SPIRITUAL BELIEFS IN EARLY FAMILY EXPERIENCES AND COUPLES’ CO-CREATION OF SPIRITUAL BELIEFS DURING THE EARLY YEARS OF MARRIAGE

by

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ABSTRACT

Research has yet to explain how individuals develop and incorporate their religious and spiritual views into their sense of self and romantic relationship beliefs and behaviors. The current study seeks to understand how individuals and couples understand their spiritual and religious beliefs and use them to negotiate satisfying marital relationships. Self-discrepancy theory assists in understanding the ways in which individuals and couples navigate the development of their spiritual, religious, and relationship beliefs, as participants beliefs are often fluid as they work to reconcile various discrepancies. To understand how participants experience these beliefs in family of origin, courtship, and the early years of marriage, a story-telling methodology is employed. Many couples experience their religious beliefs as being focused on the organization, denomination, rites, and rituals, whereas spirituality is more often about beliefs, movement or questioning, and connection to a God or Higher Power. Spiritual and religious beliefs influenced the way participants viewed romantic relationships in terms of marriage, sex, marital cohesion, dating, family of origin, children, pregnancy, cohabitation, and divorce. This study represents participants’ lived experiences and the various ways in which spiritual and religious beliefs permeate into other aspects of marital life. Interestingly, there appears to be a high salience of religious and spiritual beliefs in regards to relational beliefs and behavior beginning in adolescence leading up to marriage and then a reduction in saliency for some after marriage until the presence of children when saliency increases for some couples.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Research on romantic relationships has resulted in the development of a great deal of knowledge about how individuals navigate through relationships. However, research is limited in understanding why couples navigate relationship decisions the way they do. In addressing what may guide relationship decisions, one direction of research has been on the role of religion and to a more limited extent, spiritual beliefs. Between 80-90% of individuals’ state that they have some religious or spiritual belief (Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001), yet how these beliefs influence the ways in which individuals view their world and relationships is largely unknown. The current study explores how romantic relationships develop in the context of spiritual beliefs.

Spiritual beliefs, especially those that evolve out of early religious experiences, are likely to have early roots in childhood. In order to fully appreciate how spiritual beliefs influence the development of romantic relationships, one must first understand how spiritual and relational beliefs develop throughout childhood. One of the primary socialization mechanisms for beliefs, particularly spiritual beliefs, is the family (Durkheim, 1961, 1965; Keeley, 1976). Much of what individuals think, feel, and do, is influenced by early experiences in the family of origin. It is well known that individuals are more likely to identify as being religious if their parents were religious (Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008; Hayes & Pittelkow, 1993; Keeley, 1976; Levitt, 1995). There continues to be research efforts to understand how patterns of behavior and beliefs are transferred from one generation to the next. These patterns suggest it is crucial to understand how
individuals experience both spirituality and relationships in their family of origin before exploring how individuals shape and create their own family of procreation with a romantic partner. In order to explore the transmission process it is useful to view the way early family experiences and beliefs become in varying degrees a part of the child’s cognitive and emotional mapping of their world and relationships within it. It is unknown how individuals integrate these experiences and beliefs into their sense of self. Understanding how these experiences and beliefs influence self assists in the development of a story about how individuals shape and create their relationships with their marital partners.

Based on research much can be said about relationship formation and development, as well as what seems to make relationships succeed or fail. Relational beliefs have been shown to influence how relationships develop and if these relationships continue (Pargament, 2002). How these beliefs are translated into action within the context of relational decision making is virtually unknown. Religious affiliation and beliefs appear to influence relationships and relational decisions in a variety of areas including: problem solving (Kaiser, 1991; Pargament, et al., 1988), sexuality (Kaiser, 1991; Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, Murray-Swank, 2003; Murray-Swank, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2005; Ribner & Kleinplatz, 2007), commitment (Walker, Jones, Wuensch, Aziz, & Cope, 2008), stress and coping (Fabricatore, Handal, Rubio, & Gilner, 2004; Park, 2005; Park & Cohen, 1993; Plante, Saucedo, & Rice, 2001), and adjusting to divorce (Krumrei, Mahoney, & Pargament, 2009), among others. Despite the appearance that there is a breadth of relational phenomena known to be influenced by spiritual
beliefs, often only demographic indicators such as religious affiliation and frequency of church attendance (Mackey & O’Brien, 2005; Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001) are used to make these connections. This research allows only for comparisons to be made among religious denominations and regularity of attendance to religions services. This research is very limited in enhancing knowledge of how spiritual beliefs might become integrated into romantic relationship functioning. How spiritual beliefs are understood and used to develop satisfying, healthy relationships is largely unknown and unexplored.

Depth must be sought as to how individuals’ and couples’ spiritual beliefs influence courtship and marriage. Individuals must determine the domains (e.g., communication, commitment, sexuality, conflict, maintenance) where spiritual beliefs influence their relationships. It is quite easy to ask various questions about the existence of spiritual beliefs and derive links to romantic relationships; however, providing meaning to these links often becomes a guessing game because of the incomplete understanding as to why these linkages exist. What is needed in developing more depth of understanding is to allow individuals in coupled relationships to tell two interrelated stories. The first story is of early experiences in the family of origin with a focus on religious and spiritual experiences and how these experiences become part of an individuals’ working model of the self in terms of world view and relationships. The second story focuses on how individuals and couples incorporate their religious and spiritual beliefs into their thoughts and behaviors in romantic relationships.
The present study seeks to gain an in-depth knowledge of how individuals use their spiritual and religious beliefs to guide, direct and maintain their romantic relationships. Many individuals use spiritual and religious beliefs to guide the way they think, act and feel about the world in which they live (Emmons, 1999; Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). Individuals seem to use these beliefs to guide their lives and relationships (Mahoney, et al., 2001), yet little is known about how this process works. The current study seeks to gain a more complete story about how individuals develop and incorporate their religious and spiritual beliefs into their sense of self and into their adult romantic relationships.

As individuals develop, a sense of self develops with various inputs from family, friends, and society regarding what behaviors and beliefs are acceptable and those that are not (Erikson, 1963). Many individuals one of the ways in which beliefs and behaviors are established is through the oral and written transmission of spiritual beliefs (including religious beliefs) from generation to generation. These acceptable behaviors and beliefs are reinforced and modified as individuals develop and add to their range of life experiences. This development leads many individuals to create a personalized set of spiritual beliefs. Spiritual beliefs act as a guide to help individuals make life decisions that align with their beliefs and values. One aim of this study is to explicate how individuals develop, create, and experience their spiritual belief system and the role that it plays in their relational lives.

The way that individuals think about and act in romantic relationships is often tied to what they feel is acceptable within these relationships. Individuals may have strong
feelings and beliefs about various relational phenomena such as dating, cohabitation, and sexual relations. It is not fully understood how these relational beliefs develop and the role that they play in shaping the courtship process and early years of marriage. Spiritual beliefs may have an influential position in the beliefs and values surrounding romantic relationships and play a role as couples negotiate the formation of a dyadic set of spiritual beliefs. This study explores how spiritual beliefs influence and shape the courtship process and early years of marriage.

In order to develop a clear sense of how spiritual beliefs are used to guide, direct, and maintain relationships romantic partners will be asked to tell stories about themselves and their relationships. Two stories are told about how spiritual beliefs assist in the development of self and relationships. Stories provide a means of obtaining individuals’ and couples’ unique experiences and the meaning that they give to relational events. The first story centers on how individuals’ develop a sense of self as it relates to relationship expectations and spiritual beliefs. Beliefs formed through early experiences in the family of origin were explored with specific attention to relationships and spirituality. This story provides an understanding of how spiritual beliefs are integrated into the self from family of origin, and how participants understand spirituality and religion. The second story focuses on how individuals and couples incorporate their religious and spiritual beliefs into their romantic relationships. In order to explicate the ways in which individual spiritual beliefs influence the courtship process and the early years of marriage.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To meet the dual goals of this study, one must understand how spiritual and religious beliefs are viewed by individuals. Prior to beginning this study and addressing the influence of spiritual beliefs on the co-creation of relationship stories, one must examine the state of current knowledge in the field. Each goal of the study will be discussed in relation to current knowledge and theoretical perspectives driving the study of individual spiritual and relational belief development and the co-creation of relational stories in the early years of marriage.

Defining Spiritual Beliefs

Spirituality has been used to represent a wide range of individual and group beliefs without being clearly defined. For some, spiritual beliefs stand apart from religion, and for others, spiritual beliefs work in conjunction with or are a part of their religious identity (Hill, et al., 2000). For instance, one may be spiritual but not affiliate with any religious organization or denomination while others view their spirituality through their religious affiliation (Zhai, Ellison, Stokes, & Glenn, 2008). One limitation in this area currently is the lack of consensus regarding the working definition of spirituality (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Reich, 2000). Often studies use the terms spirituality and religion interchangeably never explicating how the two are distinct, if in fact they are. It is important to allow participants to guide a definition through their experiences, given the lack of conceptual clarity that currently exists.
I believe that spiritual beliefs are best conceptualized as an umbrella term. Religious beliefs and affiliations may be branches within spiritual beliefs for many individuals and completely distinct for others (Hill, et. al., 2000). Religion has two distinct branches or functions, one organizational and the other personal. The organizational function of religion is served through attending religious services and being part of a religious community that offers various social supports, whereas the personal function is the integration of teachings, doctrine, values, and beliefs into the view of self. The personal aspects of religion may look similar to the broader notion of spiritual beliefs, but are often informed by doctrine from an organized religious group. For example, an individual may integrate anti-contraception beliefs into the sense of self as defined by specific doctrine (e.g., Catholic); however, he/she may or may not choose to adhere to these anti-contraception beliefs in their relationships. By viewing spirituality in a way that encompasses both organized and personalized religious and spiritual beliefs, individuals are allowed to express the ways in which their beliefs exist. Many working definitions of spirituality involve the notion of a Higher Power (e.g., God, Jesus, Mother, Earth), the idea that these beliefs connect an individual to this Higher Power, and a set of personalized beliefs that help to solidify the relationship between a Higher Power and connection (Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes & Leaf, 1988). Current work in this area has not attempted to distinguish or understand the complexity of individuals’ spiritual beliefs and the ways in which they operate in relation to religion. The first goal of the current study acknowledges the complexity of spiritual beliefs for individuals and couples by allowing participants to define how they see themselves in terms of religion and spirituality.
Storytelling as a Way of Knowing Process

Little is known about the meaning that people give to their spiritual beliefs and romantic relationships as most of the current work has used surveys and quantitative scales that provide a foundation for links between spiritual beliefs and relational behaviors. Storytelling is a natural way for individuals and couples to recall important life events and to give meaning to these experiences. Studies have not attempted to provide thoughtful exploration of the process by which individuals integrate their early experiences into the development of self, particularly in regards to spiritual and relational beliefs. Storytelling allows participants to express how they believe their spiritual and relational beliefs are integrated into self and influence current and future spiritual and relational behaviors. Storytelling is particularly useful in understanding complex phenomenon and the meaning that participants give to events, beliefs and others in their lives. Although storytelling has not been used explicitly in the study of spiritual beliefs, there is extensive work using stories to capture the process by which relational beliefs and experiences are incorporated into the individual and the romantic dyad (Ben-Ari & Lavee, 2007; Currie, 2007; Orbuch & Veroff, 1993). The use of storytelling assists in the ability to explicate the meaning and process of experience without the need to speculate as to how individuals view the relationship. For instance, some previous work (Payne & Ridley, 2009; Payne & Ridley, 2008) has shown the influence of spiritual beliefs on romantic relationship functioning through quantitative methods, however, the meaning behind this influence is unknown and interpretation of results is speculative. The use of
storytelling minimizes the need to speculate on how spiritual beliefs influence individual and relationship development and maintenance.

**Current State of Knowledge Regarding the Role of Spiritual Beliefs in Romantic Relationships**

The current state of knowledge about the role that spiritual beliefs play in romantic relationships is quite incomplete, and inadequate in its use of consistent theoretical frameworks and measurement tools. The current study uses theoretical frameworks to guide the exploration of how spiritual beliefs influence individual and romantic relationship development. Thus far, the fields of spirituality and relationships have been linked together in a seemingly random spattering of connections, led in part by an ill-defined concept of spirituality and inconsistent measurement tools. This study improves on some of the problems in the field by including the use of theoretical guides as well as storytelling in order to minimize the need to speculate on the relationship between spirituality and romantic partnerships.

One significant critique of the spirituality literature when it comes to relationships is the scattered and inconsistent use of theoretical perspectives. In a general literature search of spirituality and religion one may find as many as six different theoretical approaches (i.e., attachment, meaning making, attribution, spiritual modeling, social exchange, and social-cognitive) applied to a wide variety of relationship phenomena (e.g., conflict, prejudice, marital satisfaction, the influence of family relations, sexuality, personality, homophobia, and religious conversion). This results in a lack of clarity as to how spiritual beliefs operate in these various domains and the meaning or reasons behind
these cognitions and behaviors. For instance, studies have suggested that spiritual beliefs may fulfill attachment needs for some individuals and that individuals have various spiritual needs depending on attachment style (Granqvist, 2006a, 2006b; Hall, 2007a, 2007b; Luyten & Corveleyn, 2007; Wulff, 2006), however, the number of studies that have tested these connections is minimal (Granqvist, Ivarsson, Broberg, & Hagekull, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 1997; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990). Research in the area of religion and spirituality has failed to establish a clear link between theory and research. The current study uses self-discrepancy theory as a hermeneutic guide for understanding how individuals develop a sense of self in relation to spiritual and religious beliefs. The inconsistent use of theory has been coupled and compounded with methodological challenges in the definition and measurement of spirituality.

Ignoring the lack of conceptual clarity in the definition of spirituality, the field of spirituality has wholeheartedly launched into quantitative measurement using over 100 standardized measures (Hill & Hood, 1999). While there are several well established measures including the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982), the Embodied Spirituality Scale (Horn, Piedmont, Failkowski, Wicks, Hunt, 2005), the Brief Multidimensional Scale of Religiosity and Spirituality (BMSRS)(Idler, 2003), and the Spiritual Experience Index (SEI) (Giblin, 1997), each uses a different definition of spiritual beliefs as well as theoretical perspective. For instance, SWBS acknowledges no theoretical guide, and measures existential well-being (i.e., life satisfaction and purpose) and religious well-being (i.e., satisfaction in relationship with God)(Ellison, 1983), while the SEI uses object-relations theory and a developmental perspective to measure spiritual
maturity (Giblin, 1997). Given this lack of clarity and consistency in measurement in extant research, the current study uses a qualitative storytelling methodology to assess how individuals give meaning to their spiritual and religious beliefs in order to more fully understand the influence on individual and relationship development.

**Using Self-Discrepancy Theory to Understand Spiritual and Relational Beliefs in the Family of Origin**

The development of individuals’ beliefs, values, and expectations about the self and relationships often occurs from early experiences in the family of origin (Fiese & Tomcho, 2001; Flor & Knapp, 2001; Mahoney, et al., 2001). The first goal of this study is to identify how individuals understand spirituality and religion in their lives. Early ideals and expectations are often directly related to spiritual and relational beliefs held by a parent, and subsequently internalized by individuals as they grow up and develop expectations of the self. One of the primary methods of communicating values and beliefs is through the social agency of family. Durkheim suggested that the intergenerational transmission of values and beliefs, often including religious beliefs, can be influential in understanding changes in social norms and culture (Durkheim, 1961; Keeley, 1976). Given that spiritual beliefs are often transmitted across generations through stories, rules, rites of passage (Fiese & Tomcho, 2001), it is important to recognize how these beliefs have been internalized and incorporated into the individuals’ sense of self.

Research has shown that the transmission of beliefs across generations is often complex, as individuals have a variety of options and influences on the integration of
spiritual beliefs, into the sense of self (Allport, Gillispie, & Young, 1948; Fiese &
Tomcho, 2001; Flor & Knapp, 2001; Rosen, 1965). Individuals often internalize the
values and teachings of religion into the development of a spiritual sense of self that is
based on a self definition of spiritual and religious beliefs. An individual’s upbringing
and early experiences may establish expectations and views of the self that he/she designs
or are created by others’ impressions and expectations for the individual. These early
experiences are likely to shape and influence the individual’s spiritual self and the impact
that spiritual beliefs have on the development of future romantic relationships.

Self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1989; Robins & Boldero, 2003) suggests that
individuals begin to develop a sense of self in relation to their own and others’
expectations as early as age 6 with the comprehension of others’ expectations continuing
to increase with cognitive development. At an early age, expectations related to spiritual
and religious values, beliefs, and behaviors begin to form. Research has shown that
parental religious behavior, parental desire for the child to be religious, and dyadic
discussions of faith during childhood and adolescence are related to the child’s religious
behavior during adolescence (Flor & Knapp, 2001). Therefore, it is important to garner a
sense of how spirituality was involved in the upbringing of the individual as it influenced
the development of self. To understand how spiritual beliefs become part of the self and
how individuals deal with discrepancies between personal beliefs and those beliefs held
by highly valued others, we look to self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1989; Robins &
Boldero, 2003). Self-discrepancy theory can explain how self-guides develop and
influence cognitions, emotions, and behaviors. The influence of self-guides will be
particularly notable when an individual has the motivation to meet the guides of the self and important others.

Self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1989) states that individuals develop different types of self-beliefs or representations that produce emotional responses and variations in behaviors and views of the self. Individuals typically internalize two distinct variations in the self-representation, their own view of self (the *own self*) and the view others have for them (the *other self*). These views of self can be further broken down into the *actual self*, who the individual is in the present and the *ought/ideal self* which is the self that you believe that you should be (Higgins, 1989). These different views begin to emerge at an early age as children develop the cognitive complexity to take on the perspective of others, resulting in views of self that incorporate others desires and expectations.

There are two distinct representations of the self, *actual* and *ought*, and individuals often attempt to meet the expectations of both selves. When the two guides have opposing views or end states which cannot be met simultaneously, distress may occur by electing to fail meeting one guide in order to meet another. Distress may only be notable when there are high levels of motivation to meet the guides of both the *own self* and *other self*. Without motivation, there would be no desire to meet or distress from failure to meet opposing goals of the self. It is possible that as children grow up and develop different selves, the values and beliefs of the family of origin are followed at some times and at other times a different set of values are engaged. Self-discrepancy helps to explore the meaning and value given to spiritual beliefs in the development of self and relationships.
The Relationship Between Family of Origin Beliefs and the Development of Spiritual and Romantic Relationship beliefs

Family of origin beliefs may conflict with individual beliefs developed over time. Generational differences may emerge in beliefs about pre-marital sex, cohabitation, church attendance, where parental expectations of the individual and the individuals’ expectations of self may not be in accord (Keeley, 1976; Zhai, et al., 2008). Individuals may affiliate with religious systems that discourage pre-marital sex where this value is part of the ideal other self, but the actual self is involved in a romantic relationship that does not uphold this value. It is important to learn how individuals decide which beliefs and values are integrated into self and which are not, and the impact that such decisions have on romantic relationships. Self-discrepancy theory helps to explain how an individual modifies and shapes the self to integrate familial and individual beliefs and values. Since beliefs are often integrated into working models of the self (e.g., actual and other), it is important to appreciate how individuals have incorporated spiritual and relational beliefs into guides that they have for themselves historically, currently, and projecting into the future.

The processes behind the integration of childhood beliefs into views of self and relationships are largely unknown. However, there are several known links between early spiritual experiences and later beliefs and relationships. It is largely agreed upon that during childhood and adolescence, the most influential individuals in the development of spiritual beliefs are parents, peers, and religious educators (Erickson, 1992; King, Furrow, & Roth, 2002). Although the importance of each group’s influence
on spiritual development varies, parents’ religiousness and past affiliation were found to be among the strongest predictors of change in religious beliefs in early, middle and late adolescence (Ozorak, 1989), and that for slightly or moderately religious families the change in beliefs over time was greater than for more religious families. These findings reinforce the notion that early religious experiences may influence the later development of individual religious and spiritual beliefs.

Research has shown that parental religious affiliation, service attendance, and education are related to various relational beliefs (e.g., pre-marital sex, cohabitation, abortion, marriage, divorce, and male breadwinner-female housewife views of gender) in adult children. Among Christian religions, young adults of Evangelical Protestant mothers were more likely to hold values that were anti-premarital sex, anti-abortion, and more supportive of a breadwinner-housewife model than were Mainline Protestants (Pearce & Thornton, 2007). This suggests that the strength of parents’ religious beliefs may be integrated into their children’s beliefs in a salient manner. Mother and child’s religious attendance was also predictive of pro-marriage and anti-divorce beliefs (Pearce & Thornton, 2007). It is not understood how these beliefs are integrated, and why they appear to have differential levels of salience depending on early experiences.

Relational beliefs are transmitted through family stories as well as behaviors and interactions that family members have and observe. Experiences that individuals have in their family of origin, such as divorce, spiritual experiences (e.g., prayer) and the nature of parent-child relationships all impact individual development and future romantic relationships (Boyatzis, 2006; Dollahite & Thatcher, 2008; Zhai, et al., 2008). As
children grow up and experience the interactions of their parents they often internalize behaviors and manners of interacting based on what has been observed. One example of this relates to divorce. Children of divorced parents tend to be less religious (Mahoney, et al., 2001; Zhai, et al., 2008), be wary of relational commitment, have less trust in their partner, higher levels of conflict and negativity, and lower levels of relational satisfaction in future relationships (Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Cunningham & Thornton, 2006; Dennison & Koerner, 2006; Jacquet & Surra, 2001). In addition to beliefs leading to behaviors, it is possible that once behaviors are enacted, beliefs may be altered or modified to accommodate behaviors and emotions that were not initially anticipated. For instance, an individual may integrate into self beliefs that pre-marital sex is unacceptable, however, when an individual begins to engage in romantic relationships, they may encounter a discrepancy if sexual involvement occurs. This discrepancy may result in a re-evaluation of the beliefs if negative emotions arise from the contradiction between beliefs and behaviors.

Relationship beliefs appear to be transmitted by the observations and lived experiences in the family of origin. One way that beliefs about relationships are transmitted is through attachment towards caregivers which may be integrated into a larger set of beliefs about relationships in general. These early attachment experiences are often integrated into working models of relationship functioning influencing later romantic relationships. Research has shown that children often have attachment styles that are similar to their parents (Ainsworth, 1985), which often translates into relational behaviors such as stress/coping styles, trust, commitment, and closeness (Erzar &
Kompan Erzar, 2008; Feeney, Genzel & Kerns, 2004; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Although there is some research in this area, often the questions asked about the development and transmission of relational and spiritual beliefs is whether or not there is a relationship between beliefs in the family of origin and present beliefs. The current study seeks to learn how the transmission of beliefs occurs and the influence they have on individuals and their relationships.

Studies often suggest that family of origin experiences are influential in the development of relational and spiritual beliefs, behaviors, and emotions, however, the manner in which these conclusions are drawn often leaves one asking questions about what the results mean. For example, Sabatelli and Bartle-Haring (2003) suggest that family of origin experiences (i.e., 11 items on respect, empathy, tolerance for individualism, confirmation/acceptance) influence individual marital adjustment (i.e., 18 items on intimacy and number of marital complaints). This study concludes that both husbands’ and wives’ perceptions of family of origin experience influence marital adjustment such that more positive family of origin experiences predict more positive marital adjustment (Sabatelli & Bartle-Haring, 2003). Although this is interesting, little is known about what specific facets of family experience (e.g. respect, empathy, and acceptance) have an influence on positive marital adjustment and intimacy and how these experiences were impactful.

Additionally, family experiences such as parental divorce have been shown to influence how romantic relationships function in adulthood. Parental divorce has been related to commitment (Jacquet & Surra, 2001; Weigel, 2007; Whitton, Rhoades, Stanley,
& Markman, 2008), relationship satisfaction (Cunningham & Thornton, 2006; Jacquet & Surra, 2001), spiritual beliefs (Mahoney, et al., 2001; Zhai, et al., 2008), and conflict (Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Jacquet & Surra, 2001). Often these constructs (e.g., conflict, satisfaction, and commitment) are measured using scales that provide a broad conceptualization of the problem or domain, yet do not reach into how the beliefs are related to relationship functioning and the way they impact the individual’s view of the relationship.

Although this type of research is informative, little can be derived about how these experiences in the family of origin influenced the marital relationship and spiritual beliefs. The current study seeks to answer questions about how these early experiences are perceived to influence marital relationships. What meanings do individuals give to the early experiences that they carry forward as part of the self compared with those experiences that get eliminated from the sense of self? How both spiritual and relational beliefs influence the development and success of romantic relationships is largely unknown. The current study explores how spiritual beliefs influence relational development and how the courtship process develops and is maintained, through shared agreement on spiritual and relational beliefs. The lack of consistent theory fails to help explain links between spiritual or religious beliefs and relational beliefs. One way to explain these linkages is through the consistent use of theory, such as self-discrepancy theory to understand the process by which these relationships are established, maintained, and understood.
Integration of Spiritual and Relational Beliefs

Little is known about how couples negotiate the co-creation of relational stories when they involve their spiritual and relational beliefs, we do know that spiritual and relational beliefs appear to be related in a variety of areas (Mahoney, et al., 2001). In addition to exploring the attributions that couples make during the storytelling process, cultural, and spiritual influences may also be present in the content of the courtship story. One way in which spiritual beliefs are known to integrate into romantic relationships is through notions of sanctification.

Individuals often link their relationships (e.g., parent-child, romantic) to religious and spiritual beliefs through notions of sanctification. When meaning leads one to believe that the role or relationships has spiritual characteristics or significance it may take on transcendental attributes (e.g., divine, holy, sacred), or be viewed as a manifestation of God, the relationship or role is said to be sanctified (Mahoney, et al., 2001; Murray-Swank, et al., 2005). Sanctification has been shown to occur in several aspects of family life, specifically marriage, parent-child relationships, and sexuality (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006; Mahoney, et al., 2003; Murray-Swank, et al., 2005) with various influences on individual and dyadic functioning.

For purposes of the current study, the focus of sanctification will be within the marital relationship and sexuality. Sanctification of marriage may be seen in marital ceremonies and traditions that highlight the sanctity of the institution that individuals have entered (i.e., marriage). Many of the Judeo-Christian religions have specific beliefs that tie marriage to God and religion through sanctification. The Hindu faith suggests
that marriage is a way in which individuals can enhance their dharma (divine righteousness and morality) (Weightman, 1985). Christian traditions often teach that marriage is a sacred encounter marked by transcendental love and grace (Lauer, 1985; Stanley, Trathen, McCain, & Bryan, 1998) and often describe God as an active third party whose purpose is connected intimately to the development of relationships across the life-span (Stanley, et al., 1998). In these cases religion sets out certain guidelines that validate the sacred nature of the marital bond. The understanding of how sanctification of marital relationships occurs has been furthered by research that examined how God and religion influence the actual engagement of marital behaviors (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006).

Recent research on sanctification and the influence of God in marriage has suggested that for many individuals, God influences the marital relationship in three main domains, the personal, the relational, and the spiritual. The personal realm is related to the seeking of personal fulfillment and happiness in which marriage is an avenue in which individuals can seek and find fulfillment, happiness, and completion (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). The relational aspects in which God has been viewed as sanctifying marriage include the notions that marriage is the ideal way for men and women to relate, commit to and care for one another (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). Marriage is also viewed by some as a way to achieve completion or wholeness. For instance in the Jewish faith, the notion of bashert is the idea that through marriage you and your partner are viewed as two halves in which together a wholeness or completeness is achieved (Goodman & Dollahite, 2006). In addition to these views of God as influencing the
sanctity of marriage through personal and relational factors, there appears to be a spiritual component of sanctification in which some individuals feel closer to God through marriage (Baker, Sanchez, Nock, & Wright, 2009).

