

The psychological salience of religiosity and spirituality among Christian young people in
New Zealand: A mixed-methods study

Keren Donaldson and Myron D. Friesen

University of Canterbury, New Zealand

Jeffrey D. Gage

California Baptist University

Keren Donaldson and Myron D. Friesen, School of Educational Studies and Leadership,
University of Canterbury, New Zealand; Jeffrey D. Gage, College of Nursing, California
Baptist University.

The research reported in this article was conducted as part of the Masters Thesis of Keren
Donaldson, supervised by Myron Friesen and Jeff Gage. The authors declared no potential
conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Myron D. Friesen, Private Bag
4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand. E-mail: myron.friesen@canterbury.ac.nz

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10.1037/rel0000170

Abstract

This mixed-methods exploratory study examined the psychological salience of religiosity and spirituality in a sample of young people (ages 16–21, M age = 18.9 years; SD = 1.36) from New Zealand. Participants completed a cross-sectional online questionnaire with both qualitative and quantitative questions that assessed subjective perceptions of religion and spirituality and theoretically linked social and cognitive (motivation and identity) factors associated with the psychological salience of religiosity/spirituality. The results showed considerable overlap in participants' conceptualization of religiosity and spirituality as the two constructs related to participants' faith; yet, the sample had greater affinity for spirituality than religiosity. Relationship quality and religious/spiritual support from family and friends were associated with a stronger community connection. This was associated with participants' spiritual identity and extrinsic motivation to be involved in religious activities, which in turn predicted greater religious/spiritual salience. The findings replicate previous research in the relationship between religiosity and spirituality in Christian samples, and also breaks new ground in the conceptualization of the psychological salience of religiosity/spirituality and in identifying community connection as a link to increased religious/spiritual identity and motivation among adolescents and young adults.

Key words: religiosity, spirituality, psychological salience, adolescents, mixed-methods

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Research on religion and spirituality has a long and rich history across many academic domains; however, the investigation of religious/spiritual development has significantly lagged behind (Roehlkepartain, Benson, & Scales, 2011). Nevertheless, most theorists of spiritual development would agree that over time our understanding of and relation to the images, symbols and language for faith and spirituality change. The ways that individuals relate to the sacred, and perhaps their methods for pursuing what they perceive as sacred change as they grow and develop (Benson & Roehlkepartain, 2008; Fowler, 1981; Oser, Scarlett & Bucher, 2006). With the advances in cognitive development and process of individuation that accompany adolescence, young people become more capable of personalizing their understanding of and relationship to the spiritual and sacred (Fowler, 1981; Good & Willoughby, 2008). While adolescents gradually see themselves as having a separate identity from their various social domains, such as school, family, extended family, and peer groups, they are still dependent on significant others to be a sounding board for the composition of their own faith identity (Brambilla, Assor, Manzi, & Regalia, 2015).

One of the substantial challenges in exploring spiritual development is basic definitional issues (Ammerman, 2013; Selvam, 2013). Pargament (1999a, b) argued that religiosity and spirituality should not be treated as separate constructs, but as overlapping as the essence of both concepts is the relationship to the sacred. Furthermore, religiosity and spirituality usually co-occur (Oser, Scarlett & Bucher, 2006). For example, even for individuals who see themselves to be only spiritual, there will often be aspects in their descriptions of their spirituality that many researchers would label as having originated from a religious tradition (Ammerman, 2013). In much of the literature the common distinction

that is made between the concepts of religion/religiosity and spirituality is that spirituality is understood to be an individual and personal response to the sacred, while religion refers to the institutional or collective aspects pertaining to the sacred (Ammerman, 2013; Selvam, 2013). Such a simple distinction can result in narrow operational definitions and potentially unreliable assessments with religiosity based only on church attendance, and spirituality based only on a belief in God (e.g., Good & Willoughby, 2006).

In terms of adolescents and emerging adults, one question rather poorly addressed in the literature is how do young people conceptualize their religiosity and spirituality? There are a growing number of studies on adolescent religiosity or spirituality, but these concepts are commonly defined and operationalized based on research with adults (e.g., religious affiliation, frequency of participation in public or private religious practices, and strength of beliefs). However, results from the National Study of Youth and Religion showed that almost all of these measures of religiosity declined from the first to second wave of the study, but participants' subjective evaluations of their religiosity showed that the majority of adolescents felt that they had stayed the same or became more religious over time (Denton, Pearce, & Smith, 2008). While adolescents are quickly developing a number of social and cognitive skills that are similar to adults, their limited life experience in contemplating and incorporating such ideas into their identity and worldview suggests that there could be some qualitative differences in how they view religiosity and spirituality. A study by Jackson et al., (2010) used a more exploratory approach to capture a youth perspective, or youth voice, concerning spirituality from interviews with a diverse sample of adolescents in foster care. The majority of the sample saw spirituality as a belief in God (87%) and that trusting in God provided spiritual strength (86%). In addition, a majority felt that spirituality involved prayer (79%), and almost half included worshipping with a community of people who share similar beliefs (45%). Just over a fifth of the adolescents endorsed more new age aspects of

spirituality including belief in a spiritual connection between all human beings or between people and nature (Jackson et al., 2010, pp.112-113).

Recent New Zealand demographic data (where the present study is situated) suggests that those who are most likely to report no religious affiliation are young adults aged 20-24 with males being slightly less religious than females, and a decline in religiosity among adolescents from previous census reports (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). Therefore, secularisation is perhaps most notable in the New Zealand adolescent and young adult populations, suggesting that religiosity is being transferred from parents to youths at a lower rate than in previous decades and/or that current adolescents and emerging adults are exploring religion and spirituality in ways that are different to adults. Thus, we were interested in (a) how older adolescents conceptualize religion and spirituality and (b) how individual cognitive (e.g., motivation and identity) as well as social factors (e.g., relationship quality with parents and connections to a religious/spiritual community) might predict greater religious/spiritual salience.

