients are of a minority group or religion, this risk is highest (Hodge & Limb, 2010). Erickson et al. (2002) and Gockle (2009) have found that for clinicians, religion is something that may be asked about in a session or assessment with a client, while spirituality was often perceived by clinicians as something that could be helpful to the therapy process over time. However, few therapists appear to consider implementation of religious and/or spiritual goals or interventions (Ankrah, 2002).

Much work remains if clinicians are to provide thorough, exemplary ways of understanding clients from a variety of religious and spiritual backgrounds (Hodge & Limb, 2010; Walsh, 2010). Zinnbauer et al. (1999) found that increased religious individuality and a widening of spiritual and religious affiliation amongst clients often means that any viewpoint of the therapist remains too narrow and non-comprehensive. Walsh (2010) noted that clinicians often skim over or westernize the religious and spiritual experiences of clients who will often not bring up their beliefs on their own.

Some areas of needed qualitative study have been clarified over the past decade, and may shed light on why religion and spirituality are so common in the lives of parents, and yet so rare in the clinical relationship (Erickson et al., 2002; Morningstar, 2010). Such topics include: *What religion and spirituality look like in the everyday lives of modern parents from a diverse group of backgrounds* (Hodge & Limb, 2010); *What the disciplinary and moral standards are that parents use and how parents themselves attribute or do not attribute these behaviors to religion and/or spirituality* (Pewforum, 2007); *How religious and/or spiritual identity changes over time for individuals before during and after parenthood* (Dollahite, Marks & Olson, 2002; Levenson et al., 2005) and, *What do parents think religion and spirituality are and how are such meanings constructed by parents* (Horwath & Lees, 2010). More attention to these topics is highlighted in the section of the literature review called *Qualitative Explorations with Religious and/or Spiritual Parents*.

Quantitative Understandings of Religious and/or Spiritual Parents

Religious and spiritual parents have been studied, mostly quantitatively. Such studies have aimed to find relationships between parent religiosity and: *The discipline of children* (Reinert & Edwards, 2009); *The sanctification of parenting* (Volling, Mahoney & Rauer, 2009);

religiosity and parent involvement (Bartowski & Xu, 2000; Wilcox, 2002); *Parental effectiveness* (Duriez et al., 2009;); *Parental involvement and resiliency* (McAdoo, 1995; Pargament, Ano & Wachholtz, 2005; Poston & Turnbull, 2004); *Various child outcomes* (Brody, Stoneman & Flor, 1996; Ebstyn, King & Furrow, 2008; Gunnoe, Hetherington & Reiss, 1999; Meyers, 2003) and *Object relations*.

While such data has its limitations with the parenting population, results offer important information to exploratory inquiries such as this, by providing a guideline and context for research. As noted earlier, quantitative literature outnumbers qualitative literature 3:1 on the topic of family affairs and religion and /or spirituality (Mahoney, 2010).

Parent Religiosity and Discipline

It was found that religious texts often serve as guides to religious parents about how to care for and respond to their child(ren)'s behaviors (Bartowski & Xu, 2000). For most families, parents are required to take on the role of disciplinarian to one degree or another. Quantitative Studies of the 1990's focused particularly on discipline and religiosity, but none were able to make conclusions about how particular religious beliefs or practices influence particular disciplinary behaviors or responses to children (Mahoney, 2010; Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005).

Father religiosity was linked more to parental conflict than mother religiosity in one study with rural African American families (Brody et al., 1996). In another study, it was also found that the more strongly parents felt that their identity as a parent was directly tied to a relationship with God, and who reasoned more punitive responses to their children, were more likely to have children who responded with increased affect when doing something wrong. This

was compared with parents who did not use such punitive measures who also were considered religious based on church attendance (Volling, Mahoney & Rauer, 2009).

There continue to be religious groups that believe corporal punishment is of value (Bartowski & Xu, 2000; Mahoney, 2010). Conservatively religious mothers who used greater sanctification of parenting and corporal punishment were also more likely to have positive mother-child interactions and warmer parenting styles (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005) than mothers who did not. In another study of rural, African American families, father religiosity was linked with more parental conflict than mother religiosity (Brody et al., 1996). As a result, it would appear that gender may be an influential factor in how religious parents discipline their children.

Literature written for specific religious groups, such as protestant fathers and mothers, explains correct father-child and mother-child interaction and discipline methods, proscribing mother roles as more submissive, but also as parenting experts (Bartowski & Xu, 2000). Mahoney & Tarkeshwar (2005) have also found that female children appear to be more strongly impacted by highly religious parenting styles. As noted above, no studies about religion and spirituality and parenting have been able to make definitive conclusions about any particular group or denomination (Mahoney, 2010; Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005).

Religiosity and Sanctification of Parenting

According to Boyatzis (2006, pp. 248) “sanctification is a novel measure that helps clarify the (complicated) links between specific aspects of parents’ religiosity and particular aspects of parenting.” Parental use of and development of parenting skills is often inspired by a belief in God and may be shaped by a belief that the parenting role is one that is sanctified and

should be grounded in the word of the scripture (Volling et al., 2009). It appears that the more strongly parents feel this way, the more effort they put into the task of parenting (Boyatzis, 2006; Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005). According to Mahoney & Tarakeshwar (2005), religion can provide parents with a sense of stability to work from with a divorced spouse in staying less combative and more inherently theistic in approaches to conflict and can help maintain a focus on the welfare of children during times of crisis. Increased sanctification of parenting increases the likelihood that parents will have a sense of spiritual transcendence with familial milestones such as pregnancy (Mahoney & Tarkeshwar, 2005).

Establishing governing morals and regulations for family behavior are often derived by parents from their religions (Bartowski & Xu, 2000; Volling, et al., 2009). This information can inform the expectations of parents about the behavior(s) of their children (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005). Only when parents are low in biblical conservatism do they appear to use less corporal punishment the more they sanctify their parenting role (Boyatzis, 2006). However, more often than not, parents seem to make their own adjustments in sanctification to suit their family's needs, rather than adjusting their families' behavior to suit doctrine (Bartowski & Xu, 2000; McCarthy, 2007).

Parental Effectiveness

Religious upbringing can influence the way that children view their parents as authority figures. Parents' acceptance of such authority roles and how they are carried out may also be influenced by religion (Bartowski & Xu, 2000; Mahoney, 2010; Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005). It is suggested by some studies that the collectivist nature of some religious cultures such as Orthodox Judaism encourage a greater likelihood of an authoritative structure and expectancy for parents (Horwath & Lees, 2010).

Parent Involvement with Children

According to Benson et al. (2005), children of color are most likely to cite spiritual participation as highly important to their lives. This kind of support facilitated by parents appears to offer important social benefits that help children thrive (Wilcox, 2002). Religious and spiritual parents also establish governing morals and regulations for family behavior that are often derived from their religions. Parents also provide their young adolescents with a connection to a religious community (Schachter & Ventura, 2008; Schwartz, 2006). This typically influences a child's support systems and possibly their behaviors when seeking guidance or when using problem solving strategies in a social forum (Gunnore et al., 1999; Wilcox, 2002).

It was found by Bartowski and Xu (2000) that Protestant fathers were more likely to be actively involved with the supervision of their children as compared to Evangelical fathers. Additionally, Wilcox, (2002) found in his longitudinal study of protestant fathers that there are positive associations between religion and "one on one activities, dinner with one's family and youth activities" (pp. 780) that lead fathers to be closely involved in the development of their children. It was also found that civic engagement was a strong predictor of paternal involvement for protestant fathers (Wilcox, 2002).

Various Child Outcomes

According to Mahoney & Tarakeshwar (2005), parents often pass on morals and values to their children through religious and spiritual behavior. Fathers in particular have been studied (Wilcox, 2002), with a decent amount of research indicating the importance of paternal involvement in a religious context to the outcomes of children (Dollahite, Marks & Olson, 2002). While many studies of the 1990's aimed to find correlations between parental religiosity and child outcomes (e.g. school performance and social skills attainment), no clear connections could

be made between such factors (Ebstyne et al., 2008; Gunnoe et al., 1999), although it is clear that religion plays an important role in the lives of children and adolescents (Brody, Stoneman & Flor, 1996; Ebstyne, King & Furrow, 2008; Gunnoe, Hetherington & Reiss, 1999; Myers, 2003).

A longitudinal study by Myers (1996), showed that the religious beliefs and behaviors of parents were less likely to be passed on to offspring at the same levels of intensity when parents practiced a religion that was considered highly conservative. Mothers have been found to be more likely to pass on religious socialization behaviors to their children than fathers (Levenson, et al., 2005). Interestingly, Myers (1996) also found that in families where parents take on “traditional” roles, with the mother less educated and not as involved in the workforce as the father, appeared to produce offspring that inherit religiosity. We continue to need more information about how both religious and/or spiritual mothers and fathers contend with the various developmental needs of their children (Dollahite, Marks & Olson, 2002).

Parental Resilience

Out of over 300 working and middle class African American women surveyed in 1995, who were single parents, 86% reported that religion provided them with emotional support (McAdoo, 1995), helping them to manage the stresses of parenthood. Studies involving children and adolescents who identify as religious and/or spiritual have found that such factors are immensely important to a child’s well-being (Ebstyne, King & Furrow, 2008). This theme is explored further in the *Spiritual and Religious Coping* section of the literature review.

Object Relations

The nature of object relations is that it implies transcendence and the holding of good and bad, which are spiritual processes (Piedmont, 2005). The God image is a transitional object that is in part constructed by the person’s needs and by society’s needs, with this theistic relationship

maturing over time (Piedmont, 2005). Six out of ten American adults believe that God is an entity that one can have a personal relationship with (Pewforum, 2007).

Parents can provide the possibility for a positive attachment with a God, by providing the basis for healthy attachment behavior (Paloutzian & Park, 2005; Finn & Gartner, 1992). Activities such as praying and receiving a father's blessings have been shown to provide connections between a father and his children and to help fathers reflect on their parenting relationships and the sacred nature of those roles (Dollahite, Marks & Olsonm, 2002). When parents lose a child, a disruption in attachment can also represent a disruption in spiritual connection and even a belief in God (Brotherson & Soderquist, 2002). In families where there were different religious beliefs in different generations, an overarching belief in God seemed to hold families together when they were having problems (McCarthy, 2000). This may be in part due to the parental role being influenced in some ways by fellow family members' beliefs, practices and spiritual coping (Dollahite, Marks & Olsonm, 2002; Joanides, 1996). Parents may provide the possibility for a positive attachment with a God by providing the basis for healthy attachment behavior (Paloutzian & Park, 2005), where children are more likely to replicate their parents' relationship with God (Reinart & Edwards, 2009).

Not all research shows support that relationships within the family are reflective to relationships with God (Piedmont, 2005), but aspects of personality such as agreeableness and conscientiousness are tied to religious participation in some key studies (Piedmont, 2005). Participation in religion may provide a relationship with God that can compensate when there are poor familial relationships (Rizzuto, 1979 in Paloutzian & Park, 2005). Likewise, parents who are abusive, tend to cause children to develop in ways where their relationship with God may be reflective of a poor relationship with parents as seen in self-reported data from young adults. In

the same study, correlations were found between those individuals who experienced abuse as a child and a more distant relationship with God (Reinart & Edwards, 2009).

Brody, Stoneman & Flor (1996) found that higher religiosity in parents did not necessarily mean that parents were more likely or more capable of internalizing or externalizing problems, but were possibly religiously influenced when promoting the cohesion of their families. More research is needed to explore the phenomena of relationships in families and how they are influential to or influenced by a relationship with a divine power (Mahoney, 2010).

Unfortunately, we continue to know little about the parental experience in a religious and/or spiritual environment as it relates to various parenting roles (Bartowski & Xu, 2000; Boyatzis, 2006). However, we do know that particular religious groups that are orthodox or highly conservative are more likely than other groups to have negative, more ego centric attitudes and that these are influential to children (Day, 2010).

Qualitative Explorations with Religious and/or Spiritual Parents

Studies that have sought to gain better understanding of spirituality and parenting have been uncommon and were most likely to be exploratory in nature. Such studies have included: *Interviews with minority families about spirituality and parental roles* (King, Burgess, Akinyela, Counts-Spriggs & Parker, 2006; Norton, 2006); *The role of spirituality and religion in coping with hardship, difficult children and loss* (Ankrah, 2002; Brotherson & Soderquist, 2002; Coulthard & Fitzgerald, 1999; Evans, Boustead & Owens, 2008; Speraw, 2006;); *Development of a spiritual and religious self* (Kiesling, Sorrell, Montgomery & Colwell, 2008; Levenson, Aldwin & D'Mello, 2005; Saroglou & Fiasse, 2003; Schachter & Ventura, 2008); *The influence of cultural context* (Roer-Strier & Sands, 2004; Tisdell, 2002); and *Gender differences in parenting* (Gay Vela, 1996; Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005).

Interviews with Minority Families about Spirituality and Parental Roles

Modeling of prayer and reading of the scripture by grandparents in three-generation, African American families was shown to be influential to the religious and spiritual participation of grandchildren (King et al., 2006). In addition, themes of moral justice and leadership were common with such samples and were characteristics that may have been shared with children (Dollahite, Marks & Olson, 2002).

Parents and grandparents report that they teach their children how to pray, participate in church and have a relationship with God (Gay Vela, 1996; King et al., 2006). In a diverse sample, parents reported that they bring their children to religious and spiritual educational activities, making spiritual and cultural education accessible (Gay Vela, 1996). Parents also take on the role of developing and providing a home environment that reflects beliefs and provides a forum for religious and spiritual development (Gay Vela, 1996; King et al., 2006). Parents also become responsible for acting as emotional supports for their children, often placing moral dilemmas in context, as well as assisting their children with skills for independence (Gay Vela, 1996; Norton, 2006).

Parents may act as teachers, by reading scriptures or other religious readings to their children (Gay Vela, 1996; King et al., 2006). Parents may also speak out on issues to do with spirituality and religion, and this may serve as an example of religious or spiritual behavior to children (Tisdell, 2002), that has been found to be more influential than any political or other social media to children's behavioral development (Levenson, et al., 2005).

The Role of Spirituality and Religion in Coping with Hardship, Difficult Children and Loss

Parents who are spiritual, who also seek behavioral health services, often desire a spiritual aspect to their counseling and self-help experience, and yet it is rarely offered as a

supportive part of services (Erickson et al., 2002; Evans, Boustead & Owens, 2008; Walsh, 2010). Religion can provide such structures as “Pastoral care, congregational involvement, priestly ministry of religious and spiritual direction and theological interpretation of suffering” (Doucet & Rovers, 2010, pp. 101). Religion can also provide a framework for managing difficult times including crisis that involve questioning or changing religious practice (Pargament et al., 2005). These structures provide a context to help to discuss negative events and may provide those who are in danger with a sense of comfort and control (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008; Pargament et al., 2005), as well as help to increase self-esteem and improve overall quality of life (Day, 2010).

The parental role appears to be influenced by fellow family members beliefs, practices, and spiritual coping (Dollahite, Marks & Olsonm, 2002; Joanides, 1996). When women participated in religious and/or spiritual groups, they appeared to have less depression and more coping skills (Garrison et al., 2005; Gockle, 2009)

Development of a Spiritual and Religious Self

Very little focus has been given to understanding how individual adults and parents make meaning of their spiritual selves (Kiesling et al., 2008). It has become clear that parents are highly influential when it comes to adolescent religiosity (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008) and that parents themselves experience religious and spiritual development (Dollahite, Marks & Olson, 2002). In a large study of devoutly religious adults and their role salience, Kiesling et al. (2008) defined spiritual identity as such: “a persistent sense of self that addresses ultimate questions about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life, resulting in behaviors that are consonant with the individual’s core values.” (pp. 51)

Understanding how and why people practice religion involves using a developmental lens (Levenson et al., 2005) and also includes paying attention to cultural and generational influences (Roer-Strier & Sands, 2004) and participant age (Boyatzis, 2006). Schachter & Ventura (2008) have developed an understanding of adolescent spiritual development that recognizes various adults in a person's life as influential to the reflective capabilities of adolescents. In a study of siblings, Sarogolou & Fiasse (2003) found that siblings from the same family and similar upbringing often had different understandings of their own religious and spiritual identities. Levenson et al. (2005) and Myers & Williard (2003) both contend that more longitudinal studies are needed to better understand how spiritual and religious identity are intertwined with development.