Sanctification has also been discussed as it relates to sexual attitudes and behaviors. Sanctification of sexual behaviors occurs when individuals or partners, view sexuality as being a manifestation of God and their faith. In some cases sex is a way in which individuals can fulfill or validate the sacred nature of the bond (typically a marital bond) between two people. For some individuals and religious traditions sexual intercourse is an act that should only be carried out within the context of a sanctified union such as marriage, causing some individuals to sanctify their relationships in the context of love and commitment rather than marriage (Butler & Harper, 1994; Murray-Swank, et al., 2005; Murray, Ciarrocchi, & Murray-Swank, 2007). Sanctification of sexuality has shown a variety of important influences in terms of engagement and attitudes around sexual behavior. Mahoney and colleagues (2003) found that individuals who sanctified their relationships, especially the sexual components, derived more pleasure, satisfaction and excitement from sexual experiences while feeling less fear, guilt, and sadness related to such sexual experiences. Contrary to some beliefs that sanctification should result in a more guarded approach to sexuality, results have also suggested that those who sanctify relationships based not on marital status but on love and commitment, have been shown to have higher engagement in pre-marital sexuality. Specifically, individuals who sanctify based on love and commitment have a greater likelihood of engaging in sexual intercourse outside of marriage, higher number of sexual
partners and higher levels of current sexual frequency (Mahoney, et al., 2003). In a study of college age students, sanctification of non-marital relationships characterized by love and commitment resulted in greater likelihood of engagement in pre-marital sexual intercourse, greater diversity of sexual behaviors (excluding intercourse), greater current sexual frequency, and higher number of sexual partners throughout the lifespan (Murray-Swank, et al., 2005). Non-marital partners who sanctify their relationships prior to engaging in sexual intercourse found their sexual experience more satisfying than those who engaged in pre-marital sexual relationships that were not viewed as sacred (Murray-Swank, et al., 2005). Self-discrepancy theory can be used to help explain how individuals may continue to modify spiritual and relational beliefs as they accumulate different life experiences. As individuals link their beliefs and behaviors, it is likely that a continued modification of beliefs will occur as individuals integrate new experiences into their spiritual and relational selves.

It is possible that social and religious expectations regarding gender may also appear in the content of the couple story, particularly around initiation of courtship and proposals of marriage (Erickson, 1992; Orbuch & Veroff, 1993). Society has gendered expectations that males are more likely to initiate romantic relationships and marriage proposals (Orbuch & Veroff, 1993). Many stories may involve a storyline where the male is the initiator of the dating relationship as well as the proposal of marriage, conforming to social norms and expectations. This confirmation towards social norms may be an individual’s way of managing the different views of self, as discussed by self-discrepancy theory. Highly romantic courtships are related to greater well-being in
marriage as love and romance are expected, and match social norms and expectations of romance during courtship (Orbuch & Veroff, 1993). In addition to these gendered roles related to courtship milestones, religious beliefs have been shown to be related to gendered marital roles (Pearce & Thornton, 2007). As discussed previously, mothers’ religious identification (e.g., Evangelical), more adult child religious service attendance, and greater importance of religion have been shown to predict stronger pro-breadwinner-housewife models of division of labor and gender in marriage (Pearce & Thornton, 2007). Expectations around gender may be influenced by spiritual beliefs which may influence relational decisions and functioning during courtship and in the early years of marriage.

Research has established a link between personal religiousness and marital satisfaction above and beyond mere church attendance and affiliation (Call & Heaton, 1997; Mahoney, et al., 2001). This relationship has been questioned as an artifact of religious conventionalism. In a recent meta-analysis, Mahoney and colleagues (2001) found that this effect persists above and beyond mere attendance, as the relationship between personal religiousness and marital satisfaction appears to be greater for those who identify as being more religious. Research has also suggested that a couple’s religious homogamy is also related to marital satisfaction such that higher levels of homogamy (above and beyond shared affiliation) appear to be related to greater marital satisfaction (Heaton, 1984). These findings highlight the importance of understanding how couples come to experience shared spiritual beliefs when examining relationship satisfaction regardless of religious homogamy.
Throughout the development of relationships, commitment is often of great importance as couples move from casual dating toward marriage. Using storytelling, one may be able to assess various changes and turning points in commitment to understand relational satisfaction (Rusbult, 1983; Sprecher, 2001; Surra & Hughes, 1997; Surra, Hughes, & Jacquet, 1999). The nature of changes in commitment (e.g., relationship driven changes vs. event driven changes) are related to changes in satisfaction, and a link between spiritual beliefs and commitment to marriage has also been established. Greater individual religiousness and greater church attendance have both been consistently linked to greater commitment to marriage (Erickson, 1992; Mahoney, et al., 2001; Walker, et al., 2008). In a study exploring how cost-benefit ratios can be used to understand variations in marital satisfaction as a function of personal religiousness, it was found that wives (not husbands) who were less devout exhibited a higher correlation between lower costs-higher benefits and greater marital satisfaction (Mahoney, et al., 2001; Scanzoni & Arnett, 1987). Perhaps more religious women are willing to endure greater personal sacrifice, through high costs, in a marriage and still remain satisfied. Greater homogamy was linked to greater satisfaction; however, the effect size of this relationship is small, perhaps due to the frequency of single item measure of homogamy (Mahoney, et al., 2001). Established links between commitment, spiritual beliefs, and relationship satisfaction are known but further knowledge of how these constructs are related is necessary to capture the depth and complexity of the relationships.

An increasingly important aspect of the courtship process is cohabitation. Attitudes about cohabitation have been linked to both parental divorce (Cunningham &
Thornton, 2006; Tianyi & Adler-Baeder, 2007; Weigel, 2007), and marital quality
(Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Cunningham & Thornton, 2006), as well as spiritual beliefs
(Cunningham & Thornton, 2006; Pearce & Thornton, 2007; Thornton, Axinn, & Hill,
1992). Parental divorce and lower marital quality have been shown to be related to
weaker anti-cohabitation attitudes (Cunningham & Thornton, 2006). Stronger spiritual
beliefs have been shown to relate to stronger anti-cohabitation attitudes (Pearce &
Thornton, 2007). The fact that there is a significant link between family of origin
experiences (e.g., divorce and marital quality) and spiritual beliefs reinforces the
importance of further exploration into the interpretation and meaning given to these early
experiences as they are integrated into the sense of self and relationships.

Areas of relationships such as commitment and cohabitation have been shown to
be important in the development of relationships, influenced by early familial experiences
and spiritual beliefs. Using the current literature to evaluate the state of knowledge
regarding early family experiences, spiritual beliefs and the co-creation of relational
stories, the current study was conducted. To access the process by which individuals and
couples integrated spiritual and relational beliefs into their marital relationships,
storytelling was used. Storytelling is used to gain access to the way in which beliefs are
integrated and translated into behavior of the individual and couple. Using storytelling,
two main goals were examined. The first goal is to understand how early family
experiences influence the development of self in terms of romantic relationships,
spiritual, and religious beliefs. The second goal seeks to better understand how
individuals and couples integrate their spiritual and religious beliefs into their thoughts and behaviors in romantic relationships.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODS

Sample

The sample included 15 couples ($N = 30$) in the early years of marriage. Recruitment of participants was concluded at 15 couples as saturation of common themes had occurred. The goal for sample size was between 10 and 20 couples as that was assumed to be a point at which saturation would begin to occur. Saturation began to occur around 11 couples when the responses and themes began to become repetitive. Four couples were included beyond the point where saturation began to verify themes. The goal for saturation was focused on the spiritual and religious diversity of participants and this goal was met with the 15 couples included in these results. The average age for participants was 33 years ($M = 33.3$, $SD = 12.4$) with individuals ranging from 21 to 59 years of age. Male participants were on average 34 years of age ($M = 34$, $SD = 12.2$), while female participants were on average 32 years of age ($M = 32.7$, $SD = 13.0$). The average relationship length was 5 years ($M = 5.3$, $SD = 1.9$), with the average length of marriage being 2.5 years ($M = 2.6$, $SD = 1.4$). Most participants were Caucasian ($n = 25$; Hispanic: $n = 1$; African-American: $n = 2$). Two couples were interracial with the wives being African-American and the husbands Caucasian. When identifying religious and spiritual beliefs in the family of origin, participants represented a diverse range of religious/spiritual beliefs including individuals who identified as more than one denomination growing up (Catholic: $n = 10$; Baptist: $n = 6$; Lutheran: $n = 4$; Christian: $n = 5$; Methodist: $n = 3$; Mormon/LDS: $n = 1$; Jehovah Witness: $n = 1$; Reformed Judaism: $n$
= 1; Seventh Day Adventist: \( n = 1 \); Not Religious: \( n = 1 \). The current religious and spiritual identification of participants was equally diverse with most individuals identifying as Christian (\( N = 11 \); Spiritual but not religious: \( N = 9 \); Catholic: \( N = 2 \); Lutheran: \( N = 1 \); Agnostic: \( N = 2 \); Orthodox Judaism: \( N = 2 \); neither spiritual or religious: \( N = 2 \); New Age: \( N = 1 \)).

**Recruitment**

Recruitment was primarily conducted via the internet using advertisements on services such as Craigslist (See Appendix A for internet advertisement). Flyers were distributed at several locations on the University of Arizona campus, however, most participants (\( n = 24 \)) noted that they heard about the study via Craigslist or other couples who had previously participated and passed along the advertisement (\( n = 4 \)) (See Appendix B for posted recruitment flyer). Advertisements on Craigslist were posted in education and part-time job sections. A total of 45 individuals contacted the principal investigator in response to the advertisement. In the advertisement each participant was promised $15 per interview up to $30 per person for 2 interviews. Once participants completed a consent form for each interview they received their compensation check.

**Inclusion Criteria**

Advertisements and flyers indicated the criteria for inclusion in the study which included: 1) being over age 18, 2) being together at least 1 year but married no more than 5 years, 3) having some religious or spiritual experience and 4) both members of the couple were willing to participate in both interviews (as determined by both members participating in the online pre-survey). Of the 45 individuals that contacted the study, 30
were eligible for participation. Participants not eligible (N = 15) for participation for several reasons including, not being married for at least 1 year (N = 3), and most commonly for both members of the couple failing to complete the online questionnaire (N = 6) or not responding to contact made by principal investigator to schedule interviews (N = 6). Participants who did not meet eligibility criteria were approximately 30.5 years old (M = 30.5, SD = 10.5). These participants had been in their relationships for approximately 3.8 years (M = 3.8, SD = 2.7) and married approximately 2.5 years (M = 2.4, SD = 2.9).

**Procedures**

Once participants saw the advertisement they were asked to email the study personnel to receive a participant identification number for themselves and their partner. After receiving a participant identification number both members of the couple were asked to log on to a secure website where they acknowledged consent for the online pre-survey. If consent was not given to the online pre-survey participants were directed away from the survey. The pre-survey questionnaire included demographic information such as age, relationship status and length, marriage length, a 6-item Intrinsic Spirituality Scale (ISS) (Hodge, 2003), as well as a 9-item Sanctification of Marriage scale (Mahoney, et al., 1999). Participants were instructed to complete the online survey independent of their partner. Once both members of the couple completed the online questionnaire they were contacted via email or phone (as determined by their preference indicated on the pre-survey questionnaire) to schedule the individual interview. Individuals were allowed to choose the time and location of the interview to minimize
participant inconvenience. Most participants arranged to meet at either their residence, the principal investigator’s office on the University of Arizona campus, or at local coffee shops.

Participants signed a consent form at the start of the individual interview where they indicated if they would allow audio recording of the interviews. All participants provided their consent for the audio recording of interviews. Once consent forms were signed during the initial interview, participants were presented with a check in the amount of $15 for their first interview. The same procedures were followed during the couple interview. At the start of the second interview, participants consented to audio recording and each participant received an additional check for $15. Compensation was provided at the start of the interviews to ensure that participants did not feel undue pressure to participate in the interviews in order to receive their compensation. This study was reviewed by the Human Subject Protection Program at the University of Arizona and was found to conform to legal and ethical standards of conducting research with human participants (See Appendix C for Human Subject Project Approval).
Data Collection

Pre-survey questionnaire.

Intrinsic spirituality scale (ISS). Participants completed the six item Likert-type Intrinsic Spirituality Scale (ISS) developed by Hodge (2003) as part of the pre-survey questionnaire. The ISS measures the importance of spiritual beliefs on decision making and general growth of the individual based on Allport and Ross’ (1967) measure of intrinsic religion. The ISS measure adds to the original measure (Allport & Ross, 1967) in its ability to reliably assess spirituality within the context of religiosity (Hodge, 2003). The six sentence completion questions were rated on a 10 point scale (0 = no spiritual influence to 10 = strong spiritual influence). Questions included items regarding spirituality as answering life questions, importance of spiritual growth, spirituality in decision making, spirituality as a motivator, and influence of spiritual beliefs on life which match the goals of this study. The 6-item scale has excellent reliability (α = .80) for a convenience sample of college students and its validity has been examined through confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling (Hodge, 2003). See Appendix F for complete list of items.
Sanctification of Marriage questionnaire. The Sanctification of Marriage questionnaire (Mahoney, et al., 1999) is a 9-item questionnaire designed to assess the strength of perceived sacred qualities in a marital relationship. Participants are asked to rate whether their marriage is more closely described by the adjective pairs on the right or left. Some of the adjectives provided include holy-unholy, inspiring-uninspired, blessed-cursed, heavenly-earthly, spiritual-worldly, and religious-nonreligious. This measure was selected in order to assess how participants viewed their marital relationships in terms of having divine or sacred qualities. The sanctification of marriage scale provides a foundation for the interviews in terms of how participants viewed their spirituality impacting their views on marriage. This measure has been shown to be valid and reliable in prior research, demonstrating good reliability ($\alpha = .87$) in a sample of two-parent families of nationally representative religious orientations (Mahoney, et al., 1999). Additionally, in a sample of middle class white community mothers, reliability was also good ($\alpha = .74$) (Mahoney, et al., 1999). See Appendix F and G for a complete list of items.
Individual Interview (Interview 1). Following the completion of the online pre-survey questionnaire, participants were scheduled to participate in an individual interview about the role of religious and spiritual beliefs in early family and relationship experiences. Participants met with the principal investigator at a location of their choice for the individual interview. The principal investigator’s office and the participants’ home were the most common locations for the individual meetings with 9 meetings taking place in the McClelland Park building on the University of Arizona campus, and 9 taking place at participant’s home. The remaining individual interviews were conducted at local coffee shops or restaurants ($N = 10$), and community college campuses ($N = 2$). A general interview outline was used to ensure that participants responded to similar questions, however, additional questions and probes were used as deemed necessary by the principal investigator. Interview outlines were used to guide participant stories; however, the interviews were done in an open-ended format and not a rigid question and answer format.

Individual interviews began with some general rapport building including having participants tell a story about what it was like to grow up as a member of their family. This story typically included information about family structure (e.g., intact or divorced), membership, siblings, and a general accounting of the home environment (e.g., happy, distressful). Participants were asked to recount something that they felt made their family unique or special, including traditions, and rituals. The descriptions of what makes the family of origin unique often led to an in depth discussion of religion and spiritual beliefs in the family of origin. This discussion included denomination, whether the family was
religious, spiritual or both, and what this looked like during childhood/adolescence including how important these beliefs were, the way(s) in which these beliefs were discussed and practiced, and expectations for continued participation in the families belief system. As a means to understanding the role that these beliefs play, participants were asked to discuss family traditions or celebrations that may or may not have spiritual or religious significance and the meaning behind these traditions. Once the role that religion and spirituality play in the family of origin was discussed, the interview began to focus on current beliefs and romantic relationships. Participants were asked to describe their current religious and spiritual beliefs, including how they are similar or distinct from the family of origin beliefs, traditions and rituals around these beliefs, and the ways these beliefs are currently expressed. If participants had experienced a change in beliefs they were asked to discuss how they viewed this change being initiated, whether or not there are specific reasons for these changes, and how this change is both similar and distinct from family of origin beliefs. Participants were also asked to discuss how they defined and viewed the constructs of spirituality and religion. Using the notion of a Venn diagram where one circle represented religion and the other spirituality, participants defined and described the components of each and the degree to which they believed the constructs overlapped. Venn diagrams have not been used in the study of religion and spirituality however they have been used to help individuals understand differences between generations in terms of acculturation and other beliefs (Shiffman, 2010). The remainder of the interview focused on how individuals felt that their religious and spiritual beliefs influenced the ways in which they perceived romantic relationships.
Participants were asked to discuss messages that they had received regarding romantic relationships. Topics discussed included dating partners of the same faith, pre-marital sex, contraception, cohabitation as well as other relationship ideas that they received messages about from family, clergy, teachers or other important individuals in their childhood/adolescence. Participants also discussed how important they perceived it to be to adhere to these messages and the potential ramifications for failing to follow these rules. At the end of this interview, participants were asked if there was anything that the principal investigator had not asked or should know about them and their beliefs in order to gain a more complete understanding of them. Individual interviews typically lasted between 40 minutes and 1 hour and 15 minutes. See Appendix D for Individual Interview Question Guide which was used to assist participants in the construction and recounting of their personal story.

Dyad Interview (Interview 2). Following the completion of the individual interview for each member of the dyad, the couple interview was scheduled and conducted. The location of this interview was determined by the participants. Most couples chose to conduct the second interview at the same or similar location to the individual interview (participant’s home: $N = 5$; coffee shop: $N = 5$; principal investigator’s office: $N = 5$). During the dyadic interview, couples were asked to walk through the events leading up to their marriage beginning with their initial meeting. Participants were asked to begin by discussing their first meeting and how this initial interaction led to their dating and the progression of their romantic relationship (Surra, & Hughes, 1997; Surra, et al., 1999). Participants were asked to highlight specific topics
including relational exclusivity, sexual activity, meeting the partners of family of origin, 
the role of family of origin in the relationship, cohabitation, relational and marital 
expectations (e.g., chores, free time, finances), concerns or fears about cohabitation and 
marrige, changes to the relationship since cohabitation, engagement and marriage, 
conflict, the engagement process, the wedding, marital expectations (e.g., chores, family, 
social/free time, sexuality, finances, spirituality/religion), and children (if applicable). 
Once participants had recounted their courtship experience through marriage, they were 
asked to project five years into the future in terms of spirituality and religion, work, 
family, and home. It was hoped that couples would be able to project changes and 
images that they had for their lives in the future.

The remainder of the dyad interview focused on how participants felt that their 
spiritual and/or religious beliefs influenced their courtship and marital relationship. 
Participants were asked specifically to discuss the role that their religious/spiritual beliefs 
play in marriage and the relationship in general. Specifically, couples were asked if God 
or a Higher Power influences their relationship and whether or not they felt that their 
relationship influences the way they view God, their religion and spirituality. This 
discussion often included the discussion of expectations regarding what marriage should 
be and how partners should treat one another. See Appendix E for Couple Interview 
Question Guide which was used to assist the construction and recounting of participant 
stories.
**Data Analysis**

Each interview was audio recorded (with participant permission) and notes were taken during each interview. Following the completion of each interview, notes were reviewed and transferred to electronic format. Each audio session was recorded and transcribed by the principal investigator and several undergraduate research assistants. Once interviews were transcribed, the transcriptions were checked and reviewed by the principal investigator for accuracy by reading the transcripts while listening to the audio recordings.

The specific method of data analysis is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was selected as stories can easily be understood as having themes about characters, relationships, and plot/events. Storytelling helped to facilitate the themes in this study. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns or themes within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This type of analysis allows for multiple themes to be derived from the data, either as a whole, taking into account both interviews in this study, or in parts, using information from one or more interviews and participants. Thematic analysis as a method of data analysis is flexible in that it allows for the application of essentialist or realist principles (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These principles seek to report experiences, meanings, and events that provide and shape the reality of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which is one of the goals of the current study. As the name suggests, thematic analysis strives to recognize themes from the data presented, where a theme is something important in the data in relation to the research question.
Two different strategies of thematic analysis were employed to meet the goals of the current study. To address the first research question, analysis was done on the individual interviews and participants’ perceptions of the definition and characteristics of spirituality and religion. Since the first interview contains family of origin beliefs and current beliefs about spirituality and relationships, conducting a thematic analysis on these individual accounts was the best way to understand how individuals view religion and spirituality. In contrast, meeting the second goal of the study, to understand how marital partners co-create spiritual and relational stories, information obtained from both interviews was used.

An inductive or ‘bottom up’ perspective was assumed where themes are identified that strongly link to the data themselves, where themes don’t necessarily reflect the questions asked, but the meaning behind the responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this method, a coding scheme is derived from the data. The data are not being fit into pre-existing code frames. Actual analysis focused on semantic or latent themes in the data, where the focus is on identification of surface meaning of the data and not looking beyond what the participant has said or written (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This type of analysis develops through a progression from description, where the data are simply organized to show patterns in content and summarized, followed by interpretation, where the significance of patterns and broader meaning and implications are derived (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 1990). This type of analysis met the overall goals of this study, to understand the meaning and interpretation that individuals and couples give to their spiritual beliefs as they relate to their romantic and marital relationships.
**Phases of thematic data analysis.**

The process of coding data using this method was broken down into five steps or phases. The five phases are familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each of the phases will be discussed and sub-phases are identified.

**Phase one.** The first phase involved becoming familiar with the data that were collected. Immersion in the data, came from several readings, and provided a level of familiarity in terms of the breadth and depth of the data. During these repeated readings, a search for meanings and patterns took place. At least one full read through of the data was performed by the principal investigator before beginning any coding. Patterns often develop and take shape throughout reading (Braun & Clarke, 2006). One way to become familiar with the data is through transcription of verbal data (Reissman, 1993), which was necessary in this study. The process of transcription was also seen as a key component in the first phase as it is viewed as an interpretive act in which meanings are created, rather than simply viewing the process as a mechanical act (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). The principal investigator conducted all the interviews and was involved in the transcription of 15 interviews. The remaining 30 interviews were transcribed by trained research assistants. These transcripts were reviewed and verified by the principal investigator for accuracy. Transcription aimed to retain the information from the verbal account in a way that remained true to its original nature.
**Phase two.** Phase two involved the generation of codes, which initially was a set of ideas about what the data are and what is interesting. Codes identified features of the data that were of interest, and refer to the most basic segment or element of the raw data that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomena of interest. Coding was part of the analysis process in which data were organized into meaningful groups (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The key goals for this stage included the coding of as many themes/patterns as possible, keeping codes simple including only the data and context as needed, and recognizing that data can exist in multiple themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At the end of the second phase a list of possible and likely codes were generated from the data.

**Phase three.** The search for themes took shape in phase three when data had been coded and collated and a list of codes had been generated from the data set. During this phase of analysis the focus was on broader levels of themes, which were more than codes, in which codes were sorted within identified themes. During this phase different codes were evaluated and combined into overarching themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase visual representation of themes and corresponding codes were used to help with the organization. Themes were organized around key ideas and terms found in participant stories. It is also possible to have codes that do not appear to fit into a main theme during this phase. Several themes were established at the onset of phase three that were discussed only by one or two participants suggesting a unique element of their experience that was not shared with other participants. At the end of this stage the data were a collection of themes and sub-themes where all the data had been extracted and the
development of theme significance took place. It was important not to discard codes that had not been characterized into main themes as the next phase helped to refine and combine existing themes allowing for relationships among previously un-coded themes to be identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006). See Tables 1, 2, and 3 for themes established during the second phase, code words associated with each theme and sample responses.

**Phase four.** Phase four was the reviewing of themes established in phase three. During this phase some themes that had been identified were discarded for lack of thematic quality (e.g., a lack of data or data that are too diverse), while other themes were collapsed together (e.g., two themes become one), and others needed to be broken down into smaller thematic units (e.g., one theme becomes two or three). Two criteria were outlined for judging categories—internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity, where themes cohere meaningfully, while there is clear distinctions between themes (Patton, 1990). There were two levels of review of themes that took place. The first thematic review takes place at the level of the coded data extracts. Coded themes were reread and considered for whether they appear to form a coherent pattern of themes. The second level occurred in relation to the entire data set, following the review of specific themes. In the second level there were two main purposes, to make sure that themes worked in relation to the data, and that no themes had been missed during earlier coding. At the end of this phase there were clearly defined sets of themes, with an understanding of how they fit together and the overall story of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The final phase includes the definition and refinement of each theme. A theme was named in a way that captures its essence and a detailed analysis can be written on
each individual theme based on participants’ use of the themes in their stories. Sub-themes within larger more complex themes assisted with the organization and hierarchy of meaning within the data. At the completion of this phase themes were described in scope and content in a few sentences, clearly asserting what the theme is and is not.

**Role of the Interviewer**

The role of the interviewer in qualitative research is an important one. In this study the interviewer’s approach to the subject was neutral. The interviewer’s religious and spiritual beliefs were not discussed and did not influence the interview, findings or discussion of the data collected. When specifically asked by participants, the interviewer did acknowledge her personal beliefs as being Jewish. Only 2 participants asked and the question came at the conclusion of the interviews. There is no evidence the interviewer’s personal religious beliefs influenced the interviews or the overall results of this study. Additionally, age, gender and ethnicity of the interviewer should also be acknowledged. One or two participants commented on the youthful age of the interviewer (30). Although interviewer gender (female) and ethnicity (Caucasian) were not discussed or mentioned it is possible that some participants provided additional context for their stories because of the interviewers’ age, gender or ethnicity. It does not appear that the role of the interviewer had any negative impact on the interviews or the findings of this study.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter describes the findings of the current study and will be presented in three parts. The first part of the chapter will present a summary of each couple in order to understand how individuals developed their current religious and spiritual beliefs. The second part will present themes that were developed around the first goal of the study, to understand how individuals view and define spirituality and religion. The third part presents themes developed based on the second goal of the study, how individuals incorporate their spiritual and religious beliefs into their romantic relationships.

In order to understand individuals’ religious and spiritual beliefs, it is important to understand the story of how individuals have come to understand religion and spirituality as part of their lives. Participants represented a wide range of experiences around spirituality and religion and understanding who these individuals are is essential to understanding how religion and spirituality are defined and incorporated into romantic relationships. This summary of participants is necessary to inform the reader how current beliefs were established and would later be incorporated into romantic relationships. Participant summaries also highlight the differences or perceived strength of beliefs based on the pre-survey spirituality measures. Additionally, general perceptions of relational functioning will be discussed.

Once there is a sense of these participants’ life stories in terms of beliefs and experiences, the second and third part of this chapter will focus on explicating themes around the two goals of this study; 1) defining and establishing characteristics of
spirituality and religion and 2) how participants incorporate spirituality and religion into their romantic relationships, specifically their marriages. Themes for religion, spirituality and relationships were established within the context of individual and couple stories in order to reflect the variation in experience and beliefs.

**Quantitative Pre-Survey Results**

Results from the quantitative pre-survey measure indicated that there was in fact a broad range in spiritual and religious beliefs based on the ISS (Hodge, 2003) and Sanctification of Marriage (Mahoney, et al., 1999) questionnaires. Results from the ISS demonstrated a range of spiritual beliefs in this sample (N = 30) with a full range of responses (3 – 60) with an average score of 41.9 (SD = 15.6), which is towards the higher end of spiritual inclusion. The ISS showed excellent reliability in this current sample ($\alpha = .97$). Results for the Sanctification of Marriage scale also supported the wide range of spiritual influences on marriage in this sample (N = 30). Participant responses ranged from 20 - 48 with an average score of 32.6 (SD = 8.45). The Sanctification of Marriage scale also showed good reliability in the current sample ($\alpha = .72$).