The salience of religiosity/spirituality is related to the attributed importance of this domain in an individual's life and its day-to-day relevance and application (Petts, 2015, Wimberley, 1984). This is somewhat related to a religious orientation as originally proposed by Allport and Ross (1967) and subsequently refined by Batson and Schoenrade (1991) and Francis (2007). However, the majority of previous research on religious orientation or commitment has combined the cognitive (motivation, attributed importance, commitment), affective, and behavioral elements to provide a broad and multifaceted perspective (e.g., Denton, 2012; Miller, Shepperd, & McCullough, 2013; Pearce, Foster, & Hardie, 2013). For example, in a meta-analysis, Dehaan, Yonker and Affolter (2011) identified that the most common ways for measuring religiosity were (a) frequency of religious service attendance, (b) religious behaviour, such as personal prayer or participation in church-related activities,

(c) salience, such as its attributed importance for daily life or in making decisions, and (d) questioning, which included engaging with doubts and questions about faith and religion. In this study, we were interested in narrowing the focus, and defined the psychological salience of religion and spirituality as the degree to which someone's faith is an important part of their life, relevant in day-to-day experience and decision-making, and a consistent focus of their thinking. This is more closely related to the integration aspect of religious orientation from Francis' (2007) New Indices of Religious Orientation measure. Very few studies have focused specifically on the psychological salience of religion and/or spirituality. With data from the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), Petts (2015) found that parental religiosity and family religious practices were the strongest predictors of religious salience and closeness to God. Both of these outcomes were measured with single items, and religious salience was defined as "how important youth's religious faith is in shaping how they live their daily life" (p. 101). We would argue that the salience of a construct is more than just how important it is, but also how accessible, relevant, and prevalent it is in the mind. In an attempt to develop a measure that more thoroughly tapped the idea of salience, we incorporated aspects from measures of both religiosity (Desmond, Morgan, & Kikuchi, 2010; Hunsberger et al., 2001; Smith & Denton, 2005; Smith & Snell, 2009; Zinnbauer et al., 1997) and spirituality (DeHaan et al., 2011; Koenig, 2008; Moberg, 2002; Seidlitz et al., 2002), and included elements of identification (My belief in God is an important part of who I am), integration (My faith shapes my daily life), affection (I feel close to God), and experience (I have had a meaningful spiritual experience).

Predictors of Adolescent Religiosity and Spirituality

Identity. It is well established that young people experiment with different roles according to the feedback they receive and the values they perceive are held by those they most respect (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966; Schwartz, 2001). Religious/spiritual identity is

theorized to be one of the many domains that make up the overall identity of a person (King, 2003; Magdali-Dopman & Park-Taylor, 2013; Marcia, 1966). Marcia (1966, 1967), building on Erikson's work, developed a theory of identity development which posited that the degree of exploration and commitment that young people engage in across relational and occupational pursuits, and ideological beliefs determines their identity status. Identity achievement is attained after an individual goes through a period of exploration and then makes a commitment to an identity relevant construct.

Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer (2001) found that individuals in their late teens who had an achieved identity tended to display higher well-being, including self-esteem, and also experienced little religious change from the end of high school to beginning university. Those who were religious remained so – apparently having already experienced a crisis, and had committed to a religious identity. Moratorium individuals were those who were searching, and were low in religious commitment. They displayed significantly lower self-esteem than the other groups, and high levels of religious doubt. Contrary to expectations, diffused individuals also tended to show high levels of religious doubt, which suggests some engagement in religious exploration. However, they also avoided searching out information that would help to confirm or disconfirm belief (Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 2001). This suggests that whilst they were experiencing doubt, they were not engaged in a search to resolve those doubts. Foreclosed individuals are those who have not experienced a faith crisis and have failed to explore alternative beliefs, adopting the beliefs of their parents and church without question. Characteristics of foreclosure may also include resistance to and insecurity when facing change (Schwartz, 2001). Other researchers have found that religious individuals who are foreclosed exhibit higher levels of prejudice and authoritarianism (Fulton, 1997), and may be more likely to display fundamentalist tendencies when they feel that their beliefs are being threatened (Shaffer & Hastings, 2007).

Motivation. Another important cognitive predictor of religiosity/spirituality is motivation for religious involvement. Gordon Allport distinguished between an extrinsic and intrinsic religious orientation, where “the extrinsically motivated person uses his religion, while the intrinsically motivated lives his religion” (Allport & Ross, 1967, p.434). To be extrinsically motivated in religious pursuits means to identify oneself as religious because of the benefits to be derived from it. Allport explained that these might be social benefits, or religion may fulfil a personal need, such as to escape guilt, feel morally superior, or assist in coping with stress. Intrinsic religion is where someone has learned to value the object of their faith for its own sake, rather than the benefits that can be gained from it. Hence, they are religious/spiritual because they feel that their faith brings them closer to the sacred.

Pargament (1999b) argued that dichotomising motivation for religious/spiritual participation overlooks the complexity of the construct. Just as individuals differ in the ways that they practice and perceive religion and spirituality, they may also have a mixture of motivations, both intrinsic and extrinsic. Recent work incorporating self-determination theory supports a more nuanced perspective of religious/spiritual motivation (Neyrinck, Lens, Vansteenkiste, & Soenens, 2010), but also shows that motivational tendencies moving toward the internalized and intrinsic end of the continuum is associated with greater autonomy support (Brambilla et al., 2015) and quality of life (Lau et al., 2015). In this study, the concept of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation was applied to religious participation, rather than assessing frequency of religious participation itself. We were interested in how the motivation for religious participation predicted the psychological salience of religiosity/spirituality.

The socializing influence of others. Researchers have discovered that the presence of a religious or spiritual affiliation in the microsystem has a greater impact on youth religiosity than factors such as attending a religious school (Regnerus & Smith, 2005; Smith & Denton,

2005). Based on their research, Smith and Denton (2005) and Smith and Snell (2009) argue that socialization from parents tends to have the greatest influence, followed by that of peers. Smith and Snell outlined a cluster of factors which tended to predict high religious devotion in emerging adulthood, including the importance of parental religious attendance and salience, having religious experiences, salience of religion as a teenager, prayer and scripture reading, and having few or no doubts about their faith.

Another type of social influence on religiosity is connection to a community of like-minded individuals. The term “connectedness” has been defined as a perceived bond or sense of belonging that may be expressed in domains such as immediate family attachments, friendships, school, the wider community, and in many cases, church (Jose, Ryan, & Pryor, 2012). Results from the NSYR (Smith & Denton, 2005) suggest that spiritually committed youths experience a high degree of connectedness with their parents, and members of their churches. They were more likely than their less religiously devoted peers to report feelings of isolation or being misunderstood. They also reported a higher number of supportive adults in their lives – who were generally known to their parents (Smith and Denton, 2005, p226). Involvement in a religious community is common to most faith traditions. Social support is often credited to be a potential and viable causal mechanism for the link between lower depressive symptoms and religiosity (Smith, McCullough, & Poll, 2003), and some researchers have theorized that the link between greater religiosity and higher wellbeing may be best explained by social support and social capital that church communities often provide (Good & Willoughby, 2006; Stark, 2000; Stark & Finke, 2000).