Spirituality may represent the core of one's existence and appears to be most strongly tied with identity (Tisdell, 2002), involving motivation and affect that includes investing time and frequent self-evaluation (Kiesling et al., 2008). Role salience and flexibility are influenced by one's religious and/or spiritual identity, with spiritual identity providing "a sense of continuity as well as a domain for adult developmental change" (Kiesling et al., 2008, pp.61). A person's spirituality can drive them to work for social justice or to find personal and empathic connections with others (Tisdell, 2002); a skill that seems vital to parenting. The religious and spiritual activities of fathers correlate with other fathering behavior and may serve to combine in assisting fathers to develop their identities as parents (Mahoney, 2010). Lastly, Roer-Strier & Sands (2004) noted that all parents must teach their children to navigate religious and spiritual forces and concepts in an effort to help their children achieve social acceptance. Kiesling et al. (2008) found that some adult participants who were most foreclosed in their spiritual identities viewed their spiritual selves as something inherited and inseparable from their being, essentially raising

questions about the influence of spiritual and religious environment to human development, and the expectations of parenting adults who may hold these same views for their offspring.

The Influence of Cultural Context

Explorations of the religious and spiritual experiences of various generations of a family or multiple family members at once have been rare (Dollahite, Marks & Olson, ; McCarthy, 2007; Roer-Strier & Sands, 2004). However, such studies have found that individuals who find themselves in a different social climate or within the dominant culture often make adaptations to practices that allow them to live their lives in more comfortable ways (Roer-Strier & Sands, 2004). Families that contain multiple spiritual and/or religious traditions must develop strategies to navigate interfamily diversity (McCarthy, 2007) and provide their children with skills to develop socially acceptable religious and spiritual practices (Roer-Strier & Sands, 2004). The negotiation processes of religious and spiritual families in current, progressively changing society remain rare and lack a longitudinal lens (Horwath & Lees, 2010).

The Role of Religion and Spirituality in Building Strong Families and the Strategies Parents Use to Do So

Gay Vela (1996) offers the suggestion that Love remains a central force and goal of family relationships. From interviews with a diverse group of parents, Gay Vela (1996) found that the main teaching of all religions discussed in her studies by parents was love. Family conversation about religion and spirituality remain important to highly religious families and influence how they view the strength of their relationships (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008). Familial upbringing also appears to strongly influence the emotional attachment that highly religious persons experience in their families of origin (Kiesling et al., 2008).

According to Garrison et al. (2005), how a woman's family is structured can influence how religion influences her life and the religious experiences she may have. It remains unclear whether participation in religious activities and community help religious parents to feel more secure in their parenting or more grounded a sense of parent-child connection (Horwath & Lees, 2010). Religion and spirituality can provide opportunities for mediation and growth within family structures (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008; Gay Vela, 1996; Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005; McCarthy, 2007; Walsh, 2010). In a large study of religiously identifying parents, it was found that those parents who were more open-minded were most likely to be reported by their children as being supportive and fulfilling needs. Those with more conservative views were reported as being less supportive parents (Duriez et al., 2009). In another study, parents from a variety of demographic backgrounds showed a trend of increased involvement with their children and better coping when they saw God as involved in their parenting (Dumas & Nissley-Tsiopinis, 2006), whereas involvement in a worship community was less important.

Religious and/or spiritual parents also act as emotional supports for their children, often helping to place moral dilemmas in context as well as assisting their children with skills for spiritual independence (Gay Vela, 1996; Norton, 2006). Even in families where there are a variety of spiritual and/or religious beliefs, an overarching belief in God can serve as a starting point for parents to develop their use of negotiation skills between generations and separate family members (McCarthy, 2000). Indeed, talking about religion and spirituality with children was one of the most common ways highly religious parents interacted with their adolescent children in a diverse group of family interviews (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008).

Gender Differences in Parenting

Women who associated strong moral beliefs with spirituality were able to feel more at ease with challenges in their lives (Tisdell, 2002). In a study of married, heterosexual couples, parents vocalized gender differences in the type of support provided by each parent to children, while others demonstrated this difference in interviews, with males taking on more of an authoritative role in parenting and family discussions than women (Gay Vela, 1996). In addition, religion and spirituality appear to be generally influential to intra-marital and intra-familial processes such as communication, meal-time and social activities (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008; Mahoney, 2010). Research about mothers in particular and non-heterosexual couples have been limited and need to be explored more deeply in theoretical contexts (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005).

Studies with adults who identify as spiritual and/or religious have generally found that religion and spirituality are meaningful to the lives of parents, but provide limited information about the meaning-making processes of the growing religious and/or spiritual population of individuals in this country (Morningstar, 2010). Qualitative studies on the topic have found that religion and spirituality can help parents to: have opportunities for coping (Ankrah, 2002); develop morals (Tisdell, 2002); develop a sense of self (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008; Kiesling, Sorrell, Montgomery & Colwell, 2008; Levenson, Aldwin & D'Mello, 2005; Saroglou & Fiasse, 2003); provide opportunities for community participation (Garrison, 2005); and increase physical and mental well-being (Leak, DeNeve & Greteman, 2007)

Teaching, Facilitating and Contextualizing Religious and Spiritual Practice for their Children and Grandchildren

The qualitative literature also sheds light on some of the roles that religious parents and grandparents take on in their relationships with their children and grandchildren. These include: teaching children about religion and spirituality, facilitating religious and spiritual participation and contextualizing religious practice. When adults take on such roles in families, it appears to provide such families with tools to strive toward loving familial relationships (Gay Vela, 1996; McCarthy, 2007) and increased communication (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008). Indeed, researchers examining the qualitative literature about religion, spirituality and families have found that interchanges between family members including the transcendence of relationships and spiritual processes that require further exploration (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005). Some remaining areas of interest (mentioned earlier) follow here.

What Religion and Spirituality Look Like in the Everyday Lives of Modern Parents from Diverse Backgrounds

Much focus has been given to how religious and/or spiritual parents impact and influence their children (Boyatzis, 2006; Ebstyne et al., 2008; Gunnoe et al., 1999), but little attention has been given to the experiences of parents themselves from a variety of religious and spiritual backgrounds (Dollahite & Marks, 2009; Evans et al., 2008; Gay Vela, 1996; Hexem et al., 2011) who are not undergoing stressors in addition to parenthood responsibilities (Coulthard & Fitzgerald, 1999; Brotherson & Soderquist, 2002; Hexem et al., 2011) and who are not primarily Christian (Bartowski & Xu, 2000; Gay Vela, 1996; Hodge & Limb, 2009; Poston & Turnbull, 2004). A lack of diversity in samples used in many studies is concerning, when the

current cultural context includes a widening array of non-Christian religions and spiritual communities (Pewforum, 2007).

What the Disciplinary and Moral Standards are that Parents use and how Parents Themselves Attribute or do not Attribute these Behaviors to Religion and/or Spirituality

Women, and mothers appear to be populations with strong moral convictions, yet little research has been conducted with this population (Tisdell, 2002). Less surprisingly, there is also a lack of research with non-heterosexual parents and immigrant populations (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005; Pewforum, 2007), which continue to have increasing visibility in our globalized social structure (Roer-Strier & Sands, 2004).

Studies that have examined such factors have been again, more focused on the impact that parents have on their children's outcomes (Schacter & Ventura, 2008), rather than what parents think they are doing to influence their children religiously or spiritually (Gay Vela, 1996). In order to gather clearer understandings of attachment and object relations, researchers need better concepts of what parents think they are doing to make an impact on their children's lives, and this cannot be captured in any quantitative inquiry (Reinert & Edwards, 2009; Volling et al., 2009).

How Religious and/or Spiritual Identity Changes Over Time for Individuals Before, During and After Parenthood

Scholars have referred to the spiritual experience of humans as a journey (Horwath & Lees, 2010). When an adult becomes a parent, he/she simultaneously becomes involved in the developmental processes of a child. Because no longitudinal studies with spiritual and/or religious parents in particular exist, it is impossible to know how parents themselves may change

through such a process. Because parents are clearly influential to their children with regards to religion and spirituality, it is important to gain more knowledge about how and why this is so

What do Parents Think Religion and Spirituality are and how Parents construct Such Meanings

Few studies have made the effort to define religion and spirituality when exploring such factors with parents in interviews, and even less in the case of quantitative research (Horwath & Lees, 2010). This dearth of information is striking considering that most Americans including children (Hyde, 2008) have spiritual and religious inclinations (Pewforum, 2007). When definitions developed by psychologists of religion and spirituality are explored, it seems feasible that definitions provided by parents could be equally variable and diverse (Hill et al., 2000); and could have malleable meanings dependent on context and social expectations (Piedmont, 2005; Roer-Strier & Sands, 2004; Tisdell, 2002).

Parents who have Experienced Hardship, Loss and Trauma: Religious and Spiritual Coping

Much of the research on adult populations that involves religious and spiritual attributes has focused less on parenting and more on overall functioning (primarily health) or resiliency of adults who have faced crisis or trauma (Greenfield & Marks, 2007; Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005), or their children (Ebstyne et al., 2008; Evans, Boustead & Owens, 2008). Specific populations, such as African American adults have rarely been studied (Colbert et al., 2008) and do show that religious interventions with such individuals are beneficial to their mental health and functioning, and that such parents look to their religions, God, and spiritual communities for support (Hudson, 2006). Religious and spiritual coping that are accessed through religious and spiritual communities can be positive or negative and have important implications for the

development of parenting skills and child outcomes (Dumas & Nissley-Tsiopinis, 2006; Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005). Difficult times can also result in adaptation that includes changing religions or spiritualities (Feierman, 2009). According to Garrison et al. (2005), positive correlations between several aspects of religious experience and mental, physical and social health have been found by many researchers and include increased self-worth, happiness and lower rates of depression.

In many cases, religion represents a community that surrounds the religious and/or spiritual family, and provides a context for their actions (Morningstar, 2010; Hudson, 2006). A study by Chen, Cheal, McDonel Herr, Zubritsky & Levkoff (2007) found that older adults' mental health benefited from participating in religious community, and yet also found that participation in a religious community is not a contributing factor for some older Buddhists, who have very few health issues (Chen et al., 2007)

Experiences of Parents who have Lost a Child

Brotherson & Soderquist (2002) found in a study with parents who have experienced the sudden death of a child that spirituality can often act as a protective factor for families. Families recovering from or dealing with crisis have also reportedly found spirituality supportive to a healing process (Evans, Boustead & Owens, 2008; Hexem et al., 2011). Loss of a child also often leads to adjustments in the spiritual relationships that parents have with others (Brotherson & Soderquist, 2002). This appears to be part of the process of grieving, and may essentially lead to changes in religious beliefs and orientation (Pargament et al., 2005).

Experiences of Parents who have Children with Disabilities

Parents of disabled children have had both positive and negative experiences with faith and the church that seem to vary depending on congregation and parental attitudes (Mahoney &

Tarakeshwar, 2005). In a large study of 187, mostly Christian participants, Poston & Turnbull (2004) sought to understand how religion and spirituality contributed to quality of life for families with a child with mental disabilities. Their study found that parents used having faith, prayer, and attributing meaning to disability to help them improve the quality of life of their families (Poston & Turnbull, 2004). While church can often be a socially supportive place, it appears that families with disabled children may receive the least amounts of support from the church environment and clergy (Coulthard & Fitzgerald, 1999). As a result, personal beliefs become more supportive to religious and spiritual parents who may have children with autism (Coulthard & Fitzgerald, 1999). At times, congregations will make adjustments for a family with a disabled member, while in other instances, families are the ones left to adjust to the greater religious structure (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005).

Experiences of Parents who are Caring for an Ill Child

In a mostly Christian sample of parents who had a severely ill child, it was found that most parents believed that there was a reason for their child's illness and that was connected to the power of God (Hexem, Mollen, Carroll, Lanctot & Feudtner, 2011). Religion, spirituality and personal philosophies provided structures for parents that helped them to withstand tough times (Hexem et al., 2011; Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005). However, not all parents experienced the "support," "peace and comfort," and "moral guidance" as others did. Such parents cited that they instead utilized religious orientations for "questioning," "decision making," "feeling anger or blame towards god," and "rejecting" once held religious beliefs (Hexem et al., 2011, pp.41-43).

Positive and Negative Spiritual Coping

As thus far demonstrated, religious and spiritual coping can be both positive and negative (Pargament et al., 2005) and is most often utilized through religious and/or spiritual communities (Garrison et al., 2005). In marginalized groups where the mother is often the head of the household, a strong belief and trust in god was cited as paramount to helping mothers and their families overcome trauma (Kiser et al., 2008). Similarly, women who associated strong moral beliefs with spirituality were able to feel more at ease with challenges (Tisdell, 2002). For some, religious faith can be helpful in difficult times, providing structural facilitation for adjustment and personal well-being (Chen et al., 2007; Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005). Involvement in religious and spiritual communities has been found to be a strong predictor of life satisfaction in adults, helping them manage challenges in their lives (Chen et al., 2007; Day, 2010).

While religion and spirituality appear to provide supportive and resilient functions to many parents and adults (Colbert et al., 2008; Day, 2010; Evans, Boustead & Owens, 2008), this has not been true for all, with some parents reporting a loss of faith due to traumatic or life changing events (Brotherson & Soderquist, 2002) or a belief in a punishing God (Day, 2010). Additional research is needed to understand whether or not there are concrete connections between religion and the spiritual and religious coping of parents (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005) and how traumatic experiences such as racial micro-aggressions and poverty influence religious and spiritual coping (Garrison et al., 2005; Hudson, 2006).

Religion and Spirituality and Human Development: Missing Knowledge about Parental Roles and Self-Understandings

Religion and spirituality, how they are differentiated by individuals and how they contribute to individual lives have been found to be significantly linked to developmental

processes in adults (Day, 2010; Feierman, 2009) including aging (Boyatzis, 2006). “Spiritual constructs represent genetically based cognitive and affective qualities that have behavioral implication across the lifespan” (Piedmont, 2005, pp. 253) providing stability in functioning over time. According to Myers & Williard (2003) the conceptualization of spirituality as a life-cycle developmental phenomenon is vital to achieving wellness for mental health patients.

Due to a lack of longitudinal developmental studies (Pargament et al., 2005) that aim to understand spiritual and religious development of adults and parents over time and according to age (Boyatzis, 2006), there is a dearth of information about how parents’ religious and/or spiritual beliefs develop and/or change over time (Dollahite, Marks, 2009; Gallup, 1992; Levenson et al., 2005; Pewforum, 2007), and in particular, how this process is impacted by parenthood and all the joys and perils that come with it. Indeed, spirituality and religious development have been compared to and likened to other human developmental models, but with little evidence to support such relationships (Levenson et al., 2005). There is evidence for example that particular life events such as marriage and having children increase religiosity (Colbert et al., 2008), and that spiritual and religious beliefs and practices change over time for adults in general (Day, 2010).

Indeed, the topic of how adults differentiate between religion and spirituality has been deemed a topic of salience in the adult developmental literature (Day, 2010). In some contexts, spirit represents the inner person, strongly tying the concept to developmental understandings (Horwath & Lees, 2010; Kiesling et al., 2009). Overall, adults who are more highly developed religiously and spiritually were able to be less judgmental of others and lead a life with good quality and skilled coping (Day, 2010). Highly religious parents who were more parent-centered

and hierarchical in their communication with their adolescent children were more likely than others to report an increased awareness of self (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008).

There are very few studies that have attempted to accurately represent the multiplicities of America's religious and/or spiritual population along with intersectional identity factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and geographic region, which have been indicated as influential to religious and spiritual development in adults (Day, 2010). To be more specific, studies that include non-heterosexual parents, newly immigrated parents, minority racial groups, or a wide range of socioeconomic status have been rare, if such demographic questions are even asked of participants. Less surprisingly, there is also a lack of research with non-heterosexual parents and immigrant populations (Mahoney & Tarakeshwar, 2005; Pewforum, 2007), which continue to have increasing visibility in our globalized social structure (Roer-Strier & Sands, 2004). Ryan and Martin (2000) contend that despite increased visibility, services for non-heterosexual parents or programs to promote awareness about their existence is rare. Surprisingly, empirical studies have also been rare with mothers, rural and low-income populations (Garrison et al., 2005).