**Part 1: Summary of Participants**

During the initial interview, participants were asked to identify a pseudonym that would be used to represent their stories. The names identified below represent the pseudonyms that participants selected.
Karen and Edward. Karen and Edward have been together for approximately 9 years and 6 months and have been married for 3 years and 2 months. Based on the intrinsic spirituality scale, there appears to be a difference between Karen, who scored 58, and Edward who scored a 41 such that Karen’s beliefs are more salient than Edwards. Karen is a 57 year old African American woman who considers herself extremely spiritual but not religious despite being raised primarily Catholic. Karen had multiple experiences with religion early on that shaped her current views as spiritual but not religious. Karen’s parents were married in a Catholic church despite the fact that her father was not Catholic and her mother already had a child out of wedlock. Her father had a “rabid disregard” for the Catholic Church, which shaped Karen’s views of priests as “old, white males, who were alcoholics, and took people’s money”. In addition to this negative view of the Catholic Church at home, Karen had a frightful and negative experience at a “Black Church” where people spoke in tongues and were taken out of the church in ambulances. Following the sudden, unexpected death of her mother while she was in college, Karen began her spiritual search by learning about death. Through this journey of spiritual seeking, Karen began a daily practice of meditation and yoga, which she continues to this day. Karen has integrated her spirituality into every aspect of her daily life, through her work as a yoga instructor, a medical intuitive, and her experience with taking primary Monastic vows during the late 1970’s. Karen has continued to explore the community of organized religion, but has not found a community that meets her needs, and now engages her spirituality daily through private practices (e.g., yoga, meditation) and attending a group called “Global Chant” which is a non-denominational
group who meet and engage in spiritual practices from a wide range of religions. For Karen, spirituality is a part of each and every aspect of her lived experience, as she “strives to feel the divine breath on my neck at all times”.

Edward is a 58 year old Caucasian male who was raised in a fairly religious Catholic household. Edward went to Catholic school, attended mass weekly, served as an altar boy, and spoke Latin growing up. Edward’s mother was raised Methodist and converted to Catholicism when she married his father. Edward’s family expected that he would remain a Catholic throughout his life, particularly when his older brother became a Catholic priest. During his 20’s Edward did volunteer work and served at a hospice in New York which he attributes directly to his upbringing as a Catholic and needing to serve. This experience shaped Edward as he began to question some of the Catholic dogma suggesting that Catholicism is the one true religion, leading him to begin his spiritual journey. Currently, Edward considers himself to be both religious and spiritual. Edward engages his beliefs through meditation, yoga, art, music as well as reading and learning about other religious and spiritual belief systems. On occasion, Edward does attend Catholic services; however this attendance is often sporadic and spontaneous. Edward also attends Global Chant in order to meet his spiritual needs as well as gain the sense of community that he once obtained from organized religion. Edward still believes in the biblical tenets of religion but doesn’t feel that he needs the “corporate/organized” religion.

As a couple, it was clear to see Karen and Edward shared spiritual beliefs. It was interesting that their intention and ability to practice these beliefs was very different and a
source of some tension in the relationship. For Karen, spirituality was a central part of daily life and she hoped that Edward would engage his spiritual seeking more regularly; however given the demands of his two jobs, he cited that there just wasn’t enough time. This tension between the two was palpable during the dyadic interviews discussion of how spirituality influences their relationship.

Chianna and Brian. Chianna and Brian had been together for approximately a year and a half prior to their marriage, and they have been married 1 year. In terms of pre-survey spirituality, Chianna scored a 39 and Brian scored a 33 suggesting that they both hold moderate levels of spirituality in terms of the role it plays in daily life. Chianna is a 34 year old woman who was raised in Hawaii. Although Chianna’s parents were divorced her mom was somewhat religious and spiritual and they did attend Lutheran services. Chianna’s dad was Catholic but did not engage his religion during her childhood. During her childhood, Chianna’s family affiliated with the Lutheran church however they participated in religion primarily for social functions, such as baptisms, confirmations and marriages. Chianna currently considers herself to be spiritual but not religious even though she continues to affiliate with the Lutheran church. Chianna’s spirituality takes shape through meditation and breathing practices and her mom participates in tarot card readings and is quite spiritual now. Chianna still affiliates with the Lutheran church and often talks about her desire to attend services more frequently than she currently does.

Brian is a 30 year old Caucasian male who was raised Catholic. Brian was baptized and confirmed in the Catholic Church however he stopped actively participating
in religion following his confirmation. Brian’s family was not particularly religious, his mom was more spiritual and used tarot cards and his dad was not religious at all. Brian did mention that his grandparents were extremely religious and much of his family’s engagement in religion was to meet the expectations of his grandparents. Brian’s family infrequently attended services and he was given the choice regarding his level of involvement following his confirmation. Although Brian still believes in God and Jesus, he also believes in karma and reincarnation and doesn’t understand the need to attend weekly services to “celebrate Jesus”, particularly when there is no connection between church teachings/services and “actual aspects of life”. Brian will attend Lutheran services with Chianna, but only when she wants to go, as Brian is more focused on being a good person, and treating people fairly.

Chianna and Brian were both quite soft spoken in terms of beliefs and you could tell that they were very comfortable with each other and their relationship. Their relationship progressed from initial meeting to marriage quite rapidly and it was clear that they were still negotiating the role that spirituality would have in their marriage. Chianna appeared to be the leader of the dyad, dominating the conversation, leading the discussion and moving the relationship forward.
Carol and Ray. Carol and Ray have been together for approximately 6 years and 7 months and they have been married for 1 year and 8 months. Carol and Ray were both highly spiritual according to the pre-survey with Carol scoring a 59 and Ray scoring a 56, out of 60 points. Carol is a 59 year old Caucasian woman who was raised as an American Baptist. Carol grew up in a family that was extremely active in the church at a local, state, and national level. Carol’s parents served on local, state, and national church boards and ran several local Bible study and choir groups. Carol attended a Christian college and is still very involved in her church and Bible study groups. Carol considers herself to be both religious and spiritual but focuses on the spiritual side which she characterizes as a personal, intimate, “knowing relationship with God”. Carol still practices her beliefs daily through prayers and personal devotion. She feels like she has grown in the depth of her beliefs from her family of origin as the current focus is more on the knowing of God, acting in a way that is pleasing to Him and being aware of Him (God) at all time, whereas during her childhood her beliefs were more about tradition and following the rituals of the families religious affiliation. For Carol, her relationship with God is central to all aspects of her life and she continues many of the religious traditions from her family of origin while incorporating new rituals into her family of procreation.

Ray is a 56 year old Caucasian male who was raised in a Catholic family. Ray’s childhood was challenging as his dad was career military and “a by the rules kind of guy”. Ray’s mother battled with mental illness and was institutionalized for a breakdown when Ray was approximately 7 years old. During his mom’s institutionalization, Ray’s father told his children how much he loved their mother and that if there was ever a
choice to be made between caring for her or the children, the children were disposable. Ray considered himself to be Catholic throughout college and had 3 of his 4 children (from a previous marriage) baptized in the Catholic Church, although he did this as an obligation to his parents. Ray’s first marriage was troubled as his wife battled with alcoholism and following their divorce he gained custody of all 4 children.

Approximately 8 years ago Ray’s daughter began to ask questions about Easter and he resumed going to church. He began to attend a Catholic church but was troubled that despite his not attending services for many years he had not “missed a beat,” nothing had changed in terms of the connection that he felt from attending services. This disconnect was troubling and Ray began to attend another church that was loosely affiliated with the Baptist denomination. Since attending this new church, Ray has found a personal, intimate relationship with God and now views God as someone to be open with about weakness and garner strength from compared to when he was growing up where God was to be feared, like his father. Currently, Ray considers himself both spiritual and religious and continues to be quite active in his new church, attending weekly services, praying regularly, and leading small groups.

Ray and Carol had known each other for a number of years before dating as Carol taught Ray’s youngest children. During their courtship, Ray and Carol spent a great deal of time negotiating the role of their spiritual beliefs in their romantic relationship as it impacted their decision to wait to engage in sexual relations prior to marriage. This decision was in part a result of Carol’s divorce experience in which her first husband who was a pastor engaged in several affairs. During their courtship, Ray was also able to
solidify his beliefs and launch his children into adulthood before embarking on a marital relationship with Carol. Carol and Ray are extremely connected emotionally and in terms of sharing their spirituality.

**Angela and Jerry.** Angela and Jerry have been together for approximately 7 ½ years and have been married just under 5 years. Angela and Jerry’s spiritual beliefs appear to have moderate influence based on the pre-survey measures as Angela scored a 39 and Jerry scored a 34 out of 60. Angela grew up in a family that she describes as more spiritual than religious even though they often attended a Methodist church. Her dad was Methodist while her mother was not affiliated with a particular denomination. The family often attended a Methodist church when Angela was young but stopped going when Angela was in elementary school. During middle school, Angela would attend a Methodist church with her friends but as she entered high school she realized that she didn’t fit in with that religion. After this realization that she didn’t fit with organized religion, Angela began to explore her spirituality through meditation and her love of nature. Currently, Angela considers herself spiritual and not religious, although she does see the benefits of organized religion. Angela aligns her beliefs with those who respect and love nature, and is closer to Wiccan/Pagan religions than to her Methodist upbringing. Angela discussed her desire to find an organized religion and be more active as she feels she benefitted from the knowledge and structure that religion provided when she was young and she would like to provide that for her 3 children.

Jerry is a 45 year old Caucasian male who was raised in a German Lutheran family. Jerry’s family has always been Lutheran and he considers that a central part of
his families German background. Jerry attended church on Sundays, went to catechism and attended Parochial school growing up. Once he left home, Jerry began to question some of the teachings of his Lutheran faith and began to explore other denominations. During this exploration, Jerry attended Catholic mass and started to learn about other Christian religions. None of these other denominations met Jerry’s needs and he got away from Christianity in favor of more holistic, spiritual beliefs. Jerry still believes in many of the traditional Christian tenets but has formed what he calls his own doctrine as he struggled with the notion that Christianity works on faith and not on proof and individual experience. Jerry feels that he can be spiritual with what is around him without organized religion, which started with his struggle to integrate ideas of both evolution and creation. Jerry doesn’t currently participate in organized religion but does want his children to attend church services primarily in order to continue his family’s German Lutheran traditions. Although Jerry does not currently attend church, he is open to the idea of becoming more active in organized religion as his children get older and can think for themselves about religion and not just be Lutheran because he is.

Angela and Jerry differ in their spiritual and religious beliefs with Jerry being more open to the idea of organized religion. One of the primary motivations for Jerry to see their family increase their involvement is for the educational and structural benefits that being Lutheran will provide for their young children. Although Angela is somewhat skeptical about organized religion and believes more in the power of nature she and Jerry appear to have an easy acceptance of their differences. There is a shared understanding
and respect for each others’ beliefs and both partners appeared very willing to compromise and support the differences between them if they are important.

**Jenna and Joshua.** Jenna and Joshua have been together for approximately 4 and ½ years and have been married for 2 years and 7 months. Joshua and Jenna appear to have strong spiritual beliefs in terms of the pre-survey as Joshua scored a 59 and Jenna scored a 57. Jenna is a 21 year old Caucasian female who was raised in a Christian household where religion was central to family life. Jenna considers herself and her family to be both spiritual and religious. Growing up in a rural area, her family attended church regularly and if they did not go to church (which was 45 miles from home) they held Bible study groups at home. Jenna’s parents did daily devotions in the morning and prayed before all formal meals. Jenna was taught that family keeps individuals accountable for their actions because their religion states that “one should act in a way befitting of Christ (i.e., avoid sin)”. Religion was a central part of daily life growing up and being home schooled from 2nd to 8th grade, religion was incorporated into education (e.g., creationism and evolution). Although Jenna’s beliefs are consistent with her upbringing, she considers her current beliefs to be more acceptable, genuine, and flexible. Jenna attends church regularly, does daily devotions and prays with her husband before leaving the house each morning to “dedicate the day”. Jenna’s current religious and spiritual beliefs are an extension of her family’s beliefs in a way that is more central as it is incorporated into all aspects of daily life without the rites, rituals, and rules of more strict organized religion.
Joshua is a 21 year old Caucasian male who was raised as a Christian by parents who are Christian missionaries. Growing up Joshua lived on a Christian mission in South Africa and attended a non-denominational church loosely affiliated with the Baptist denomination. Growing up on a mission field, Christian beliefs were integrated into school (i.e., religion classes were mandatory), youth groups, group activities, and weekly church services. Joshua’s family participated in prayer before dinner and regular devotionals with discussion groups. Currently, Joshua considers himself to be spiritual but not religious as spirituality is a personal relationship with Jesus as opposed to the rules and expectations that come with organized religion. Although Joshua’s beliefs have not changed much from his family upbringing there are several aspects of organized religion (as his parents saw it) that he has struggled with. These struggles are about rules regarding alcohol and the role of women in the church. Joshua and his parents disagree about how to implement the Bible’s teaching about alcohol which condemns drinking until you are drunk but are otherwise unspecified as to whether or not it is okay to drink alcohol on occasion. Joshua also struggled with his father’s view of how women should be able to participate in religion, believing that women can be active in the ministry while his father believes that women should not speak and preach in church. Joshua has sought out a church that is more aligned with his views about the role of women and isn’t as strict in the rules about regular attendance, instead focusing on a personal relationship with God and Jesus.

It is clear that Joshua and Jenna have a great deal of love and mutual respect for each other and their spiritual beliefs. From their discussions spirituality is a central
feature not only individually but as a couple. There is a shared focus on the marital relationship and making sure that it received time and energy as is emphasized by their “Wednesday” nights which are reserved for couple activities. Joshua and Jenna have spent a great deal of time together and they have an in-depth understanding of their own beliefs, their partner’s beliefs, and the role that these beliefs play in their marriage.

**Allison and Steve.** Allison and Steve have been together for approximately 4 years and 2 months and have been married for 9 months. Allison and Steve appear to have dramatically different spiritual beliefs as is indicated in their scores on the Intrinsic Spirituality Scale (Hodge, 2003), as Allison scored a 42 out of 60 while Steve scored only an 18 out of 60. Allison is a 25 year old Caucasian woman who was raised in a “super religious” Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ Latter-Day Saints) family. Growing up Allison’s family was very involved in their Mormon faith, attending church weekly, going to Bible study as a family, holding family prayers at night and before meals, and attending seminary classes each morning during the week. Being Mormon, Allison’s family was very close, having family dinners each night, where the children had to be home, and keeping Sunday as a family day. Allison’s parents were very strict and being Mormon there were many rules and regulations that Allison didn’t conform to leading her to change her affiliation with the Mormon Church. Allison no longer follows the Mormon teachings and regulations but instead considers herself Christian. For Allison one of the motivating factors to renounce her Mormon faith occurred when she was in high school and told a Mormon Bishop something in confidence and that confidence was betrayed. Currently, Allison is much less involved in organized religion. Instead of
dedicating much of her time to the church, she lives by the morals and values of her upbringing but does not conform to all the rules and regulations of being Mormon. Although Allison is not as religious as she was during childhood, she still engages in daily prayer and has found a more personal relationship with God.

Steve is a 27 year old Caucasian male who was raised in the People’s Church (Unitarian Universalist). Steve’s family was not very religious growing up going to church services only once or twice a year usually at Christmas and Easter. Steve’s dad would not go to services with the family. The family’s religious involvement diminished further after his parents’ divorce when he was 13 when he began to split time between his mother and his father. During high school Steve did attend youth group with some friends in order to explore religion. He only attended twice noting that the group was more social than religious. After high school, Steve joined the military and tried to be more religious during his overseas deployments. During his time in the military, Steve often went to church as it was viewed by many as an escape, as “no one will yell at you for an hour or so while you are at services”. He also read from the Bible while overseas during his deployments. Although Steve was more active during his deployment, he describes his faith as being in phases where his involvement ebbs and flows. Currently, Steve does not consider himself to be religious or spiritual.

Allison and Steve appear to have a quiet connection between them. Allison is more spiritually connected than Steve based on her upbringing and he often defers to her judgment in terms of the role that spirituality will play in their marital relations. Steve and Allison both discussed the importance of love, and similarity in values as being more
central to their marriage than is the shared set of religious or spiritual beliefs. Early in their relationship, Steve was deployed which impacted their relationship by helping them focus on communication and not taking each other for granted. It is clear that Steve’s experience in the military has helped to solidify their relationship and marriage is a vital expression of this commitment to each other.

Shauntae and Brandon. Shauntae and Brandon have been together for 4 years and 9 months and they have been married for 1 year. Shauntae and Brandon both expressed moderate levels of spirituality in the pre-survey with Shauntae scoring a 47 while Brandon scored 40 out of 60. Shauntae is a 22 year old Caucasian female who was raised in a Baptist Christian household. Growing up Shauntae’s family was somewhat religious, as they did go to church and followed the rules of being a Baptist, however Shauntae did not follow the families beliefs. Shauntae’s family did celebrate religious holidays and often read Bible stories during the holidays. Shauntae does not consider herself to be religious, as she feels she is more open-minded than her family given their Baptist beliefs. By exploring other cultures and religious belief systems once she moved out of her parent’s house Shauntae found that although she retains the moral aspects of her Baptist upbringing, she is more aligned with Buddhist and Taoist philosophies. One of the most important changes in Shauntae’s beliefs is that she is much more open-minded and accepting of people who have different beliefs than she perceives her family to be.

Brandon is a 30 year old Caucasian male who was raised as a Jehovah Witness. Growing up, Brandon’s family was extremely active in their church, attending services 3
or more times a week, and his father was an elder in the church. Being a Jehovah Witness, Brandon was involved in prayer before meals, study groups, and proselytizing through door-to-door preaching. Brandon was baptized into the faith at 15 years of age at which point he was expected to become a district overseer and work for the Jehovah Witness organization. Around age 16, Brandon began to question some of the Jehovah Witness beliefs; and between 18 and 20 he began to distance himself from his religious beliefs. At 21, Brandon formally left the church, and as a result has little contact with his family due to their current religious differences. After leaving the Jehovah Witness’ Brandon began to explore different faiths such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and even Catholicism. Brandon currently considers himself to be spiritual but not religious, being more open-minded now believing in magical, earthly based beliefs where there is a celebration of the elements of nature.

Shauntea and Brandon spoke of the growth and development that they have experienced as a couple over the course of their relationship as something that continues to connect them. Throughout their dating relationship, Shauntea and Brandon have worked together to negotiate what their beliefs are and how they will be a part of their marriage. The upbringing of these two was quite different however they have negotiated a way to allow their spirituality to be expressed through their exploration of various spiritual groups and organizations. This shared experience is something that they both discuss as an ongoing exploration of their spirituality as separate from their family of origin. Although there is quite a bit of support for each other, it is clear that this couple is still trying to negotiate the role of their families in their marriage, as there are strained
relationships with both families due to the shift by Shauntae and Brandon in their spiritual and religious beliefs.

**Andrea and Joe.** Andrea and Joe have been together for approximately 5 years and 9 months and they have been married for 4 years and 2 months. Andrea and Joe appear to be highly spiritual based on the pre-survey. Andrea received 56 out of 60, while Joe appears slightly less intrinsically spiritual scoring 47 out of 60. Andrea is a 54 year old African-American woman who was raised in a Roman Catholic family. Growing up, Andrea’s family was very active in their religion; she attended Catholic school where her father was religious and involved in the church as he had even studied to be a priest when he was an adolescent. As she puts it, growing up family was “church, church, church…religion, religion, religion”. Andrea’s mother did not discuss her religious or spiritual beliefs and was angry about having to stay home with the nine children as a result of the church’s beliefs regarding contraception. Andrea’s family rarely spoke about religion although they were very active in the religious community, going to church, and holding prayers at each meal. Growing up Andrea considered becoming a nun although her mom strongly disagreed with this idea at which time Andrea gave up the idea. Andrea became pregnant prior to marriage which was the beginning of a change in her beliefs as having a child out of wedlock presented a contradiction with her Roman Catholic faith. Prior to marrying Joe, Andrea was married twice, both times to African American men. One of her former husbands was a minister for United Methodists, however, she notes the primary reasons that marriage ended and her faith took a significant shift was because of the discrepancy between her husbands
sermons and the way he was at home in their private life. This discrepancy made her begin to question the values and teachings of the Methodist and Catholic Churches. Now Andrea considers herself to be spiritual but not religious. She does not believe in organized religion as she feels it has caused much damage and she does not agree with the tenets of the doctrine. As a spiritual person, Andrea prays regularly, but feels that her spiritual beliefs are quite private. She engages her spiritual beliefs through readings (e.g., “Conversations with God”) and prayers as she strives to cultivate a relationship with God.

Joe is a 49 year old Caucasian male who was raised in a non-religious family even though his mother was raised Roman Catholic and his father was raised Baptist. Growing up Joe did attend Catholic Church and youth groups for approximately 2 years but neither of his parents were interested in practicing religion. Joe’s parents were both “functional alcoholics” which eventually led to their divorce when Joe was 18 years old. Following his parents’ divorce, in his early 20’s Joe began to struggle with religion questioning if God even existed and for a time considering himself agnostic. It was during this time that Joe and a girlfriend ran away and pretended they were married attending a small informal church exposing Joe to different ways of experiencing organized religion. Upon their return to their family who they had not had contact with in over a year their families were overjoyed. There return was celebrated as it was during the time of the Jonestown massacre and his family feared Joe had run away to join that group. In his late 20’s Joe began to explore animism and shamanism, which believes in animals as spirit guides, as well as pagan beliefs. In the late 90’s, Joe began to see himself as spiritual but not religious, believing in God but not the guilt and obligation of
organized religion. Joe considers himself a “recovered Catholic”. He currently is a 2nd level Reiki (i.e., form of energy healing) and practices meditation to engage his spiritual beliefs.

Andrea and Joe are quite connected in terms of spirituality and marriage. The foundation for their relationship began and was solidified with their shared spiritual beliefs. Andrea and Joe’s relationship developed with a focus on shared beliefs as Andrea had previously been married to a pastor who did not act as he preached, causing distress for Andrea prior to their divorce. Both Joe and Andrea have children from prior relationships and both discussed the importance of knowing their own spiritual beliefs as part of raising children and being in a healthy and satisfying marriage. The connection and love that is expressed through this marriage is evident. During the dyadic interview, there were times where Andrea and Joe faced each other and discussed the progression of their relationship, almost forgetting that they were being interviewed.

Jessica and Patrick. Jessica and Patrick have been together for 7 years and 4 months and have been married for 4 years and 4 months. Based on the pre-survey, Jessica and Patrick appear to have different beliefs in terms of their spirituality. Jessica appears more spiritual, scoring 41 out of 60 while Patrick scored a 27 out of 60 on the intrinsic spirituality scale (Hodge, 2003). Jessica is a 29 year old Caucasian woman. She was raised in a Catholic family, although her father was not religious and her mother was frustrated with Catholicism and was new age spiritual. Jessica attended a Presbyterian preschool, but only because her dad was employed through the school, and it was not very religious. As a child, Jessica attended church infrequently and had to ask her mom
to take her while her dad was working swing shift for the border patrol. Prayer was common at meals but only when she was with her maternal grandparents. Jessica does remember saying unstructured prayer at night throughout her childhood. Jessica’s parents had twin girls 16 months after Jessica was born, and Jessica often was responsible for helping to mother the girls. Taking on this mothering role was stressful, according to Jessica, and she has struggled with bi-polar disorder which she controls with medication and alternative therapies (e.g., Neuro-Lingusitic Processing, hypnotherapy). Jessica was baptized as a Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ Latter-Day Saints) at around 20 years of age while going to college in Southern Arizona. Upon moving to Northern Arizona after transferring colleges Jessica realized that the church was quite different. After 18 months, dissatisfied, she left the church. Today, Jessica considers her beliefs quite different from how she grew up as she is no longer as interested in organized religion and more interested in new age spirituality, meditation, alternative medicine, and private prayer. In her view, organized religion is useful for establishing structure, by asking God to help her manage her emotions. Jessica often uses prayer to self-soothe and deal with emotions.

Patrick is a 26 year old Caucasian male who was raised primarily Lutheran although his mother was raised Catholic. Patrick went to a Lutheran church being involved in catechism from ages 11 to 13, attending church every weekend and Bible groups regularly. Patrick remembers religion in his childhood as something that his dad pushed on them and that he hated. There were expectations that Patrick would go to catechism, and confirmation, but following graduation from confirmation, Patrick never
went to church again. Patrick now considers himself to be more spiritual than religious. He has tried to find a church to attend, but work conflicts and lack of fit with an organized religious community have made it difficult. Patrick connects to his spirituality through yoga and meditation to connect to the universe. He notes that he especially enjoys the freedom of spirituality and meditation more than the rituals and guilt of organized religion. Patrick feels that in general his beliefs are fairly similar to those he had growing up as he believes in Jesus and God, and can find the information provided at church in other places. Patrick feels it is more important that he can access his spirituality when he needs it, as opposed to being involved in organized religion when he is supposed to only need it on Sunday’s during weekly church services. Patrick hopes that in his future he might go back to more organized religions if he could find one that fits their needs and their beliefs for his daughter.

Patrick and Jessica are clearly a couple that loves each other. They frequently used humor to show affection and work through situations that were difficult such as discussion of Jessica’s obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and her struggles with bi-polar disorder. Jessica describes Patrick as a calming presence for both her and their daughter. Due to Jessica’s personal struggles, they both emphasized Patrick’s ability to adapt and pick up the slack in the family as needed. Both Patrick and Jessica lean on their spiritual beliefs in times of need and struggle, but for them it is a personal journey that may become more of an organized family experience as their daughter gets older.
Trish and Bob. Trish and Bob have been in a relationship for approximately 5 years and 5 months and they have been married 2 years and 7 months. Trish and Bob showed fairly high levels of intrinsic spirituality based on the pre-survey, as Bob scored 40 and Trish achieved the ceiling score of 60. Trish is a 24 year old Caucasian woman who was raised in a non-religious Catholic family. Trish’s mother was raised Lutheran and her father was raised Catholic, and as a result, Trish was baptized Lutheran and confirmed Catholic. Growing up, Trish’s family said grace at meals and went to church every Sunday, but she describes it as having no spiritual sense, as it was done out of obligation. During her time in college Trish was involved in Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) where she met people of different Christian faiths and describes her spiritual and religious growth as starting during this period of her life. Approximately 4 years ago, Trish’s parents divorced following a series of extra-marital affairs by her father. Trish describes her beliefs “being killed” with her dad’s affairs, resulting in a strained relationship with her father for a period when she was angry at him for being a hypocrite. Trish now considers herself to be less religious and more spiritual compared to how she was growing up. She attends a non-denominational church; prays before meals, at bedtime, and in times of big decisions; hosts church dinners; and attends group Bible study. She enjoys and is involved in the music at their church through the band, and feels no guilt if she misses a Sunday service. Trish describes her current beliefs to be deeper in that they have more meaning and fewer rules than before. Trish considers herself a spiritual Christian and engages her beliefs through attending services, reading, and being active in the spiritual community.
Bob is a 27 year old Caucasian male who was raised in a Catholic household. Bob attended Catholic school from kindergarten through high school. Growing up, Bob’s family was very involved in their religious beliefs, attending church on Sunday’s weekly, and through prayers at meals and bedtime. Although Bob was an altar boy, he describes his family’s involvement as due to tradition and being routine and ritualistic as opposed to having spiritual or personal meaning. During college Bob was involved in the Fellowship for Christian Athletes (FCA) and through this group was able to explore other religions. It was also during this time that Bob started to do yoga and meditation as a way to engage his religion and link to Christ. As a leader of FCA for 3 years during college, Bob contemplated working in ministry and worked at a church. He decided not to pursue this career because he was troubled by the money and business aspects being more important than the religious aspects, particularly as he would have volunteered to do many of these things he was being paid to do. Currently, Bob considers himself to be both religious and spiritual although he considers his spiritual side to be more important. The spiritual journey is quite active for Bob as he still reads and thinks about his beliefs and continues his spiritual exploration through a non-denominational church that he now attends as well as yoga and meditation practices.