In this study we were interested in how the combination of social influences and the cognitive aspects of identity and motivation were jointly related to the psychological salience of religiosity/spirituality. A variety of theoretical hypotheses have been proposed concerning how the socializing influences of factors in the microsystem shape religious participation and

maturity (Martin, White, & Perlman, 2003; Regnerus, Smith, & Smith, 2004). The channeling hypothesis (Himmelfarb, 1980) suggests that religious socialization begins with parents who model personal religiosity/spirituality privately at home and publicly through involvement with the church and other religious groups. Further socialization comes by channeling children toward group and individual peer affiliations which support parents' religious/spiritual beliefs (e.g., encouraging involvement with a religious youth group). The channeling hypothesis has received mixed support in empirical studies (e.g., Martin et al., 2003; Regnerus et al., 2004), but most of this research has primarily focused on the social factors that predict religiosity. Desrosiers, Kelley, and Miller (2011) examined how parental and peer relationship quality and spiritual support were associated with adolescents' relational spirituality (a measure comprised of self-reports of daily spiritual experiences, forgiveness, and positive religious coping), which has several items closely related to our conceptualization of religious/spiritual salience. The authors found that paternal care, maternal spiritual support, and peer spiritual support were each significant predictors of better relational spirituality. In light of these findings, we tested a mediational model using structural equation modeling (SEM) whereby social factors of relationship quality, spiritual support, and community connection were modeled as predictors of increased religious/spiritual motivation and identity, which then predicted the psychological salience of religiosity/spirituality.

The Present Study

Although international research on adolescent religiosity/spirituality is growing (e.g., McNamara-Barry & Abo-Zena, 2014; Pearce, Foster & Hardy, 2013, Petts, 2015, Smith & Denton, 2005, Smith & Snell, 2009), the vast majority of the work in this domain is from North America and particularly the U.S. Thus, the present study attempted to extend the research in this domain and to explore a bit deeper adolescent perspectives of religiosity and

spirituality through an exploratory, mixed-methods, and cross-sectional study involving a New Zealand cohort of older adolescents and emerging adults from Christian backgrounds. New Zealand is a country with a rich religious and spiritual history seen in the cultures of both New Zealand Māori and European settlers. However, like many Western countries, in general New Zealand is a liberal, secular nation (Griffiths, 2011) in which the number of citizens who profess to have no religion is growing as the total population increases. The four main Christian denominations (Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist) have seen significant decreases in membership over the past 50 years, while certain other denominations, such as evangelical churches, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Māori denominations have increased in membership. As immigration continues to occur, there has been a significant increase of other faith traditions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism (Hoverd, 2008). Although there have been some significant contributions to date on religion in adult New Zealanders (for example, Bulbulia, Osborne & Sibley, 2013; Sibley & Bulbulia, 2014; and Wilson, Bulbulia & Sibley, 2013), this study has focused exclusively on a younger population. The specific research questions included:

1. How do young people define "religiosity" and "spirituality"? How similar are these two constructs and where and how do they overlap?
2. Do adolescents consider themselves to be religious and/or spiritual and how is this identification related to the psychological salience of their faith?
3. How are social (e.g., community connections and support from family and friends) and cognitive (e.g., identity and motivation) constructs associated with religious/spiritual salience?
4. Do cognitive constructs of faith identity and motivation mediate the associations between social support constructs and religious/spiritual salience?

Method

We addressed these research questions with an exploratory mixed-methods research design that utilized the differences in quantitative and qualitative methods to answer different or secondary questions (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Participants responded to an extensive online questionnaire in which the open-ended (qualitative) queries were embedded with the quantitative (Likert-based) scales. A number of additional scales not included in the analyses for this study were also included in the questionnaire. The qualitative data was analyzed from an inductive qualitative descriptive perspective (Sandelowski, 2000) with the purpose of describing the findings in a way that matched the language used by the participants, rather than imposing any additional interpretive layers on the data as is common with other strategies. The study was reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury human ethics research committee and all participants provided informed consent.

Participants

University and secondary student participants were recruited through electronic (email, Facebook, website) and paper advertisements, and verbal invitations (both personal and to church youth groups and university-based religiously affiliated student clubs). The majority of participants were from the Canterbury region of New Zealand (although 30% resided outside of the Canterbury province), and indicated they heard about the study through Facebook (25%) or via second-hand recruitment through friends, teachers, and youth leaders (33%). A total of 153 participants accessed the electronic questionnaire, but only 80 (74% female) fully completed the questions considered in this analysis. Participants' ages ranged from 16-21 years (M age = 18.9 years; $SD=1.36$). The majority of participants were New Zealand European (74%), and came from families with parents in middle to upper level professional occupations (81%). The vast majority of participants identified with one of the Christian protestant denominations (84%), with the remaining participants identifying as Catholic (6%) or having another religion or spiritual affiliation (9%). Although the

recruitment strategy attempted to target a diverse range of young people, it was apparent that those participants who completed the measures for this study were mostly young people who would be considered highly religious as eighty-six percent of the participants indicated they attended church or youth group once a week or more.

Procedures

The questionnaire was available to the public via a web-link, so that potential participants could access it and complete it in a convenient place and time. After reading the study information sheet and completing a consent form, participants were able to work through the questionnaire on any electronic device with an internet browser (participants could have also requested a paper version of the questionnaire to be sent to them, but no one selected this option). At the conclusion of the questionnaire, participants were asked to provide their email address or phone number which entered them into a prize draw for one of nine \$50 gift vouchers.

Measures

The questionnaire started with the open-ended items which queried participants for their own definitions of religion/religiosity and spirituality as a prime, then moved to the quantitative scales. All quantitative items (apart from demographic questions) were scored on a four point ordinal scale, with the options, “Very True” (4), “Often True” (3), “Slightly True” (2), and “Not True” (1). Composite scores were calculated by averaging individual items together to retain the 4-point metric.

Psychological salience of religiosity and spirituality. Spirituality and religiosity were each measured with a single item that asked participants to agree/disagree with the statement, “I consider myself to be a religious/spiritual person (respectively).” An additional eight items, which we have collectively termed religious/spiritual salience, queried respondents’ religious/spiritual experiences, the role and relevance of their faith in daily life,

and the importance of their faith (see Table 2 for a full list and descriptive statistics). Items were drawn after an extensive review from previous studies and refined through discussion among the authors, and finally pilot tested with a small sample of Christian young people who completed the full questionnaire (Desmond, et al., 2010; Hunsberger et al., 2001; Smith & Denton, 2005; Zinnbauer et al., 1997).