Conclusion

Qualitative studies that capture the "religious/spiritual experience" are "central to the study of religiousness and spirituality across the lifespan" (Levensen et al., 2005). Religion and spirituality are important to the lives of most parents in the United States (Boyatzis, 2006) and the population in general (Campbell, 2010), but studies thus far have failed to provide a clear understanding of how parents make meaning of religion and spirituality in their lives. With a trend of increased diversity in the US across topics of sexuality (CNN wire staff, 2011), immigration trends (Department of Homeland Security, 2011; Pewforum, 2011; US), race and

ethnicity and socioeconomic status (US Census Bureau, 2011), clinicians must be ready to assist the client who may be conflicted over how and whether to integrate multiply diverse dimensions of the self (Hathaway & Ripley, 2009).

In summary, religious and/or spiritual parents include a large and diverse population of Americans who increasingly identify as being multiply affiliated (religiously and/or spiritually) and belonging to pluralistically religious and/or spiritual families (Mahoney, 2010; Pewforum, 2007; Walsh, 2010). These parents face a variety of tasks and challenges in their parenting experiences that often deal with a desire to influence their children and provide their children with stability (Mahoney, 2010). While some understandings of these adult religious and/or spiritual developmental phenomena exist, it is clear that more in depth explorations with such parents is needed to understand how parents make meaning of any connections between their parenting role and their religious and/or spiritual identity (Kiesling et al., 2009).

While the mental health professions have recognized the significance of religion and spirituality to clinical practice with adults and families (Hathaway & Ripley, 2009), it is also clear that clinicians often lack the training and training expectations to ensure competency in their work. More clarity is needed in understanding the developmental processes of religious and/or spiritual parents, and how parents themselves perceive this process (Levenson et al., 2005). It also leaves gaps in understanding how modern religious and/or spiritual parents cope in modern society. This essentially limits the level of competent practice available to clients from the mental health professions (Hathaway & Ripley, 2009). With rising numbers of adults who favor a wide range of religious and spiritual traditions, it becomes increasingly necessary for clinicians to be well-trained in this area of cultural competence and to conduct research that deepens our understandings of the meaning-making process for our clients. As it stands, the risk

remains high for clinicians to be ill-prepared and more westernized in their views of religious and spiritual clients (Hodge & Limb, 2010).

Quantitative studies that have explored the topics of religion and spirituality with parents have often used singular measurements of religiousness or spirituality (Moberg, 2002), and have explored topics of transcendence of beliefs (Myers, 1996), discipline of children (Mahoney, 2010), child outcomes (Dumas & Nissley-Tsiopinis, 2006; Ebstyne et al., 2008) and object relations (Finn & Gartner, 1992; Hall et al., 2000). As a result of limitations that include skewed samples and limited measurement tools (Boyatzis, 2006; Moberg, 2002), quantitative studies have provided much information about parenting behavior, but few indications of how parents make meaning of religion and/or spirituality in their lives.

Qualitative studies have served to provide information about how parents and grandparents communicate things about their religion and/or spirituality to their children (Gay Vela, 1996; King et al., 2006), the goals religious and/or spiritual parents have for their children (Roer-Strier & Sands, 2006), and the strategies they use to attain their goals (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008; Gay Vela, 1996; King et al., 2006). Some qualitative studies have focused on parents with disabled (Poston & Turnbull, 2004; Speraw, 2006), ill (Hexem et al., 2011) or deceased children (Brotherson & Soderquist, 2002), and what spiritual and religious coping skills parents have used (Pargament et al., 2005). Overall, qualitative studies thus far have helped practitioners to be more keen on religious and/or spiritual family dynamics, communication and coping, but with results that are often not generalizable to a greater population.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore parent's perceptions about the impact of their religious and/or spiritual identity on their parenting. Since most studies on this topic have been quantitative and by design in the voice of the so-called outside observer, we know little about the perceptions of parents on this topic, and in their own voice. This qualitative study was designed to make a contribution to filling this gap by seeing what I could learn from adults that were actively parenting and self-identified as having a religious and/or spiritual identity. This study employed a sample of convenience recruited using a snowball sampling strategy. Participants were seen in face-to-face interviews that were tape recorded and transcribed. A content analysis for recurrent themes and emergent categories of subjective meaning was then conducted on the transcribed data to provide an organized understanding of participant responses.

Characteristics of Participants and Nature of Participation

Participants in this study had to be English-speaking parents over the age of 25 that self-identified as having a religious and/or spiritual identity and were actively engaged in the parenting of a child and/or children under the age of 18. Each participant had to agree to meet for a face-to-face interview with the researcher at an agreed upon place and time for a period of time not to exceed one hour. The interview was tape-recorded and participants were required to sign an informed consent at the time of the interview. At the end of their interview, participants were given the opportunity to recommend other potential candidates they knew that met the criteria for the study and might be interested in participation.

A minimum age of 25 was chosen due to the typical consolidation of character that happens by this age due to the completion of adolescence. Developmental life cycle/life stage theorists generally concur that by the age of 25 the transition from the challenges of identity consolidation in late adolescence (Identity vs. Role confusion) to those of early adulthood (Intimacy vs. Isolation and Generativity vs. Stagnation) is more or less complete (Erikson, 1950; Erikson & Erikson, 1997). Similarly, there is also consensus among cognitive development theorists that around this age the highest stages of cognitive development that encompass the capacities for abstract thought and making sound judgments when reasoning are also consolidated (Hoare, 2006; Cherry, 2011).

The requirement that these parents' children be under the age of 18 was a way of further defining active parenting. Under the law in the United States, eighteen is the age of majority when a child ceases to be a minor and can assume control over his own person, actions and decisions.

Recruitment Procedures

As indicated, this study employed a sample of convenience recruited using a snowball sampling strategy. For the purpose of identifying potential candidates, a recruitment letter (Appendix B) and a recruitment flyer (Appendix D) were developed. Both were brief and only addressed only the purpose, focus and requirements for participation in the study in addition to introducing me as the researcher.

I initially contacted people I knew socially and professionally in western Massachusetts to tell them about my study and asked that they help me identify potential candidates for the study by distributing the recruitment letter to persons they might know within their personal

network that met the criteria for study participation. They were also asked to help me identify (and/or post flyers in) public spaces they might know and have access to where the recruitment flyer could be posted, (e.g., at work, places of worship, childcare and community centers, etc). The latter was in addition to the exploration of such public spaces that I knew where flyers could be posted. Persons interested in exploring further their participation in my study were asked to be in contact with me directly (by phone or email) to let me know how and when I might best be in contact with them to discuss further their interest and eligibility for participation in my study.

At the time of the telephone screening with an identified candidate I described the purpose and nature of the study in greater depth, confirmed that the candidate met eligibility requirements for participation, spoke about what would be required of those that agreed to participate and answered any additional questions the candidate might have. An interview was scheduled at a mutually convenient time and place with those who met the requirements for participation and agreed to participate. Participants were also informed that they would be receiving in the mail a copy of the study's Informed Consent (Appendix C). The informed consent reviewed all of the material covered verbally in the screening, and had to be signed by the participant and the researcher before the formal interview could take place at a mutually agreed upon location.

At the beginning of the face –to-face interview participants were given the opportunity to ask any additional questions they might have about the study before being required to sign the Informed Consent. At the end of each interview the participant was asked to recommend other potential candidates they knew that met the criteria for participation in my study and might be interested. Study participants that agreed to assist in identifying other potential candidates were given copies of the Recruitment Letter and/or the Recruitment Flyer for distribution or posting.

As outlined above, both of these recruitment instruments included instructions for a candidate to be in direct contact with me about scheduling a time for the telephone screening.

Data Collection and Analysis

Face to face interviews lasting no more than one hour were scheduled with each participant individually. The research schedule (Appendix D) began with a set of demographic questions that were followed by a set of open-ended interview questions that probed the participant's perception of the impact of their religious and/or spiritual identity on their parenting. Interviews were tape recorded, with some notes being taken by me.

Demographic information was subsequently compiled into charts for analysis in conjunction with the content analysis of transcripts for recurrent themes and emergent categories of subjective meaning. Concerning issues of validity and reliability, the findings are considered to have a certain face validity since they are grounded in the participants' own narratives. As noted by Golafshani (2003), "Although reliability and validity are treated separately in quantitative studies, these terms are not viewed separately in qualitative research. Instead, terminology that encompasses both, such as credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness is used." (p.600).

Risks and Benefits

Participants were offered no financial compensation or other material benefits for participating in this study. Participants may have benefited from having the opportunity to reflect upon the relationship between their religious and/or spiritual identity and their parenting. They may also have benefited from the knowledge that they were assisting in filling a gap in the professional literature by sharing their views as parents on this topic.

There were few potential risks to participants in this study. Every precaution was taken to safeguard the confidentiality of participants. This included removal of all names from the data collection tools (tapes, transcripts and interview notes) and their replacement by a numeric code. The researcher transcribed all tapes. Only the researcher and her advisor have access to the transcribed data. All interview data is being kept in a secure location for three years as required by Federal regulations. After that time all materials will be destroyed or remain secure until they are no longer needed and will then be destroyed. Any data used in subsequent presentations and publications will be presented primarily in the aggregate with any quotes being sufficiently disguised to protect the confidentiality of participants.

However, in any exercise of self-reflection strong feelings may emerge which the participant may wish to explore further. To meet this contingency I compiled and distributed to each participant at the time of the interview a listing of local mental health and human service resources in the community that could be contacted should a participant experience this need.

Informed Consent Procedures

Informed consent procedures (Appendix C) were described in the initial telephone screening interview. A copy of the written Informed Consent, which had to be signed at the time of interview, was mailed to participants for their convenience and review prior to the interview. The informed consent described the voluntary nature of the participation in the study, the participant's right not to answer any particular question(s), the participant's right to completely withdraw from the study at any time prior to the results being written up and the procedure for handling all data connected with a participant should they chose to withdraw.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Demographic Background Information

The sample was comprised of eleven parents ranging in ages from 25-56 years old, with a mean age of 40.8 years old. Eight participants (8= 72.7%) identified as females, while three (3= 27.2%) identified as males. Nine (9= 81.8%) identified as Caucasian or white, one (1= 9%) as Latina/South American, and one (1=9%) as Black or African American. Below participants' ages, genders and self-described racial and/or ethnic identities are shown.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Background: Personal Information

Participant	Age	Gender	Race/Ethnicity
1	25	Female	Caucasian
2	27	Female	Latina, South American
3	33	Female	Non-Hispanic, White
4	41	Female	White, American, New-England born
5	41	Male	Caucasian
6	42	Male	Black
7	43	Male	Caucasian
8	44	Female	Italian, Irish, American
9	45	Female	White
10	52	Female	Caucasian, Italian-American
11	56	Female	White, European, Jewish
Mean: 40.8 years			

Ten participants (10= 90.9%) reported a coupled status. One of those ten (1=9%) reported a same-sex marriage. Two of those ten, two (2= 18.1%) reported being in a partnership. One participant (1= 9%) reported being single. The number of children each parent had ranged from one to three. Five participants (5= 45.4%) had one child; five (5=45.4%) had two children and one (1= 9%) had three children. Collectively, these parents had 18 children that ranged in age from 11 months to 17 years, resulting in a mean average of 7.9 years. Seven participants (7= 63.6%) reported parenting children ages five years and below; Six participants (6= 54.5%) reported parenting children between the ages of six and ten years; and three participants (3= 27.2%) reported parenting children between the ages of 11 and 18.

The most common household size was four members, with five participants (5= 45.4%) reporting this size, and this included one participant (1= 9%) who reported living with her parents and one participant (1=9%) who included a housemate. The next most common family size was three, with three participants (3= 27.2%) reporting this size. One participant (1= 9%) reported a household of two and one participant (1=9%) reported a household of five. It should be noted that the household of two includes the participant and one child, but not a partner.

Table 2*Participant Demographic Background: Family Information*

Participant	Marital status	Children	
		Age(s)	Gender(s)
1	Single	11 months	Male
2	Married	3 yrs	Female
3	Married	5 yrs	Male
4	Married	5 yrs	Male
		7 yrs	Male
5	Married	5 yrs	Male
		7 yrs	Male
6	Married	5 yr	Male
		10 yrs	Female
7	Married	3 yrs	Female
		7 yrs	Male
		9 yrs	Male
8	Widowed/partnered	9 yrs	Male
9	Married	14 yrs	Male
		17 yrs	Female
10	Divorced/partnered	12 yrs	Male
11	Married (to a woman)	9 years	Female
		15 years	Male
		Mean: 7.9 years	

Additionally, participants were asked to describe whether they shared their parenting responsibilities and with whom. When responding to this question, some responded in ways that demonstrated a narrower and more immediate group of supports, while others included wider and more community-based types of support. Ten out of eleven participants (10= 90.9%) reported that they share their parenting responsibilities with others. For nine out of those ten (9=81.8%), this included sharing such responsibilities with a spouse or partner. For four participants (4= 36.3%) parenting responsibilities were shared with participant's parents or participant's spouse's parents. For three participants (3= 27.2%), community members such as babysitters, teachers and a co-housing community were included. For two participants(2=

18.1%), non-residential parents of a shared child were considered to share parenting responsibilities. Only one participant reported sharing their parenting with a brother-in-law (1=9%).

Table 3

Participant Demographics: Shared Parenting by type including Household Size

Participant	Who Parenting is Shared with:						Who is in Household:		Total in Household (Adults + Children)
	Spouse /Partner	Participant's Parent(s)	Child's non-residential Parent	Spouse's Parent(s)	Other Relatives (brother-in-law)	Community Member(s)	Adults	Children	
1		X					3	1	4
2	X			X			2	1	3
3	X	X					2	1	3
4	X						2	2	4
5	X						2	2	4
6	X		X	X	X	X	2	1	3
7	X						2	3	5
8							1	1	2
9	X		X				2	2	4
10							3	1	4
11	X						2	2	4
									Mean: 3.63

Parents were also asked to describe their own parents' sense of being religious and/or spiritual. While such responses were narrative, the details are summarized in table five. Seven participants (7= 63.6%) identified that both of their parents were religious. Three participants (3=

27.2%) identified that both of their parents were spiritual. Three participants (3= 27.2%) identified that only one parent was religious and/or spiritual, while two participants (2= 18.1%) indicated that both of their parents were spiritual and religious. Two participants (2= 18.1%) indicated that one parent and not the other was religious.

Nine participants (9=81.8%) reported having a religious father. Eight participants (8=72.7%) reported having a religious mother. Four (4= 36.3%) reported having a spiritual mother, and three (3=27.2%) reported having a spiritual father.

Table 4

Participant Demographics: Participant’s Parents’ Religiosity and Spirituality

Participant	Parent Religious		Parent Spiritual	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
1	X			
2	X	X		
3	X	X		
4	X	X		
5				
6		X	X	
7	X	X	X	X
8	X	X		
9		X	X	X
10	X	X	X	X
11	X	X		

The way participants described their own parents’ religious and spiritual identities varied, with some participants providing succinct, clear answers, and with others offering a variety of qualifiers and adjectives to explain their parents’ religious and/or spiritual identities. Findings

from this demographic, open-ended question include that four of the five participants (5= 45.4%) who identified their parents as catholic or Roman Catholic, did not use qualifiers to explain their perceptions. One (1= 9%) who identified their mother as protestant, did not use qualifiers.

Participants who used qualifiers to describe their own parents' sense of being religious and/or spiritual included six participants (6= 54.5%), with three (3=27.2%) that reported having atheist or anti-religious parents; two (2=18.1%) who reported having catholic parents; and one (1=9%) that reported having one parent who is protestant and one who is Unitarian Universalist.

The two participants (2=18.1%) who reported having parents with different religious and/or spiritual identities also reported that those parents are divorced. The two participants (2=18.1%) who reported that their parents changed religious and/or spiritual identities and did so together, reported that their parents were still married.