Bob and Trish are extremely spiritual and dedicated to their faith and their marriage. Bob and Trish met during college through Fellowship for Christian Athletes (FCA) they began dating. Approximately 6 months into their relationship they wrote joint letters to their parents asking them to support their relationship and declaring their intention to date and someday marry. This thoughtfulness and cognizance of faith in
their dating influences the relationships they have with their families, each other, and the plans they have for their future. Bob and Trish’s spirituality influences every aspect of their marital decision making and is a salient part of their marriage on a daily basis.

**Brooke and Brandon.** Brooke and Brandon have been together for 5 years and they have been married for 3 years and 10 months. Brooke and Brandon appear to be high in intrinsic spirituality based on the pre-survey as they both scored the highest score possible, 60. Brooke is a 30 year old Caucasian woman who was raised both Lutheran and Assembly of God as her parents were divorced and affiliated with different religions. Brooke describes her childhood religious experiences as very different depending on which parent she was living with. Her father was Lutheran and went they went to church faithfully, attended parochial school through 8th grade, and being Lutheran was as much about culture and heritage as it was about religion. Religion with her father was a silent experience, not to be discussed and presented in a “wrath of God” light. Brooke’s mother went to Assembly of God and Baptist churches and religion was integrated into daily life through Bible study, youth groups, and community service and presented in terms of God’s love. For a period of time during high school, Brooke says she walked away from God as her dad was very ill (he later passed on) and she had no relationship with her mom. Today, Brooke considers herself to be Christian, as she likes to think in terms of world visions of spirituality as opposed to specific denominations. She also believes that religion and spirituality are not about the rules but what you do to live a holy life. She states that her relationship with Christ is of equal importance as her relationship with her husband, and that she now has a more clear understanding of God and Christ. She
attends a Baptist church but finds it difficult to attend with 2 small children and often conducts Bible studies with friends to help her grow spiritually when she can’t attend services.

Brandon is a 39 year old Caucasian male who was raised in a Baptist family. Brandon’s father and grandfather were both career military men and his mom was a mid-west farmer’s daughter who was submissive to her husband. The family went to church most weekends until his father reached 40 and had a midlife crisis and began to believe in reincarnation and developed a problem with alcohol. Brandon pursued God and church more than his father but was not very involved in groups and did much of his exploration independently through reading and watching Charles Stanley on television when he wasn’t able to go to church. Brandon describes his religious beliefs as a much stronger dominant part of his life compared to when he was growing up. Religion is integrated into all aspects of Brandon’s life as he prays before meals, works to grow in his religious and spiritual faith daily, teaches his children about religion, he works in a Christian school, he tithes, and is involved in charity and mission work. Brandon notes that growing up he was baptized, and thereby saved, however, now “He is the Lord of our life every day, He is everything, and He helps us stay grounded”. Brandon notes that when Christ isn’t first in his life it shows up in his relationships, his house, and his marriage. Brandon now considers himself to be both spiritual and religious but more spiritual as his beliefs are more about the people rather than the place.

Brooke and Brandon both had difficult experiences in their families of origin and their courtship was equally rocky. After dating for a year they became engaged.
Following their initial engagement, they broke up a total of 3 times, as they struggled to negotiate the boundaries and expectation for their relationship. During their break-ups, they simply stopped being engaged, but their actual relationship did not change. Following their last break-up, they proceeded to get married two months later, in part due to their struggle to wait to engage in sexual relations. Throughout their relationship they have gone to counseling and use their faith to help them keep their marriage together. Both Brook and Brandon expressed that their faith was central as they “trust in God to keep their marriage together”.

**Amber and Brandon.** Amber and Brandon have been together for 7 ½ years and they have been married for 1 year. Amber and Brandon appear to be low in intrinsic spirituality scoring 23 and 7, respectively. Amber is a 26 year old Caucasian woman who comes from a Swedish Lutheran family. Growing up, Amber’s parents divorced when she was 3 and both remarried. Amber got along very well with her stepfather and at one point asked him to adopt her since she did not get along with her father very well. Amber’s maternal great-grandmother was very religious and every Sunday Amber would take her to church, until she passed away when Amber stopped attending services. Amber was baptized and confirmed Lutheran mostly to please her great grandmother. After her great-grandmother’s passing, Amber began to question the doctrine which stated that Jesus was a savior and following him was the only path to salvation. Amber now considers herself spiritual but not religious as she believes that Jesus was an important figure and prophet, but doesn’t believe he was a savior, and emphasizes the importance of karma and a nature tied to a Higher Power. She cites the church’s view on
women in ministries and gays as being additional reasons she does not affiliate with organized religion. Amber believes that religion provides rules whereas spirituality is how you feel rather than what you practice.

Brandon is a 26 year old Hispanic male who was baptized Catholic but not raised religious. Brandon’s childhood was unstable as his parents were never married and both involved in drugs, and they often were struggling to make ends meet. Brandon was baptized at a young age but was not raised Catholic despite his large extended family being Catholic. On occasion Brandon’s mom would take him to church and as a child Brandon would seek refuge in the church. Brandon would go to the local church on his own because people at the local church would be nice to him and provided him with food and Christmas presents. Brandon remembers that when he spent time around his extended family life was more stable and more religious. During adolescence Brandon became interested in alternative Christian music and his band members would take him to church and they would conduct Bible studies and he found a social network through this group. When Brandon was in college he began to question the discrepancies that he saw between the behavior inside church and what was going on outside church and realized that he did not agree and these beliefs did not make much sense to him. Currently, Brandon considers his religious and spiritual beliefs non-existent. He states that he does not feel comfortable in churches and is not sure he ever really believed but he was involved for the social and community aspects of church. Brandon remembers going to church as something positive but struggles because he feels he is more aware of how the world works and can imagine alternative solutions or situations for Biblical stories.
Amber and Brandon were one of the happiest couples that participated in this study and it was clear that although their relationship had been intense these two individuals were truly appreciative of their relationship. Brandon and Amber had known each other for a long time (approximately 7 or 8 years) before dating and although marriage wasn’t important to them, they kept an envelope with a marriage license marked “just in case” for about 6 months before deciding on a whim to get married. Marriage has been an adjustment, but there are frequent discussions about how to make the relationship better. Brandon’s family of origin experiences influence his views of marriage, as he often talked about how they were different from all the models he had witnessed growing up about what relationships should look like. Although they are not particularly spiritual, this couple has a vested interest in supporting and negotiating their relationship so that both of their needs as individuals are met within their new family unit.

**Ara and Jason.** Ara and Jason have been together for 5 years and 7 months and they have been married for 4 years and 5 months. Ara and Jason are a couple who were identified on the pre-survey as having moderate intrinsic spirituality as they scored 47 and 33 respectively. Ara is a 29 year old Caucasian woman who was raised Catholic. Growing up Ara’s family was very involved in their Catholic religion. Ara went to church on Sundays; she was involved in Catholic Christian Doctrine (CCD) and confirmation classes, communion, youth group, church choir, and participated in youth mass, retreats, and discussion groups. Ara’s extended family would pray before meals and one of her great aunts is a nun. Ara’s Catholic beliefs have always been important and that continues to this day. Ara knew that she would one day get married in the
Catholic Church or it “wouldn’t count”. Although Ara did get married in a Catholic church and has had her 2 children baptized as Catholic, her husband is not involved in Catholicism. She often attends church alone with her 2 children. Ara still considers herself a Catholic however she views religion as something that should not be forced on someone. Now that she is involved in her beliefs by choice she feels like she is able to gain a different understanding of the readings and how to apply the teachings to her life. She still prays in the mornings and seeks out her religious beliefs more often when she is struggling.

Jason is a 27 year old Caucasian man who was raised Baptist. Jason’s parents were divorced at an early age and Jason didn’t know his dad until he was 13 years old as he was living with his grandparents. Jason has some contact with his parents now, but it is quite limited. Growing up, Jason went to church every Sunday as it was part of their routine and members of the small church community they lived in would frown upon it if you didn’t attend. Jason went to college for one year before joining the military where he says that he became more involve in organized religion during his time in Iraq and at Walter Reed medical center. Jason notes that as his military involvement increased so did his religious involvement. His religious involvement was quite high particularly during his time in Iraq when he used it to remain connected to family through writing and discussing religious passages. Jason recalls that he attended religious services quite regularly during his deployment in Iraq. Although Jason considers himself religious and a Christian, he states that he doesn’t practice it like he should by going to church and praying before meals. Jason struggles with understanding why each religious group has a
different version of the Bible and religious stories and why they compete with each other. In order to deal with this ongoing struggle, Jason notes he has a personal spirituality and thinks about his beliefs on a daily basis.

The initial connection between Ara and Jason occurred when they met on an airplane and is still visible 10 years later as they anticipate the birth of their third child. Ara and Jason spent much of their courtship living on opposite sides of the United States while Jason was in recovery at Walter Reed Medical Center as he was there for almost 2 years. Jason and Ara have different views and experiences related to their beliefs but they have negotiated a way in which they are both able to have their spiritual needs met through different levels of engagement. Ara’s Catholic beliefs sometimes puzzle Jason as he often doesn’t understand, however, he is supportive of her beliefs and they are raising their children as Catholics.

**Aliza and Jonathan.** Aliza and Jonathan have been together 3 years and 10 months and have been married 1 year and 2 months. Aliza and Jonathan are towards the ceiling in terms of their intrinsic spiritual beliefs scoring 54 and 50 correspondingly. Aliza is a 23 year old Caucasian woman would who would consider herself a Jewish American. She was raised in a Reformed Jewish household where her dad’s beliefs were reformed leaning towards unaffiliated, and her mother was fairly conservative. Growing up Aliza went to Sunday and Hebrew school, participated in youth groups, had a Bat Mitzvah, attended synagogue during the High Holy days, and her family would celebrate Shabbat and light candles on Friday nights. During adolescence Aliza’s younger sister told her parents that she did not believe in God and the family suddenly stopped lighting
candles and going to temple. Around age 16, Aliza went to an Orthodox Jewish youth group and found that this environment allowed her to ask questions and it made sense to her. Gradually Aliza made changes to her routine to conform to Orthodox laws such as trying not to work on Friday nights, wearing a skirt instead of pants, and obeying the laws of keeping kosher. Now Aliza considers herself to be an Orthodox Jew, which was a shock for her parents. Aliza feels that she is more devout now and that many Reformed Jews engage their religion as a show and not in a genuine sense. Her current beliefs are not as lenient; she keeps kosher, doesn’t drive on weekends, prays regularly and observes the Sabbath through services and ritual such as lighting candles. Aliza views herself as both religious and spiritual as spirituality is a connectedness to God the creator, but that for her you need religion to know who you are spiritually connecting to. For Aliza, spirituality does not work without religion.

Jonathan is a 23 year old who is Caucasian and Hispanic. Jonathan’s mother was Cuban and affiliated with the 7th Day Adventist church while his dad was raised in a Roman Catholic Mexican family. At the age of 3 his family converted to Conservative Judaism. After this conversion, Jonathan attended a pluralistic Jewish day school where he was often bullied. He then transferred to an Orthodox Jewish school where at age 10 he began his conversion to Orthodox Judaism. In exploring his beliefs, Jonathan has spent time studying in Israel and has even lived with a Rabbi’s family in Los Angeles for a few years during his parents’ conflictual divorce which started when he was 19. Although Jonathan’s family is not Orthodox, he considers their beliefs to be similar although he is much more strict and devout in how he experiences his religious and
spiritual beliefs. This difference in practice has caused some distress in the relationship that Jonathan has with his parents. Jonathan’s relationship with his mother has disintegrated in recent years as she has battled cancer several times causing a strain in their relationship; his relationship with his father has in fact become stronger. Although Jonathan’s dad was not supportive of his study in Israel wanting him to go to college first, they have mended their relationship and are closer now than they were during his childhood. Jonathan practices his beliefs daily through his beliefs in keeping a kosher household, attending shul daily and wearing a kippah and tefillin. For Jonathan, his Orthodox beliefs permeate all his decisions and actions.

Aliza and Jonathan are equally spiritual and having made the choice to become Orthodox Jews, their lives are truly centered on their religious and spiritual beliefs and the practice of them on a daily basis. Aliza and Jonathan met while both studying in Israel and followed traditional Orthodox Jewish customs throughout their courtship. As part of their connection to their beliefs, both believed that courtship was intended for marriage, and as part of those beliefs, there was no physical contact prior to their marriage even though they had dinner together nightly after moving to the same city. Although they are highly committed to their marriage and they clearly love each other, it is apparent that this couple is still negotiating their roles and expectations in their marriage.

**Rachel and Michael.** Rachel and Michael have been together for 4 years and 10 months and they have been married for 1 year and 10 months. Rachel and Michael appear to be low on spirituality according to the intrinsic spirituality scale (Hodge, 2003).
with Rachel scoring 27 and Michael scoring 7 out of 60 points. Rachel is a 24 year old Caucasian woman who was raised in a Methodist and Northern Baptist household. Rachel describes her family as not being very religious as she often went to church with her grandparents who were more religious. Rachel did attend church and Sunday school regularly until 9th grade when she stopped but her younger sister kept attending. Rachel’s family emphasized that they should be good individuals more than they emphasized their religious beliefs. Rachel no longer considers herself to be a Christian, although this change was gradual. As a teenager, Rachel began to struggle with reconciling the idea of creation versus evolution, causing her to reevaluate her religious beliefs. Additionally, the idea that each religion believes that they are the only one true religion was another notion that Rachel struggled with as she began to question her Christian upbringing. It was around this time that Rachel also became a vegetarian for ethical reasons as part of her search to establish her beliefs. Today, Rachel considers herself to be an agnostic, believing in a connection to the world and nature that can be reached through meditation.

Michael is a 26 year old male who was raised Methodist. As a young boy, Michael was “forced” to go to church until he was approximately 8 years old when his family continued to attend church only during the holidays. Both of Michaels’ parents were raised Methodist and his parents were active in their attendance at church and in saying prayers before meals, however, this stopped after Michael turned 8 and soccer and other extracurricular activities began to interfere with religious involvement. Michael’s paternal grandparents are quite religious and this influences the way that the family interacts when they are around (e.g., prayer before meals). Around age 13 Michael notes
that he once again became involved in religious activities attending youth group at a Methodist church until he moved when he became involved in a Presbyterian youth group. During his involvement in the Presbyterian group, he took mission trips to Belize and Scotland even though he did not attend religious services. Michael enjoyed these trips but noted that they were not very religious. After he graduated from high school Michael’s involvement in organized religion died off almost completely. Currently Michael does not consider himself to be religious or spiritual instead considering himself agnostic, however he does think that there may be a place in his life for spirituality in the future. Michael considers himself agnostic as he struggles with notions of religion that center around the belief in creation versus evolution as well as the ideas in the Bible not making sense in a mathematical $a = b$ type of way. Michael believes that the Bible can be viewed more accurately as a “book of fables” rather than fact because scientifically many of the stories “just don’t add up”. Michael views his spirituality today as being connected to his love of the outdoors and his beliefs about the preservation and conservation of nature.

Michael and Rachel met and began dating while on a trip to Ecuador where they were studying abroad and staying with local families. After dating for approximately 6 months they began to live together as a natural step in their relationship. For Michael and Rachel, spirituality does not really play a role in their relationship and many of their decisions are made using logic and practicality. Their decision to become engaged was a joint discussion with no ring and no proposal and they made an announcement to their families of their intentions to marry the following year. Michael and Rachel still struggle
to manage their families expectations about beliefs as they often omit details such as not
telling their parents they were having a non-traditional, Buddhist minister perform their
wedding ceremony which focused on appreciating the environment and their
commitment. Although both Michael and Rachel identify as Agnostic, they can see the
utility of incorporating some broadly defined Christian beliefs into their marriage when/if
children enter the family.

Part 2: Themes for Religion and Spirituality

In order to meet the first goal of this study, themes were established for both
religion and spirituality. Themes for religion and spirituality were established in parallel
to compare and contrast features of the constructs which have been previously assumed
to overlap. The results suggested that while there is overlap between religion and
spirituality in terms of predominant themes, there are also distinct themes for each
construct. Prominence of themes was established based on the number of participants
who indicated each specific theme. The more frequently that a theme was cited by
participants, the more prominent it was. Results are presented independently however
participant stories represent a circular interrelation between religion, spirituality, and
relationships. Religion, spirituality and relationships have bi-directional influence on
participants’ stories, and highlight the ways in which these belief systems are interrelated
and circular in their influence on individuals and couples. The establishment of themes,
key words and phrases were identified for both religion and spirituality. Participants own
words were used to label the themes as there was often commonality in the way
participants discussed their beliefs. Although the themes are presented as discrete
categories, given the complex way in which these beliefs are experienced some of the statements and examples may encompass multiple themes.

**Religion Themes.**

At the end of stage 4 of the thematic analysis process 12 themes were established around religious beliefs. Themes included beliefs, attendance, activity/education, denomination/identification, expectation, generation, rites/rituals, meaning, questioning/re-evaluation, community, rules and role in marriage were established in order of prominence. The theme of beliefs focused on participants beliefs about religion in terms of what they believe in, and how they view their own religious beliefs. Attendance was often discussed as participants spoke of the frequency and type of participation that they had with religion, specifically frequency of religious service attendance. Many participants discussed specific holidays and occasions when they were likely to be involved attend religious services. Participants highlighted the importance of religious education and activities that shaped their religious beliefs. In addition to multiple participants discussing attending religious school, activities such as youth groups and religious studies courses were also discussed. During the stories, participants often identified themselves as being religious and named a specific denomination to which they belonged in the family of origin and currently. Participants discussed expectations about their religious involvement and participation that they perceived from highly valued others including parents and spouses. These expectations regarding religious involvement were both implicit and explicit. Generational differences and similarities were identified and discussed in terms of involvement in religion as well as
their role in the hierarchy of family when related to religion. Rites and rituals often highlighted participants’ experiences as they were involved in their religious affiliation. These rites and rituals varied from daily prayer to specific activities such as Baptism, Confirmation, and Communion. Meaning was often ascribed to their involvement in religious organizations such as feeling obligation and guilt as well as the importance of religion to daily life. Many participants discussed questioning their religious beliefs in an evaluative sense. This often included questioning God’s intentions, or whether biblical stories could be explained using alternative reasoning. Community was highlighted as an aspect of religious faith such as being a part of a group of like-minded individuals, as well as gaining social benefits from participation in religion. Rules about religious participation included discussion of things that they must or should do in order to be “good” in the eyes of their religious beliefs. This theme included, but was not limited to rules about cognitions, affect and behavior. The role that religion plays in marriage was often focused on activities and beliefs that marital partners shared or areas where discrepancy in beliefs was present. See Table 1 for a list of religion codes, key terms, and sample responses.
**Beliefs.** Religious beliefs were mentioned by all participants as a theme in the interviews. Beliefs were discussed in both positive and negative valence, with participants highlighting aspects of organized religion that they accepted as well as aspects which they did not agree with. Religious beliefs were often indicated by participants stating how they perceive religion. Religion is often “the organized structure of what you believe” (Allison, 25), as well as “formalities, going to church, the rights and rituals involved...religion has a connotation for me where it’s all these rites and rituals, the same each time, the same place…” (Jenna, 21), which identify how religion is perceived and what is necessary to be religious. In addition to the discussion of religious tenets, participant also presented a concept of religion by highlighting what they did not believe in. For instance, “I don’t believe that evolution and creation have to contradict” (Jerry, 45), and “…in some religions if you don’t get confirmed, then you go to hell. I don’t believe that” (Brian, 30). The theme of religious beliefs centers around both a positive and negative perspective on organized religion highlighted by beliefs identified through specific beliefs and disbeliefs.
Attendance. Religious attendance was the second most common theme discussed by participants. Participants frequently discussed specific reasons to attend religious services or to go to an organized religious institution. Many participants discussed the importance of attending weekly church services on Sunday, and on religious holidays such as Easter and Christmas. The frequency of participant attendance was highlighted with participants varying in how often they attended religious services from multiple times a week to occasionally or sporadically. For some participants frequency of attendance was “tied to whether you are a good person or not” (Joe, 49), while for others, “going is not as important as my relationship with God” (Andrea, 54), suggesting that the meaning given to religious attendance can also vary widely. These examples draw attention to the wide variation in the frequency, importance, and meaning attending services provided for participants specific to organized religion.

Activity/Education. While many participants highlighted attending religious services, equally important for many were the activities and educational opportunities that were provided by organized religion. A number of participants discussed attending some form of education that was tied to religion. The educational component of religion came both in the form of religious specific schools (e.g., Sunday school, Confirmation classes, and Hebrew school) as well as primary education which was tied to religion. Many participants discussed attending religious education during the primary grades, where there was little separation between general education and religion. For example, “We homeschooled for a lot of our years, I was homeschooled from 2nd grade through 8th grade… I was involved in a homeschooled group that was um [sic]
pretty much all other Christian families in the area a lot of them went to our… a lot of the education that I got was kind of supplemented with the kind of Christian beliefs, so when we did our astronomy course, there was a lot of talk about creation and things like that where they were added in there” (Jenna, 21).

In conjunction with the educational component of organized religion many participants discussed specific religious activities such as youth groups, being members of church choirs, and participating in church camps where religious teaching was done in a context of social activities. This education and activities theme was present and salient for over half of the participants.

**Religious Identification and Denomination.** Identification and denomination was captured by individuals’ willingness to identify their religious beliefs predominantly through identification with a specific denomination (e.g., Catholic, Lutheran). Often participants held several denominations and identified with various groups throughout their lives. Participants discussed the meaning that belonging to a specific group had for them and potential differences between their denomination and other denominations. One participant specifically distinguished herself from other Catholics by stating, “…I’m not judgmental, and I think that a lot of people think that Catholics are so judgmental, and that they’re so one way, and granted some Catholic people can be that way but I think it just depends” (Ara, 29). In addition to distinguishing themselves from stereotypes about specific religions, many participants emphasized that their identification with religion was something they choose, and not what was inherent based on family of origin beliefs. One example, “My parents always told us there was a choice, uh, they instilled that into
us, that this is not something that they, just because they’re Christian does not mean that
we were Christian” (Joshua, 21). These examples highlight the importance and
limitations of identifying with various religious denominations.

**Expectations.** Many participants highlighted expectations that were related to
their religious beliefs in terms of behavior. Behaviorally, participants discussed
expectations of both participation and relational behavior. Expectations about behavioral
participation included having to attend religious services at certain times (e.g., on
Sunday), having to participate in certain rituals,

> “I had my first two kids, first three kids really, we had them baptized. And um ya
>sic know, when through that whole process, but we weren’t really, it was more
>like we were like doing it because it was an obligation, not because it was
>something that we wanted to do” (Ray, 59).

In addition to these behavioral expectations, participants discussed behavioral
expectations that were related to relational behavior, “Like I think of sex is very, I’m not
nonchalant about it, like I would never have a one night stand and I think that’s seriously
from being raised from religion” (Allison, 25). Expectations based in religious beliefs
were also directly tied to expectations about relationships and marriage for many
participants. The importance of being married in a specific church is highlighted by Ara
(29),

> “I knew right away that I would get married in a Catholic church, yeah, I mean it
>is expected to get married in a Catholic church…Now it’s, in the way that my
family looks at it is, if you don’t get married in the church, it doesn’t count, you’re not married to them.”

Expectations regarding religious behavior clearly permeated many individuals and couples beliefs about relationships and marriage.

**Generation.** Since religious beliefs are often initiated within the family of origin, many participants discussed the role that their family played in their religious development. Many participants highlighted differences between their religious beliefs and the beliefs of previous generations of family members. Several participants indicated that they are less strict and devout in their religious beliefs than their parents and grandparents. Often prayers were done at meals at parents or grandparents homes, but that they did not currently pray before meals in their family of procreation. Participants also discussed feeling like they should engage their religious beliefs because of family traditions, “We are all Germans and stuff, my grandparents were Lutheran, and their parents were Lutheran, and their parents were Lutheran, so um [sic] you know, my parents naturally progressed and went into, I was raised as a Lutheran” (Jerry, 45). The notion of generation influenced the views and often preceded justifications and explanations for why they may engage their beliefs in ways that differ from previous generations, almost as if there was a need to rationalize the differences. For others however, their beliefs may in fact be a mirroring or changing of the beliefs of over generations,
“A lot of it has to do with tradition. My parents did it, and their parents did it and that’s what we’re supposed to do. The older I get the more I embrace these traditions I guess. I see more value in them with my family” (Jerry, 45)

Overall, the theme of generation emphasized the role that family of origin plays in the development and maintenance of religious beliefs over time.

**Rites and Rituals.** The theme of rites and rituals takes two different forms. Rites and rituals are discussed by participants as a key component in having religious beliefs, as well as in specific things that one does to express their religious beliefs. For many participants religion is primarily about rituals, for example, “If you’re religious then you’re following rituals and certain practices and when you’re religious…Religious beliefs are the rituals and practices associated with that belief in that higher being” (Ray, 56). This characterization by Ray was common among many participants. Rites and rituals were also associated with specific religious holidays such as Christmas and Easter which for many were directly related to religious events. Carol (59) discussed a ritual that her family did each year around Christmas,

> “Well every Christmas we would like re-enact the Christmas story and we would dress up and you know play that out. And then um so [sic] yes even as my kids were little we would do that to every year.”

The importance and prominence in this Christmas ritual was salient enough for Carol that it was carried over from her family of origin to her family of procreation. Many participants noted experiences similar to Carol’s in that they carried rituals and traditions from their family of origin into their families of procreation. While some rituals involved
holidays, religious rituals were part of daily routines and included prayer or grace before meals, and reading scriptures or the Bible for many participants. These rituals were ways in which religious beliefs were expressed and demonstrated to others.

**Meaning.** The theme of meaning was prominent for a few individuals and was often related to views about religion and the pressure to be religious in certain ways. Meaning was frequently tied to the rituals and practices involved in being religious. A number of individuals viewed the participation in rituals as something that is done but often lacks meaning as it is routine. This example highlights that experience,

“When I saw a kid, you grew up and you would like um [sic], you would pray the rosary so you have this little string of beads, and, and each one, like there’s little clumps of 10, there 5 clumps of 10 and you would, and then there this other little part, and you would pray, the hail Mary in each of these things. Well, ya [sic] know, come on, at the end of, after about 20 of those things, all you wanna [sic] do is get through. They don’t have any meaning, it’s like, oh, 13 more to go and then I’m done. Ya [sic] know it’s like, whereas you wanna [sic], that sorta [sic] takes away, um [sic] that takes away, I think the meaning, the significance of it, ya [sic] know, you want to have a relationship with God. You don’t wanna [sic] just practice some ritual, cause the ritual doesn’t have, have, have any meaning” (Ray, 56).

For other individuals, participating in the rituals and being involved in religion provided a meaning to their beliefs. As a Catholic, Ara (29) described the meaning that going to
church services had for her and how she realized this only after not attending for a period of time,

“And then I stopped for awhile, and then I started going again because I felt that I was missing something, and I needed that time to go and kind of reflect and that’s just where I feel that I can do that, and kind of just have a sense of peace. And that gives me that chance to do it, and I mean now, it’s a different understanding of where, of what I’m learning from the readings and things of that sort, and applying it to my day to day life.”