Spiritual identity. The identity items were adapted from the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (OMEIS; Adams, 1998). The OMEIS is designed to measure and categorize participants into Marcia's four identity statuses, by assessing commitment and exploration in the ideological, relational and vocational domains. The current study measured identity in just one domain: the ideological, and specifically, religion and spirituality. Items from the OMEIS were reworded slightly so that they referred to matters of religion or spirituality (as opposed to the other domains of identity such as friendship and occupation) with two items that mapped onto each of Marcia's four identity statuses. Diffusion included, "When it comes to matters of faith, I just haven't found anything that appeals to me. I don't really feel the need to look", and "The topics of religion or spirituality don't interest me. I'm not fussed one way or the other" ($r = .67$). Foreclosure included, "My views about faith/spirituality are very similar to those of my parents. I'm not really interested in questioning those views", and "My participation/non-participation in religious/spiritual practices/activities (such as church attendance, prayer or meditation) are the same as my parents/caregivers. I've never really questioned why" ($r = .75$). Moratorium included, "I'm not really sure who God is for me. I'd like to make up my mind, but I haven't finished searching yet", and "I feel confused about what I believe right now. I keep changing my views about what is right for me" ($r = .58$). Finally, Achievement included, "I've gone through a time of serious questions about my faith/spirituality, and now I can say that I mostly know what I believe (even if I don't understand everything)", and "I have considered

and re-considered what I believe, and now I think I know where I stand with faith and spirituality” ($r = .64$).

A principle components analysis was employed in order to test that these items reflected the hypothesized factor structure. The principle components analysis with Promax rotation revealed that all items loaded onto four factors which was further confirmed with no substantive cross-loadings ($> .20$) on the pattern matrix. Examination of the scree plot also showed a distinct change in the Eigen values after the fourth factor, although it was slightly under the recommended 1.0 criterion (foreclosure = 2.69, diffusion = 1.72, achievement = 1.35, moratorium = 0.98), and cumulatively accounted for 84.2% of the collective variance. The OMEIS is traditionally used to categorize individuals into one of the four identity statuses. However, this was not possible with the present sample due to the high percentage of the sample reporting an achieved identity (e.g., 60% of the sample had an achievement score of 3 or higher compared to only 14% for foreclosed, 11% for moratorium, and 3% for diffusion). Therefore, individual items for each status were averaged together and participants' continuous scores were used for all four measures in the analyses.

Intrinsic/extrinsic motivations for religious involvement. Frequency of religious attendance is commonly included in measures of religiosity, however few researchers have examined the effects of motivation for doing so. The concept of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from Allport's theory (Allport & Ross, 1967; Donahue, 1985) was applied to church participation and assessed with ten items developed for this study. Intrinsic motivations for church included: “It's important for my spiritual growth”, “It helps me not to feel alone in my faith”, “It helps with my understanding and knowledge of the scriptures”, “By going, I feel closer to God”, and “By going, I receive guidance for how I should live my life” ($\alpha = .91$). Extrinsic motivations for church attendance included: “Many of my friends

attend”, “My leaders inspire me”, “I feel part of something bigger than myself”, “I enjoy catching up with people I know”, and “My leaders are cool” ($\alpha = .89$).

Community. Connectedness to community assessed the degree to which young people felt part of a community group, were valued for their contribution to the group, and were supported by other members in their community (Martin et al., 2003; Smith & Denton, 2005; Whitlock, 2004;). The seven items in the scale included, “There are adults outside of my immediate family who would be willing to help me if I needed it” , “There are older adults in my community who care about what I have to say”, “I have some close friends within my community”, “My community makes me feel valued and accepted”, “We help each other out”, “I trust most of the people in my community”, and lastly, a reverse-coded item: “I don’t really feel a part of my community” ($\alpha = .82$). Participants were asked to identify one or more of the communities that they felt connected to, if any, and 86% ($n=68$) identified some type of religious community (e.g., church, youth group, Bible study group, etc.).

Relationship quality with parents and peers. Due to the overall length of the questionnaire and to minimize potential item overlap with other constructs, seventeen items were employed from the Inventory of Parents and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Amsden & Greenberg, 1987). The selected items were drawn from all three domains of the full IPPA measure (Trust, Communication, and Alienation), and queried the relationship quality with participants’ mother, father, and peers separately. Internal consistency reliability was tested collectively across all items and showed excellent reliability ($\alpha = .92$).

Religiosity/spirituality among family and friends. Drawing on the work of Smith and Denton (2005), seven items measured the extent to which the participants had parents or other family members with an active faith or religious practice, and the extent of religious or spiritual practice and openness of their friends. These items included “At least one of my

parents/caregivers attends church/mass/mosque/synagogue”, “I would describe at least one of my parents/caregivers as having an active faith/spirituality”, “There are several members of my extended family who I would describe as having an active faith/spirituality”, “I can talk about religious/spiritual matters with some or all members of my family”, “I have family members who pray for me (privately or with me present)”, “A lot of my friends have an active faith/spirituality”, and “I have friends with whom I can discuss religious or spiritual matters” ($\alpha = .81$).

Demographics. Several demographic variables were considered as potential covariates in this study. Previous research has found that women report higher religiosity and spirituality than men (Denton, Pearce, & Smith, 2008; Desmond et al., 2010; Smith & Snell, 2009), and Pearce et al., (2013) found a number of demographic differences in their latent class analysis of adolescent religiosity for both socioeconomic status (SES) and ethnicity. In New Zealand, the Maori and Pacific Island communities tend to have a stronger cultural emphasis on the importance of spirituality and religion than New Zealand Europeans (Durie, 1994; Manuela & Sibley, 2013). Finally, some evidence suggests that younger adolescents are more religious than older adolescents and emerging adults (Regnerus & Uecker, 2006). In light of this, participants were asked to report their age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), and religious affiliation. SES was assessed based on parental occupational status. Both parental occupations were categorized according to Statistics New Zealand guidelines (Davis, McLeod, Ransom & Ongley, 1997) on a 5-point ordinal scale ranging from ‘upper level executives and professionals’ (5) to ‘unskilled manual labour/unemployed’ (1).