Qualitative Questions

After the demographic questionnaire part of the interview was completed, participants were asked to answer a series of open-ended questions about the impact of their religious and/or spiritual identity on their parenting. In table six, participant's religious and/or spiritual identities are charted, and include whether or not participants made a distinction between religion and spirituality. Eight participants (8=72.2%) indicated that they were religious, with seven of those participants (7=63.6%) also indicating that they were spiritual. Three participants (3=27.2%) indicated that they are spiritual and not religious. The table also includes which participants indicated more than one religious and/or spiritual group or tradition that was important or influential to them. In their explanations, participants demonstrated how they make meaning of religion and spirituality in their lives. Table seven shows the prevalence of a variety of traditions

indicated by participants. Each X represents a participant who indicated that denomination or tradition as important.

Table 5

Religious and Spiritual Identity, Including if the Participant makes a Distinction between Religion and Spirituality and if their Identity Differs from their Parent(s).

Participant	How Participant identifies				
	Religious	Spiritual	Makes Distinction between R&S	Different Identity than Parents	Identifies with more than one belief
1	X	X	X	X	
2	X	X	X	X	X
3	X	X	X	X	
4	X	X	X		
5	X		X	X	
6		X	X	X	X
7	X	X			
8	X	X	X		
9	X	X			
10		X	X	X	X
11	X	X	X	X	

In addition, three participants indicated that Christianity was important (3=27.2%), three indicated that Buddhism was important (3=27.2%) and three indicated that some other religious group or belief system was influential (3=27.2%). Two identified as Roman Catholic, with no other affiliation (2= 18.1%). Two identified as protestant (2=18.1%), and two indicated that Judaism or aspects of Judaism were important (2=18.1%). One participant indicated aspects of Islam were important, while another indicated that aspects of native American traditions, specifically Seneca were relevant (1= 9%). As a result, four of the eleven participants were multiply affiliated, some with more than two religious or spiritual traditions.

Table 6

Participant Demographics: Traditions identified as important or influential currently in their lives

Participant	Buddhism	Catholicism	Christianity	Islam	Judaism	Native American	Protestant	Roman Catholic	Other
1									X
2	X	X							
3								X	X
4			X				X		
5			X				X		
6	X			X					X
7								X	
8		X	X						
9		X							
10	X				X	X			X
11					X				

Question 1: *Tell me about your religious and/or spiritual identity. Do you consider yourself religious, spiritual or both? If both, what is the distinction you make?*

This question generated three responses:

1. Over half of the respondents (8=64%) self-identified as being both religious and spiritual.
2. Two (2=18%) participants identified as being spiritual and not religious
3. One (1=9%) participant identified as being spiritual and not religious.

The largest group (8=64%) that felt they were both religious and spiritual further divided into two groups: those that thought religion and spirituality were separate but interrelated (6 = 75%); and those who thought religion and spirituality were separate but inextricably intertwined (2 = .25 %).

Both Religious and Spiritual – Separate but Interrelated: The six participants (1,2,3,4,8,11) that considered their religious and spiritual identities to be separate but interrelated made the following distinctions between their religious and spiritual identities:

1. *Religious Identity:* When they described themselves as being religious, they were thinking more of the religion they were introduced to in their childhood. It was where they had attended religious services, and there had been the sense of belonging to a religious community with shared beliefs, rituals, songs, etc.
2. *Spiritual Identity:* When they described themselves as being spiritual, they seemed to want to convey their personal and ongoing search in adulthood for a connection with a higher power that was a better fit with their current beliefs. This spiritual stance allowed them to retain what they valued from their childhood religion (e.g., the language and instructive stories/parables, the rituals, the values etc.) and draw from multiple religious and cultural belief systems in the present.

Participant 2:

I'm like in a journey... I'm still looking for something that I strongly identify with so...[I consider myself to be] spiritual. I guess religious is more like following a faith... yeah

like a more structured...faith or I don't feel like I do that necessarily, but I do think that, I... believe in God but that I am not part of any congregation or religion or....Well, my husband is catholic too, but he was born in, in Albania, so even though we were raised by the same spiritual beliefs, you know and the same dogma, we practice in you know, in really different way[s]...I have mixed feelings about the way I learned to be a catholic, but I also you know have really good memories about it and, so we decided to baptize her as catholic...My aunt, who's really close to me, she's more of a like Buddhist kind of thinking, so she does influence me a lot, but I don't, you know I'm not, I don't practice, but I guess just the idea of the teachings of like Buddha, they're just really interesting, so, we're in that process I guess, you know I feel right now like I am starting a new spiritual life. And also in my work, you know, I see it as really important part of my work, so I feel like I'm in that journey.

Participant 3:

I was born to be religious and I went to church and did all that stuff, but when I got older, I think that I sort of rebelled. And from that rebelling maybe became more spiritual and less religious...[when I was a child] it was more of a routine, what we were supposed to do and that's what we did. I don't have anything against it, it's just not really what --- I prefer to do it on my own time and not really have someone cramming it down my throat. My spirituality came out of my religion. I think [religion and spirituality] can be different. I think you can have someone that's never ever gone to church, who can be spiritual. You know you can create your own beliefs about whatever you think if there's a higher being, you know.

Participant 8:

There is a distinction [I make between religion and spirituality]. I haven't really explained that to [my son]. I don't know if I've ever really even thought it out very carefully. Religion is more...I have the faith, I have it mostly because I grew up with it. So I don't sit around thinking how logical is this or that. It's what I grew up with, it's just my belief. I'm not emphatic about it, and by that I mean that I'm not very strict or follow everything according to a reading, so I think of that as my religion. I really do think of that and the bible and going to church [as religion]. And then I think of spirituality as maybe something more that I've gotten from being a little bit older, for myself and having lived a little bit more, and just seeing that life is bigger than—so I do see a distinction. One is sort of what you're raised with and what you believe and one is more of like a worldview, so I do see a distinction.

Participant 11:

I think I distinguish [religion and spirituality] because I did not experience that spiritual part in my Jewish upbringing. And so that was something that I, as an adult, worked to connect- to bring that spirituality into my Jewish practice.

Both Religious and Spiritual –Separate but Inextricably Related: In contrast, Participants 7 and 9 were the two participants that felt that religion and spirituality were inextricably interrelated. For both religion seemed to be the rules, regulations and specific religious practices, e.g., mass in the Catholic Church. Things spiritual seemed to refer to things accepted based more on faith. Here, both 7 and 9 make specific references to a belief in a higher power being spiritual.

Participant 7:

Well I don't see a diff-, I mean, for me, well, we're Roman Catholic. Not *American* Roman Catholic. We're Roman Catholic. And, spirituality is just a part of the religious life, of the religious experience. I don't see a separation in between the two...For me they're one and the same, because, my spiritual experience is through my faith and through my, you know, religious practices and belief and things of that nature.

Participant 9:

I'm a practicing catholic. I've raised my children catholic. I'm very spiritual. I believe, in a higher being: God. I don't necessarily agree with all the catholic rules and regulations, but I do find solace going to mass, and praying to my God. And I think it's very important to raise my children, to believe in a higher being. I don't [make a distinction between the two].

Spiritual but not Religious: Participants 6 and 10 both noted that they incorporated multiple traditions, that are different from how they were raised, while maintaining the perspective that these are ideas or worldviews, but they do not include religious behavior or practice.

Participant 6:

When you live in the United States, you're sort of Christian by association, there are just, parts of Islam that I find very sort of interesting, you know? Even if there's a horrible thing to say this day in age. And I just roll it up all into one, and that's kind of the way that I like to see it...Buddhism and all that kind of stuff. Like, if you're nice to other people, I don't know what religion that is, but. Sort of what you put out there, it comes back to you. I'm all down with that. And that's sort of all rolled up into one. Definitely. That's the biggest thing for me.

Participant 10:

I draw inspiration and support from different religions and spiritual traditions. Buddhism [is important]. I guess, like metaphysics. Also, you know Native American, Seneca, the

Seneca specifically. Seneca spiritual teachings, I guess yogic traditions. Um, also I feel like I've been influenced by Judaism, you know, mystical Judaism...

(Later in the interview):

I think you know the other think I feel has really influenced me is the- which I did not come from, in terms of my upbringing, is, just, you know, the idea which maybe isn't so profound, too, you know it seems so obvious, but, the idea of like, just of a basic respect and equality between me and other children, you know, I mean really elevating [children] to a place of respect and equality. In certain ways, certainly you know I am a teacher in his life, and a mentor, but to really be careful about how I use my implicit power. You know, to not power over him, and to really communicate and discipline in a way that's and not shaming, and so I fell like that's something that's really important to me that I have, healed from where I come from and the generation that raised me, my family that's raised me to a very different way of raising him.

Religious but not Spiritual: Participant 5, identified as religious and not spiritual, noted a different upbringing in his childhood as compared to decisions he has recently made as an adult. He was unsure about the meaning of spirituality.

Participant 5:

So, I was raised as a secular Jew, and went to Hebrew school and had bar mitzvah. I had a mixed [upbringing], my parents were mixed religious backgrounds. My mother was catholic, but not practicing, and my father was Jewish, and not practicing.... I began attending church, well because my wife's a minister for the past 10 years, but then, in particular, so that our kids could have a religious education, and, I had a conversion experience. .. I would say I'm religious but not spiritual. Maybe I am, but I just don't know what spiritual means. I guess I'd wonder is spiritual component of religious, somehow the way you were phrasing it made me think that in your mind, it was, that there were people who are spiritual but not religious, but just as I'm thinking it out, well, I guess I'll just stick with my original answer.

Question 2: *In what ways does your religious and/or spiritual identity currently impact your parenting?*

Both Religious and Spiritual – Separate but Interrelated: Participants who identified as both religious and spiritual as separate but interrelated identities (1,2,3, 4,8,11) provided responses generating the following themes in terms of how :

1. Spiritual Beliefs and Religious Practices as Guides and Tools for them as parents teaching their children morals, values and ethics (6=100%).
2. How Parents use a Conscious sense of self in their Roles as Teachers (3= 50%)

Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 8 and 11 reported that part of their roles as parents is to engender an awareness in their children of others and/or themselves that includes being thankful, respecting others and having reciprocal relationships. In regards to defining “others,” some participants included a connection to other family members, their children or a higher being as significant. Parents explicitly spoke of acting as teachers to their children, and utilizing religious and spiritual practices in doing so. Some parents noted the reflective learning that they themselves are experiencing as religious and spiritual parents. For most parents in this group religious and/or spiritual beliefs were influential to parenting.

Participant 2:

Well I guess the things that you want to teach to, your kids, especially like the moral parts and ethics are always guided by my spiritual beliefs, you know it always guides me: What should I do in this moment? Or should I let it go? Or should I say something? So I am always referring to these spiritual themes. I guess like the compassion for others, the honesty, I mean, those are things that are really important for me you know that I think come from the way I was raised. Yeah, I think those two are really important, like being honest in life and being compassionate to others.

Participant 4:

If I'm rising to it, it's really by God's grace. I think [my older son] is such a sweet boy and always has been...He's very sophisticated in the way, in what he does with his sweetness...I think a couple of weeks ago [my children] heard the Creation story, in

church, and this weekend, the Fall story, and [my older son] said to me: “do you think Adam and Eve is the way I really began?” ;and I said, “well I think it’s one way to tell the story of how it began. I don’t think historically or cosmologically that’s how humanity came to be. But I think there’s something important in this story that tells a truth, that sort of, an ascertain[ing] of facts as we know them, [it] kind of missed the mark or doesn’t tell the who story” and...I actually think he got that, and he said, I don’t think Adam and Eve is where we began either, because I don’t think they had names back then, and [he said] something else about how, he said he thinks that there was a time when there were half-monkey, half-human beings. And I said, well yeah, they were called Neanderthals, right? I mean I think he’s kind of getting, like, that there are a lot of ways to interpret what we think we know. And to choose just one is to really impoverish yourself. But, that it’s not also a matter of cognitive dissonance, or, of holding one thing that’s false for fantastic reasons, or for sort of comfort reasons, or [holding] one thing that’s true because you have to be grounded in reality. It’s more dynamic than that there are just a lot of ways to tell the story of what is and why it is. I do actually [find that they often have questions for me]. [My older son] has always had a pretty existential mind. [my younger son] is more, I would say he is more demonstrative and more spirited, but less reflective. But, I think most children would [ask] if you gave them the chance.

Participant 8:

Well I do think of the Ten Commandments... I don’t want my child... stealing, lying, hurting... I try to, I don’t wanna say enforce...but try to explain to him too, and have him always, for example, praying in his CCD class, we learned about praying and some of the things quite honestly that I’ve forgotten in my own religion, so that when I hear something, I’ll say, I forgot about that, and...that’s important, because that’s part of our religion and then I’ll sort of tell him more about it and I will just look at those values in terms of what I teach him and what I want him to learn and him to know and how important it is to pray and how that’s a strength for him and a resource for him, and that you can be sorry or be honest and say you’re sorry and those kinds of things. Or just the Good Samaritan or different little parables, or stories, those that I read as a kid, I’ll read those to him because I know that they helped me. Also, and...those are the stories I found very helpful and some of the teachings of the bible to daily life practice...I think they were helpful to my faith as well as my values. So I teach him that and then I see if it relates to an incident that happened with a friend or somebody, I’ll sort of try, say, you know, relate it to his faith...

Participants 4, 8 and 11 talked about activities that they participate in with their children or facilitate for their children. When participants talked about engaging with their children, they reported a consciousness about the level at which their children are

able to take in such information. For some participants, this included noting what their children were developmentally capable of doing or understanding. These parents were aware of how their religious and spiritual identities influenced the activities they implemented with their children and how this was integrated with their understanding of their children's capabilities. Some participants spoke about the importance of selecting institutional resources such as a school or church that would reinforce important values.

Participant 4:

Mostly at this point the prayers are about thank you. Thank you for our teachers, thank you for our home. Because I think gratitude is um, a really, good place to start. I think that, a good place to start any religious impulse. If it starts with gratitude, then it can't be too far off. And slowly I've been putting in little requests for forgiveness. ... because I do think that there are things from which we do rely on God's forgiveness, but I don't think that that's generally where faith should start. Um, In children anyway. Maybe as an adult, a sense that maybe we rely on forgiveness. But as a child I think it's very hard to put that into perspective or to de-personalize that. That's not because of something I've done, but because of just the way things are. And the limitations within which I am working. I feel like it is a challenge right now with where they are [developmentally]... We take [our children] to church every Sunday... a church that has a very active Sunday school, which is an Episcopal church here in [our town]... and it's a great Sunday school, because it awakens the spirituality of each individual child, however that spirituality is there at play. And it gives them language and story to give word to their spiritual, nature.

Participant 8:

And I think it's also important again from my own, from my perspective, that if you teach these values, these good values and what's important, to your child, it will help your child to get out of himself more to be able to hold the religion and the spirituality, so. I think in part yes [to have more confidence]. I do see it as if you will, a resource but also as something that will guide him in life so that he doesn't get so critical or so um... as quick to have a negative outlook, or, to know that it's, there's reason for things that we don't always understand. So it's both, it's both keeping that religion going for him but it's also and probably more, because I think that there are good values in it, and I want him to have those so It might be some of those reasons playing into it as I'm talking about it and hear myself.

Participant 11:

We've sent both our kids to a religious elementary school. So my son already went through that, he's at a public high school now...but he was there from kindergarten through 6th grade...and my daughter's currently in 4th grade in that same Jewish School so that's kind of a big piece.

Both Religious and Spiritual –Separate but Inextricably Related: Participants who understood religious and spiritual identity as inextricably related (7,9) had responses that generated the following theme:

1. Religious Action and Participation as a Tool for Modeling (2=100%)

Participants 7 and 9 report that attending church, praying and religious participation have been important in providing an example, guidance and preparing their children for adulthood. Despite the differences in the ages of their children, participant's seven and nine reported that this remains important and this includes an awareness of being role models for their children.