The meaning of religion was not as prominent as anticipated as many individuals did not readily ascribe meaning to their beliefs.

**Questioning and Evaluation.** As individuals develop, many experienced a time, often during adolescence, when they began to question and evaluate their own religious beliefs. Several individuals discussed questioning the existence of a God or Higher Power and whether or not they believed in God. For some individuals this questioning led to a shift in beliefs as demonstrated in the following example,

“In my early twenties I really struggled with the whole idea of religion and um God, and whether God existed or not, uh [sic] and for a while I considered myself an agnostic….Um [sic] but I really struggled a lot you know internally with the whole concept. You know what is my position on religion you know? Do I believe in God?” (Joe, 49).

For others, questioning involved an exploration of other religious groups through readings, attending services and discussions with people from that group. These
explorations resulted in both affirmation of beliefs and changes in religious beliefs. For Jerry (45), it was both an affirmation of his beliefs as a Lutheran but also a shift in his participation,

“I kind of started at that time questioning religious beliefs that were taught to me and seeking my own to make sure that if that be right or if it is in fact what I believe. And did a lot of reading, and I attended Catholic, I had friends who were Catholic, so I went to Catholic mass. I never actually been to Jewish synagogue, but I learned a lot about that uh [sic] actually Catholic religion and like if you want to call it Baptist, or Methodist, I’ve been to a couple of those, but really no other religions, like I’ve never been to Jewish…but I am familiar with the faith from reading and things of that nature, their beliefs and their doctrine.”

The idea of questioning was not as common in participants’ discussion of religion as it was when discussing spiritual beliefs. For individuals who still viewed themselves as religious, many noted that religion is not to be questioned and is based on faith.

Community. It is common to understand religion as a place when people can find a group of others who are like-minded in their beliefs. While for some participants the community aspect of religion was an extremely positive feature. Participants discussed church as a “place to find good friends” (Ara, 29) as well as a place to be cared for “we got food from the church, I would walk to the church every Monday and pick up food in like a baby stroller and bring it home” (Brandon, 26). While these two examples highlight the positive aspects of religious community, participants also discussed the
religious community as isolating and about social status. Many religious groups can be isolating as was experienced by Karen (57),

“It was in the black neighborhood in Chicago and the pri [sic]… there was nothing to do with multiculturalism in the church at that time. The priests were always older, white men, probably alcoholics…kind of a felt like there wasn’t a connection there, in the, in the church.”

Similarly, status was another feature of the religious community that was a distracting for some participants. The following example highlights the recognition of the communal benefits of organized religion as well as the problem of social status within the community,

“I think, for some people they may feel that it’s the community thing, and that’s wonderful but for me it feels more like a status thing. Or, or [sic] something of that nature, that kind of turns me away. Yes, I didn’t want to get caught up in the whole, ‘Oh! Well you didn’t come last Sunday!’ As I’ve said before I felt like it was more of people going to church for more social… and um [sic] for social reasons and as a status thing more than to actually go and be closer to God” (Angela, 33).

For some participants, the benefits of community are outweighed by the negative implications and expectations associated with being an active member of the religious community. Overall, the community aspects of religion did not have as many benefits as one might expect for these participants.
**Rules.** Religion was viewed by many participants as having a number of rules and mandates that a person is obligated to do as a member of a specific religious group. There appear to be rules surrounding how one should engage and practice their religious beliefs as well as what one must do in order to be good in the eyes of God and the religious community. For instance,

“Humans are very good at, society is very good at setting up conditions about, what dictate what a good person is. A good person is supposed to go to church on Sundays. A good person is supposed to believe in God. A good person is supposed to be pious and religious.” (Joe, 49).

This quote represents the condition that dictate what rules there are about not only being religious but being a good person. Participants also discussed rules about how to do specific religious rituals such as prayer (e.g., you must pray to the saints and not directly to God), and rules about participation in rituals (e.g., you have to go to confession in order to receive communion). In addition to these rules, there were also specific religious rules that mandate relational behavior such as pre-marital sex and the use of contraception. For example, Karen (59) discusses how religion influenced her family of origin because of rules about contraception, “the church would not allow birth control and I really don’t think she [my mom] preferred having five children”. A number of participants noted that these rules made them feel as if they weren’t able to measure up and prompted a shift in religious beliefs.
**Role in Marriage.** The role that religion plays in marriage differed across participants. Many participants spoke about the role that beliefs about pre-marital sex, contraception and cohabitation played in their current relationships. For instance, there was a general consensus that pre-marital sex was unacceptable from a religious perspective and while not everyone implemented this belief in their marriage, several couples noted the impact on their relationships. One couple noted that even though they had both been married previously and had children from those earlier marriages, they choose to wait until they were married to have sexual relations. Another participant noted that religious views about cohabitation influenced her marriage,

“You just knew you weren’t supposed to do it, yeah. In fact my current husband and I lived together for, I don’t know how, maybe a year, before we got married and that felt so weird. I mean I couldn’t do it until I was practically 50” (Andrea, 54).

This suggests that the anti-cohabitation message was integrated into how this participant viewed cohabiting with her soon-to-be husband. In addition to these relational messages, some couples had found ways to begin new religious traditions in their marriage. One couple emphasized that although daily prayer was an important part of their individual lives, they had also begun a new tradition where they would hold hands and pray in the morning before leaving the house for the day in order to “dedicate the day” (Josh, 21 and Jenna, 21). These new traditions were a building block for a religious relationship and many participants noted the hope to begin new traditions once they had children.
Spirituality Themes.

Spirituality themes were generated in conjunction with religious themes, as many of the same basic components are shared. Many participants discussed ideas related to spiritual beliefs that were distinct from religious beliefs and unique themes were established as needed. In order to fully reflect the complex relationship between spirituality and religion, thematic qualities were allowed to overlap as it reflected participants’ experiences. Twelve themes represented in order of prominence regarding spirituality included beliefs, movement/questioning, connection, denomination/identification, activity/education, spouse, rites/rituals, meaning, attendance, generation, expectations, and community. Spiritual beliefs were discussed as being a relationship with nature, a Higher Power, or God. Non-traditional beliefs were emphasized such as past lives, belief in karma, the afterlife, and a divine spirit. Similar to questioning in religion there was often a questioning of beliefs that typically led to a movement towards deeper spirituality. The theme of connection was unique to spirituality and represented a focus on the personal connections and relationships that participants felt represented their spiritual beliefs. Denomination and identification represented participants’ identification with non-traditional groups and practices that captured their spiritual experience. Many participants made a comparison in their identification to specific religious beliefs. As a spiritual theme, activity and education took shape in the personal practices that participants perform to engage their spiritual beliefs. Activities often included learning about alternative belief systems (e.g., Reiki breathing) and practices such as yoga, and meditation. In terms of spiritual beliefs,
participants often noted similarities and differences between their beliefs and their spouses’ beliefs. Rites and rituals was a theme created in direct relation to the religious category of rites and rituals. Most participants noted that the main distinction between their religious and spiritual beliefs were the rites and rituals. The spiritual meaning theme often referenced a spiritual journey or the meaning and place that spirituality held in the daily lives of participants. The theme of attendance referred to participants’ attendance at various groups and organizations that allow them to connect to their spirituality. A number of participants identified going to religious services as a way to engage their spiritual beliefs, reinforcing the notion that for some individuals religion and spirituality have common elements. Family of origin continued to represent generational distinction that participants noted. Participants often acknowledged how their beliefs compared to previous generations, highlighting change and influence of family.

Expectations around spirituality showed a great deal more ownership. These spiritual expectations came from internal sources as opposed to the expectations of religion which were often external. The theme of community was mentioned by several participants and focused on the feeling that being with other like-minded individuals had on their spiritual journey. The spiritual community did not appear to have the social status implications of religion which was often a distinct advantage of being spiritual. See Table 2 for a list of spirituality codes, key terms, and sample responses.
Beliefs. The theme of beliefs highlights how participants view their spirituality. Spirituality appears to be more of an individual notion in the sense that there is wide variation in how people see spirituality. For some spirituality is something that can be found within the context of religion, whereas for others spiritual beliefs exist completely separate from religion. Many participants noted that their spiritual beliefs incorporated a more personal relationship with God or a Higher Power. This personal relationship is demonstrated in the following example,

“I would put myself on the spiritual side of things. I have a relationship with God and it is unique to anybody else’s because I’m a unique person and um [sic] God is, beyond any comprehension, I mean not any comprehension but complete comprehension…That’s why I’m following Jesus, I think Jesus set a pretty awesome example. And um [sic], and that’s the one I want to follow, and that’s, that’s where I would line myself up with, is, that what I would define as spiritual, is, it’s unique to anybody because you’re a unique person and the way” (Josh, 21).

This example highlights the emphasis on a relationship between the individual and God or a Higher Power and that the beliefs should be experienced daily. For other participants, God or a Higher Power is not the focus, as the focus is on nature, animal spirits, past lives, sixth sense, astrology, or even more esoteric. This quote represents one of the more interesting examples of spirituality,

“I have crafted a personal relationship with the divine. And I nurture that um [sic]…you know. Every single thing in my life, uh [sic], is part of the divine…I know that there’s uh [sic], there’s a wired telephone line to the divine in our
physical bodies that one can clear and create receptivity in... I do daily practices, like I said, to cultivate an opening to the divine. I, I [sic] strive to feel the divine breath on my, my neck at all times. Uh [sic], you know, and I, I [sic] usually do.” (Karen, 59).

Although, this example represents a more extreme esoteric view, many individuals mirrored the notion that their spirituality is part of every aspect of daily life and that it is a personal relationship with some divine spirit. For most participants, spiritual beliefs involve some form of personally crafted, unique way of relating to either nature or a Higher Power.

**Movement/Questioning.** For many participants there was a point in which they began to question their religious beliefs and move towards a more spiritual perspective. The theme of movement and questioning included questioning the meaning of various life events (e.g., death, divorce, and infidelity) and a challenging of religious institutions. The movement away from strict religious views was common and is captured in the following quote,

“Um [sic], well, I think cause I was raised like, you know primarily Mormon families, um [sic], and then I came to Tucson it was like an eye opener. There are all kinds of different people here and like, I just see most people are just good in general. Just, be a good person. You don’t have to be a certain religion or raised a certain way, that you can just be a good person. So now I’m more like all around general, just, a Christian. Like, just be a good person.” (Allison, 25).
A number of participants discussed how they viewed spirituality as being less strict, rigid and judgmental than organized religion. Movement and questioning was most likely to occur when participants encountered events in life that they could not explain, such as the sudden, unexpected death of a parent, the series of affairs by a spouse, the discrepancy between religious officials’ statements and actions, and events in religious text that don’t resonate. For example, “My mom actually passed away...That was very suddenly unexpected. That was the beginning of my spiritual seeking. In a major, major, major [sic] way. No, no teacher like death” (Karen, 59). These events for most participants resulted in a movement away from organized religion to a more unique and personalized set of spiritual beliefs.

*Connection.* Connection was a theme unique to spirituality as many participants specifically noted how their spiritual beliefs connected them with something larger than themselves (e.g., nature, Higher Power). Several participants noted they were extremely comfortable in the water, as they were born in the astrology sign of Pisces and that being in the water was a place where they could connect. The idea of being able to connect in any setting whether it was the shower, out in the sun, with animals and nature, was common for many participants. The idea of connection also focused on relationships with others, and had an element that was distinctly personal. This quote by Carol (59) represents the idea of connection reflected by a number of participants, “Spirituality is kind of the, the connection the awareness of that connection between you and and [sic] God and knowing what you’re doing to to [sic] make him happy…” This thematic
category of connection was unique to spirituality and quite salient for most individuals in this study regardless of religious views.

**Spiritual Denomination/Identification.** The spiritual theme of denomination and identification is distinct from the similarly named religious theme. Spiritual denominations often incorporated duo-theistic and polytheistic belief systems as well as beliefs in Shamanism, Animism, and Reiki (a spiritual form of alternative energy healing). In addition to these specific spiritual belief systems, a number of participants noted that they were spiritual and not religious and they would not identify with a specific religious group. “I’m a spiritual person, I believe in God but I don’t believe in religion…” (Joe, 49). This type of identification which discounted religion was extremely common among participants, although for some spiritual identification came in the form of a specific religious belief system. A number of participants noted a movement away from specific denominations toward a more simplistic viewing of beliefs as spiritual and/or Christian. For example, “We are Christians, and um [sic] they raised us saying that the most important part of that is the spiritual relationship, the personal relationship with Jesus” (Jenna, 21). There was a wide range of spiritual identifications however unifying foci included discrepancies between spiritual and religious, as well as a personal and unique component.
**Activity/Education.** The theme of spiritual activity and education can be seen as things individuals or couples do to engage their spiritual beliefs, through yoga, meditation, transcendental meditation, and unstructured daily prayer. Participants talked about using yoga and meditation practices to calm themselves, listen and often take spiritual journeys. One example that represents several participants’ use of transcendental meditation is reflected in the following statement,

“I was trained to do transcendental meditation when I was uh [sic], about 15, so I learned a mantra and stuff and you know just how to be in touch with um, a higherness [sic] of life” (Chianna, 34).

In addition to meditation and yoga, several participants discussed their participation in non-denominational chanting groups, Reiki, which is a form of energy healing, Sudarshan Kriya, a breathing practice, and one person had even pursued taking monastic vows. A number of couples emphasized that they engaged these various activities together. For the individuals who still identified with religious groups, their spiritual activity reflected their religious beliefs in that they emphasized prayer, reading the Bible daily, and learning about other beliefs. For instance, reading and learning about other beliefs was a part of the spiritual activity and educational process for many individuals and couples and is represented by the following quote,

“I had already read Warren’s purposed drive life and I told him that, if he wanted to go out with me again, he had to read the book. And because I wanted us to both be on the same page, and beliefs and see what their values were and see what they stood for” (Carol, 59).
These spiritual activities were used by individuals to maintain connection to their beliefs and many couples described practices that they were able to do together to maintain their relationship and engage their spiritual beliefs.

*Spouse.* The theme of spouse was unique to spirituality in that many participants discussed ways in which they and their current spouse engaged or connected on a spiritual level. Participants discussed various ways in which they connected initially on a spiritual level as demonstrated by the following quotes from one couple,

“I firmly considered myself uh [sic] a spiritual person with a belief in God and um [sic] when I met my wife she introduced me to The Conversation with God books which really kind of reinforced exactly where my mindset was going.” (Joe, 49)

and the following quote is from his wife discussing their first date,

“We just started talking about new aged kinds of things and… it was a physical reaction. Oh my God…something opened up one once we started talking about new age…Umm [sic] but just the fact he was not only aware of it but opened to talking about it just felt like a breath of fresh air. Some of the other men I dated you know sex okay, but other than that nothing. You know this guy was different.” (Andrea, 54).

The spiritual connection and common ground for this couple on the first date was something that visible connected them to this day. Other couples discussed how their spiritual beliefs assisted them in making the decision to wait to engage in sexual relations until they were married. The spiritual connection between spouses was discussed as assisting in keeping a marriage harmonious as emphasized by the following quote,
“I just stress that Christ is 1st, and um [sic], if He isn’t then it really shows up in our marriage and our relationship with just being able to talk to my wife, how I treat my wife, how she treats me, when we try to do it alone, we haven’t been to church, we haven’t been praying together, then things are just not good, ya [sic] know, it’s just kind of a lot more conflict, a lot more disagreements, get on each other’s nerves a lot more, just little things like that, I think escalate to bigger things, so our religion or faith, Christ is number 1. Otherwise we try to do it in our own strength which is weak, and it’s just a lot different, a lot more [sic] different.”

(Brandon, 39).

This quote emphasizes the importance to maintaining a spiritual connection to the marital relationship as it appears to influence multiple areas of relational functioning. Spiritual beliefs have a way of uniting and maintaining marital relationships for many participants.

**Rites/Rituals.** Spiritual rites and rituals were not as salient or formal as religious rituals for most participants. Many participants contrasted their religious experiences to rituals they considered to be spiritual in nature. Many participants discussed an unstructured nature that distinguished spiritual rituals such as saying prayers or grace at meals was not longer a set prayer that we repeated each time, but was more reflective of a conversation where you acknowledge what you are thankful for at the time. For example,

“We still pray before meals but instead of saying the same prayer, you pray, you thank God for your food, or for whatever blessings you may have, or you ya [sic] know, tell him what’s on your mind” (Ray, 56).
This idea of personalizing prayer was one of the main ways in which rituals played into participants’ spirituality. A number of participants cited the lack of rituals as being an advantage of spirituality over religion and that the rituals were part of the driving force away from organized religion, as Andrea (54), stated “I don’t do rituals”. Spiritual rituals appeared to be more private and were often done at home rather than in community like religious rituals.

**Meaning.** The theme of spiritual meaning had a much different presence in the daily lives of individuals than did religious meaning. Participants spoke of taking spiritual journeys as they sought to further deepen their spiritual experience, as well as helping others understand their own spirituality as highlighted in the following passage,

“Oh, I really feel like God has brought me down a really amazing path. Um [sic]…That I’ve just really grown deeper in my understanding of who He is and in awe of how He is at work in the world. And just amazed by opportunities I get to join Him at work an-and um [sic] working with other people and helping them on their journey.” (Carol, 59).

Spiritual meaning extended further into daily life for many participants than did religious meaning. This is illustrated by several participants statements that spirituality is “not something you do, but a way of being” (Joe, 49) and “…much stronger, uh [sic] than it was, uh [sic] much more part of our life, more dominant in our life…we try to pursue our faith so that we are growing in it” (Brandon, 39). These instances are representative of the ways in which participants ascribed meaning to their spiritual beliefs.
Attendance. The theme of attendance was found in a sub-set of participants. Most participants’, who considered themselves to be spiritual but not at all religious, did not describe attendance as something that was critical to their engagement of their spiritual beliefs. Attendance was important however, to the participants who still engaged and participated with organized religious groups and who considered themselves both spiritual and religious. For instance, Ray (56) described having a spiritual experience while attending his current church for the first time after growing up Catholic,

“So I went, and it’s like um [sic], the pastor there, the guy was speaking, um [sic] I mean there was six hundred people in there probably at 8 o’clock in the morning and it’s like he was talking to me. I mean it’s just like, he knew what I was struggling with and he was talking to me…ya [sic] know, just talking to me. I thought, well that’s really weird, so I said I’ll come back next week, and I’ll see what it’s really like.”

Some participants attend religious services to engage their spirituality, and others attend alternate groups such as traveling Tibetan Buddhist groups, and others attend group activities (e.g., home Bible study) to engage their spirituality in a private setting.
Generation. Family of origin and differences between generations had a weakened influence on individuals spiritual beliefs compared to the impact on religious beliefs. Earlier generations were often acknowledged for having opened the door for exploration by being open to alternative worldviews. For instance, having a parent present Native American chant cds opened the door for one participant to explore other types of meditative chants,

“For all of us for Christmas and its probably high school that I started to notice um [sic] because she got us this cd ohh [sic] by like it was Native American cd and uh [sic] I’m more into like Chinese type meditation…and I really like the Gregorian chants and things like that. That’s very common for me and like the serine and calms and balance life of like Chinese type culture. Um [sic] so but my mom got us this same American one and I have a hard time with meditation cds…” (Jessica, 29).

Additionally, for some the changing of generational roles, such as a child caring for younger siblings, or a parents passing can influence the development, depth, and importance of spiritual beliefs. Another participant highlights the impact of her mother’s sudden passing on the role she had in her family of origin and subsequently her spiritual seeking,

“My mom actually passed away in 1972. I was in college in NY, I came home because my older sister was gone, so my sister Stephanie and I tried to be mothers [sic] to the boys. So that became very sad, obviously. That was very suddenly
unexpected. That was the beginning of my spiritual seeking, in a major, major, major way. No, no [sic] teacher like death.” (Karen, 57).

For these participants, generation and family of origin had an impact on spiritual beliefs, allowing individuals to seek out their own spiritual beliefs with the support of their family.

**Expectations.** Spiritual expectations were not nearly as prominent as religious expectations and they were focused more on individuals and couples’ assumptions about what role they desired for their spiritual beliefs. Some participants noted expectations about how their romantic and marital partner would fit into their spiritual beliefs. Participants discussed expectations they had for partners to share their beliefs such as “I wanted to be with other seekers. And I, well [sic] artists, seekers. So if they weren’t an artist, and they weren’t a seeker, they didn’t really have a snowballs chance.” (Karen, 57). Another aspect of spiritual expectations was the expectation that spiritual beliefs would begin to take a more active role in the family as children became part of the picture (or got to the age where they could actively participate). This was demonstrated in the following quote,

“We need to start some of our own traditions, trying to think about, trying to think about what that might be, but um, [sic] our kids aren’t old enough yet, but we are definitely gonna [sic] have our own family Bible studies” (Brooke, 30).

Overall, the expectation around spiritual beliefs centered on internal or personal expectations for the role that spirituality would play rather than expectation that others have for individuals and relationships as demonstrated by religious expectations.
Community. The theme of spiritual community was something that was present for some of the participants in this sample, although for others spirituality is something that is conducted in private. Participants who mentioned being part of a community, spiritual communities do not appear to have in-group preferences that isolate individuals with various beliefs or the focus on social status which was associated with religious community. Participants noted that spiritual beliefs often deepened and became richer when enacted within a community as highlighted in the following example,

“um [sic], there is so much depth and richness of life as you live your spirituality and community with other people and, you were very short circuited if you tried to be spiritual on your own.” (Carol, 59).

Another aspect of spiritual community was the acceptance of new individuals to the group and the recognition of multiple denominations or belief systems within the group. Participants noted that they are involved in groups such as Global Chant which incorporates songs and hymns from all denominations, welcoming anyone to participate regardless of spiritual beliefs. On the whole, the spiritual communities that participants joined were more accepting and open than religious communities.

Part 3: Themes on the integration of spirituality and religion in marital relationships

Relationship Themes.

The second goal of the current study was to understand how individuals incorporate their spiritual and religious beliefs into their romantic relationships, and themes about relationships were established from the conducted interviews. The
following relationship themes emerged from participants’ discussion of their views and experiences in romantic relationships as they are influenced by spiritual and religious beliefs. As with the themes established for religion and spirituality, the relationship between these various belief systems is complex and interrelated, therefore themes may overlap as there was often overlap in the participants’ experience. A total of 13 themes were found to describe the ways in which religious and spiritual beliefs influenced the ways participants thought about and engaged in romantic relationships. The relationship themes in order of prominence were marriage, sex, marital cohesion, dating, family of origin, morals/values, children, cohabitation, divorce, pregnancy, and contraception.

Marriage includes ideas and expectations about marriage such as its value or importance as indicated by words like marriage, husband and wife. The theme of sex included ideas about who should engage in sexual relations and when, as well as notions about the importance of sexual relations in dating and marriage. Indicators of this theme include, but are not limited to pre-marital sex, sex, and physical relationship. The notion of marital cohesion was centered on commonalities between spouses particularly in terms of beliefs and values. This theme was indicated by reference to we, us, spouse, and specific ideas or events that connected partners. Dating as a theme incorporated ideas about dating relationships including rules about interracial and interfaith relations as well as the purpose of dating. The dating theme was illustrated by the specific discussion of dating or courtship and often referenced specific participant experiences. Family of origin was an influential component of the integration of spiritual and religious beliefs into marital relationships. Exemplars of the family of origin theme include mention of
parents, extended family members, teaching and examples by parents around romantic relationships. Morals and values were an unanticipated theme in terms of romantic relationships. Many participants discussed the importance of their spiritual, religious and general morals and values in terms of having great influence on their courtship and marriages. Indicators of this theme included integrity, values, judgment, and transparency. Children were discussed by every couple whether they had children, planned or did not plan on having children in the future. Children were referenced in both the present and future and individuals discussed the importance of being a parent. Cohabitation was an important theme in that religious and spiritual beliefs often included value statements about cohabitation. Participants often discussed their decisions regarding cohabitation in their relationships. This theme was indicated by ideas about cohabiting, staying over, or living together. Divorce was an unanticipated theme that arose from participants’ stories. A number of participants who spoke of divorce, their own or parental divorce, influencing the way they viewed romantic relationships was somewhat surprising. Participants spoke of the reciprocal influence of divorce and spiritual or religious beliefs. Pregnancy was a theme that appeared as distinct from children in that several participants spoke directly of the impact that their religious and spiritual beliefs had on both pregnancy views and experiences. This theme included specific discussions of pregnancy and often mention of out-of-wedlock. The theme of contraception was less prominent than imagined but its lack of salience was often directly related to religious and spiritual beliefs. Mention of contraception or birth control and their impact on relational beliefs was included in this theme.
Marriage. The theme of marriage incorporated several elements of the marital relationship that were influenced by participant’s religious and spiritual beliefs. The three most prominent marital sub-themes were expectations about marriage, influence of religious or spiritual beliefs on marriage, and ways to focus and maintain marital relations. Although these sub-themes are presented independently, there is a circularity of influence between religious or spiritual beliefs and beliefs about marriage.

Expectations about marriage included expectations about the marital ceremony and who one might marry (e.g., a Christian girl). For some couples expectations about marriage were clearly driven by one member as demonstrated by the following example,

“Now it’s, in the way that my family looks at it is, if you don’t get married in the church, it doesn’t count, you’re not married to them… I knew right away that I would get married in a Catholic church, yeah [sic], I mean it is expected to get married in a Catholic church… that my family looks at it is [sic], if you don’t get married in the church, it doesn’t count, you’re not married to them.” (Ara, 29).

This example is particularly representative because this couple was not matched on religious identification and therefore, the spouse in this case was not Catholic and did not always understand why getting married in the Catholic church was so crucial. This couple compromised and did get married in the church, creating a unified decision that both member of the dyad could be satisfied with. The second sub-theme was the influence of religious and spiritual beliefs on views of marriage. Some participants discussed how their religious views shaped when marriage should be discussed in dating and the role of dating or courtship in marital decisions. For one participant, she chose not
to date individuals who identified as Mormon (her family of origin’s religion) because of expectations that the religion places on dating and marriage as represented here,

“I did for a few weeks…The guy was really gung-ho on marriage and I, I [sic] was 18 and I was like this is not gonna [sic] happen right now. I, we, [sic] it was just few weeks. I don’t think that should have come up yet…A lot of them tend to get married really quickly. I call it the shot-gun Mormon wedding.” (Allison, 25).

This choice to date certain types of individuals based on their religious and spiritual beliefs was represented by a number of individuals in this sample and was both positive and negative. Some individuals in this sample would only date others with whom they shared spiritual and religious views. A third sub-theme within the theme of marriage was specific relational behaviors or activities that couples engaged in that connected them to their beliefs and each other. This included things that couples did daily or weekly to focus on their marital relationship such as keeping one night free each week to focus on the marriage. Many of these activities were either explicitly or implicitly connected to religious or spiritual beliefs as represented here,

“We’re just married, we don’t have any, any kids other that our dog and our cat, and it’s mostly just our dog but um, we still try to make a huge focus, even though we are both working, we both are really busy, we try to make sure there’s a focus on spending time together. And uh, that’s huge deal, like Wednesday nights.” (Josh, 21).
This focus on the marital relationship was evident for many couples in that they set aside time spend together that was special or sacred. For those individuals whose religious and spiritual beliefs were critical to their relational functioning, much of this time shared together centered on religious and spiritual activities. Quite a great deal of emphasis was placed on the importance of marriage by these participants. As demonstrated by these examples, there is a distinct interrelationship between religious and spiritual beliefs and participants views and behavior in marital relationships.