Results

Qualitative analyses. The first two questions from the questionnaire were open questions which asked participants to write what they understood “religion/religiosity” and “spirituality” to mean. The themes from the descriptions that the participants gave were derived from a qualitative descriptive analysis (Sandelowski, 2000). Participants’ definitions were usually one sentence, with only a few being over two sentences. Most were between ten and fifteen words, with the few longer definitions being over twenty words. Key words or common clauses were those that frequently appeared as the subject of a definition, and themes were derived by compiling key words/clauses that were synonymous with each other. Themes that were mentioned by 20% or more of the participants were classified as main themes, while minor themes were considered those described by 10-19% of participants. Finally common ideas (<10%) and idiosyncratic ideas (<5%) were also identified (see Table 1). The coding process and identification of themes was discussed frequently amongst the authors, but a formal assessment of inter-rater reliability was not conducted.

Two main themes and two minor themes were identified for spirituality. The overarching themes were (a) connectedness or relationship to God or a Higher being, and (b) ‘belief’ as a standalone word, or regarding God or Higher being. Over 30% of participants wrote that spirituality is about a sense of connection, relationship or bond. The object of this connection was usually God, a Higher being, or supernatural force. For example, “Being connected to God.” “Your bond with God, or a higher power.” The minor themes were (a) connection with or belief in a ‘spiritual’ or non-material dimension (transcendence). For example, “Being aware that our natural world isn't the be all and end all of existence. Being spiritual means understanding that there is more to our world than we see and beyond our control.” (b) Spirituality was also defined as incorporating part of the self – one’s spirit, soul, or deeper feelings. For example, “Things regarding one’s spirit, more metaphysical experiences, belief/participation in a greater realm.” “Being aware of God, who is

supernatural and above everything physical, as well as our own non-physical entity – soul and spirit.” “The part of you that longs to identify to a higher power, e.g. God.” Three common ideas were that spirituality provided a sense of meaning and purpose, that it was related to religion, and that the Holy Spirit was an important element. This context given to beliefs suggested that spirituality was not only understood as a cognitive concept, but is something that is experienced and lived. The ways that participants referred to “belief” suggested an engagement with the object of those beliefs that shapes the way a person lives. Examples include, “Believing in God and the bible, and behaving accordingly. Having faith.” “Spirituality is a personal belief in “otherworldly” things that tend to shape how a person lives their life and their morals and beliefs.”

There were three main themes and one minor theme for the term “religion/religiosity”. (a) ‘Belief’ was again a particularly prominent theme, and this was used as either a stand-alone word, with regard to God, or in an organisational sense – a “set of beliefs” or “system of beliefs”. The descriptions suggested that religion is not just miscellaneous beliefs about anything of a sacred nature, but rather a network of beliefs that are adhered to (i.e., doctrine). For example, Religion is “an organized collection of beliefs shared by multiple people.” “A group that follow a set of dogma about the belief in atheistic, monotheistic, or pantheistic views of a diety, the afterlife, and the meaning of life. This suggests that participants saw religion/religiosity to be more of an organised system of beliefs than spirituality. (b) As illustrated in the two quotes above, community affiliation and groups who share similar beliefs, or belonging to a group, including the mention of specific religions was the second major theme. Another example includes, “Being part of a community with the same morals and goals of life as oneself, in order to progress on a healthy manner along that path.” (c) Ways of living, practices, rituals or traditions related to one’s beliefs was the final theme. When participants described religion they did not only describe prescribed belief

(“system” or “set” of beliefs), but also prescribed behavior. Many of the participants described that the purpose of a system of religious beliefs was to shape behavior by providing expectations and contexts for how to live. For example, one participant wrote, “Religion is what we believe in. It’s our faith that we live by and it gives us guidelines to help us live each day.” A minor theme similar to this was the mention of rules, morals, adhering to rules, or religion as a set of rules that are to be followed. For example, “Following specific doctrines and rules centered around a belief system.” “Adherence to common practices / regimes / routines / regulations to achieve strong unity of belief.”

A number of participants described similarities across the two terms which warranted a separate theme. When the respondents were defining spirituality, religious practices were sometimes mentioned as facilitating one’s spirituality, or one’s connection to God/Higher Being, as the following statements about spirituality allude to: “Going to church and other religious activities therefore being connected to God.” “What I think is that spirituality can be considered someone’s consciousness, but through Christianity and building a relationship with God it is opened up fully and we begin to understand and know what it means to be spiritual.” These statements and others suggested that for these religiously affiliated adolescents, their religious worldview provided a context through which they expressed, understood, and defined their spirituality.

When the respondents were using spirituality in their definitions for religion, spirituality appeared to be something that could exist apart from religion. Sometimes it seemed that spirituality was the superordinate category and religion provided a specific set of beliefs or guidelines within that, and in other definitions religion was the broader category that provided the context for the spiritual experience. In the following statements respondents used spirituality in their explanations of religion as, “A specific set of beliefs, rituals, or

practices regarding your spirituality.” “Religion is faith lived out, an extension of spirituality that marks every facet of one’s personhood.”

Associations across Spirituality, Religiosity, and Religious/Spiritual Salience

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics and zero-order bivariate correlations across the individual religious/spiritual salience statements and their associations with the two items, “I consider myself to be a religious/spiritual person (respectively).” Rather unsurprisingly considering the sample demographics, on average all items were rated towards the higher end of the 4-point scale, and the sample viewed themselves on average as more spiritual than religious (M difference = 0.34; $t = 2.51$ (1, 79); $p = .01$). There was a moderate positive association between religiosity and spirituality, but this correlation was not high enough to suggest substantial overlap in the two items. While all the correlations with the religious/spiritual salience items were modest to moderately strong for both religiosity and spirituality, all of the correlations except for one (*I am aware of God's presence in difficult times*) were stronger in their association with spirituality than religiosity.

To explore the factor structure of religious/spiritual salience with religiosity and spirituality we employed a principal components analysis across all of the items. Only one factor was extracted (Eigen value = 6.84) which explained 59% of the variance across the items collectively, with items loading between .86 and .52. Rather interestingly, the statement, ‘I consider myself to be a religious person’ was the lowest loading factor. A confirmatory factor analysis confirmed this factor structure and showed acceptable fit ($\chi^2 = 31.83$; $df = 39$; $p = .42$; CFI = .99, RMSEA = .02) after four constraints were added across pairs of error terms (correlations ranged from .26 to .56). In light of this, a single composite variable was created from these 12 items that reflected the psychological salience of religiosity/spirituality ($\alpha = .92$).