Participant 7:

I try to have an impact—I try—as most parents would say, we try to have it permeate everything that I do when I parent. As far as, you know, from everything, from soup to nuts, just because...for me, being Roman Catholic is not a title, it's the way you live your life. So, if you're not, you know, you can say this about any group, but...you can say, “there goes so and so, he's a, a democrat,” and then, he doesn't... he's basically a republican who calls himself a democrat. So, my Roman Catholicism is, you know, right down to the core of my being... It's a way that we behave, that is in accordance with our beliefs, that is most important, that we keep [our children focused on our faith]—that there's a congruency between [our words and actions]. Otherwise it would be meaningless...we just try to explain the importance of going [to church] when they do give us some grief, uh, we pray at night before they go to bed, so and actually a lot of times, often, when we don't—cause when I'm just like, I've had it with em and I've finally wrestled em into bed.—Not K--, she's a piece of cake. But, L--- and C--, you know all of the sudden I'll be walking past their room, and they're like, “we're doing the rosary, right?” I'm like, “uh, I just want to go downstairs and sit on the couch and watch TV?” but you know, when my kid asks me, can I pray? What are you gonna say to em? Yeah. So, “Alright L--, I'll be right in.” So we go in, we say one decant of the rosary. Which is really the most—which is fine, for their age. And then we move on. So yeah. We want to instill in them hopefully, that's a good thing.

Participant 9:

I guess my spirituality impacts my parenting, because I want my children, to believe in themselves, to believe that they can achieve anything, if they believe in themselves, if they are grateful, if they show gratitude for the things they have... I want them to make their own religious decision, as far as what path they wanna, as adults they want to go, and I would respect any, any decision they made, but I really think it's important that they believe in something. Whether it be the universe or, that there's someone out there that they can ask for help: "guide me, help me, protect me."...And I want them to be thankful. That's a huge thing...we do attend church, a catholic service every week, and even if we don't feel like going, it's like, no, we're gonna go. We have a lot to be thankful for, we're gonna go, we're gonna give our thanks...So, I think that [my encouragement for my children to pray has] impacted [my children], whenever there is,--and I'm talking even minor problems...I just think its gonna help them later on in life. I don't want them to ever have to go through something, thinking that there's not someone out there looking out.

Spiritual but not Religious: Participants 6 and 10 had responses generating the following theme:

1. Teaching an Awareness of Others and a Sense of Reciprocity (2=100%)

Participants six and ten both explained how they see engendering a sense of kindness, gratefulness and attunement are essential aspects of their spiritual role in their children's lives and within the context of others' feelings. Both noted a conscious use of self as a role model and a teacher, with less structure and without the religious structure of previous responses. This renders their responses as conscious about what is taught to their children but unclear about how such a process happens.

Participant 6:

I often talk to him about how, [our family has] five things you're supposed to be good at. And this is in no particular order, but, you're supposed to be nice, then it's good if you're smart, it can't hurt if you're attractive...but the number one tenant is that, you're supposed to be nice to other people's

feelings, that's sort of the spiritual sort of thing that we do. If you're nice to other people, they'll be nice to you, generally.

Participant 10:

In my...I guess in my connection to life and to nature and to the interconnectedness of all beings, and nature that I, bring that into my parenting and teaching and... I don't know how specific you want me to get, but in general, I feel like, that's basically the essential theme...I feel like you know, sharing values and bringing awareness to what he's [my son's] eating and where it comes from and all of the elements of nature and human life and everything that really kind of contributes to that and, also in teaching him about his awareness of other people's feelings, you know, he's very empathic like he's learned to really be attuned to others' feelings and needs as well as his own... His, you know, his, he often has a sense of gratitude or appreciation.

Religious but not Spiritual: Participant 5, identified as religious and not spiritual. His response generated two key themes:

1. Spiritual Beliefs and Religious Practices as Guides and Tools for Parenting and Teaching Children (1=100%)
2. He is impacted by a religion that teaches him how to be a better parent through forgiveness (1=100%)

Participant five understands his religion as something that provides instruction to people about how to live that includes a conscious sense of being a role model. For him this includes behaviors and activities involved with the church.

Participant 5:

One of the main gifts from God is a set of ways of living, how you, how God wants us to live, and, so...I mean really helps us try to be a good person and so that guides how I'm teaching the boys how to be a good person....It also means being in the church, taking communion, learning about the bible stories....

Participant five is impacted by a religion that teaches him how to be a better parent through forgiveness of mistakes. This understanding of God's forgiveness has provided him with an opportunity to reflect on mistakes.

Participant 5:

I'd probably also say, that, part of being a parent means, recognizing how you get it wrong and how you make mistakes and how you are with your kids, and how you wish you'd done it differently. And so, I think, I'd say that one of the things that God does is forgive us, helps me, not be hard on myself for, you know, really making stupid decisions [as a parent].

Question 3: *Have there been significant changes over time in your parenting as you see impacted by your own sense of religious and/or spiritual identity?*

Both Religious and Spiritual – Separate but Interrelated: Participants who identified as both religious and spiritual as separate but interrelated identities (1,2,3,4,8,11) provided responses generating the following themes:

1. Adaptation and drawing more deeply on religion and/or spirituality based on the growing needs and challenges of their children (5=83.3%).

Participants 1, 3, 8 and 11 reported that they have adapted to the needs of their children as they grow and develop. For most of these participants, over time, the consciousness of such adaptations have deepened which has included a deepening of faith through familial relationships. In other words, the needs and wishes of these participant's children have led to compromise which results in bringing families closer and an increase in spirituality and faith. For participant eight, this includes a connection with the deceased. Participant four (1=16.6%) noted that she has not experienced changes in her parenting as impacted by her religious and spiritual identity over time.

Participant 1:

I've just started [being a parent]... I feel like it kind of has [influenced my identity as a parent] because, I'm more aware...because of the feeling like I'm being judged, I'm more aware of what I do...I treat my child like gold anyway, but, I think that at times, I feel like I have to make up for something just because something's watching me.

Participant 3:

I think I'm more spiritual than I was, well, when he was born, probably just in the last, you know, couple of years. I've tried to become more in touch with my feelings... and tried to think about things...living in the moment...that kind of inner peace...trying to focus on things like that.

Participant 8:

When I began taking my son to church...when his dad passed away, I wanted him to...have a base and good support because I think when you have a life changing event like that, you just see how important your faith is. Those are the things that last and I think...when you kind of get hit in the face with mortality and [the fact that] we aren't going to live forever. That connection to his dad in a spiritual way and in a religious way [is important]; that he can pray to his dad...I think that has definitely prompted me to talk much more about prayer and to get him into his CCD classes and to get him going to church.

Participants 2, 8, 9 and 11 noted that they have had times of questioning or refining their beliefs that at times has changed their behaviors as religious and/or spiritual parents or has caused them to make adjustments in their expectations of their children.

Participant 2:

Changes in myself, um yeah, I mean a lot I guess when you become a parent, I never really thought about like, like if I want to raise my daughter in a certain religion or not, you know, I never really cared about it, but then when you have a daughter or you have a child, then you start thinking "wow that's an important question," that you really have to think about. What do you want to do, whether, raise your child in a certain religion, or so, so that's questioned me a lot, like my own beliefs and so, trying to be honest, I don't want her to just go to the catholic church because that's the only, because that's what she has to do, I really want her to see that if I do something, it's because I truly believe in that. And not because I'm just doing it because I have to, or, that's the way it should be or, so in that sense I guess, it has [caused me to question] my own beliefs and spirituality. I [collaborate with my husband]. There are theories about...like education for example, like finding a good school for my daughter is my number one priority [but] for my husband, it's like "eh, every school is the same, like whatever," but, definitely the spiritual part was something that we both, that we both wanted to talk about it, and not assume that because we were both raised as catholic we have the same view of you know of the religion, or the spiritual belief.

Participant 8:

Yeah, actually my father passed away, suddenly, unexpectedly, 10 years ago...The kids were young. We didn't, include them in the ceremony, because we

couldn't handle our own grief at that point, so we made that decision, that's a decision I regret, because, they needed closure as well, but, we couldn't [do it]. I couldn't see beyond at that point, but there was a time, at that point, I was very angry... we did not, I did not attend church probably for a month after my father passed away, because I was angry. I had no understanding of it... And then, you know, a really strange event happened... I was driving, and I was very upset. And it was the end of March, and there were really no leaves around and this leaf, blew in my window, I had my window down halfway, and landed on my shoulder, so I rolled my window down more, and, I had both windows open, and the wind was blowing, and the leaf didn't move. So I took the leaf off my shoulder, and I don't know why, but I smelled it, and I swear it smelled just like my father, so anyways, I you know, after a half hour, I let this leaf go, believing like, ok, go give peace to the rest of my family. Um, and then, my daughter asked, she dais, why don't we go to church anymore? So I said, ok, we're gonna go. And we walked in, and it was a beautiful sunny day, no leaves, and on the alter, was this one leaf. Yeah, so it was really, kind of, you know, I mean, weird to other people, but it really meant a lot to me, and I think that was really a turning point, like ok—I don't know what's out there, but let's hope he's in a good place...so that was one, one turning point.

Participant 11:

How we do the Sabbath, has shifted to become less sort of role-bound, and more, I would say, more about the meaning, so more spiritual in that way, so we used to say no electronics. Of course...then our son grew to be a teenager, and that became pretty impossible, but anyway, like from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown [we had that rule] and he complained and my daughter also complained. Because that also included TV. Which was more salient to her. And that it was all—that religion was all about “no”—that it as all about what you can't do. And so we, shifted to, making it be that Friday night, being in Shabbat is a time that we all need- that we all—that those other things can happen, but what must happen is some family time... So we can all have a family meal and then go separate ways. Or we can all do a family activity after dinner, and then turn on the electronics or whatever...Well we've [also] tied some increased privileges for my son, to his having been bar mitzvah-ed, so we allowed him to drink caffeinated beverages after his bar mitzvah.

Participant 3 noted that she has become more peaceful, patient and are more likely to live in the moment as they have been parenting as a spiritual and religious parent.

Participant 3:

I think I'm more spiritual than I was, well, when he was born, probably just in the last, you know, couple of years. I've tried to become “more in touch with my feelings” you know and tried to think about things, which is not really necessarily, spirituality, but living in the moment, you know, that kind of, inner peace, you know trying to focus on things like that. Maybe it's become less about religion

for me, and more about spirituality. We don't try to [shelter him] right. [we just] deal with it.

Both Religious and Spiritual –Separate but Inextricably Related: Participants who understood religious and spiritual identity as inextricably related (7,9) had responses that generated the following themes:

1. Compromise and Deepening of Spousal Relationships (2=100%)

Both participants seven and nine spoke about changes in their family life and parenting that were influenced by spousal relationships. For both, decision making as a couple about religious practice has brought their families closer together and has allowed them to model changed to their kids. For participant seven a relationship with his spouse within a religious framework has informed his choice to have children and that over time faith in his spousal relationship has deepened. For participant nine, the importance she has placed on setting an example for her child has influenced a change in her husband's role in attending church.

Participant 7:

I've become more patient, but that's just due to sheer parenting and exhaustion. Um, kids, pounding you, constantly, with, just being kids...I would just say that our, faith in our married life has deepened. You know, because of our commitment to one another and our faith. And then hence we had children and we, we teach them. We don't just send them off to Sunday school. We pray with them everyday and try and have, five minute, little explanations of something, so they get a better grasp.

Participant 9:

Even though I was born and raised and brought to church every Sunday, my children are the ones who really brought spirituality into my life. They're such a gift. They're amazing... And I know my husband, he was born and raised catholic, and he would golf on Sundays, while I took the baby to church, and then when my son was two, he said, "I'm not going to church cause daddy's not going" and I looked at him and said, "you'll have to deal with this one" so, uh, so he started going to church and he's never stopped. Which is kind of, interesting, so he really taught him a little bit about , um, and he's become really spiritual as

well. So, it's just, I just think it's important, to support them as well because we made the decision to put them in parochial school, and, um, so we are gonna support what we chose for them. I don't know if that answered it or not.

Spiritual but not Religious: Participants 6 and 10 had responses generating the following theme:

1. Drawing on Spiritual Identities to Adapt as Parents to the Changing Developmental needs of their Children (2=100%)

Both participants six and ten speak about strategies for responding to and managing change. For participant six, this includes managing challenges as they arise which has led to increased preparedness. For participant ten, this involves a connection to divinity that has helped her to improve the management of her feelings and affect. Both noted changes they have made on behalf of their children's needs in order to arrive at a spiritual way of managing challenges in accordance with their beliefs.

Participant 6:

I have two children and obviously I have more access to one than the other. You know what I'm saying? So the way [my daughter] sort of turns out is more like her mother. The part that she's like me is genetic, I suppose. You know what I mean? But with [my son] I'm more hands-on, yeah. Of course [my wife] is more like me than [my daughter's mother] I suppose... Sort of the older I get, I donno, I sort of get a little more mellow than I used to be... [I]Try to live in the moment. Focusing on the positive. Yeah we always try to be positive. But yeah if something bad happens, we don't try to shelter him, you know, put his head in the sand or something like that, you know what I mean? Shit happens all the time (laughs)...Deal with it. Yeah we generally have a positive outlook

Participant 10:

So I think that as [a parent] I've kind of learned more about [my own connection to divinity]...it's helped me to manage my own feelings and then reconnect with myself and with [my son].

Religious but not Spiritual: Participant 5 indicated that he has experienced no changes over time.

Question 4: *When you reflect on your religious and/or spiritual identity and your parenting, are there ways in which they impact one another? In what ways do you see an impact or relationship?*

Both Religious and Spiritual – Separate but Interrelated: Participants who identified as both religious and spiritual as separate but interrelated identities (1,2,3, 4,8,11) provided responses generating the following themes, with participant one not providing a response:

1. Drawing on Religious and Spiritual Identity as Guidance for Parenting (5=83.3%)
2. Recognizing and Overcoming Challenges (3=50%)
3. Maintaining a Grounded and Contained Home Life and Parent-Child Relations (2=33.3%)

Participants 2, 3, 4, 8 and 11 indicated that they aim to maintain a sense of mindfulness and continuity in their parenting, or have developed life philosophies that impact their parenting and their relationships with their children. For some, this has meant a developmentally conscious approach to religious and spiritual practice. Some participants indicated that this involves a need for them to be models for their children and has lead them to questioning of their own beliefs and what they might like to pass on to their children.

Participant 2:

I think if it wasn't because of my daughter, I don't think I wouldn't have started questioning my own spiritual beliefs. I think I [teach her] by example you ... [If] I really want her to learn this way, Then I have to be in this way, and so I stared my own process of ... thinking this is what I practice, this is what I don't believe in... if she decides to be catholic then, it's because she really wants to be...._Spiritual beliefs are like a guideline

for parenting...It also gives meaning [and purpose] to what you do [as a parent]....that part is...most important to me.

Participant 3:

I would want to go to church voluntarily, to not feel bad, you know, for, well he's not baptized, but. Someday, [I don't want him to] feel bad for being not baptized and not confirmed and not going through that whole thing that I did. Because you feel like you have to. I mean, I didn't learn anything in CCD. I went because I had friends that were in [it], you know. My parents made me go and I had friends who were there... so I think that, I don't know if that's, I don't know if that's really impacted—like, [my son] didn't want to go to church last Christmas. I tried to get him to go, didn't work, I haven't pushed the issue since. Whereas, if that was me, if I was the child, I would not had an option. Like [my parents would have said, “ you go, because, that's what we do. You go and you listen,” and I don't even think they cared if I listened, but.. I think for us—it just doesn't work for us [as a family].

Participant 4:

The way in which I understand God and understand my relationship to God and others' relationships to God, has informed my parenting in that—one of the great lines from scripture is [Saint] Paul saying, there are many gifts... there are gifts of prophecy, there are gifts of teaching, there are gifts of leadership, he makes this whole list. And I think that move on his part, to not give primacy to any one gift, but to recognize them all as equal in value, just different in manifestation, has helped me to do what my parents were less, successful, less able to do...recognizing that, the way in which the boys are different, which, they are so different! - Doesn't' make one better than the other...I do actually think that one of the things my faith, the way in which I understand God and understand my relationship to God and others' relationships to God, has informed my parenting in that—one of the great lines from scripture is Paul saying, “there are many gifts, there are gifts of prophecy, there are gifts of teaching, there are gifts of leadership,” he makes this whole list. And I think that move on his part, to not give primacy to any one gift, but to recognize them all as equal in value, just different in manifestation, has help me to do what my parents were less, successful, less able to do. That, recognizing that, the way in which the boys are different, which, they are so different! Doesn't' make one better than the other. And I think they got that. [my older son] will often ask, “what do you like about me and what do you like about [my brother]?” I think he's really comforted by the fact that, though they are very different, they are both really awesome!