**Sex.** The theme of sex was prominent and discussed by every participant. Participants expressed a wide range of beliefs and expectations related to sex. Most all participants received messages stating that pre-marital sexual relations were unacceptable, and that sex was something that was to be saved for marriage. For a number of participants, these anti-pre-marital sex messages were salient enough to influence their behavior within their romantic relationships, while for others these messages were present but not important enough to impact their decision to engage in sexual relations outside of marriage. The messages received about sexual relations came from parents, spiritual or religious teachers and institutions, and education systems.

There are two stories that are particularly representative when it comes to the different ways couples incorporated messages about pre-marital sex. The first is in Carol and Ray’s relationship. Both of these individual had previously been married and had children from those prior marriages, however, their spiritual beliefs were so critical that they waited to have sexual relations for 5 years while they dated. Carol (59) described the importance of this decision in the following way,
“I think, that when you um [sic], when you develop your physical relationship before your spiritual and emotional relationship, that you short circuit the whole relationship…I think when you um [sic], start as a friendship and develop into a spiritual emotional. Um [sic] closeness and then wait for marriage before you ya [sic] know, cross that line, I think that you’re relationship has so much greater chance of flourishing and being healthy.”

This was a message that sex should be saved for marriage was prominent among participants and over half of them had waited for marriage to engage in sexual relations. For others however, the message that sex is for marriage was received but did not translate into lived behavior. When this decision to engage in sexual relations prior to marriage was made this decision was often followed by a sense of guilt and regret as demonstrated by the following,

“Those are the things [pre-marital sex, drinking, etc.] that made me feel guilty, ya [sic] know, participating in that kinda [sic] stuff, but I don’t ever remember like who was telling me like, specifically not to do that other than myself.” (Brandon, 26).

These decisions to engage in pre-marital sex were often influenced by spiritual or religious beliefs or as is demonstrated in the prior example caused a re-evaluation of religious and spiritual beliefs. Overall, sexuality was largely influenced by the religious and spiritual beliefs held by individuals and in turn, decisions and behaviors regarding sexuality often influenced these beliefs.
*Marital Cohesion.* The theme of marital cohesion emerged from participants discussions of how they relate to each other spiritually and religiously. This theme was identified by focus on the dyad in the use of the terms, we, us, my spouse, in the discussion of shared beliefs influencing marital relations. For about ¾ of participants, having shared beliefs whether they were spiritual or religious was something that reinforced their marriage and was a unifying feature of their relationship. These participants discussed shared beliefs, practices and specific ways in which they engaged their beliefs together. One participant, discussed how the presence of God in their marriage kept them on the same page,

“We make sure that he’s everything to us, uh the decisions we make, and how we talk and how we treat each other and make sure the Bible is open and that we try to stay in it so that we are grounded.” (Brooke, 30 and Brandon, 39).

This couple represents a number of participants experience in keeping God or their religious beliefs open and central in order to accentuate the positives in the marriage and remain focused on the same goals. While for the remaining ¼ of participants, having shared beliefs was not a crucial and they were accepting of the ways they differed from their spouse. For instance, one participant discussed a breathing practice that both her and her husband knew but that she engaged this practice more frequently and positively when she was not focused on having her husband participate. This quote represents an acceptance of a difference between spouses in the engagement of their spiritual beliefs,

“I do it every day, sometimes twice a day. My husband has done the courses but he doesn’t really practice unless I ask him, and I’ve been accused of dragging my
husband to things and being controlling so I don’t pressure him anymore and, and [sic] it creates the optimism and the, so that you are living your life in a different way.” (Karen, 57).

Most participants whose beliefs differed from their spouses had come to a consensus about how they would each engage their beliefs and it was perfectly acceptable for these couples that they would engage their beliefs separately. The differences between spouses in their beliefs and the lack of significant negative implications for the relationship were somewhat surprising given that prior research suggests marital homogamy is highly correlated with marital satisfaction (Mahoney, et al., 2001). For these couples the negotiation of how beliefs will be incorporated into the marriage as individual or shared beliefs has resulted in an agreement that when executed allows each individual to meet their own spiritual and religious needs.

**Dating.** The idea of dating was a salient theme in many discussions as religious and spiritual beliefs helped many individuals establish their rules and expectations about the purpose of dating and how that was to be executed. When it came to dating, many participants stated that their religious and spiritual beliefs often suggested (or in some cases dictated) who you could and could not date in terms of religious or spiritual beliefs and ethnicity. For a number of participants, dating or courtship, as it was often referred to, was intended solely for the purpose of finding a spouse. Some participants expressed an appreciation for these guidelines for example,

“Dating was considered, what was supposed to be really a courtship where you were really looking for someone who was gonna [sic] be the right partner for you.
It was not just to have fun, but to kinda, ya know [sic], look for the person God had for you.” (Jenna, 21).

This example represents the direct linkage between religious, spiritual, and relational beliefs. Many participants emphasized that they received messages about the difficulties of dating someone who had a different faith particularly that it is bad to be “unequally yoked”. Other participants emphasized that they received messages about inter-racial relationships and that these messages were often implicit and subtle, only being discussed when it arose in their personal lives. Several participants expressed distain and frustration with these messages about inter-racial relationships, often causing them to question other messages about equality of individuals. For instance one participant noted that his sister dated an African American man and although they had been taught that all people were equal, there was an extremely negative reaction from his parents to this relationship causing him to question the message he received growing up that all people are equal. Another participant cited his own experience when he discussed dating someone (who he would later marry) from another race with his father,

“…I mentioned it to my father and he, he [sic] never responded. And so I had to pointedly ask him, look what do you think about this and uh, he, he [sic] believes that races shouldn’t mix, but I never picked that up growing up.” (Joe, 49).

This message about not dating people outside your ethnicity was received by many participants however for many of them it did not impact their choice of partner if they were attracted to someone of another ethnic group. Additionally, participants’ reactions to these messages were similar to their responses to dating individuals of other faiths.
Participants often received these messages but many times did not incorporate them into behavior, often having experience dating people of other faiths, even if they did eventually marry someone with similar beliefs. Dating and courtship processes were often crucial in how partners were selected for marriage and religious and spiritual messages were often received and commonly incorporated to varying degrees into relational behavior.

**Family of Origin.** Family of Origin represented the foundational theme for many individuals where relational, spiritual and religious beliefs were taught and established. Participants discussed their family of origin influencing their relational beliefs in many ways including the example that parents set in their romantic relationships shaping the ways in which participants viewed marriage. For some participants, the model established was one of love that focused on the importance and value of the marital dyad in the family as is represented in the following example,

“…he always took care of my mom, they set a very good example of what a relationship should look like and um, [sic] there was always a bound…they did a very good job setting an example of this is their relationship and here’s our family dynamic…” (Josh, 21).

This boundary that is referred to around the marital dyad is reflected in this participant’s marriage as they reserve one night of the week for their relationship and no activities are engaged in on that night. However, another participant, Brandon (26) who was raised by a very poor single mother who had a daughter out of wedlock and was later married to a verbally abusive man, setting an example of what not to do. Brandon specifically
discussed his desire to do things in his marriage differently from how his mom had done them. This active decision to either emulate or avoid parents’ relational example was discussed in some fashion by most participants.

Another area in which family of origin influenced relational beliefs was in parental expectations regarding relational behavior. This translated into messages about general conduct and the continual focus on relational behavior being in accordance with religious and spiritual beliefs. Parents’ expectations, which may have been based on religious or spiritual beliefs, translated into reminders towards children about manner of conduct as represented in the following quote,

“…I think my parents um wanted to make sure that, um ya [sic] know, especially in our dating life, and in all avenues of our life that we would really um, um [sic] reflect who we were, that we belonged to God… we needed to make them proud, but (laughs) not disappoint them or God.” (Carol, 59)

From this example and Carol’s conduct in her relationships (recall, she did not engage in pre-marital relations with her current husband until marriage even though she had been previously married and had children) this expectation her parents established in childhood, remained quite forceful and salient throughout her life. The salience of parental messages was present for many of the participants in this study, often more so for younger participants. Family of origin appears to be a context in which participants receive various messages about the integration of religious or spiritual beliefs and relational expectations and beliefs.
**Morals/Values.** In addition to the messages directly related to romantic relationship behavior, participants also integrated spiritual and religious beliefs into their broader beliefs about how to treat other people. The salience of these beliefs resulted in the recognition of a theme dedicated to morals and values. This theme was exemplified by discussions of integrity, values, the Golden Rule, the Ten Commandments and beliefs about judgment. Participants discussed the importance of living with integrity, and adhering to the Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments as general ways of knowing how to treat people, as is demonstrated by this example, “I believe in the Golden Rule and I think it pretty much takes care of everything else” (Brandon, 26). While the expectation that you follow the Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments were common amongst most participants for some participants, there was a stronger link between behavior and spiritual beliefs. The added strength of these linkages are represented in the following example,

“I just mean that we were expected to act in a way that was befitting, ya [*sic*] know, we were trying to be more like Christ, and be um, ya know [*sic*], avoiding sin, having good behaviors…” (Jenna, 21).

This deeper relationship between spiritual or religious beliefs and behavior was common for a number of participants, most of who still identified as religious or spiritual. For those individuals and couples who were not spiritual or religious, there was emphasis placed on having integrity and being a good person more so than on specifically behaving in any one way. Although there was variation in how these messages were received (e.g., parents, religious/spiritual leaders, teachers) there was a consistency in that it was
important to be a good person who acts with integrity regardless of religious or spiritual beliefs.

**Children.** Children were discussed in some way by all participants in this study. The theme of children emerged as a number of participants who had children discussed the impact of children on their marriages, religious and spiritual beliefs. Participants who did not yet have children often discussed the impact that they foresaw children having on both their relationship and their beliefs.

Individuals who already had children at the time of the study, often discussed the impact of having children on their spiritual and religious beliefs. Some individuals found a strengthening of religious beliefs following the birth of their children while others re-evaluated their spiritual beliefs. One participant discussed the responsibility he felt when his first child was born,

“…you change as a person when your first child is born because you think you know you got this responsibility you know for teaching this little person, you know and and [sic] you know what do I say to this child about you know religion and on my beliefs in God because I never thought about it before you know I had to figure this out I felt like I got to figure this out now [sic].” (Joe, 49)

This need to solidify personal beliefs in order to be able to teach children was echoed by a number of participants who already had children. Other participants noted the impact that religious beliefs had on their decision to have children. One participant, witnessing the impact of having 5 children on her mother as a result of religious rules about birth control, concluded early on that kids trap people, and that she did not want children.
For participants who did not yet have children, the decision on when to have children and what role spiritual and religious beliefs would have on family varied based on participants beliefs. Participants often cited that they anticipated their beliefs would remain as salient and even increase when children entered the family system. For example, one participant who was raised religious but does not currently consider herself religious stated “…now that I’m married and everything I would like my kids to be raised with this structure and stuff just so they have those morals…” (Allison, 25). The idea of returning to religion or experiencing an increase in the salience of religion was extremely common and many cited the structure and morals as primary reasons they anticipated such a shift. It appears that for those individuals who have young children or anticipate having children, spirituality and religion may in fact be more important for the role they play in educating, and providing morals and structure.

**Cohabitation.** Cohabitation was anticipated to be an extremely salient theme for individuals who considered themselves to be religious or spiritual, as it is often believed to be a taboo topic. While many participants noted that cohabitation was in fact taboo according to the messages they received, there were a number of different responses to handling behavior surrounding cohabitation. Cohabiting appears to still be a taboo notion, particularly for those who held strong beliefs about not engaging in pre-marital sex before marriage. When these beliefs are held in conjunction with one another, participants did not receive explicit messages about cohabitation, but they were implied with messages about pre-marital sex.
Although the predominant belief among participants was that cohabitation was unacceptable and often regarded as living in sin, a number of participants engaged in cohabitation prior to marriage. For those who believed that cohabitation was unacceptable, but made the decision to cohabit, there were a 2 main ways in which participants minimized the discrepancy between their beliefs about cohabitation and their behavior. The first way in which participants minimized discrepancy was to state that they did not “technically” live together as they maintained separate residences but stayed at their partner’s house on a regular basis. This “technicality” seemed to absolve many participants from the guilt that they felt they would have for committing such a sin. For others, the clear intention to marry or to even be engaged prior to cohabitation seemed to minimize the discrepancy between beliefs and behavior. Although many felt secure in their decision to cohabit based on these strategies, others discussed that they continued to have insecurities about their decision even after making it. Andrea (54) discussed that even at 50 years old she felt weird cohabiting (with her current husband) because of a belief instilled in her during childhood. Despite the overwhelming majority of participants believing that cohabitation was not acceptable, it appears to be more common among younger participants in this sample as a natural stage in the courtship process near the time when decisions to marry are made.

**Divorce.** A number of participants in this sample had experienced either parental divorce or their own divorce which subsequently had an influence on how they experienced their religious and spiritual beliefs and romantic relationships. For participants who experienced parental divorce, many saw a diminishment in their
religious and spiritual involvement around the time of the divorce. This was a noted time of change and questioning about marriage and beliefs as many had previously been taught that divorce was unacceptable. Participants who experienced the dissolution of their own marriages had differing views on spirituality and religion following their divorce. Two participants in this sample had been previously married to religious pastors and following their divorces they had vastly different beliefs about religion and spirituality. For one of these two women, her husband was a pastor and had a series of affairs during their marriage. She cites the time following their divorce as the biggest time of spiritual growth, resulting in a stronger, deeper commitment to her religious and spiritual faith. The other woman noted having a problem with the marriage as there was a discrepancy between her husband, the pastor, and her husband at home. Her divorce caused her shame and guilt as she had failed to succeed at marriage and had gotten divorced, something that was unacceptable based on her religious upbringing. It was following her divorce that this participant moved away from organized religion to a more personal construction of spirituality. Whether it is parental divorce or your own divorce experience, divorce is a time when individuals often re-examine their religious and spiritual beliefs.

**Pregnancy.** The theme of pregnancy was salient for a number of participants but was not as important as anticipated for a number of participants due to its relationship with pre-marital sex beliefs. The most common messages about pregnancy were that is was not acceptable outside the marital relationship. For individuals who had children outside the marital context, there was often shame and a rush to marry in order to make it
“right”. One participant noted that a girlfriend had a pregnancy scare in college and it was a “traumatic” experience and following that he abstained until marriage. A number of individuals stated that they did not receive messages about pregnancy because it was assumed to be something that only occurred in the marital context as pre-marital sex was unacceptable. Although some participants discussed pregnancy, there were often only implicit messages about pregnancy.

**Contraception.** Messages about contraception were not as prominent as anticipated but it warranted its own theme as contraception was often bundled with messages about pre-marital sex. Participants often stated that they did not in fact receive contraception messages as pre-marital sex was not acceptable and therefore there was no need for contraception. The majority of participants who did receive specific messages about contraception noted that these messages often came directly from religious institutions; with the message that it was not accepted. A couple of female participants noted that their mothers had discussions with them about contraception leaving the door open for them to make educated decisions about sexual relations, however this was much less common. There were surprisingly few messages about contraception in this sample of participants however; it was not surprising given the strength of anti-pre-marital sex messages.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The current study has shown that spiritual, religious and romantic relationship beliefs are discrete but are circular in the influence they exert on how individuals and couples navigate their romantic relationships. It is clear from the findings that spiritual and religious beliefs influence beliefs about romantic relationship and the reverse is also true in that romantic relationships influence the way individuals and couples experience their spiritual and religious beliefs. The impact of the present study is discussed in terms of conceptual analysis of the two primary goals of the study, implications this study has for research in the area of spirituality and romantic relationships, the generalizability of the current study, as well as its limitations, and future directions.

Conceptual Analysis of Research Goals

The first task is to understand the results in terms of the two main goals of this study which were to understand 1) how individuals view and define spirituality and religion and 2) how individuals incorporate their spiritual and religious beliefs into their romantic relationships. Each research question will be discussed separately and then an integration and assessment of the mutual influence of spiritual/religious and romantic relationship beliefs will be addressed. The first goal of the study was to disentangle spirituality and religion in terms of how individuals and couples view their beliefs. It is clear that beliefs are created in a complex and personal way, such that it is crucial to understand how different participants view these constructs. Several important conclusions can be drawn from the thematic analysis related to how individuals define
and perceive their religious and spiritual beliefs, including the idea that although the concepts are related for some individuals, for others there is little or no relationship between spiritual and religious beliefs.

**Research Goal 1: Religion and Spirituality.**

For almost all the participants in this study, religion appears to be much more concrete in terms of who is involved, how individuals represent their involvement and why they choose to be involved. There is a fairly consistent notion among participants that religion is primarily about beliefs, the attendance and participation in specific activities, rites/rituals, expectations and rules associated with these religious beliefs. Additionally, religion tends to have several unifying features such as organizational structure, rules governing cognitions and behaviors in ways that regardless of specific beliefs connect all religious groups. Spirituality on the other hand was a set of beliefs and relationships that were much more personal, individual, and unique to the individual (and sometimes the dyad). For these participants there were fewer rules and the rituals/rites that were performed around spiritual beliefs (e.g., yoga, meditation) could be performed in any location at any time. By allowing for a more flexible system where people can engage and distance themselves as they deem necessary, spirituality and religion appear quite distinct. Participants who identified as spiritual and not religious, there appeared to be a more individual and fluid set of beliefs, that often are captured as journey of growth and questioning. Participants often described how the spiritual journey or growth began with a questioning of organized religion, its tenets or even relational events in their lives.
**Spirituality, Religion and Denomination/Identification.** Denomination and identification with specific religious groups was a key distinguishing component of religion compared to spirituality. In terms of religion, many participants readily identified with a specific religious group (e.g., Catholic, Lutheran, and Orthodox Jew) as a means of distinguishing themselves from other individuals and other beliefs systems. By naming a specific group with which to identify, participants often discussed assumptions that others may have about them based on affiliation. Assumptions based on identification solidified the beliefs and values of the in-group. For instance, by identifying as a Catholic or an Orthodox Jew, participants often made the assumption that others would know how these beliefs influenced their lived experience. These assumption about lived experience based on denomination were often framed in a positive manner. For some identification held negative connotations, such as being judgmental resulting in a re-evaluation of identification, occasionally resulting in a shift from religious identification to a more broadly defined spiritual identification.

Spiritual identification was different in that there was less emphasis on identifying with a certain group and often individuals simply identified as being spiritual. This broad categorization of being spiritual was only explicated when asked and was more focused on what distinguished these beliefs from other beliefs such as being polytheistic, duotheistic, believing in Animism or Shamanism, and practicing Reiki. A number identified simply as Christian which appeared to encompass individuals who were religious, spiritual and both spiritual and religious. This Christian subgroup seemed to have a distinct distaste for specific denominations within Christianity and varied in how they
further conceptualized their beliefs beyond sharing the common belief in God and Jesus Christ. For a small number of participants there was little or no distinction between religious and spiritual beliefs. These participants appeared to have incorporated religious beliefs into self in such an important and vital way that they cannot distinguish between their religious beliefs and their spiritual beliefs. Interestingly, the participants that fit this category all identified as Catholic. The inability to distinguish between religious and spiritual beliefs appeared to be more salient for individuals’ whose religious beliefs were powerful in their need to be followed and unquestioned. Individual who don’t question their religious upbringing often incorporate spirituality directly into their religious beliefs.

**Spirituality, Religion, Rites/Rituals, and Rules.** Based on the consistent references to rites, rituals, and rules of organized religion, there appears to be less variation in terms of religious beliefs compared to spiritual beliefs. Religious beliefs tend to be statements about specific beliefs (e.g., I believe in God and Jesus) and where attendance and participation in activities reinforce these beliefs, which are crucial to having a strong religious faith. Belief that God, Jesus, or a Higher Power were at the center of these religious beliefs were central to most individuals understanding of religion. In addition to this common notion that there is an active Higher Power, many individuals (even those who did not identify as religious) suggested that religion is an organization or way to organize and engage beliefs in a Higher Power. These rites and rituals are often engaged in to cope with difficult life circumstances (e.g., illness,
uncertainty) as well as to self-soothe when coping with personal struggles (e.g., needs for control).

Directly related to the organizational function of religion, attendance, activities and education were ways in which individuals demonstrated and engaged their religious beliefs. Participants who had experience with organized religion, either currently or in the family of origin, noted the importance and value of attending religious services and participation in activities and educational opportunities around religious beliefs. Attending services and being active in religious organizations and education was a central tenet of organized religion. Within these activities there was consistent discussion of attending specific educational schools (e.g., Sunday school, Hebrew school) by participants who identified as religious at some point in their lives, often noting that these educational opportunities were valuable and important regardless of current beliefs. Additionally, for individuals who considered themselves to be religious currently, being involved in organizations related to their religion was an important foundation for beliefs, values and morals. Attendance, activities and education around religious beliefs were critical to distinguishing variations in the engagement of religious beliefs.

Rituals, rules, and attendance were also present for spiritual individuals in this sample, however, the way in which they were discussed and engaged differed dramatically. The themes of rituals, rules, and attendance were exemplified by specific activities such as yoga, transcendental and other form of meditation, practicing Reiki and an overwhelming sense that spirituality is not what you do but how you are. Individuals who identified as spiritual often highlighted the emphasis on a way of being, that is
constant as opposed to religion which is often something that is enacted when engaging in specific practices. Spiritual education also differed in substantial ways from organized religion in that spiritual learning often took many forms including reading, participating with groups (e.g., Global Chant), and finding ways to connect to the self, God, and nature. Education regarding spiritual beliefs was much more informal than religious education. This distinction continues to emphasize the focus of spirituality on personal, unique, beliefs and relationships compared to the organizational features of religion.

**Spirituality, Religion and the Role of Expectations.** Religion was also distinguished from spirituality in that the idea of expectations, particularly expectations that salient others had for their participation and beliefs, were quite common. Many participant spoke about what to do or not to do in terms of behavior, specifically relational behavior, as they experienced expectations from parents, clergy, and religious institutions. As noted earlier, based on self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1989), when individuals begin to form their sense of self independent from highly valued others, others’ expectations and individuals’ behaviors often do not align causing individuals to re-evaluate the importance of meeting these expectations. Many participants spoke about the expectation and even the discrepancies they noted in their own experiences that resulted in a questioning or re-evaluation of religious beliefs. Interestingly, many of the expectations regarding religious participation and relational behaviors were high in saliency up until participants got married and then their saliency diminished significantly, only to reemerge again during discussions of children and child-rearing. It appears that for many individuals in this study, it was very important to follow the rules and beliefs of
religion leading up to marriage, but that they didn’t feel as if there were as many rules to follow for married couples. Given the lack of rules and expectations for marriage, many individuals saw this as a time where there may have been less emphasis on religious beliefs and less need to maintain an active religious life. However, these beliefs become more salient during discussions of child rearing as most religious organizations strongly emphasize that parents should raise their children to ascribe to their religious beliefs. Religion was emphasized for its structure, organization and education when discussed in terms of children. Additionally many individuals wanted to expose their children to organized religion so that they could make informed choices growing up about their beliefs.

Many individuals noted expectations that started to address the idea of why one should be religious. As individuals perceived and integrated an obligation to engage their religious beliefs and the more important it is to obtain approval from highly valued others the less likely they were to question or distinguish themselves from their family of origin in terms of active and engaged beliefs. Individuals who did not perceive that highly valued others held strong expectations for their religious identification, were more able to explore various religious and even spiritual beliefs, identifying with only those beliefs that they held. Expectations that were held by participants regarding religious beliefs were often generated by others as opposed to being expectations held by the participants themselves. These discrepancies caused many to discuss how these expectancies resulted in their movement away from organized religion while others simply modified their beliefs to meet these expectations. Although participants in this study emphasized the
lowered expectations as playing a role in their ability to engage in a spiritual search, it is possible that other circumstances may also allow for individuals to begin and explore a spiritual journey. For instance it is possible that individuals who experience a low need for approval from others may not feel pressure to conform to family of origin beliefs allowing them the freedom to explore. Additionally, individuals who did not experience a discrepancy between their family of origin beliefs and their spiritual search (i.e., there is overlap) may be able to simultaneously explore other beliefs without experiencing a sense of betrayal in terms of family of origin beliefs. Finally, some individuals may have a sense of self that is not dependent upon others (i.e., highly valued others) and therefore, it is possible for them to explore their spirituality thoroughly without any impact on their relationships with others.

**Self-Discrepancy Theory and Understanding Beliefs and Movement.** As self-discrepancy theory suggests the expectations and beliefs about self held by highly valued others often shapes the view individuals have of the self (Higgins, 1989; Robins & Boldero, 2003). Self-discrepancy theory can help understand how individuals and couples experience the beliefs and movement in three specific ways; 1) discrepancies between beliefs and behaviors, 2) discrepancies between beliefs and other beliefs, 3) discrepancies between own expectations and other expectations. Discrepancies between beliefs and behaviors were discussed when participants beliefs and behaviors did not match creating a discrepancy. Many participants discussed this type of discrepancy as occurring when they engaged in behavior that did not match highly valued beliefs such as beliefs about pre-marital sexual relations and cohabitation. Several participants noted
this type of discrepancy often resulted in the shifting of beliefs to match behavior or other strategies to reconcile this discrepancy such as sanctification.

The second way that self-discrepancy theory can assist in explaining movement is through discrepancies between beliefs and other beliefs. The role of generation and family of origin had a substantial influence on the beliefs held by many participants in the current study. Most individuals who identified as religious did not differ significantly in the identification in their family of origin and noted that their family played a role in the establishment of their own religious beliefs. For instance, several participants noted that their family had been a specific denomination for generations and it was just expected that regardless of your active involvement in that religion you still identified as that religion. For some participants this expectation did impact their view of self as they were able to fit their own beliefs to this familial expectation about identification, however, for others this was more challenging and even justified a movement away from organized religion. For instance, one participant who was raised in the Church of Jesus-Christ Latter Day Saints (i.e., LDS, Mormon) was frustrated by the rules and regulations laid out in her family of origin around attire, relational behavior (e.g., nothing more than kissing until marriage, you should marry a Mormon), and preference given to other Mormons that she no longer considers herself to be Mormon, but now identifies as a Christian. These regulations and expectations were a main motivating factor in the shift away from the LDS community to a more broad reaching set of Christian beliefs. This movement will be further discussed in terms of spirituality, as a number of individuals noted a more dramatic shift away from organized religion to a more self-directed spirituality.
All of the participants who identified as spiritual but not religious noted a shift in response to beliefs, tenets, expectation, or relational events that propelled them towards their current spiritual beliefs and for many away from organized religion to reconcile discrepancies between beliefs. The movement away from religion and towards spirituality in response to beliefs, tenets and expectations has been noted in prior research and supports the distinction between religion and spirituality (Saucier & Skrzypinska, 2006). In place of the emphasis on rituals, rules and expectations seen in religion, spiritual individuals were more likely to focus on achieving a connection that is personal and unique to their beliefs. For spiritual individuals it appears that it is more important to emphasize the connection and personal relationship with God, a Higher Power, or nature than it is to enact specific rituals and rites of practice. Many individuals noted that they did not need or perform rituals in order to maintain their spiritual beliefs but that the practices they do engage in (e.g., yoga, meditation) help them to connect both internally and with a God or Higher Power. Although it was probed, this sense of connection to self and a Higher Power was in fact very private for many individuals. Most individuals did not have the ability to clearly express how it was that they knew that they were connecting to their Higher Power or God. It appeared that many individuals in this sample, did not appreciate the constraints that organized religion demanded on their daily lives. Specifically, some individuals had practices that they engaged in as a means of establishing a connection, while for others the practices, and obligations (e.g., must do’s, should’s, have to’s) were part of what was causing a discrepancy between religion and spirituality.
The third way in which self-discrepancy theory can assist in the reconciliation of discrepancies is in terms of own and others expectations. Often this type of discrepancy was noted when expectations were held by highly valued others that directly conflicted with the individual or couples’ beliefs about themselves. The movement away from religion towards spirituality can be explained using self-discrepancy theory, as the view of self can also exist for couples. Couples often have views of self that incorporate an actual and ideal view of the couple and discrepancies in how the dyad is perceived can initiate the need to modify beliefs and behavior to reconcile potential discrepancies. This is highlighted by one participant who discussed how she became highly spiritual, shifting her involvement in organized religion after realizing that she could not be genuine and transparent as a pastor’s wife in an unhappy marriage that was filled with infidelity. In seeking a divorce and then later on finding someone to marry who would provide a match between her beliefs and their marital behavior, she was able to reconcile this prior discrepancy and further deepen her spiritual beliefs and the connection she felt to God. Although her experience was unique, many participants noted that there was an attempt to reconcile beliefs with behaviors. Previous research has shown that in the face of divorce, some individuals experience a growth and movement away from organized religion towards spirituality (Krumrei, et al., 2009). This supports the potential for difficult relational experiences to influence spiritual and religious beliefs in an attempt to reconcile views of self.