Table 3 displays the descriptive statistics and bivariate zero order correlations across the study variables. Religious/spiritual salience was rated relatively high, while three of the four identity variables were quite low (diffusion, moratorium, and foreclosure). On average participants felt they had slightly higher intrinsic motivations for church compared with extrinsic (M difference = 0.24; $t = 2.92$ (1, 79); $p = .005$), and on average participants also felt that they had strong community connections, a supportive spiritual environment among family and friends, and close relationships with parents and peers. Religious/spiritual salience was significantly associated with every variable except for age, and the association with intrinsic motivations for church attendance was so strong that it posed problems with multicollinearity in multivariate analyses. Somewhat surprisingly, the correlations among the spiritual identity variables were small and only two of these were significant. Increased diffusion was associated with increased moratorium, and increased moratorium was associated with lower identity achievement. There were also rather distinct associations between individual identity variables and other predictor variables. For example, while intrinsic motivations for church was associated with all the identity variables, extrinsic motivations had small associations with foreclosure and moratorium but these were not statistically significant ($ps = .06$). Better community connections was only associated with lower diffusion, while a more supportive faith network among family and friends was only associated with increased foreclosure. Closer relationships with parents and peers was associated with higher foreclosure and lower moratorium which was also associated with older participants. Thus, out of the four spiritual identity variables, achievement was associated with the fewest variables in the study.

Much like religious/spiritual salience, intrinsic motivations for attending church was associated with many of the study variables except for age, while extrinsic motivations for attending church was associated with fewer variables and less strongly than intrinsic

motivations. Due to the strong correlation between intrinsic motivations for church and religious/spiritual salience, this variable was not included in the multivariate analyses reported below as it overwhelmed the contribution of the other variables in predicting religious/spiritual salience. Finally, there were small associations between increased community connections and better spiritual support and closer relationships among family and friends, and a moderately strong association between better spiritual support and closer relationships among family and friends.

Before moving to multivariate analyses, we considered how the measured demographic variables were associated with participants' religious/spiritual salience. The analyses revealed no significant associations between religious/spiritual salience and age, SES or gender. Analyses with the ethnicity and religious affiliation variables were not possible due to the high percentage of participants who were New Zealand European (74%), with very low numbers of participants from a variety of other ethnicities; and the majority of participants (84%) who were associated with a variety of Christian protestant denominations and non-denominational churches

Multivariate analyses. To examine how the social support variables (community, faith of family/friends, and relationship quality), along with religious/spiritual identity and church motivation were collectively associated with religious/spiritual salience, we conducted two sets of multiple regression analyses. In the first set of analyses, religious/spiritual salience was simultaneously regressed on community and faith of family/friends or relationship quality with family/friends (because of the high correlation and associated multicollinearity issues between the faith of family/friends and relationship closeness variables, these variables were run in separate models). Somewhat surprisingly, across both analyses, community connection was the only significant predictor of religious/spiritual salience (with faith of family/friends, community $B=.38$, $SE=.12$; $\beta=.33$; $p=.003$; R^2 change from .06 to .16; F_{change}

= 9.43, $p=.003$; with relationship quality, community $B=.38$, $SE=.13$; $\beta=.33$; $p=.005$; R^2 change from .05 to .14; $F_{\text{change}} = 8.43$, $p=.005$). Follow-up tests showed that community connection mediated the association between relationship quality with parents/peers and religious/spiritual salience. In other words, better relationship quality with parents/peers strengthened religious/spiritual salience by way of stronger community connections (Preacher & Hayes (2004) bootstrap estimates: unmediated direct effect $B=.22$, $SE=.06$; $t=2.02$, $p=.05$; mediated direct effect $B=.11$, $SE=.11$; $t=1.01$, $p=.32$; indirect effect mean=.12, $SE=.06$; 95% CI=.004 to .287). In the second set of regression analyses, religious/spiritual salience was regressed simultaneously onto the four identity variables and extrinsic motivations for church. Three of these variables retained significant net associations with religious/spiritual salience, including diffusion spiritual identity ($B=-.66$, $SE=.12$; $\beta=-.47$; $p<.001$), achievement spiritual identity ($B=.19$, $SE=.06$; $\beta=.28$; $p<.01$), and extrinsic motivations for church ($B=.28$, $SE=.07$; $\beta=.35$; $p<.001$).

Testing a Mediational Model between Social and Cognitive Predictors

To examine possible indirect (mediated) paths from community through the motivation and identity variables to religious/spiritual salience, structural equation modelling was employed with AMOS (see Figure 1). Each of the paths displayed in the model in Figure 1 was statistically significant, except for the links from community to identity achievement and from community to religious/spiritual salience. The effect of community connections on religious/spiritual salience was fully mediated (standardized indirect effect = .24) by its association with both higher extrinsic church motivations and lower diffusion identity. In addition, higher extrinsic motivations for church, lower diffusion identity and higher identity achievement were all significantly predictors of stronger religious/spiritual salience. This model showed good predictive utility of religious/spiritual salience, accounting for 50% of the variance with good fit estimates ($\chi^2 = 2.27$; $df = 3$; $p = .52$; CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00).

Due to the substantial skewed distributions of the identity variables, all of the multivariate analyses were re-tested with the identity variables converted to dichotomous measures based on median splits (other transformations typically used were not successful in normalising the distributions). The results were largely unchanged except for slight reductions in the strength of the associations which resulted in identity achievement no longer remaining a significant predictor of religious/spiritual salience.

Discussion

Commonalities and Distinctions between Religiosity and Spirituality

This study investigated four research questions concerning religiosity and spirituality in a relatively small sample of Christian young people from New Zealand. The first and second research questions concerned young people's perceptions of religiosity and spirituality and how identifying as religious and/or spiritual was associated with a variety of indicators of the psychological salience of religiosity/spirituality. Both the qualitative and quantitative results suggested considerable overlap concerning the concepts of religiosity and spirituality. It appears that the majority of participants understood these to be slightly different, but highly related concepts. In the qualitative data, the distinction seemed to concern the organised/institutional framework in which religion is oriented and the expectations for behavioral influences for religiosity. Similar to a study of Canadian adolescents (Spurr, Berry, and Walker, 2013), participants' definitions of spirituality seemed to focus more on individual experiences and idiosyncratic expression than their definitions of religiosity. These themes appear to reflect the common dichotomy found in much of the literature where spirituality is understood to be more experiential, individual and authentic, whereas religion is seen to involve the institutional, ritual aspects (Ammerman, 2013; Zinnbauer et al., 1997).