Later in the interview:

There's a bedtime, there's a wake-up time, there's lunchtime, there's a time for things. And that's a very scriptural idea, for everything there is a time and a season under heaven...and so there's something regular and something timely and orderly...I feel that I have created [an ordered existence] because I would not know how else to do it, but also because I've decided that that's one way that I've learned how to survive and thrive, and that it feels like a gift of God, and that I want to give that to my children.

Participant 8:

I think if you look at your faith will tell you not to look for revenge...turn the other cheek...so that will impact how I parent my child...I want my child to learn what has been taught in church and CCD. And that spirituality piece again is that, that life is not to be so hung up on the physical things and the material things and that life is really much more important than that...For his own awareness, for his own welfare, just trying to give him a lesson I've learned in life...I think that for example, sharing with other kids, I mean, that's just a message I got from my religion. That, would be more of my religion than, necessarily what I would tell my child as opposed to what I would tell someone else. It would be more that you share with other kids and you accept people... more of a religious belief than sort of doing the right thing and that is definitely not how God would want you to treat other people... I think in terms of how to treat other kids, because of course he's in elementary school...And that would be based on, not just is that the right thing to do, but it's based on my faith. I mean, just in terms of like, the Leper that... so I don't know all the readings from the old and new testament and all that, but I just think of Jesus, not being repulsed by somebody or not sending someone away, and beggars or just again, this is all coming from my faith, I'm in church for several years, these are values, these are what you learn, so this is something that I would absolutely impart to my child, and I would say to my child... when we're in church: This is not what God would want us to do" so , these teachings- I want to bring into his awareness of hi everyday life. And that's for this reason, not just because mom says it. There's a bigger piece and there's a bigger reason, because it's your faith guiding you.

Participant 11:

I think [I am] sort of focused on...divinity...Godliness, and open-heartedness, and what's most important... I'm hoping anyway, my intention is, that all of this will help me to be less, distracted by and less effected by behavioral, kind of, annoying things. And more, always aware of, our love, and people's [behavior] including my kids who are acting out in the moment, you know, hears and souls, so that's the intention.

Participants 1, 8 and 11 spoke about difficult or frustrating aspects of their lives that have related to the influence of beliefs as judgmental or the need to make choices that are spiritually or religiously sound. Some indicated that such events in their lives were informative to their faith. Some indicated that they foresaw challenges over the course of their children's development.

Participant 1:

It's actually very frustrating. Um. It can really wear me down to the point where it's just, yeah, an overwhelming sense of wrong-doing because of the yeah, the feeling of being judged by some sort of higher being. That's [the overall feeling that I have]. It's kind of strange. I'm not really, that, like, I didn't really feel that way until I had [my son]. Like at

all, and then it was just like, “oh jeese, Something, something’s going on.” Yeah [something changed]. Yeah cause I’m not really that- I wouldn’t like consider myself to be like practicing a religion really at any point, but because I have some sort of belief, it kind of just like manifested more of a negative thing than a positive type feeling.

Participant 11:

I have, healed from where I come from and the generation that raised me, my family that’s raised me to a very different way of raising him...One more thing, actually...my own upbringing was very entrenched religiously, and although I rebelled against a lot of, the religious aspects of it, the strand of practice, because it was a most conservative in many ways. But, I also felt very comfortable and at home. I felt like I could rebel against it, because it was, you know it was my house. And I could do what I wanted there, in a way. And so I felt pretty comfortable and I wanted to give that sense of comfort to my kids. With the idea that they may also rebel and either come back to a new vision of Judaism, which is kind of what I did, or someplace else altogether, um, that’s not Judaism at all, but that they would at least be starting from an at-home place.

Participants 3 and 4 indicated that providing their children with a sense of predictability as well as responsiveness was informed by a deepened sense of individual spirituality and by religious structures that are reflective of traditional family culture.

Participant 3:

Trying to be more in touch with my spirituality has made me more of a patient [person]...I’ve really tried to do the whole, focus on the positive, remain positive, remain calm, try not to freak out about things...I’ve been able to be a better parent...because generally [I] can remain sane in difficult parenting situations, misbehaviors...I think for a while I could fly off the handle pretty easily...I don’t do that as much, if ever, anymore...because I just try to remain more focused and calm and, peaceful and positive.

Participant 4:

Well I think my religious practice and spiritual experience are largely about finding coherence in a wild existence, kind of a , wild creation. Um, and I do think there’s coherence to be found And I know that humans’ survival relies on thinking, there’s coherence to be found. So whether I am, creating meaning in order to survive, or whether God is offering meaning and that allows for survival, those two things seem to be the flipside of the same coin, um, so, I feel like making a home and a family life for my children that is coherent and is equal parts predictable, and regular, and secure, but also, emotionally alive, you know, I certainly have my mood swings, and I definitely like to express myself emotionally, that all of that, the wild aspects of life together can be...could be described as a religious home....I mean, that all feels very informed by scripture and formed by my religious upbringing and um, and informed by my psychosocial upbringing, um, my home life was a very regular, safe, sort of normal, middle class, American upbringing.

Both Religious and Spiritual –Separate but Inextricably Related: Participants who understood religious and spiritual identity as inextricably related (7, 9) had responses that generated the following theme:

1. Religion and Spirituality provide Guidance in responding to everyday questions

Both participants seven and nine provided examples of how they contextualize the belief systems and practices of others or assist their children in making sense of the religious and spiritual world that include adhering to the rules of the church. Both experienced the need to contextualize for their children their modern experiences within their faith. For participant seven, his sense of appropriate ways to encourage his children's adherence to their religious practice was noted.

Participant 7:

Well we are constantly asked to explain, what religion other children are [by our kids]. Which isn't always easy to do....a lot of times we don't know, so we just say we don't know...we don't try to explain the differences between religions, we just try to explain the fact that they are different and have a different belief than we do...we just try to keep them focused on our faith.... they are still so young, that they're like, well, they just assume everybody does it so. You explain, no, some people, some people go, some people don't. some people go sometimes, some people don't ever go, so it's really they're own choice. But then we explain to them it's not their choice though. Yeah. Cause they're always, "I don't really feel like going to church" it's like, I know you don't. Put on a nice collared shirt and some khaki shorts, and let's go. They don't give us too much grief, but the, you know, like any kids, it's Sunday morning, they'd rather be watching TV or playing a video game, and we gotta rustle them up....[our faith] has to be lived, as opposed to preached...if you really want it to stick, you have to...live it, as opposed to talk about it...[as parents] we try to walk the walk the best we can...show our enthusiasm for it.

Participant 9:

I remember my son, he was in, he was little, he was in second grade, and there was a raffle at his school, and he won this great BMX bike, and he came out, he was so excited, I'm like, "How'd you do that?" He said, "I just asked God and said I wanted to win that bike and he gave it to me!" so, there's some drawbacks to that as well, but, yeah I don't

know, I just think it's great. I mean, and society today, you know what's going on with this world, if they can find a little bit of peace, knowing that there is a higher being up there, that can guide them, or that they can talk to [that is great]... There's not doubt that I've been in church and I've prayed for wisdom, and guidance to help raise two honest, successful, good human beings.

Spiritual but not Religious: Participants six and ten gave responses generating the following themes:

1. Maintenance of a Positive Outlook (1=50%)
2. Maintenance of a Reflective, Self-Aware Stance (1=50%)

Participant 6 notes the importance of providing his son with a positive example, by assisting him in finding his way through world that has all types of people, some whom are perceived as negative. This was noted to be a part of a daily experience for him and his son.

Participant 6:

[I tell my son] If you have a positive outlook on things, and that's what we do in our family, we be positive, we're like nice people and stuff like that. That's everything. That's all. [I] tell him that like every single day. Like, if you're nice good things will generally happened to you. And that, some people are just, nasty...those are just people you just separate yourself from...whether that just happens naturally or...some people will just weed out of your life for, whatever reason and in whatever way, you gotta keep positive people around you....Generally...our mantra usually is: we're good people, so good things should generally happen to us all the way around. If you put the good stuff out there, it should...generally come back on us, and we're sort of all in it together.

Participant 10 noted the that the experience of parenting her son has been transformational and has increased her spiritual awareness providing her with opportunities to become more centered and mindful.

Participant 10:

Definitely, you know, my responsibility to bringing this spirit into the world and really helping him navigate, you know his, his kind of innocence and vulnerability kind of keeps me connected to my own vulnerability and remembering what's important so it definitely...just the love, that's there, you know, that's just so constant, even through

hard feelings you know, it's, I think that that's very softening, you know, the responsibility and the love; it's kind of a devotion or dedication in a way to my role in his life that pulls me back. Helps to keep me, that will pull me back to my own center sometimes, you know, so it definitely is a given- it kind of goes back and forth you know? They do impact each other....Certainly around the separation with, from his father, I think that it was really important, and we both shared the value of you know keeping our son's well-being as a primary focus, kind of guided us in how we were handling the pain of the separation, so that uh, that particular time in my life was both important and necessary and also devastating and it really, I felt like I went into, connect on a deeper level to my own spiritual, um searching, looking for meaning, really understanding my motivations, and, really weighing the benefits, the pro's and con's and how it was gonna impact my parenting by either staying with the marriage, you know how that would impact me, which would then impact him [my son], versus, leaving, you know, weighing it all out, so that was a pretty big influence and , I don't know, and opportunity to really get clear and sort things out.

Religious but not Spiritual: Participant five indicated that his main task as a person is to follow his religious teachings. He notes that how he parents is inextricably related to being a good Christian.

Participant 5:

One of the ways parenting influences my identity is, that my...primary task as a person is, essentially about being a good parent... that's my main job. And that being a good parent means, being a good Christian, so that's one way.

Question 5: Overall, how satisfied are you with the impact of your religious and/or spiritual identity on your parenting?

Participants rated their responses on a scale from one to five, with one being very dissatisfied and five being very satisfied and three being neutral. Participants were then prompted to explain their rating. Six participants (6=54.5%) indicated that they were very satisfied, four participants (4=36.3%) indicated that they were satisfied, and one participant (1=9%) indicated that she felt neutrally. Table 7 captures the rated responses.

Table 7

Parent Satisfaction with the Impact of Religious and/or Spiritual Identity on Parenting

Participant	Satisfaction							
	Least	1	2	3	4	5	Most	
1				X				
2					X			
3						X		
4						X		
5						X		
6						X		
7					X			
8					X			
9						X		
10					X			
11						X		
Mean: 4.4 out of 5								

Satisfied, but Still a Work in Progress

All participants indicated in one way or another that the impact of their religious and/or spiritual identity on their parenting was a work in progress and that there was room for improvement. Participants overall noted challenges to having their religious and/or spiritual identities impact their parenting that were often due to barriers related to modern times. Many participants noted a sense of pride about the outcomes of their children, particularly with regards to spiritual development. Participants 4 and 5 specifically indicated that their religion (Christianity) made allowances for parenting mistakes.

Both Religious and Spiritual – Separate but Interrelated:

Participant 2:

I'm in the process, I'm not completely satisfied, because I'm still wondering, what are my own beliefs? But I think that with my husband we have started a conversation that it is important you know...I think we're on the right track, but we still have a long way to go.

Participant 4:

[mistakes are] not, disallowed or a punishable offense, but is just, the reality of what a parent can do, and all of what a parent can't do. [my religion] allows for all that.

Participant 11:

I mean there are things I would like to be, to do better, in terms of the spiritual part especially, all of it I would like to do better. But, I feel like overall it's been a positive, its been a positive impact on my parenting...it also helps me to think about, questions that might not come up if I didn't have this, in terms of morals and ethics.

Participant 11 indicated modern challenges, such as scheduling, media and otherwise that act as deterrents to their impact as spiritual and/or religious parents or that question their beliefs.

Participant 11:

[My religion and spirituality] also help me to think about, questions that might not come up if I didn't have this, in terms of morals and ethics. And the tension between that and individual rights and soccer on Shabbat or you know, sort of how to figure that out. Or electronics. Is it really about electronics? Does that really meet the goal? And what is the goal? And why is that a goal? And so I think those are all great questions to really figure out as a parent, and, my religious/spiritual practice really brings those up for me.

Both Religious and Spiritual –Separate but Inextricably Related:

Both participants seven and nine spoke about their roles as religious and spiritual parents inspiring them to seek out and increase their levels of patience. They also indicated that the guidance provided by their faith and their choice to raise their children in a faith has been comforting to them.

Participant 7 indicated that the impact of their religious and/or spiritual identity on his parenting was a work in process and that there was room for improvement.

Participant 7:

You know it's a work in progress. I would be surprised if you got five on that from most, from most people, most anybody....I'd be surprised, because being a parent is certainly a wonderful and beautiful experience, but it's the hardest thing in the entire planet... I'm also fascinated by my religion. So it, it makes it I guess easier for me in the sense that I, I read about my faith, and I read about the saints, and about the history of the Roman Catholic church in my spare time, um, so, I've gained a lot of insight and wisdom from my own kind of self study, that has directly impacted my parenting. Especially in the area of patience, because, that should be, uh, that should be taught even before you have children, if you can teach patience, even, but, um, I reflect on some of the saints who

were so, I mean like saint peter, who was so headstrong, I mean the guy was, it made him the first pope and you couldn't keep his mouth shut, and they couldn't keep his anger down for most of his life, I mean he was just an impetuous blowhard for, for, in his early year. And I think about that, and I think, but ok, we learned how to kinda chill out, and take the high road when it was necessary. And um , I reflect on, I always reflect on him very often, because, there are so many times you and probably, and right—rightfully so you probably want to blow up and just settle the situation down, but you know, with kids, yelling really isn't terribly effective. As much as, you feel the need sometimes. So I reflect on, you know, some different saints and the faith. And that helps me at times. Sometimes I blow it. Sometimes I don't.

Participant 7 indicated modern challenges, such as scheduling, media and otherwise that act as deterrents to their impact as spiritual and/or religious parents or that question their beliefs.

Participant 7:

My parents openly admit that they are very grateful that they do not have to raise children in this day and age... [As kids] we didn't have half of the major, negative issues that we have to deal with [today as parents]...The electronics, the [lack of] safety of leaving a child at home now, and things like that...that's just a minefield. It's an absolute minefield. We know it from an adult perspective and [my] kids don't get any unmonitored computer time. They get very little...They're blocked to basically kiddie stuff that's below them but I'm like, I can't put you on anything that's supposedly at your age group, because it's you know, this guys' blowing other guy's heads off. Not good.

Participant nine noted differences between each of her children with regards to religious accomplishment. She also notes however the security she feels in how she has spiritually raised both her children, regardless of the religious path they choose.

Participant 9:

I think my daughter is a very spiritual person. Um, she's 17, she's looking at colleges, and it's interesting, she seems to be focusing on catholic schools, no that we're pushing that at all, you know, we want her to go where she wants to go. But um, she's definitely doing down that direction, she made her confirmation.... she came home and she said, "I've decided I'm not making my confirmation at this particular church." And I said, "ok, um" She said, "I want to make it at the other church where we've actually been going to mass" ... You know, she's very, I'm finding her becoming much more spiritual as well, which I like. I like to see that. You know, um, and she also knows what she wants, which is great. Like she know we wanted to make her confirmation... I probably can't take all the credit....she has been in parochial school, but I do find my son, is not, as influenced. He's wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, um. My daughter will call us on it, you know, ok, what mass are we going to? And we have to, you know [tell my son] it's time for church,- he's fine, and he goes, but he's not as, into it, I would say, as my daughter. Which is ok, you know, and if he never does, that's fine too. My goal is to give it to him and he can do

what he wants with it. ...I really want them to, always feel the presence of somebody out there, having their best interest... I'm not a perfect parent all of the time...I think that [my religion] gives me more, patience, and more understanding...I do pray for more patience a lot... It just makes me want to be there for them more. Um, to listen, to understand. So I try to, really be patient, and think about really what I would want, as a parent—you know, if someone was parenting me. “Do unto others” you know? So, I, Think it's given me more patience and more peace. And knowing that what if, if they don't become president of the united states--- or whatever their dreams are, guess what? We raised two amazing kids, no matter what they choose to do... It's funny. That's one thing in my life I have never ever second-guessed, or ever questioned is that I am a great parent.