Attempts to reconcile discrepancies between beliefs and behaviors were much more prominent for individuals who at one time identified with religion but currently
identified as spiritual but not religious or neither spiritual nor religious. Many of these individuals cited a questioning of beliefs and tenets of organized religion and an inability to reconcile discrepant beliefs as the impetus for movement away from religion. One frequently cited example was the inability to dismiss personal beliefs about evolution for the religious notions of creation. Individuals who currently identified as spiritual but not religious or not having either spiritual or religious beliefs, were more likely to cite having questioned main tenets of religion as opposed to individuals who still identify as religious who often questioned the meaning or rules of being religious rather than the tenets of the beliefs. For many religious individuals, questioning the tenets of religion was something that was viewed as unacceptable.

On the whole, spirituality and religion do in fact have shared features as they both focus on beliefs, activities, education, rituals/rites, and a means by which individuals identify themselves, yet the ways in which these features operate and are executed by individuals and couples may in fact be truly distinct for some and overlapping for others. For most participants, religion is primarily about the organization and implementation of specific beliefs as dictated by doctrine, whereas spirituality, in all of its various forms, is the personal relationship with God, nature, and others. Religion tends to have more dictates and rules of belonging than spirituality and many participants note that the personal journey and intimacy that they receive from their spirituality is deeper than what they experienced in organized religion. It is important to understand and allow for participants to explicate how they view spiritual and religion in terms of commonalities and discrepancies as some participants often feel the need to conform to social labels for
their behavior as opposed to how they would actually choose to identify. The ability for people to continue to self-identify as either spiritual or religious and to explicate what that means will provide future research a more honest representation of how individuals’ beliefs influence their romantic relationships.

**Research Goal 2: Romantic Relationships, Spirituality & Religion**

The second goal of the present study was to understand how individuals and couples incorporate their religious and spiritual beliefs into the romantic relationships beliefs and marriage. It was quite interesting to note that while spiritual and religious beliefs had influence on relational beliefs and marriage, they appear to exert their influence in very different ways. Religion was used to know how to act in romantic relationships particularly leading up to marriage, whereas spiritual beliefs had a much more prominent role after marriage. Participants’ relational values (e.g., regarding sex, cohabitation, contraception, pregnancy) were often contingent on marital status specifically as these values relate to religious beliefs. For many participants, religious beliefs dictate a great deal regarding courtship behavior leading up to marriage, such as dating, engagement in sexual relations, cohabitation, contraception, and pregnancy. On the other hand, spiritual beliefs were often referenced in marital cohesion, morals and values, and the decision to have and raise children.

The way in which religious beliefs influence courtship behavior is complex as there are a number of rules and beliefs that religious individuals hold valuable telling them what is acceptable in the context of pre-marital relationships. Religious beliefs about dating and what takes place in the context of dating relationships can be thought of
as influencing the way people think about and engage in their romantic relationships up until the point in which they become married, at which point these rules are often minimized, and then re-activation of these valued beliefs re-emerges with the decision to have children and questions about how to raise these children. Leading up to marriage, religious beliefs informed participants’ views of who were acceptable dating partners (e.g., it is important not to be unequally yoked), and what should happen in the context of dating (e.g., no cohabitation, no pre-marital sex).

Decisions and behaviors that are enacted in pre-marital relationships are often mandated by dictates of religion particularly for those individuals who believe in religion. For those individuals who are spiritual and not religious, there are fewer mandates about specific relational behaviors. Many still internalized these “rules” of dating since they were raised with religion and often the movement towards spirituality did not begin until during or after adolescence when participants had already begun to date.

**Dating.** Dating sets the stage for individuals to find a marital partner. Given the prominent focus on marital relations by many organized religions, dating for some has a very specific purpose and many rules and regulations. Dating often did not take place until you reached a specific age, indicating a milestone in maturity. Most participants stated that they were not allowed to do any dating or formal courtship process until they were sixteen, at which time, they could begin to engage romantic dating. For some, dating was to be done with the sole purpose of finding a suitable partner and as such it was crucial to act in a way that constantly reflected their beliefs (e.g., act in a way befitting Christ). Not only was an individual to act in a way that was befitting Christ or
God in their dating life, they were also supposed to seek out a partner who would not make them unequally yoked. Being unequally yoked would result in your relationship facing additional strains and stresses as were often exemplified with personal examples and biblical support. For some participants these messages translated into a strict adherence, dating only those individuals with shared beliefs. Highly religious individuals often spoke of seeking out individuals who shared their beliefs and the strength of those beliefs. There appeared to be some flexibility in specific denominations as long as there was a generally shared set of religious beliefs. For instance, it was common that it was okay to date a Methodist if you are Baptist, as there is a set of shared beliefs however, it would be more difficult to be a Catholic who is dating a Jew (as one participant described), because of the lack of shared beliefs. Additionally, individuals who were highly spiritual often were older and viewed dating as a way to find a partner who shared their beliefs or could at least understand their spiritual journey. This latter dating strategy employed by highly spiritual individuals, was apparent in several of the older (i.e., over 40 years) individuals who seemed to have a highly defined sense of self in terms of spirituality before entering into dating relationships.

In addition to not being unequally yoked, a number of participants spoke about inter-racial dating, which was an unanticipated subtheme. Several participants noted that the time period or geographic region in which they grew up influenced the messages that they received about inter-racial relationships. Growing up during the 1960’s and 1970’s, or being in the south played a role in the messages that some participants received about inter-racial dating. Many of the participants that discussed race were older and often had
some personal experience with dating individuals of other races or seeing the response to family members inter-racial dating. For instance one individual discussed how his parents were extremely unsupportive and “went ballistic” when his sister began dating an African American man. Although this was an unanticipated theme, prior research has shown that individuals who are non-Christian or do not practice organized religion are more willing to date individuals of other races (Fitzpatrick, Sharp, & Reifman, 2009; Wilson, McIntosh, & Insana Ii, 2007; Yancey, 2002). Several participants received specific messages that races should not mix and that you should not date outside their race, calling into questions religious beliefs and values that they had grown up with, that all people were equal. A number of individuals dismissed these messages, opting for what they deemed to be a suitable partner, who may or may not be of their same race. These participants did not use race as a factor in determining who might be a suitable partner regardless of the messages that they had received about inter-racial dating.

**Sexuality, Spiritual and Religious Beliefs.** The most prominent belief that was integrated into dating relationships based on religious views was the notion that it was unacceptable to engage in pre-marital sexual relations. This belief was held by most all individuals and directly influenced the messages and beliefs that individuals received about a number of other relational decisions such as cohabitation, contraception and pregnancy. Anti-pre-marital sex beliefs often began at an early age and were integrated into individuals’ beliefs systems such that they permeated further than just beliefs about sexual relations into beliefs about cohabitation and contraception.
Without exception, participants received messages that pre-marital sex was not the preferred context in which to engage in sexual behaviors although the ways in which this influenced actual relational behavior differed. Some participants and couples decided to adhere to anti-pre-marital sex beliefs as dictated such that they chose to abstain from sexual relations until they were married. While abstinence from sexual intercourse was a common message, a devout Orthodox Jewish couple abstained from all physical contact prior to marriage as is dictated by their faith. Other individuals stated that they valued this belief but that they chose not to adhere to it in their own relationships. For these couples, they often sanctified their relationships and behavior by stating that they had already discussed marriage or they were in fact already engaged when they decided to engage in sexual relations. The sanctification of the relationship has been frequently noted as a strategy to reconcile beliefs and behaviors in religious individuals (Murray-Swank, et al., 2005; Walker, et al., 2008). Sanctification was also used to justify or reduce the discrepancy between other discouraged pre-marital behaviors and religious beliefs that are directly related to beliefs about pre-marital sex.

Pre-marital sex messages seemed to incorporate messages about other pre-marital relational behaviors such as the use of contraception and cohabitation (Cunningham & Thornton, 2006; Jacquet & Surra, 2001). It was quite surprising how many individuals did not receive messages growing up about contraception, as it was simply and implicitly understood that you shouldn’t or weren’t engaging in sexual relations outside of marriage and therefore there was no need to discuss contraception. Of the few participants who did receive messages about contraception use, many of them were given under the
premise that this wasn’t to be used or necessary but if they did decide to engage in sexual relations prior to marriage they were to be safe in doing so. These messages however were quite rare.

In addition to the lack of messages about contraception there were equally few and taboo messages about cohabitation. Many participants were taught and believed that you were not to live with someone of the opposite sex outside of marriage and therefore cohabitation was unacceptable. These messages about cohabitation were guided and presented as they related directly to beliefs about pre-marital sex. A number of individuals chose to abide by these beliefs, not living with their partner until they were married, however, others chose to cohabit prior to marriage. The individuals that chose to cohabit prior to marriage had several strategies for reconciling their beliefs and their behaviors. The first strategy was to note technicalities that supported their adherence to the valued belief but allowed for limit testing. These participants discussed maintaining separate residences and stayed together only a few nights a week, so they weren’t “technically” living together, as they still maintained their own places. This technicality allowed them to minimize the discrepancy between the anti-cohabitation beliefs and the engaged in behavior. The second strategy was more explicit in that participants often rationalized their cohabitation as not being as bad or unacceptable since their intentions were clear (i.e., they were heading towards marriage) or they were in fact already engaged to be married. This strategy mirrors the notion of sanctification of sexual relations (Murray-Swank, et al., 2005) in a new way applying it not only to actual sexual relations but also to relational decision that for many imply sexual relations.
In addition to messages about contraception and cohabitation being subsumed by pre-marital sex beliefs, the idea of pregnancy was also closely tied to religious beliefs about pre-marital sex. Pregnancy was not often discussed as most individuals believed that they were not have sex outside of marriage, impacting the way they experienced dating and relationships. Since messages about contraception were uncommon, and sex was for marriage, several participants experienced the consequences of sexual intercourse outside of marriage. Several participants had experience with pre-marital pregnancy and their experience shaped their beliefs about relationship, religion and spirituality. For instance, several participants noted that being pregnant outside of marriage was traumatic and caused them a great deal of shame because it was something that would continue to identify that they had “broken the rules”. Although the stories behind these experiences are unique, many people who identify as spiritual and religious experience shame and guilt in regards to sexual attitudes and behaviors (Murray, Ciarrocchi, & Murray-Swank, 2007). These experiences resulted in a significant shift in religious beliefs, moving away from religion towards a personal spirituality, for one participant, and a change in relational behavior for another, in the decision to remain abstinent until marriage after that. These examples represented the complex and circular influence that religion, spirituality, and relationship beliefs have on each other.

**Marriage, Religion and Spirituality.** Many individuals spoke about the importance of marriage based on their religious and spiritual beliefs. Given the emphasis during childhood on relational behaviors that are only sanctioned in the context of marital relationships, many participants discussed the importance of marriage. There were three
sub-themes that emerged in regards to marriage, religion and spirituality; expectations regarding marriage, the direct influence of religious or spiritual beliefs on marriage and ways to focus and maintain marital relationship. Each sub-theme highlights the interrelationship between these various types of beliefs.

Quite a few participants discussed various expectations that they had for marriage and marital partners based on their religious and spiritual beliefs. Participants who identified as religious as well as those who identified as spiritual had expectations that they would marry someone who held similar or the same spiritual beliefs. Spiritual seekers often discussed the importance of being with other seekers, while religious individuals often sought out other religious individuals. While it was important for many to find someone similar, it was also common that while there may be some overlap in beliefs, often partners stated that they married for love and that religious and spiritual beliefs were negotiated after the relationship was initiated.

Furthermore, a number of participants had expectations regarding the actual marriage ceremony and the role that religious and spiritual beliefs would have in that momentous occasion. A number of participants emphasized the importance of being married in a religious location such as a church. This expectation had to do with religious beliefs, generational traditions and family of origin, and often set the stage for how beliefs would be active in marriage. This notion of being married in a specific religious place often was negotiated by partners and often influenced their beliefs and identification into the first year of marriage. Religious and spiritual beliefs play a direct role in how couples engage their spiritual and religious beliefs within marriage.
Many participants expected to marry someone with similar beliefs; some individuals fell in love with people from different faiths or experiences and needed to engage in more active negotiation and discussion regarding the roles of these beliefs in order to achieve marital cohesion. For couples who do not share religious homogamy (i.e., they had different religious beliefs), several strategies were used to negotiate this difference in the relationship. There appear to be three different paths that couples took as they negotiated the role of spiritual and religious beliefs in their marriages. The first path involved couples arriving at a set of shared beliefs that they enact and engaged together that they perceive make their relationship and marriage stronger. For some these beliefs appear based on activity and involvement to be religious yet participants often deemed them spiritual. This was the most common pattern among participants in this study. The second path was one in which individual beliefs appear to be parallel. Parallel beliefs may appear similar but are practiced and engaged in differently and in an individual way. These couples have often negotiated a set of important events or activity they participate in together however on the whole they may share beliefs but differ in their implementation. The third and least common pattern is one in which each person experiences their religious and/or spiritual beliefs in isolation from their partner, but they have agreed to support each other in their individual endeavors. For some couples in these last two patterns they stressed the importance of supporting their partners’ engagement in their beliefs simply because it is what they believe and it’s important to them. Couples who were able to negotiate this shared appreciation for each others’
beliefs even when the beliefs and practices differed appeared to be more satisfied with their relationships and their engagement in spiritual and religious beliefs.

Many couples cited religious and spiritual ways in which they maintain and focus on their marriage. Using religious and spiritual beliefs to focus and maintain marriage was distinct for some of the younger couples who had begun their own traditions, however, for couples with children it was often more salient. For the younger couples without children, it was important to many of them to begin their own traditions and rituals. For some couples, these traditions reflected values and traditions that were found in the family of origin, while for others there was an expression of shared values between marital partners. For instance, one couple began their day with a shared prayer before leaving the house, which reflected the traditions that they had both experienced but was their own variation, while other couples participated in yoga together each morning which was a time for them to connect and share what they deemed a spiritual activity. In addition to engaging in shared activities some couples used religious and spiritual beliefs to maintain and focus their marriages in much more explicit ways. For instance, several couples described the impact that not engaging in their beliefs has on the way they treat their marital partner, citing added conflict, tension, bickering, distress and dissatisfaction. This suggests that for a subset of highly religious individuals their perception regarding the role of their beliefs (e.g., in God, Jesus, Higher Power) was so salient that when it is not a central focus the marital relationship showed strain.

**Children.** Couples with children, particularly young children, were more likely to have discussed a movement back towards religion if they were spiritual or various
expectations about how religion would be active in their children’s lives. Many spiritual parents discussed valuing the importance of structure, history and education that religion provides, suggesting that they may return to organized religion so that their children may have the same values and experiences that they had. Interestingly, for these parents they may discuss moving back towards organized religion, but they often emphasized that they wanted to expose children to multiple faiths, and that they would not force it upon their children. This was often contrasted by their own family of origin experiences where they were forced to follow their parents’ beliefs. For couples who identified as being religious, they often did not allow their young children to choose and instead mandated that the children adhere to their religious beliefs. These couples often suggested that they would accept it if their children decided at some point not to adhere to their religious beliefs, but that it may in fact depend on what they chose to believe (e.g., wouldn’t support devil worship). Many couples who did not yet have children and were religious up until they got married had become more relaxed (by their own accounts) in their participation recently. This is particularly interesting to note that most all of these couples mentioned a possible return to religion in a more devout sense once they had children. It appears that for some individuals and couples, religious beliefs guide their behavior in a significant way until marriage, at which point, the rules lessen, only to be followed by an increase in involvement upon the arrival of children. It appears that spirituality and religion may become dormant for some after marriage and these beliefs are activated with the expectation and birth of a child. Many participants discussed the notion that children needed religion for structure and education and that they didn’t want
their children to be uniformed or to believe that there was only one religion. Even couples who did not identify with organized religion currently appeared to leave the door ajar for a time, when children are present or as they age, when religion might become more important and salient.

**Family of Origin, Religion, and Spiritual Beliefs in Marriage.** Family of origin experiences had a large influence not only on the development of spiritual and religious beliefs but also on marital relationships and relational beliefs. For many participants, family of origin, specifically parents set a positive example of how to engage in marital relationships that enacted their religious and spiritual beliefs. For other participants, family of origin experiences were not nearly as positive calling into question religious and spiritual beliefs as well as shaping relational beliefs and behaviors.

Many participants described coming from happy, loving homes, where their parents were still married. This type of family experience often resulted in children who shared their parents’ spiritual and religious beliefs or had developed their own based on positive experiences. These adult children enacted various traditions and behaviors that were modeled by parents. Several participants stated that they hoped to set as positive example for their children as their parents had. These connections between generations in stable and religious or spiritual family has been show in prior research (Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001) and is reinforced in the present study.

Unfortunately not all participants experienced such a positive environment in the family of origin. Experiences in family of origin including divorce, relational instability, infidelity, homelessness, and drug/alcohol use had impacted adult children’s views of
religion, spirituality and relationships. When participants experienced events in their family of origin that were in direct contradiction to spiritual or religious beliefs taught in the home, participants were more likely to express distress and questioning of both relational and spiritual belief (Krumrei, et al., 2009; Mahoney, et al., 2001; Zhai, et al., 2008). For instance one participant described her parents’ divorce following affairs as calling into question all of their teachings based on the Biblical values and importance of marriage, and the sinfulness of adultery. This example highlights the complexity of the interrelationship between religious, spiritual beliefs, and relationship beliefs.

For other participants, parental behavior may simply be judged on the relationship behavior. One participant described watching both of his parents abuse drugs and alcohol, and his mother having a series of bad relationships with abusive partners. From these early experiences this participant made a conscious decision not to become dependent upon others as his mom had been, and to place a high value on healthy positive experiences in his marriage. This participant reflects a common movement away from parents’ beliefs relationally, spiritually, and religiously following the experience of a traumatic or difficult event such as divorce or parental instability. Movement and weakened beliefs following divorce has been shown in a number of other studies (Krumrei, et al., 2009; Mahoney, et al., 2001; Zhai, et al., 2008), suggesting that these participants experiences of questioning following familial divorce is not an uncommon response to difficult family experiences. These various events in family of origin highlight the variety of experiences and responses to modeled behavior that may be likely to shape individual views of self.
These results are supported by the limited research that exists on the interrelationships between spiritual and religious beliefs and relational beliefs and behavior. Additionally, as many participants and behaviors suggest an attempt to reconcile beliefs that are held, viewed, and integrated into self, self-discrepancy theory appears to be a beneficial in understanding how participants continually modify their beliefs as they continue to experience life.

In summary, participants’ definitions and understanding of religion and spirituality are consistent with much of the literature which suggests that religion is much more centered on organization, rules, and rituals (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Hill, et al., 2000) whereas spirituality is much more personal and is focused on individual beliefs, connection, and private practices (Hill, et al., 2000). The ways in which individuals and couples expressed movement of spiritual and religious beliefs was consistent with the tenets of self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1989; Robins & Boldero, 2003). It was not surprising how consistent religious and spiritual messages were about relational behavior prior to marriage in terms of pre-marital sex, dating, pregnancy, and the importance of marriage. What was surprising was the lack of spiritual and religious messages about the role of beliefs in the marital relationship and the reemergence of beliefs when children were discussed or present. This finding was not discussed in prior research. Fluctuation of beliefs appears to be a unique contribution to this area of research.

**Research Implications Based on the Current Research.**

Part of the broader goal of this study was to understand and evaluate whether current conceptualizations and measurements of spirituality and religion were accurate in
their assumptions and capture the actual lived experience of individuals. Although there are points of distinction and shared aspects, this research suggests that individual experiences vary greatly in terms of spiritual and religious beliefs, cognitions, and behaviors. The use of a qualitative story-telling methodology allowed for an in-depth understanding of how individuals and couples integrate their spiritual and religious beliefs into their lived experience. The integration of activities, education, rules, and rituals that are part of spiritual and religious beliefs permeated into daily life, and relationships with others, specifically in terms of dating and marital partners. During the experience of this study, some couples highlighted the inherent problem with quantitative measures regarding religious and spiritual beliefs. The decision was made to use existing measures to evaluate spiritual and religious beliefs in order to ensure a diverse set of participant beliefs, and valid, reliable measures were selected that met the specific goals of evaluating how individuals perceived their beliefs in marriage. Despite these methodological precautions, couples noted that they often did not know how spirituality and religion were to be defined and responded based either on their own definition, which may or may not have matched others, or based on what they perceived to be the common and accepted definitions. Fortunately, participants in this study were asked to define spirituality and religion as well as provide an explanation as to the similarities and distinctions, however, had the survey responses simply been used the results would not likely reflect a true sense of the individuals who participated.

This calls into question the use of even validated measures of spirituality, for which there are many (Idler, et al., 2003). The accuracy of representing the vast array of
spiritual beliefs is often absent as measures often confound religion and spirituality through the use of God or a Higher Power with the exclusion of connections to nature, and other practices of spirituality such as Animism, Shamanism, belief in past lives and reincarnation which were all mentioned by participants in this study to describe their spiritual beliefs. The challenge persists in the use of quantitative measurement as in order to encompass the range of spiritual beliefs, measures need to remain broad enough to be inclusive, yet this often presents a problem for parsimony, validity, and reliability in the evaluation of spiritual beliefs. Additionally, when attempting to understand how these spiritual beliefs influence romantic relationships, quantitative measures will continue to be limited by their need to be broad in order to be inclusive.

The current study also has implications for the continued use of self-discrepancy theory in conjunction with story-telling methodology as a means by which the interrelations between spiritual, religious, and relational beliefs can be understood. Although this theory has not previously been used to understand spiritual beliefs in relationships, it was informative in this study to explain and understand how participant shifted in their beliefs throughout the course of individual and relational development. The ability for participants to reconcile notions of actual and ideal selves with actual other and ideal other selves was validated as participants discussed shifts and deepening of beliefs as it related to expectations of the self held by the individual and important others (Higgins, 1989; Robins & Boldero, 2003). By using a story-telling approach to the interviews, participants made connections between specific religious, spiritual, and relational events as they related to their own experiences. Participants were able to
discuss the influence of important others, society, and other social institutions to explain how they form and implement beliefs in daily life. An additional benefit of the use of self-discrepancy theory and storytelling methodology is that it allowed for participants to explicate the interrelated and circular relationship between religious or spiritual beliefs and the engagement in romantic relationships. Although this relationship is complex, it reflects the actual nature of experience that participants had, and does not require interpretation of how spiritual or religious beliefs are integrated into romantic relationships.

**Generalizability**

Although the current study is important in expanding the understanding of how spiritual and religious beliefs develop and influence romantic relationship formation and functioning, there are several aspects of this sample that limit its generalizability as well as several aspects that provide advantages and applicability to the larger population. The generalizability of this study may be limited based on sample size, eligibility criteria, recruitment, geographic restrictions, and cultural norms. Despite these limitations there are several aspects of this sample that should be noted as advantages including the variations in religious and spiritual identification, age, and relationship length prior to and in marriage, as well as the vast array of relational experiences (e.g., experience of divorce and remarriage, the presence and absence of children). Each facet of these limitations and advantages to generalizability will be discussed.

As in many qualitative studies the size of the sample is relatively small. Even though a total of 45 interviews were conducted, 30 individual and 15 dyadic, these
interviews only give a glimpse into the breadth of different constructions, viewings, and applications of religious and spiritual beliefs on romantic relationships. Participants in the present study elected to participate knowing that the study would involve the discussion of spiritual and religious beliefs. By using a small sample of convenience, it is possible that these individuals’ experiences with spirituality, religion, and relationships are unique and do not extent to broader populations. Spirituality, religion, and relationships may have been subjects that certain individuals and couples did not feel comfortable with, limiting their participation for unknown reasons. It is possible that individuals who self-selected participation in this study did so for several reasons including a desire to discuss their spiritual and religious beliefs, and their romantic relationship or perhaps for the monetary compensation that was advertised. Therefore, although this study represents the experiences of these individuals and couples, it is possible that these couples represent unique spiritual, religious and relational beliefs.

A total of 34 couples initiated contact with the study, yet several couples did not respond to requests for interviews and other couples only completed the pre-survey for one participant, violating the eligibility requirements. Several couples were not eligible based on the marital length requirements which further limited the samples generalizability to individuals beyond the first five years of marriage. Recruitment based primarily off the internet has some limitations particularly for individuals who may not have internet access (Ogolsky, Niehuis, & Ridley, 2009). Although access to the internet has sometimes been cited as a limitation in reaching older individuals, the age range and found in this study suggests that this may not be quite the same limitation it was several
years ago. It is possible that lower socio-economic status minority individuals (e.g., Latinos) did not have the same internet access or awareness of websites such as Craigslist where the advertisements for participation were placed. Future work should attempt to broaden the recruitment strategies in order to achieve a more representative sample.

In order to conduct the interviews for this study, participants needed to be located in Southern Arizona, limiting the generalizability of the study beyond the region. Although this geographic restriction can be seen as a limitation, the area of Southern Arizona does have a diverse population and a variety of religious institutions as well as a large spiritual population as demonstrated within this fairly small sample. Although participants needed to be living in Southern Arizona at the time the study was conducted, most participants did not live in Southern Arizona all their lives with many originally being from areas outside the southwest region. It is possible that conducting this study in a different location would achieve different results for some individuals as other regions are more homogenous than the Southern Arizona region. Expanding these interviews to other geographic regions will confirm whether participants in the Southern Arizona are unique in terms of their religious, spiritual, and relational beliefs.

The final limitation to the generalizability of this study was the lack of representative ethnic diversity that represents the population of the region. Southern Arizona has a large population of Latino couples and yet this study had several Latino individuals yet no dyads comprised of Latino’s. It is possible that recruitment and content of this study limited the participation of Latino couples as they may not be as comfortable discussing their religious, spiritual, and relational beliefs. In the future,
specific attempts will be made to expand this research into this population as they are a growing population whose voice has not been heard in the same way in this study as other ethnic groups.

Despite these limitations towards generalizability, the variation in this small sample does assist in minimizing some of the limitations to generalizability previously discussed. This small sample was extremely diverse in terms of religious and spiritual identities. By finding a heterogeneous group of individuals and couples for this study, it was possible to gain a more in depth understanding of how different individuals view their spiritual and religious beliefs, providing a wide range of experiences. Additionally, this diversity allowed the researcher to understand the various ways in which individuals and couples negotiated their spiritual and religious beliefs, and integrated them into their marital relationships. Had a more homogeneous sample been obtained, it is possible that a clear understanding of the range of influence that spiritual and religious beliefs can have on relationship formation and development would still be largely unknown.