The shared conceptual space between these two constructs in the qualitative analyses was the centrality of faith/belief in the divine and/or transcendent. Pargament (1996) asserted that the overlap between religion and spirituality concerned the search for the sacred. While the findings from this study do not challenge that notion, they do supplement it by showing that from the subjective perspective of Christian adolescents, they gave voice to this search by focusing on faith/belief in their own journey (spirituality) and as related to the systems of beliefs found in organized contexts (religion). The centrality of belief for spirituality was also reported by Spurr et al., (2013), in a qualitative study of older adolescents from more diverse religious backgrounds. The quantitative data also showed that the religious/spiritual salience items had a stronger connection towards adolescents identifying as spiritual than religious, yet all the items (including the identification as religious and/or spiritual) loaded on a single factor. Data from the NSYR showed that just over half of participants reported they were more spiritual than religious at both Wave 1 (55%) and Wave 2 (60%) of the study (Denton et al., 2008). Further results from this study (Pearce et al., 2013) suggest that this ambiguity between religiousness and spirituality seems to contribute to the distinctions in latent classes across the NSYR ‘adapters’ (high personal spirituality and less involved in religious institutions), ‘assenters’ (more involved in religious institutions but lower personal salience), and ‘avoiders’ (firm belief in God, but no personal religious/spiritual practice or institutional involvement).

Predicting the Psychological Salience of Religiosity/Spirituality

Our third and fourth research questions concerned the associations across social (community connections, quality of relationships, and supportive faith network) and cognitive (faith identity, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations) constructs with religious/spiritual salience. The regression models with only the social constructs showed that community connections was the best predictor of religious/spiritual salience over relationship quality and

the supportive faith network of family/friends. Intrinsic motivation was dropped from the analyses due to its high correlation with religious/spiritual salience. For the predictors of extrinsic motivation and identity, we found that increased identity achievement, lower diffusion, and greater extrinsic motivations were associated with stronger religious/spiritual salience. Finally, the SEM analyses with both sets of predictors showed that better community connections was associated with lower identity diffusion and higher extrinsic motivations for religious participation which then predicted the psychological salience of religiosity/spirituality. This mediational pathway from the social context of religion and spirituality to the cognitive identity and motivation constructs confirms a general socialization perspective of spiritual development and also breaks new ground.

Previous studies have focused mostly on the influence of parents and peers and overlooked community connection (Gunnoe & Moore, 2002; Smith & Denton, 2005). For example, Gunnoe and Moore (2002) found that socialisation in the form of social role models in childhood and adolescence were significant predictors of religious salience, attendance, and frequency of prayer in emerging adulthood. The presence of religious, supportive mothers was highly predictive of religiosity; however, peer religiosity exerted a slightly stronger influence. The present results showing that community connection mediated the link between parent and peer relationship quality seems to support the channeling hypothesis (Himmelfarb, 1980; Martin et al., 2003), whereby parents exert some influence on peer relationships and group connections that support their religious socialization goals. Perhaps when children are young, parents channel their children into church participation, but then at some point (possibly in adolescence) there is a transition from tacit attendance to internalized engagement as the psychological salience of religion/spirituality grows. The current results suggest that such a developmental transition could be mediated by the connectedness young people feel to a supportive community. The important role of the peer group was also

demonstrated by Brambilla et al., (2015) who found that Catholic adolescents from Italy that were involved in a peer group which demonstrated the intrinsic value of their faith (greater enjoyment, authenticity and consistency in living according to their faith) showed higher levels of an identified internalization of their religiosity. Cohen-Malayev, Schachter, and Rich (2014) also showed that a non-alienating school environment (conceptually similar to our measure of connectedness) predicted meaningful religious study which then predicted religious identity. Finally, in a study of Muslim students from Malaysia, school engagement and mosque involvement along with parental religious socialization were the best predictors of a Muslim religious personality (Krauss, Ismail, Suandi, Hamzah, et al., 2012).

For the motivation and identity variables, although all the measures of faith identities were associated with religious/spiritual salience in the expected direction by themselves (bivariate associations), lower diffusion and higher achieved spiritual identity were the only two retained in the regression analyses along with extrinsic motivations for attending church. On average the sample reported rather high levels of identity achievement and low levels of identity diffusion (there was also a moderate negative correlation between the two), and it seems that relatively small individual differences particularly on diffusion contributed to greater religious/spiritual salience. In some ways, our measure of diffusion identity (lack of exploration, lack of commitment) is similar to amotivation, or a general apathy towards the religious/spiritual dimension. From a self-determination theoretical perspective this would be at the farthest end of the motivation continuum and is associated with controlled regulation and nonself-determined behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2000). While not directly comparable to assessments of motivation based on self-determination theory, these results are compatible with studies from this perspective. For example, in a sample of mostly middle-aged adults, Soenens and colleagues (2012) found that greater autonomous religious motivations (representing integration and identification) was the best predictor of a transcendent view of

God (interpreted as higher religiosity), and also predicted a more symbolic cognitive style towards religion. In contrast, controlled religious motivations (representing introjected and external regulation) did not predict either of these religious orientations.

Strengths, Limitations, Future Directions, and Conclusion

The novel findings and considerable overlap between the results of this study and previous research suggests that New Zealand Christian adolescents perceive and process religious/spiritual constructs similar to their North American and European peers.

Nevertheless, the present findings should be considered in light of the following limitations.

First, this is a cross-sectional study based solely on self-reported data. While that has helped us capture participant's subjective perceptions of their religious and spiritual orientations and test a theoretical model of the links between social and cognitive factors associated with religious/spiritual salience, it remains possible that these associations may work in the opposite direction or be related to one another in patterns that were not tested in this study.

Second, the small and homogeneous nature of the sample means that the present results should not be considered applicable to adolescents outside a Christian and mostly protestant culture. Third, our conceptualization and measurement of the psychological salience of religiosity/spirituality certainly extends previous research that has employed this concept; nevertheless, the measure is exploratory and requires further testing and potential refinement.

For example, the strong correlation with intrinsic motivation which was dropped from our multivariate analyses suggests considerable overlap between these concepts. Fourth, while we have included a number of social predictors of religiosity/spirituality that are theoretically relevant for adolescents and emerging adults, an important variable not considered is the role of media. Electronic media is an ever present source of information in the lives of many Western adolescents, and there is some evidence to suggest that young people may pick and

choose their beliefs, which may be partly influenced by what they read and see in the media (Smith & Denton, 2005). This is certainly an area of future research possibilities.