Spiritual but not Religious:

Participant 10:

I mean I guess between four and five. And the reason that I hesitate is because I feel like it's a work in progress, so I'm not always feeling like I'm on top of my game, you know? But um I do feel really good about what moves me and inspires me. I think that I could be even, I definitely could be more intentional and inclusive with my son. So sometimes it's more of a private practice and not so much a direct teaching. So I guess I would go with a four.

(Later in the interview):

I would guess I would think that I think that there are ways in that I can get, attached to certain ideas and what's really important to me and you know, lose sight of the fact that he's [my son is] his own spirit that needs to find his way, and uh, right down to playing with guns, you know? Or watching certain kinds of things and I get really confused about that. About how much he needs to really find his way and how much I need to let him play out certain themes and what ways to let him play out those themes and how to then engage him so that he's learning from them, and not and really- you know? So there's times when I'll just really cut things off and just stop it, because I can't tolerate it, you know, and so, I think that there are ways I can be kind of controlling out of my own fears and anxieties. I feel like what I know, I know what's gonna be right or good for him. But he's, you know, gotten to the point where he can really tell me: “you know, I don't- I'm not that kind of person; I don't take pleasure in hurting animals or people. It's just a game-“ you know?

Participant six was cognizant of his curiosity about a wide range of religious and spiritual traditions, but did not seem to connect this with his relationship with his children. Despite this continued sense of searching and curiosity, he noted that he is highly satisfied with his openness to a variety of traditions as a parent.

Participant 6:

Like part of my dad's church, he's a Pentecostal minister. We're talking like holy roller, with the really good music in the church, which is fantastic, I'm telling ya, it's like...it's wild. It's wild...They're into it, there's got to be something to it... Yeah they had church like at his house at one particular point in time. There's was like, they would come over, and there would be like nine people in there and stuff like that. They're all brothers and sisters and they all generally have a lot of affection for each other. And see that part I, I find very, ya know, appealing...I like that part. And like Islam, there are parts of Islam that I really like. You know, the fundamentalists seem like they have some issues, but you know what I'm saying?...but there's parts of it which are quite beautiful and I understand them, so I kind of take the parts of the stuff that I like. I pick and choose which [ones I incorporate]—it could be wrong, but that's the way I roll.

Spiritual but not religious:

Participant 5:

I'd say [adjectives that describe my parenting include] kind, loving, forgiving, accepting, uh, thoughtful, and playful. Um. Well, I just think I mean, certainly just spontaneous play, cause the kids are always playing so when I enter their space, um it puts me in a playful mood as well, even if I'm not playing directly with them, and I think that worship at it's best is playful. In terms of being creative, and, um, something new, something fun, I guess I'd also add "considered" to my list of adjectives, because I think about how I want to be a parent and how I want to be a Christian, in serious ways, so I think that's another way.

Words used by Parents to Describe the Relationships Between their Religious and/or

Spiritual Identity and Their Parenting

Participants used the following positive words to describe relationships between their religious and/or spiritual identities and their parenting (in alphabetical order): *acceptance, accepting, awareness, binding, calm, creative, coherence, considered, enthusiasm, equality, forgiving, fortunate, foundation, fun, good, guidance, guideline, honest, importance, kind, lived, loving, new, normal, opportunity, orderly, patience, peace, playful, positive, purpose, regular, respect, right, sanity, sharing, serenity, survival, thoughtful, timely, tolerance, true, value, wisdom.*

Participants also used some negative words, although very few, and included: *judged, obligated, overwhelming, preached, and strange.*

Question 6: *Is there anything else you would like to add about the impact of your religious and/or spiritual identity on your parenting?*

In response to this question, six participants (6=54.5%) responded that they did not have anything else to add or had no response to the question. The five participants (5=) who did respond indicated that they were cognizant of their children's religious and/or spiritual development and their own hopes or expectations as parents for their child(ren)'s spiritual and/or religious development. Those responses, from participants 2, 4, 7, 8 and 10 are captured below, in their respective groups for the following theme:

Hopes or Expectations for Children's Spiritual and/or Religious Development

Both Religious and Spiritual – Separate but Interrelated:

Participant 4:

What we call the holy spirit in classic Trinitarian thinking, is the presence of God at work in history, and I believe in the holy spirit, and so, that means that I can have a very off day as a mother, and kind of be off the mark in the grand scheme of things as a mother, and still know that my children are going to be guided by something that is true, that's loving, and merciful and life-giving...it's also a way of saying if they grow up and do not resemble me, in their religious practice or spiritual experience, that's ok too, because I trust the holy spirit.

Participant 8:

I think [I felt] forgiveness...when I had stopped going to church and ...was going to my philosophy classes, or just, getting a little, cynical: oh, this isn't true, that isn't true...the church sort of forgave me... And nobody ever said that to me, but [the church] allowed me to have my, son be baptized when I hadn't been going to church and I didn't get married in the church—they did what I thought was a very forgiving thing, that you hear about, when you think of Jesus or God...And then when I was allowed to have a mass for my husband when he passed away at a catholic church. Those were the forgiving things that made me think... that made me realize that this is really important for my son, and I want to tell my son these things. And that this is something that can be a value to him and it is some part of his faith that he should know.... we're all here for a time-limited period...there's more to...to our life.... I would tell [my son stories about that]. I have told him different things, because he's a very, he's young, but he's old enough to see and to know...he'll understand something like this... the church that [my son] goes to... is a wonderful church and it's a church for all people and it's for people with disabilities...so there's a Sunday mass, and [my son] gets pretty hyperactive, and...quite honestly I wasn't taking him to church because he was so active at church I was afraid, people will

look at him like, what's wrong with you mom? Why aren't you controlling your child better? [There's] none of that judgment in church, and I've told him, this is a wonderful church that will accept you, so if you're having a problem behaving and you're struggling with just keeping yourself still, it's not gonna be looked upon... This is the message that you would get from God or from Jesus, and they're following those... that acceptance piece as well, so he can see that... [my son will] actually say things like, "I really like God, he's nice."

Both Religious and Spiritual –Separate but Inextricably Related:

Participant 7:

I just hope, that my children...they don't have to appreciate what I do for them...hopefully at some point I will have done enough things right that they'll say hey he was a good dad...he tried his best...but my hope and prayer, is that they'll grow up...I hope that happens to them [that they gain an interest in their faith]...I hope they don't just go through the motions...I hope they really—it interests them...because that's gonna...make the difference in their life.

Spiritual but not Religious:

Participant 10:

I would guess I would think that I think that there are ways in that I can get, attached to certain ideas and what's really important to me and you know, lose sight of the fact that he's [my son is] his own spirit that needs to find his way, and uh, right down to playing with guns, you know? Or watching certain kinds of things and I get really confused about that. About how much he needs to really find his way and how much I need to let him play out certain themes and what ways to let him play out those themes and how to then engage him so that he's learning from them, and not and really- you know? So there's times when I'll just really cut things off and just stop it, because I can't tolerate it, you know, and so, I think that there are ways I can be kind of controlling out of my own fears and anxieties. I feel like what I know, I know what's gonna be right or good for him. But he's you know, gotten to the point where he can really tell me: "you know, I don't- I'm not that kind of person; I don't take pleasure in hurting animals or people. It's just a game," you know? He can talk about who he is and remind me you know about his own soul and spirit.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how parents who identify as religious and/or spiritual make meaning of their identities and how they understand the impact of their religious and/or spiritual identities on their parenting. Much of the literature on this topic has been quantitative, and by design has been unable to capture the nuanced responses of parents themselves on the topic of their own religious and/or spiritual identities. The primary emphasis of the quantitative literature has been to find connections between parent religiosity and relationships with children and child outcomes. This qualitative study was designed to explore what we can learn from the parental wisdom of parents who have children of all ages and who identify as religious, spiritual or both, by allowing such parents to provide their own definitions of religion and spirituality. How do parents make meaning of and understand the meanings of religion and spirituality in their lives; and, how do parents who identify as spiritual and/or religious see an impact on the parenting from such identities? The sample of this study was comprised of eleven spiritual and/or religious parents who in total are responsible for 18 children ranging in age from 11 months to 17 years. All eleven participants provided material that generated discussion on the research topic.

Limitations

This was a qualitative study that employed a small sample of convenience utilizing a snowball sampling method. As such, the findings of this study cannot be generalized beyond this particular sample (Anastas, 1999; Padget, 1998). However, the sample did represent a wide range of ages of parents and children. The sample was skewed with regards to race, with nine of the eleven participants identifying as white or Caucasian. Most participants were married or

partnered, with two who had been married and now are divorced or widowed. All participants aside from one reported that they share their parenting responsibilities with others. Seven of the eleven participants identified as either Christian and/or catholic. Most participants reported that religion and/or spirituality has been a part of their lives from childhood, and that they, like their children experienced spiritual and/or religious parenting.

It is also to be noted that participants were all recruited from approximately a 50 square mile geographic location, and that some parents were interviewed in their homes, while others preferred to be interviewed at their place of work. All interviews were conducted in spaces that participants indicated would provide them with sufficient privacy, nonetheless, each environment was inherently different by design and experience. Thus, it was sometimes difficult for participants to answer questions if a spouse, child or other person was within proximity. Because participants were asked to provide information about their own parents, which was retrospective, some participants appeared to lack clarity in providing this second-hand information. Two participants also reportedly felt challenged by the use of language in the wording of questions including the use of the word “identity.” Others needed questions to be repeated in order to feel confident in answering questions. It is unclear whether this was due to how questions were phrased, or whether participants were distracted by other stimuli or unfamiliar with the use of language.

Due to a Human Subjects Review process, the demographic information collected by this study was limited. Parents’ sexuality, income, education and other demographics were not collected. It should be noted that some participants were interested in sharing this information, either during collection of demographics or during the interview and at times connected this information to their development as spiritual and/or religious persons. As these are inherent

cultural factors that often have intersectionality with religion and spirituality (Hathaway & Ripley, 2009) further studies should make effort to collect such data. In addition, a lack of information about how other household members identify in terms of religion and/or spirituality may have also been explanatory of the intra-familial dynamics of modern religious and/or spiritual families.

Additional Prominent Themes

Additional themes were quite prominent overall throughout the interviews and included the following:

Instilling Morals and Values

Ten participants (10= 90.9%) noted that they instill morals and values in their children throughout different parts of the interview. Included are how participants use or teach prayer to their children. Thankfulness, generosity and awareness were all mentioned.

Acting as Teachers and Facilitating Education

Ten participants (10=90.9%) reported ways that they educate their children, respond to questions asked by their children that pertain to religion and spirituality, or facilitate religious educational services for their children.

Development of Patience

Eight participants (8=72.7%) indicated that they developed patience through their faith and while being a parent.

Hopes for Child(ren)'s Spiritual and Religious Development

Eight participants (8= 72.7%) indicated that religious and spiritual outcomes for their children were important throughout the interview.

Deepening of Beliefs and Turning Points

Combined, many participants (7=63.6%) reported experiencing either a deepening of beliefs or turning points in their lives that provided clarity to who they wanted to be as a spiritual and/or religious person.

The table below summarizes these themes, common in various questions and which participants indicated that such themes were important to them

Table 8
Additional Prominent Themes Throughout the Interviews

Participant	Theme:				
	Instilling Morals and Values	Acting as a Teacher/Facilitating Education	Development of Patience	Hopes for Child(ren)'s Spiritual and/or Religious Development	Deepening of beliefs/Increase in Practices over time
1					X
2	X	X		X	X
3	X	X	X	X	X
4	X	X	X	X	
5	X	X	X		X
6	X	X			X
7	X	X	X	X	X
8	X	X	X	X	X
9	X	X	X	X	X
10	X	X	X	X	
11	X	X	X	X	

Major Findings

For each established profile or group (Religious and Spiritual, Spiritual but not Religious, etc) there were various major findings grounded in participant narratives. In some cases, a theme was prominent across groups. The chart below summarizes these major findings:

Figure 1: Major Findings by Participant groups and question (beginning with question 2)

How participants identified themselves:			
<u>1. Religious and Spiritual</u>		<u>2. Spiritual but not Religious</u>	<u>3. Religious but not Spiritual</u>
<i>a. Separate but Interrelated</i> (6=100%)	<i>b. Separate but Inextricably Interrelated</i> (2=100%)	(2=100%)	(1=100%)
Participants: 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, and 11	Participants: 7 and 9	Participants: 6 and 10	Participant: 5
Question 2: <i>In what ways does your religious and/or spiritual identity currently impact your parenting?</i>			
Spiritual Beliefs and Religious Practices are Guides and Tools when teaching their children morals, values and ethics (6=100%).	Religious Action and Participation are Tools for Modeling (2=100%)	In Teaching an Awareness of Others and a Sense of Reciprocity (2=100%)	Impacted by a religion that teaches him how to bet a better parent through forgiveness (1=100%)
Question 3: <i>Have there been significant changes over time in your parenting as you see impacted by your own sense of religious and/or spiritual identity?</i>			
Adaptation and drawing more deeply on religion and/or spirituality based on growing needs and challenges of children (5=%)	Compromise and Deepening of Spousal Relationships (2=100%)	Drawing on Spiritual identities to adapt as parents to the changing developmental needs of their children (2=100%)	No Changes over time (1=100%)
Question 4: <i>When you reflect on your religious and/or spiritual identity and your parenting, are there ways in which they impact one another? In what ways do you see an impact or relationship?</i>			
Drawing on religious and spiritual identity as guidance for parenting	(Religion serves as) Guidance in responding to everyday questions of children	Maintenance of a Positive Outlook (1=9%)	Parenting is inextricably related to being a good Christian (1=100%)

(6=100%)	(2=100%)	Maintenance of a Reflective, Self-Aware Stance (1=9%)	
Question 5: Overall, how satisfied are you with the impact of your religious and/or spiritual identity on your parenting?			
Satisfied as a group, but still a work in progress (10=%)			
Question 7: Is there anything else you would like to add about the impact of your religious and/or spiritual identity on your parenting?			
Hopes or Expectations for children's Spiritual and/or Religious Development (9=%)			

By each self-identifying group, the major findings are as follows:

1. a. Religious and Spiritual: Separate but Interrelated

- Spiritual beliefs and religious practices are guides and tools when teaching their children morals, values and ethics (6=100%). It was important to these parents that they not only model moral and ethic behavior to their children, but that they also take part in the educational process with their children. Participants in this group noted that they use bible stories, prayer and other activities as tools to teach their children about their faith. For some, a sense of guidance was derived closely from beliefs about a higher power,

while for others; making compromise with regards to religious adherence was necessary in order to be effective in their parenting.

- Adaptation and drawing more deeply on religion and/or spirituality based on growing needs and challenges of children (5=83.3%). Participants in this group were mindful of the challenges that have and will arise as their children age and have increasing questions and needs within spiritual and religious realms. Participants in this group noted that familial bonds have strengthened as they have utilized such challenges to gain a better understanding of their faith. When in need of guidance, all participants in this group (6=100%) Drew on aspects of their religious and spiritual identities.

- As a group, these parents were either satisfied or highly satisfied with the impact of their religious and spiritual identities on their parenting, and yet noted that their roles as impactful religious and spiritual parents was still a work in progress (5=83.3%). Some participants in this group specifically noted the forgiveness and flexibility within their religious beliefs and practices that makes allowances for mistakes and more importantly, learning.

- Hopes or Expectations for children's Spiritual and/or Religious Development (5=83.3%). Most participants in this group, aside from participant one, demonstrated their thoughtfulness with regards to their children's religious and/or spiritual development presently and in the future. Parents in this group were overall most focused on the spiritual outcomes of their children with wishes for their children to have beliefs that would help them to feel confident, safe and secure, even during times of transition.

1. b. Religious and Spiritual: *Separate but Inextricably Related*

- Religious Action and Participation are Tools for Modeling (2=100%). Participants in this group were mindful of the inherent modeling that they provide to their children,

particularly with regards to religious practices such as praying and attending church.

These parents offered examples of conversations they have had with their children during various times of their development where as parents and spouses they were faced with decision-making processes regarding their children's religious participation. Through this process, these participants noted that they experienced:

- Compromise and Deepening of Spousal Relationships (2=100%)
- Throughout different time periods in their children's lives and in their own as children, these participants noted how Religion serves as Guidance in responding to everyday questions of children and raising children in a modern context (2=100%).
- Similar to the previous group, these participants noted that they were Satisfied with the impact of their religious and spiritual identities on their parenting, but that this was still a work in progress (2=100%); something that they looked to their religion (prayer, bible study, etc.) for guidance and answers. This process of seeking out answers, led both participants to experience a deepening of faith over time that has informed their parenting.
- Hopes or expectations for children's spiritual and/or religious development (2=100%). Participants in this group also noted the emphasis that they put on their children developing grounded beliefs that will help them to do well in the future. For participant seven it was important for his children to continue in the faith he has raised them, while for participant nine, the focus was more on the spiritual development of her adolescent children, regardless of what faith they choose to follow. She appeared to have a sense of pride, regarding the spiritual development of her older child in particular.

2. Spiritual but not Religious

- In Teaching an Awareness of Others and a Sense of Reciprocity (2=100%). Participants in this group were both focused on their children's behavior and understanding in the context of others. Participant ten also noted reciprocity in the spiritual relationship with her son as he develops. Participant six was strongly focused on teaching his child basic tenants with regards to kindness. For both, teaching their children these important values meant:
- Drawing on Spiritual identities to adapt as parents to the changing developmental needs of their children (2=100%). Participants in this group noted experiences with their children where they needed to take pause or think more carefully about their interventions and expectations of their children. Participant ten noted a sense of pride in her son's spiritual development, particularly with regards to his attunement to others and sense of gratitude.
- For participant six, maintenance of a positive outlook when teaching his child about ways of being in the world was most salient (1=50%), and appeared to be closely related to how the participant managed himself in challenging parental situations.
- For participant ten, maintenance of a Reflective, Self-Aware Stance was most salient (1=50%), particularly in learning from her son and from challenges she has with her son with regards to differences in interests or ideas.
- Satisfied as a group, but still a work in progress (2=100%). Participants in this group noted a high level of satisfaction with the impact of their spiritual identities on their parenting, but also noted continuous challenges with their children that must be met with spiritual thoughts and awareness. It was unclear with this group what other activities beyond talking to their children were important to their satisfaction.

- Hopes or Expectations for children's Spiritual and/or Religious Development (2=100%). While hopeful about their children's outcomes, this group was less specifically so, and mostly indicating hopes that their children would treat others with respect and that they would learn from and contribute to their environments.

3. Religious but not Spiritual

- Participant five noted that his parenting is impacted by a religion that teaches him how to be a better parent through forgiveness, and this is an understanding that he has come to over the past ten years, and in the context of his own religious family (1=100%).
- He noted that there have been no changes over time in his parenting that have been impacted by his religious and/or spiritual identity during his parenting, but did note some changes before his parenting years in his religious and/or spiritual identity (1=100%).
- In his experience thus far as a parent, participant five understands his parenting and any guidance received as inextricably related to being a good Christian (1=100%).
- Like participants in other groups, participant five noted that he is highly satisfied with the impact of his religious and/or spiritual identity on his parenting, but that is still a work in progress, something that is forgivable by his God and a source of reflection (1=100%).

All of the participants interviewed were able to give voice to their understandings of religion and/or spirituality and to indicate whether they understood there to be a difference between the two and that these understandings impacted their parenting; mostly in positive ways. However, one parent, participant one, did report that her experience with spirituality has been negative since the birth of her child. This is surprising since most studies have not asked participants to define or explain their understandings of religion and spirituality (Hodge, 2009; Horwath & Lees, 2010), because all participants in this study were able to do so to one degree or another.

Most participants found satisfaction in the impact that their religious and/or spiritual identity has had on their parenting, with most indicating that part of this impact has to do with their roles as teachers, with many teaching or sharing morals and values with their children. This finding is congruent with other qualitative studies with parents and grandparents that identify as religious and/or spiritual (King et al., 2006). Such an impact also had to do with participants' interactions with other family members in their lives with whom they communicate, cohabitate and share traditions. Expanded understandings of how not just being religious or spiritual but doing so in a family context influences well-being (Chen et al., 2007; Colbert et al., 2008) appear to be warranted by these findings, as participants in the current study reported satisfaction even when they made mistakes as parents (Duriez et al., 2009), noting that their religion made accommodations for mistakes. Further, how parents feel they collaborate with God or a higher power in their parenting (Dumas & Nissely-Tsiopinis, 2006), may help to deepen understandings of differences in object relations understandings of God (Hall et al., 2000).

While other studies have noted communication patterns between family members in highly religious and/or spiritual families (Dollahite & Marks, 2009), none have actually specifically studied the impact of other family members on a religious and/or spiritual parent. Some studies have noted, however, that family members, particularly parents, make accommodations for other family members who may not share a belief system (McCarthy, 2007) or who may face challenges in adhering to religious practices due to disability (Poston & Turnbull, 2004). Many parents in the current study indicated that they have made accommodations for their children in service attendance and observance of holy days, and that they expect to see their children make their own adjustments in order to become spiritually-identifying adults.

Many participants in this study indicated that important life events including loss of a loved one and child birth as signified turning points and milestones in their religious and/or spiritual development, which more than half of participants reported developed over time in one way or another (Feierman, 2009), often becoming more deepened with their own aging as a parent. Some parents indicated particular activities such as praying for guidance or meditating with other adults and parents to help them manage and cope with the responsibilities of parenting. For these reasons, the age of participants and the number of years participants have been parenting becomes of interest (Boyatzis, 2006).

Perhaps because this study was not focused on crisis or trauma, few other responses made mention of religious and/or spiritual coping, however, when asked if and how their religious and/or spiritual identity had changed over time, more than one parent brought up life changing events, including the death of a loved one and divorce, while another noted the support of the church after she became widowed. In this way, religious communities appeared to provide some parents in this study with components of healing and strength (Chen et al., 2007; Coulthard & Fitzgerald, 1999; Day, 2009), while for others difficult times helped them to explore their spirituality more deeply.

Participants were also concerned with the spiritual and/or religious development of their children, indicating hopes and wishes for their children's outcomes, while simultaneously indicating unwavering love for their children, regardless of what path their children choose as adults. Many participants in the study seemed implicitly aware of religious and/or spiritual questioning of one's identity, and had some level of concern for their children. Parents in this study reacted to this understanding in varying ways, with their learning and understandings often grounded in their own experiences as children or young adults who rebelled against or

questioned the faith they were raised in. How this relates to outcomes for modern children raised in religious and/or spiritual families is of interest, and yet has only been addressed thus far by quantitative inquiries, that do not capture family histories or intra-familial dynamics (Dollahite & Marks, 2009; Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008).

In terms of the actual question of how parents make meaning of an impact of their spiritual and/or religious identity on their parenting, It would appear that most parents in this sample are focused on providing their children with supports and skills to succeed in spiritual and religious life. Some parents have deliberately explained this as “living by example,” while others have indicated important roles that they assume in an effort to address their children’s questions, provide them with a safe and comfortable home, and provide space for religious and/or spiritual questioning and/or rebellion. It would appear that in this study, parents were more focused on their own self-discipline and modeling behavior, rather than speaking about how they discipline their children according to God’s word or other doctrine (Mahoney, 2010). Only one parent (participant 4) appeared to offer information about her role as a parent that might be considered sanctified (Volling et al., 2009), but was not labeled as such by the participant.

Parents’ own experiences of being a child in a spiritual and/or religious household appears to be influential to decision making processes as a parent and the assumption of particular roles. This would appear to be new territory in qualitative research, as a topic that appeared to be influenced by having parents answer a demographic question about their own parents’ sense of being religious and/or spiritual. Many parents in this sample have deliberately chosen to not duplicate some or all of their own parents’ religious and/or spiritual parenting practices in contrast to quantitative findings of the past (Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009). Others

made clear the reflective learning that they are experiencing as parents and that their own parents' religious and/or spiritual behaviors are influential to them and have been adjusted for a new generation of children, while also incorporating multiple influences (Hood et al., 2009). The reflective thinking capabilities evident in parent's responses in this study are congruent with developmental models that consider religious and spiritual development as inherent to human life (Kiesling et al., 2008; Levenson et al., 2005), as many participants talked about an increase in reflective thinking and patience over time that they related to religious and/or spiritual identity.

Two parents indicated that they have learned or are learning things about their religion and/or spirituality from their children. While this was not a common response in this study from participants, it seems worth exploring in future studies with religious and/or spiritual parents, particularly those who make religious and/or spiritual choices based on familial influence (Gebelt & Leak, 2009; Myers, 1996). Again, only a few studies have included the entire family dynamic, but have found that compromises, and other skills develop as a result of interfamilial dynamics in religious and/or spiritual families (Dollahite & Marks, 2009; McCarthy, 2007). In one of this study's questions, participant 11 commented, "you'd really have to ask my kids [about how they have been impacted]." This statement really points to an uncharted set of responses from children themselves in religious and/or spiritual families about the effectiveness of their parents' spiritual and/or religious behaviors in parenting. It is worth noting that almost all participants indicated that the experience of having children has changed the way they perceive religion and spirituality in some way, including questioning how important it is to raising a child in modern context (Bartowski & Xu, 2000; Starks & Robinson, 2007). Many parents echoed the challenges suggested by Wilcox (2002), including: individualism, technology, and other structures of society. The question of conformity over individualism for parents raising

their children in religious and/or spiritual households is of interest, especially since single-childhood is a commonality and individuality is an overarching cultural pressure.

Recommendations for Future Study

The findings of this study indicate the dire need for additional information about modern religious and/or spiritual parents, and in the context of their families and communities. Most parents in this study indicated that a large part of their tasks as parents trying to have an impact on their children is providing their children with educational opportunities, appropriate modeling, and accommodations. Therefore, further study must include questions about how parents utilize their ecosystems and fellow family and community members to create supportive religious and/or spiritual learning environment for their children. Additionally, what role religious and/or spiritual parents perceive schools having in the religious and/or spiritual development of their children is also needed.

Since most studies with the religious and/or spiritual parenting population have taken place with heterosexual, Christian samples (Hodge, 2011; Mahoney, 2010; Walsh, 2010), it is vital that further qualitative study include multiply-identifying spiritual and/or religious persons and their families and include more diverse religious and spiritual affiliations such as Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Native American traditions and others; that better fit the religious landscape of the United States as we know it (Pewforum, 2007). What works and what doesn't for such families in their parenting and what language they use as a family to convey important concepts is also lacking from the literature, and may help to inform the structuring of questions for future interviews. Getting a better grip on the many ways parents communicate religious and/or spiritual affiliation may assist further research endeavors with this population that seek to quantify religion and spirituality more accurately. Further qualitative study will help to increase

the visibility of families who identify with multiple spiritual and/or religious traditions and who are non-Christian and/or from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning and Fluid populations and their children. Mothers in particular are missing from modern research on this topic (Boyatzis, 2006; Mahoney, 2010) and need to be engaged if we are to provide supportive, multi-cultural services that include collaborations with religious and/or spiritual leaders (Hathaway & Ripley, 2009). Similarly, gender conscious studies with parents are of interest, because women appear to have more influence on their children than men with regards to transcendence of beliefs (Hood et al., 2009). This establishes an important task for social workers over the next decade to gain a better understanding of the parents and families we work with.

Lastly, as mentioned earlier, a significant shortcoming of this study is that it did not gather sufficient demographic data from participants. Further qualitative studies should make it a point to gather information such as educational level and educational experience, sexuality, income and gender role compliance (Hood et al., 2009). Combining these demographics with studies that seek to understand how parents manage adversity through faith (Hudson, 2006) is also desperately needed. All of these factors can help social workers understand how various aspects of identity intersect with spiritual and/or religious identity in parents (Hathaway & Ripley, 2009).

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Appendix A
Human Subjects Review Approval Letter



Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950
F (413) 585-7994

March 12, 2011

Tiffany Sermini

Dear Tiffany,

Your revised submission has been reviewed and it is fine. We are happy to give final approval to your study. The literature review added a lot.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Ann Hartman".

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Mary Hall, Research Advisor

Appendix B
Recruitment Letter to Potential Participants

Date:

Dear Participant:

My name is Tiffany Sermini and I am a graduate student at the Smith College School for Social Work. You have indicated an interest in my research study about the impact of a parent's religious and/or spiritual identity on their parenting by contacting me by phone or email. Most of the current literature on this topic does not address the opinions of parents. This research is being conducted in partial fulfillment of my master of social work (MSW) degree.

In order to participate, you must be a parent who is at least 25 years old and actively engaged in parenting at least one child under the age of 18. You must also be English-speaking and identify yourself as being spiritual, religious or both.

I will be calling you within a week to describe the study in greater depth and to schedule an interview time with you if you are still interested in participating.

In addition, please find attached the informed consent, which you will be required to sign should you decide to participate. Should you have any questions about this document, you will have an opportunity to address them with me before you agree to participate.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Sermini, MSW Candidate
Smith College School for Social Work
Northampton, MA 01060
Email: tsermin@smith.edu

Appendix C
Informed Consent form for all Participants

Dear Participant,

My name is Tiffany Sermini and I am a graduate student at Smith College School for Social work. I am conducting a qualitative study to explore the perceptions of spiritual and/or religious parents about the impact of such an identity on their parenting. Most studies on this topic have been quantitative and by design in the voice of the so-called outside and objective observer. Thus we know little about the perceptions of parents on this topic. This qualitative study was designed to make a contribution to filling this gap by seeing what we can learn from parents in their own voice about how they view the impact of their religious/spiritual identity on their parenting. This research is being conducted as part of requirements of the Master of Social Work degree (MSW) and for future presentation and possible publication on this topic.

To participate, you must be over the age of 25, self-identify as having a religious and/or spiritual identity and be actively parenting a child under the age of 18. You must also be English speaking and agree to meet in a private, mutually convenient time and place for a face-to-face interview that will take no more than an hour and will be tape-recorded. I might also take some additional notes during the interview.

The research schedule will consist of structured demographic background questions followed by a series of more open-ended questions that probe your opinions about the relationship between your religious and/or spiritual identity and your parenting.

Every precaution will be taken to safeguard your confidentiality. All names will be removed from the data collection tools (tapes, transcripts, interview notes) and be replaced by a numeric code that will be developed. I will transcribe all tapes. If another transcriber is used, she/he will be required to sign a confidentiality pledge. Only my advisor and I will have access to the transcribed data. Any data used in subsequent presentations and publications will be presented primarily in the aggregate with any quotes being sufficiently disguised to protect the confidentiality of participants. All interview data will be kept in a secure location separate from informed consent for three years as required by Federal regulations. After that time all materials will be destroyed or remain secure until they are no longer needed and then be destroyed.

There are few potential risks to you in this study. However, in any experience of self-reflection, feelings and emotions can arise that you may feel warrants further exploration. To meet this need should it occur, I have compiled and will distribute to you a listing of local mental health and human service resources in the community that can provide this type of support.

There will be no financial compensation or other material benefit for participating in this study. You may benefit from having the opportunity to reflect upon the relationship between your religious and/or spiritual identity and your parenting. You may also benefit from knowing that you are helping to fill a gap in the professional literature on this topic.

Your participation is voluntary. You have the right not to answer any particular question(s) or to completely withdraw from the study at any time up until the deadline of April 31, 2011, when the findings will be written up. If you choose to withdraw, all data connected with your participation will be destroyed

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE
ABOVE INFORMATION AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK
QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION AND YOUR RIGHTS AND
THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE: _____ DATE:

RESEARCHER SIGNATURE: _____ DATE:

Please keep a copy of this form for your records.
Questions regarding any aspect of participation in the study should be directed to:

Researcher Contact Information

Tiffany Sermini, MSW Intern
Smith College School for Social Work
EMAIL: TSERMIN@SMITH.EDU
PHONE: 413-446-0902

5. Overall, how satisfied are you with the impact of your religious and/or spiritual identity on your parenting? (Circle) Your choice

Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
5	4	3	2	1

Please explain this rating.

6. Is there anything else you would like to add about the impact of your religious and/or spiritual identity on your parenting?