In conclusion, the cross-sectional and correlational results of this study suggest that as adolescents and emerging adults from Christian communities in New Zealand develop an understanding of and relationship to their religiosity and spirituality, they are pressed to orient their faith to the context of the religious system that they are affiliated with and their own unique spiritual experiences and perspectives. While there seems to be a greater affinity towards spirituality than religiosity, there is considerable overlap as the two constructs relate to faith. We have operationally defined the psychological salience of religiosity/spirituality as the degree to which one's faith is important, relevant, accessible, and emotionally close. This salience appears to be predicted by the social support from community and relationships with family and friends by way of stronger religious/spiritual motivation and identity. However, this exploratory research needs to be further examined through longitudinal research and a larger more diverse sample.

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Table 1: Frequencies of themes for spirituality and religion

	Spirituality	<i>n</i>	%	Religion/Religiosity	<i>n</i>	%
Main Themes	Connectedness/relationship (with God/Higher being)	27	33.8	Belief (System/set of beliefs, standalone belief, or belief in God/Higher being)	40	50.0
	Belief (Standalone, or belief in God/Higher being)	22	27.5	Ways of living/ritual/practices	22	27.5
				Community/group affiliation/specific religion	13	16.3
Minor Themes	Non-material dimension/other realm	14	17.5	Rules/Morals	10	12.5
	Part of the self	11	13.8			
Common Ideas < 10%	Ways of living/ritual/practices	6	7.5	Spirituality	6	7.5
				Negative view	5	6.3
	Purpose/Meaning	5	6.3			
	Religion	5	6.3			
Idiosyncratic Ideas < 5%	Holy Spirit	5	6.3			
	Growth/transformation	4	5.0	Purpose/Meaning	1	1.3
	Relation to others	3	3.8			
	Relation to the natural world	3	3.8			

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients across items of religious/spiritual psychological salience.

Variable Name	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>Factor</i>		
		<i>Loadings</i> ¹	<i>r</i> Religious ²	<i>r</i> Spiritual ²
I consider myself to be a religious person.	2.95 (1.11)	.52	-	.34
I consider myself to be a spiritual person.	3.29 (0.96)	.76	.34	-
My belief in God is an important part of who I am.	3.55 (0.88)	.86	.44	.57
My religious/spiritual experiences have shaped who I am.	3.53 (0.84)	.84	.41	.60
I have had at least one meaningful spiritual experience in the past.	3.46 (0.97)	.77	.35	.54
Maintaining my faith is important to me.	3.57 (0.85)	.85	.40	.59
My faith shapes my daily life.	3.21 (0.95)	.81	.27	.57
I feel close to God.	2.86 (1.00)	.79	.39	.49
I feel connected to a higher power/Being/God/transcendent reality/power within myself.	3.20 (0.89)	.77	.25	.73
I am aware of God's presence in difficult times.	3.31 (0.99)	.71	.39	.38

NOTE: $N = 80$; ¹ Principal components analysis ($R^2 = .60$). ²All correlations were statistically significant at $p < .05$.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and bivariate zero-order correlations across study variables.

<i>Study Variables</i>	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Religious/Spiritual salience	3.13 (0.71)	-.54**	-.33**	.22*	.37**	.78**	.39**	.36**	.24*	.22*
2. Diffusion	1.17 (0.46)	--	.35**	-.13	-.18	-.45**	-.04	-.32**	-.11	-.17
3. Moratorium	1.66 (0.80)		--	-.18	-.33**	-.46**	-.21	-.12	-.14	-.24*
4. Foreclosure	1.76 (0.85)			--	.02	.20	.21	.13	.48**	.35**
5. Achievement	2.93 (0.93)				--	.31**	.04	.08	.01	.03
6. Church intrinsic motivations	3.23 (0.88)					--	.55**	.35**	.33**	.28*
7. Church extrinsic motivations	2.88 (0.81)						--	.24*	.21	.10
8. Community connection	3.40 (0.55)							--	.21	.34**

9. Faith of family/friends	3.04 (0.85)	--	.64**
10. Relationship quality with family/friends	3.02 (0.64)	--	--

Note: $N = 80$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

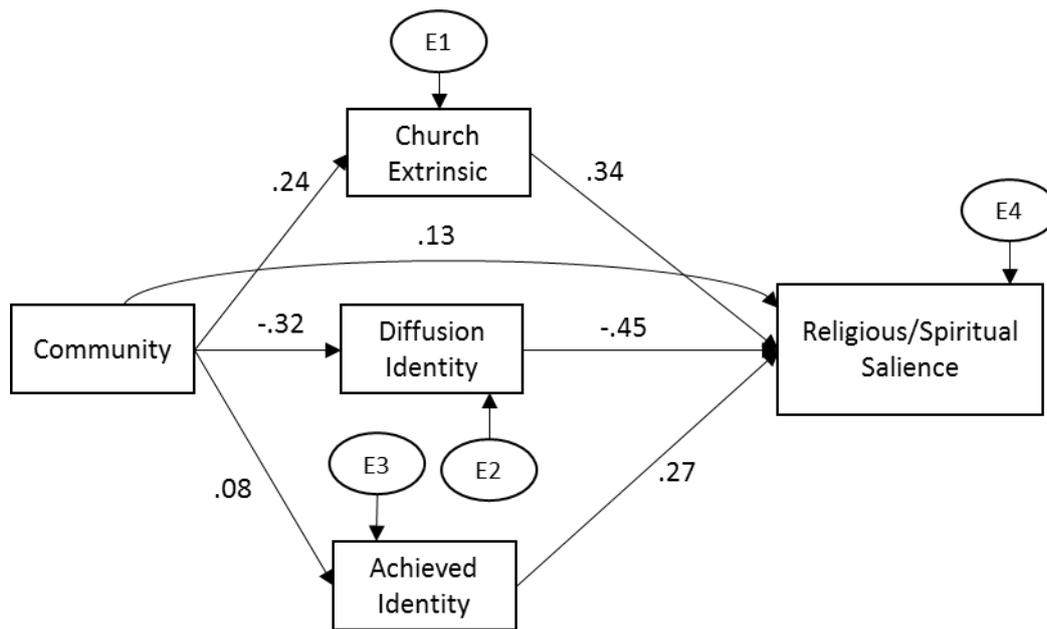


Figure 1: Structural equation path model of associations between adolescent community connections, identity and extrinsic church motivations, and religious/spiritual salience ($R^2 = .50$)