In addition to the spiritual and religious diversity, this sample also represents a wide range of participants on a number of categories such as age, relationship length, length of marriage, and broader relational experiences (e.g., multiple marriages, divorce, and presence of children). Participants were diverse in terms of age, with the youngest couples being in their early 20’s with a range of participants in their 30’s, 40’s and 50’s. This range of participants provides the ability to see how not only lived experience may influence spiritual and relational development but to see how different time periods (e.g.,
growing up in the 1970’s) may have impacted not only spiritual and religious beliefs but attitudes about relational behavior.

A secondary impact of the age range of participants was the variety of prior experiences both in these current relationships and in other previous relationships. One unanticipated advantage of this sample is that a number of participants had been married previously and were on their 2nd or 3rd marriages, providing different views of how to integrate religious and spiritual beliefs into romantic relationships. These participants often discussed how their previous marital relationships influenced not only their relationship beliefs, but the way in which they viewed their religious and spiritual beliefs as being an active part of their current marriages. Additionally, a number of participants had children from prior relationships as well as some having young children from these new marriages. The impact of children and child-rearing on marriage and on the integration of religious or spiritual beliefs into marriage varied, but for many having children highlighted the need to solidify these beliefs so that they could be transmitted to younger generations.

Length of relationship prior to marriage was also an area where participants varied. Participants had been in relationships as little as 1 year prior to marriage and as long as 9 ½ years before marrying. The range of relationship length prior to marriage, added to participants understanding of each other in terms of their religious, spiritual and relational beliefs and values. It was apparent that some of the couples who had been together longer prior to marriage, had already spend a great deal of time negotiating and discussing their individual beliefs in order to develop a dyadic set of beliefs.
In addition to the length of relationship prior to marriage, the length of marriage was diverse within the range established by the eligibility criteria that participants were in the first 5 years of marriage. Although 6 couples were concluding their first year of marriage at the time of the study, 4 couples had been married for approximately 2 ½ years and at least 2 other couples were approaching the 5 years of marriage mark. This added to the diversity of the sample in that even though participants had to be in the first 5 years of marriage, there was still variation in that not all of the couples were newlyweds.

Although there are limitations to generalizability demonstrated in this sample, there are also a number of advantages to this sample that provide the opportunity to learn about how individuals and couples view and incorporate their spiritual beliefs into their marital relationships. Since the goals of this study were exploratory, this sample provides a diverse foundation to further this line of interesting and valuable research.

**Limitations**

Although there are many advantages to conducting a qualitative study on the impact and integration of religious and spiritual beliefs on romantic relationships, there are several limitations that should be addressed. Several limitations were present in the way the study was conducted, particularly in that participants were allowed to select the meeting location as well as the lack of time and resources needed to establish reliability. A few other limitations were found in the content of the interviews in terms of gender, and the discussion of soul mates.
In terms of limitations based on how the study was conducted, one of the primary limitations was in allowing participants to select the location of the interviews. Although this was necessary in order to minimize participant burden, the variety of locations presented some difficulty for obtaining the depth and detail of certain experiences. For instance, many participants elected to conduct the interviews at local coffee shops and restaurants which did not always provide a private and quiet area in which to conduct the interviews. Participants did not mention noise or lack of privacy in their interviews; however, there were a few places where audio recordings were disturbed and difficult to hear due to ambient noise from the street or other individuals at the location. The decision to allow participants to select the location was intended to minimize burden as participants are being asked to give quite a bit of time. Many individuals selected their home or the principal investigators office, so this issue was only present for a select few participants who selected public meeting places. Future research can minimize this problem by asking all participants to come to a pre-determined location, such as the principal investigator’s office or a research lab, where the location will be the same for all participants. Additional compensation or the possibility to compensate for parking costs may have eliminated this problem however the funds were not available to offer these types of compensation in the current study.

Reliability coding was not conducted for the present study due to a lack of trained and available coders who were able to exercise the demands of this study. Due to the lack of available personnel coupled with lack of additional monetary resources to hire personnel inter-rater reliability was not conducted. This is a limitation that should be
rectified in the future, as consistency and reliability in the establishment of themes is extremely important. Although reliability coding was not conducted, it can be particularly useful in establishing a level of trustworthiness of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). One problem with using reliability coding in this study was that although transcriptions were available, the sole use of transcripts does not allow for the understanding of context to be taken into account such as partners’ non-verbal behavior and visual descriptions of phenomenon as were often cues to what was being spoken. This lack of context has been discussed as a problem with verification as often inter-raters assess meaning from synthesized and decontextualized transcriptions (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002) which would have been the case for these interviews. Although reliability coding was not conducted, steps were taken to ensure that processes were verified during the interview process. Verification can be done in an ongoing manner as data collection and analysis are iterative processes (Creswell, 1997; Morse, et al., 2002). During the interview process, questions and ordering were modified to assist in the flow of participant stories. Additional questions were developed as part of the interview sequence as needed. Although this strategy is one of many to assist in establishing rigor in qualitative work, other steps and processes should be incorporated into future studies. Further work in this area should include the use of multiple interviewers, video coding and the training of research assistants to be able to interpret the data presented in transcripts.

Another limitation of this study comes in the form of participant responses and the salience of specific topics to the discussion of religious/spiritual and relational beliefs.
The idea of gender roles have been shown to be influenced by religious and spiritual beliefs in previous research (Baker, et al., 2009; Flor & Knapp, 2001; Mahoney, et al., 2001), yet it did not appear as a salient theme in the current study. This was somewhat surprising in that only one or two individuals even mentioned gender roles even though all participants were asked about the impact of gender roles and division of labor during the interviews. Since gender roles are often salient as new marital partners negotiate the roles that they enact, future research will need to explore the construct of gender roles further. Given the lack of discussion regarding the various expectations and roles regarding the different genders in marriage, additional questions and probes directed at obtaining information about gender should be employed in future studies.

When individuals and couples speak of their experiences in finding their partner and deciding that they would marry, often people refer to the idea of finding one’s soul mate. The idea of soul mates was notably absent from all the interviews. It is unclear whether or not this was an intentional omission by participants, or if they did not view these marital partnerships in this way, but it is a curious omission that should be further explored. One interesting notion was that all participants viewed these marriages as being permanent and satisfying and yet none of these individuals spoke about having found their soul mate in their marital partner. Perhaps the notion of soul mates implies that partners are not in control of selecting a mate, however, it was surprising that none of the participants spoke about their relationships as fulfilling this notion of having a soul mate.
Although these limitations were present, it does not appear that they impacted the overall validity of the study. By allowing participants to select the location, a lesson was learned about pre-screening locations and the variability of privacy in public meeting places such as coffee shops. This limitation will also be expanded on in the future directions for this line of research. The omission of specific topics many not be a limitation but only a representation of how participants in this particular sample viewed their gender roles and the notion of soul mates. Future work in this area should direct additional attention to specific questions, probes, and issues around gender roles, and soul mates which were themes that were anticipated but unsupported in the current study. These limitations provide tools for expanding and focusing the research in this area on topics that may not be as salient for participants such as how gender roles influence marital relationships.

**Future Directions**

Given the exploratory nature of this study, there are a number of lesson learned that can be implemented in future research. Several aspects of this study could be modified and additional features could be added to increase the information generated about how couples integrate their religious and spiritual beliefs into their romantic relationships.

One area that could be modified and expanded involved having the research conducted at a research laboratory. Given the time and monetary restrictions of the current data collection, requiring participants to conduct their interviews at the University of Arizona in the McClelland Park research lab was viewed as a significant limitation to
collecting data in a timely fashion. If time constraints were less stringent, and more funds were available participants could be compensated for parking costs and addition time to go to the university bringing participants into the lab would have been beneficial. This addition would minimize the limitation of allowing participant interview locations to be chosen resulting in public and noisy locations. By having a set location, the environment in which the research is conducted could have been more consistent across all participants. Although this was a limitation, many participants cited the choice of location as an added benefit to their participation. In addition to maintaining and establishing a consistent location for data collection, additional data could have been obtained.

A promising future direction that was not conducive to this study’s current completion would be the addition of video recording to assess non-verbal communication between marital dyads during the couple interview. There were several times during couple interviews where the use of video recording would have captured the ways in which participants focused on each other during the interview. For example, during one couple interview the participants turned and began to have a discussion with each other, to the point where they appeared to forget that they were being interviewed. Additionally, there were a number of non-verbal cues that participants engaged in such as touching the partners hand or arm, high fiving each other in response to behaviors and comments being made during the interview which may have provided further insight into the relational dynamics if they had been captured on video. Interpersonal distance was also something that may have been captured and informative as many couples sat
extremely close to each other during the dyadic interview. The use of video recording was prohibitive in meeting the scope and goals of this study in a timely manner but its use will be an important addition and expansion to future work.

Another element of work for future directions would be to incorporate a daily diary to capture additional relational dynamics on a daily basis. The addition of a small daily diary would add to the ability to examine broader relationship dynamics in a prospective and not retrospective manner. In addition to the use of video recording, having couples participate in a diary prior to conducting interviews, a greater understanding of the ongoing negotiation regarding both religious or spiritual beliefs and relationship dynamics could be obtained. The use of diary methods would increase the information that participants provide in regards to relationship dynamics and functioning specifically in areas where frequency or occurrence can be informative. Although the use of diary methods would be an interesting and insightful expansion on the current study, it will have to be conducted with much thought. It appears that there is quite a bit of individual variation in how spiritual and religious beliefs are incorporated into relational functioning, it appears that qualitative work is more valid here in order to understand the personal experience as participants will still need to be able to self-define spirituality and religion.

As part of conducting this qualitative study on the influence of religious and spiritual beliefs it was hoped that it might be possible to develop a measures to assess how spiritual beliefs influence relationships. Although it is possible that the information obtained from this study could assist in the development of a survey, this must be done
with extreme care as a plethora of surveys currently exist to evaluate religious and spiritual beliefs. Additionally, even the well established and validated surveys, such as the Intrinsic Spirituality Scale (Hodge, 2003) do not appear to encompass a broad enough range of spiritual beliefs. It appears that it is possible to know the components of spirituality, as reflected in the themes derived from participant experience however survey research does not allow for the understanding of the ways in which individuals construct and implement their spiritual beliefs. This individual variation makes the use of quantitative survey measures quite complex as not all people will fit into a spiritual model that centers around the mean.

The present study represents the ways in which individuals and couples view and integrate their spiritual, religious, and relational beliefs into their sense of self and their marital relationships. By approaching the formation of spiritual and religious beliefs in the context of romantic relationships from a story-telling perspective the beliefs and behaviors of individuals and couples can be understood as an ongoing process of development and growth. This study advances the current knowledge of how individuals and couples operate in their romantic relationships based on their spiritual and religious beliefs. The use of self-discrepancy theory assisted in understanding how individuals integrate and experience their religious and spiritual beliefs in their romantic relationships. The continued use of this theory will assist in developing a solid foundation of knowledge regarding how individuals and couples understand the impact of their beliefs on their lived experiences. Spiritual and religious beliefs impact individuals and couples in a variety of ways, influencing not only individuals’ but marital dyads with
the joint negotiation and agreement regarding the role of these beliefs being an important step in the formation of lasting and satisfying marriages.
APPENDIX A: INTERNET RECRUITMENT ADVERTISEMENT

SPIRITUAL BELIEFS AND RELATIONSHIPS STUDY

Purpose: To investigate how spiritual beliefs are developed and inform romantic relationships.

Eligibility:
1) Be married currently married for at least 1 year and no more than 5 years
2) Both members of the couple must be 18 years or older
3) Both members of the couple must be willing to participate in the study
4) Have some spiritual or religious beliefs

Procedure: Complete an initial questionnaire (~15-20 minutes) and 2 interviews of no more than 90 minutes each.

Compensation: $30.00 EACH ($60.00 a couple). Compensation of $15 made at the completion of each interview.

For More Information Contact:
spiritualbeliefs@cals.arizona.edu
APPENDIX B: POSTED RECRUITMENT FLYER

**Do your spiritual beliefs influence your relationship?**
**We want to know what you think!**

**Spiritual Beliefs and Relationships Study**
Conducted through the University of Arizona
We are looking for people who are:
1) Currently married for at least 1 year and no more than 5 years
2) Both members of the couple must be 18 years or older
3) Both members of the couple must be willing to participate in the study
4) Have some spiritual or religious beliefs

**You will be paid for your time.**

For further information please contact: 520-621-4284 or spiritualbeliefs@cals.arizona.edu

Pamela Payne
(520)621-4284
spiritualbeliefs@cals.arizona.edu
APPENDIX C: HUMAN SUBJECT APPROVAL

HSPP Correspondence Form

Date: 02/09/10
Instructor: Pamela Payne, PhD Candidate
Department: Family and Consumer Science
Advisor: Carl Ridley, PhD
Project No/Title: 09-1126-02 Spiritual Beliefs in Early Family Experiences and Couples Co-Creation of Spiritual Beliefs During the Early Years of Marriage
Current Period of Approval: 02/09/10 – 02/08/11

IRB Committee Information

☐ IRB2 – IRB00001751
FVA Number: FVA00004218
☐ Expedited Review – 02/09/10

Nature of Submission

☐ New Project

Documents Reviewed Concurrently

Project Review Form (received 12/04/09, revised 02/04/10)
Consenting Instruments:
• Disclosure Form (version 02/04/10)
• Informed Consent (version 02/04/10)
• VOTF (received 12/04/09)
Recruitment Materials: Flyer
Surveys/Questionnaires: Pre-Screening Questionnaire, Interview Questions, Events
Relational Timeline, Couples Relational History, Spirituality Relationship Vignettes
Other (define): Referral Resources

Appr
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Committee/Chair Determination

Approved as submitted effective 02/09/10

Additional Determination(s)

Expedite Approval (45 CFR 46.110 Category 6): Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

Expedite Approval (45 CFR 46.110 Category 7): Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Waiver of Documentation of Informed Consent (45 CFR 46.117(c)(2)): The research involves no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context.

Reminder: Continuing Review materials should be submitted 10–15 days prior to the expiration date to obtain project re-approval:
• Projects may be cancelled or withdrawn at any time using the forms available at www.irb.arizona.edu.
• No changes to a project may be made prior to IRB approval except to eliminate apparent immediate hazard to subject.
• Original signed consent forms must be stored in the designated departmental location determined by the Department Head.

Form version: 12/01/09

Arizona’s First University – Since 1885
APPENDIX D: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE

Family of Origin/Childhood Religious/Spiritual Beliefs and Experiences

1. Tell me a story about your family that will give me the best possible understanding of how your family is.
   a. What was it like growing up in your family?
      i. Were your parents married?
      1. If not, who did you live with primarily?
      ii. How many members are there in your family?
      iii. How did your family get along? Did you participate in activities as a group?
      iv. Was there anything special or unique about your family growing up?

2. Was your family religious or spiritual?
   a. If so, what denomination?
   b. Can you describe what your family’s religious/spiritual beliefs looked like when you were young?
   c. How often did you practice these religious/spiritual beliefs?
      i. What did you do to practice or participate in religion?
   d. How would you describe your family’s religious and spiritual beliefs?
   e. Were there expectations about your participation in the religious/spiritual beliefs of the family?
      i. Were there expectations of behavior that are related to your spiritual/religious beliefs (e.g., beliefs about pre-marital sex, contraception, lies)
   f. How critical would you say that your religious/spiritual beliefs were to your family during your childhood?

3. Did your family have specific traditions or celebrations that you took part in?
   a. Were any of these traditions or celebrations religious in nature?
      i. How did religion fit into these traditions or beliefs?
      ii. Think about ________ (e.g., Christmas, Hanukah, Easter, Passover) were there any traditions around these holidays that your family participated in?
      iii. What did these traditions/rituals/celebrations mean to you as a child?

Current Religious/Spiritual Beliefs

1. Now that we have had an opportunity to discuss how religion and spirituality influenced your family throughout your childhood, I would like to discuss how
you view your (not your families) religious and spiritual beliefs. Can you tell me how you view your religious and spiritual beliefs today?

a. Is this the same or different than your religious/spiritual beliefs growing up?
   i. In what ways is it similar or different?
      1. If your views are similar, what was it about your childhood beliefs that you enjoy/appreciate and continue?
         a. Are there specific traditions/rituals that you participate in today that are the same as when you were a child?
            i. What meaning do these traditions have for you today? Is it the same as when you were younger?
         b. What are the ways in which you express your religious/spiritual beliefs today? How is this similar to how you grew up?
      2. If your views are different from how you grew up, how did you come to understand your religious/spiritual beliefs as different from your family growing up?
         a. Were there specific things about your childhood religious/spiritual beliefs that you did not agree with? Were there specific reasons for developing different religious/spiritual beliefs from your family as you grew up?
         b. How would you describe the differences between your religious/spiritual beliefs growing up and your current religious/spiritual beliefs?
            i. Are there differences in the way(s) in which you participate/engage your spiritual/religious beliefs?
         c. Are there any similarities between your religious/spiritual beliefs growing up and your current religious/spiritual beliefs?
   ii. Do you view your spiritual and religious beliefs as being the same?
      1. What makes them the same or different from each other?
      2. Is one more powerful/critical than the other?

2. As we grow up we often receive messages, some more subtle than others about how we should act/behave/think/respond/feel based on religious/spiritual teachings/beliefs. Many of these messages relate to how we deal with other people (e.g., the Golden Rule, act Christ-like). Were there specific ways in which you were expected to act/behave/think/feel based on religious/spiritual beliefs?
a. Were there any specific “rules” about romantic relationships that you received growing up (e.g., dating partners have to be of the same religious/spiritual upbringing)?
   i. Dating partners faith
   ii. Contraception
   iii. Pre-marital sex
   iv. Cohabitation
b. Did you feel that it was/is critical to follow these “rules” about relationships?
   i. If so, how do you feel about these “rules”?
   ii. If not, why?
      1. Do you feel pressure/obligation to follow these “rules”
      2. How does your family react when you do not meet these “rules”?
   iii. What might occur if you did not meet the relationship expectations that were taught to you by members of your family?
      1. e.g., if your family valued waiting to have sex until marriage, but you engaged in pre-marital sex, did you feel there were any consequences to not meeting this expectation?
3. Is there anything else that is critical for me to know in order to understand your spiritual/religious beliefs now and as you grew up?
APPENDIX E: COUPLE INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE

Couple/Relational History

1. I would like to begin this interview by having you tell me about your relationship. While you are telling me about your relationship, starting with how and when you met, I would like for you to fill out this timeline of relationship events, marking critical events in your relationship.
   a. Some events that I would like for you to make sure to include are:
      i. When you met
         1. How did you meet?
         2. Did you start dating right away?
         3. What was your initial reaction to your partner?
         4. Where did you meet?
      ii. When you began dating formally/exclusively.
         1. Did you start out dating other people?
         2. How did you decide that you would be dating exclusively?
         3. What were some of the rules/expectations about your relationship now that you are exclusive?
      iii. When you first became sexually active in this relationship.
         1. Was there a conversation about having sexual relations?
         2. Did you discuss sexual history and/or contraception?
            a. Who initiated this conversation?
         3. If you have not been sexually active in this relationship (or others) how did you make this decision?
            a. When and how did you discuss this decision with your current partner?
      iv. When you first met each other’s families?
         1. How did this meeting occur?
         2. How did your partner get along with your family the first time they met? What did this meeting look like?
         3. Did you have any particular concerns or fears about your family meeting your current partner?
         4. How often do you spend time with your families?
         5. At what point did your families meet each other?
            a. What was that interaction like?
            b. How did your parents meet?
            c. What is your parents’ relationship with each other?
      v. When you moved in together (if you are cohabiting).
         1. How did you decide to move in together?
         2. What were some of the changes that you anticipated when you moved in together?
            a. Chores
b. Free space and time
3. Did you have any concerns about living together before marriage?
   a. Were any of these concerns related to your (or your families) religious/spiritual beliefs?
4. How has your relationship changed (for good or bad) since you began living together?
   a. Was there anything that has happened since you began living together that surprised you about yourself, your partner and/or your relationship?

vi. First significant argument/fight.
   1. What was the argument/fight about?
   2. How was it resolved?
   3. What did you learn about yourself, your partner, your relationship from this argument/fight

vii. When you knew (believed) you were going to marry your partner.
   1. Was there something that changed or happened to indicate that you would have a long term relationship with your partner?

viii. When you became engaged.
   1. How did this occur?
   2. Was there planning involved?
   3. Were your families involved in the decision to get engaged?
   4. What was your engagement period like as a couple?
      a. Were there any significant decisions that you had to make as a couple during that time?
      b. Did you learn anything new about your partner during the engagement period?
   5. What did you expect life to be like once you were married?
      a. Work
      b. Chores
      c. Family time
      d. Social
      e. Sexually
      f. Financially
      g. Spiritually

ix. When did you get married?
   1. What was your wedding experience like?
   2. Were your families involved in your wedding?
   3. Have there been any significant changes in your life since you got married?
      a. If there were any conflicts during this time, what were they and how were they resolved?
4. How are your families involved in your marriage?
   a. How often do you see your parents/in-laws
   b. How does this compare to your expectations?

5. Is marriage what you expected?
   a. Work
   b. Chores
   c. Family time
   d. Social/Free Time/Friendships
   e. Sexually
   f. Financially
   g. Spiritually

x. Where do children fit into your marriage?
   1. Do you have children?
   2. Do you plan to have children? If so, how many?
   3. How do you plan to decide when to have children (if you don’t have them already)? If you do have children, how did you decide when to have them?

2. After discussing the relational history through the timeline, I would like for you to consider how your timeline will look in 5 years. I would like for you to continue your timeline into the future.
   a. Some events that I would like for you to include are:
      i. Work
         1. Where do you plan to be working
         2. Do you expect changes in your work life
      ii. Home
         1. Where do you anticipate living in the next five years?
         2. Is this a change?
      iii. Family
         1. What do you expect your family to look
            a. Involvement

**Couple interview: Integration of Religious/Spiritual Beliefs and Romantic Relationships**

1. How do your spiritual/religious beliefs/values influence your relationship with each other?
2. Does your relationship influence the relationship you have with a God or Higher Power?
   a. If so, please describe how this works. Give an example if possible.
3. Does your relationship with a God or Higher Power influence the way you are in your relationship with your partner?
   a. If so, please describe how. Give an example.
4. Do you view God or a Higher Power as being active in your relationship?
a. If so, how does this influence your relationship? To what extent and in what ways is God/Higher Power active in your relationship?
APPENDIX F: INTRINSIC SPIRITUALITY SCALE

Intrinsic Spirituality Scale

For the following six questions, spirituality is defined as one’s relationship to God, or whatever you perceive to be the Ultimate Transcendence.

The questions use a sentence completion format to measure various attributes associated with spirituality. An incomplete sentence fragment is provided, followed directly below by two phrases that are linked to a scale ranging from 0 to 10. The phrases, which complete the sentence fragment, anchor each scale. The 0 to 10 range provides you with a continuum on which to reply, with 0 corresponding to the absence or zero amount of the attribute, while 10 corresponds to the maximum amount of the attribute. In other words, the end points represent extreme values, while 5 corresponds to a medium, or moderate, amount of the attribute.

Please mark the number along the continuum that best reflects your initial feeling.

1. **In terms of the questions I have about my life, my spirituality answers** (α = .73)

   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   No questions  absolutely all my questions

2. **Growing spirituality is** (α = .78)

   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   Of no importance to me  More critical than anything else in my life

3. **When I am faced with a critical decision, my spirituality** (α = .79)

   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   Plays absolutely no role  Is always the overriding consideration

4. **Spirituality is** (α = .83)

   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   Not a part of my life  The master motive of my life directing every other aspect of my life
APPENDIX F CONTINUED

Intrinsic Spirituality Scale

5. When I think of the things that help me to grow and mature as a person, my spirituality ($\alpha = .84$)

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<td>Has no effect on my personal growth</td>
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6. My spiritual beliefs affect ($\alpha = .83$)

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<td>No aspect of my life</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX G: SANCTIFICATION OF MARRIAGE QUESTIONNAIRE

Sanctification of Marriage Questionnaire

Perceived Sacred Qualities

Directions: Please rate whether your marriage is more closely described by the adjective on the left or the adjective on the right by marking the appropriate line.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Closely Describes</th>
<th>Closely Describes</th>
<th>Slightly Describes</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Slightly Describes</th>
<th>Closely Describes</th>
<th>Very Closely Describes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Holy</td>
<td>Unholy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Inspiring</td>
<td>Uninspiring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Blessed</td>
<td>Cursed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Everlasting</td>
<td>Temporary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Awesome</td>
<td>Ordinary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Heavenly</td>
<td>Earthly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Spiritual</td>
<td>Worldly (Secular)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Religious</td>
<td>Nonreligious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Mysterious</td>
<td>Routine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX H: MANIFESTATION OF GOD SCALE

Manifestation of God Scale

Original Measure

Directions: Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. God played a role in the development of my marriage.
2. God is present in my marriage.
3. My marriage is a reflection of God’s will.
4. My marriage is an expression of my spirituality or religiousness.
5. My marriage is symbolic of God and what I believe about God.
6. God is part of my marriage.
7. My marriage is consistent with my spiritual or religious identity.
8. I experience God through my marriage.
9. My marriage reflects my image of what God wants for me.
10. My marriage is influenced by God’s actions in our lives.
11. My marriage is a holy bond.
12. My marriage represents God’s presence in my life.
13. My marriage follows the Bible and what it teaches.
14. My marriage follows the teachings of my church.

Modified scale will not use the Likert-scale response. Sentences will be presented as prompts for the discussion of integration between spiritual beliefs and relationship functioning. Items 13 and 14 will be modified to be:

13. My marriage follows spiritual or religious doctrine such as the Bible and its teachings.
14. My marriage follows the teachings of an organized spiritual group, such as a church or synagogue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic Category</th>
<th>Key terms</th>
<th>Sample responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>I believe and religion is/can be</td>
<td>I believe in God and Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Religion is organized structure of what you believe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>Go to or went to</td>
<td>Go to church on Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>We went to church often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity/Education</td>
<td>Youth group, school, read, prayer</td>
<td>Catholic school, Choir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Youth group, pray at meals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denomination/Identification</td>
<td>A specific religious group, I am…</td>
<td>Mormon, Catholic, Baptist, I am a Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation</td>
<td>How, don’t, must</td>
<td>Had to go until confirmed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Go to confession. Don’t have sex before marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation</td>
<td>My family, parents, grandparents</td>
<td>My family has been Lutheran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Forever, Parents did it, their parents did it…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rites and Rituals</td>
<td>religious ceremonies, practices, rituals, holiday’s</td>
<td>Baptism, Confirmation, Midnight Mass on Christmas, Religion is rituals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Category</td>
<td>Key terms</td>
<td>Sample responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>religion is, meaning, models</td>
<td>Religion is must do’s, must go to church, no personality, soul-less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning &amp; Evaluation</td>
<td>question, explanation</td>
<td>Question whether Jesus was man or God. Can provide alternative explanation for Bible stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>congregating, community</td>
<td>Mormon community is isolated. Don’t see value in congregating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>a good person, don’t, have to</td>
<td>A good person is supposed to be pious and religious. You have to do things a certain way. No choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role in Marriage</td>
<td>husband, wife, we</td>
<td>Don’t force husband to participate. We dedicate the day with prayer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Category</td>
<td>Key terms</td>
<td>Sample responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>belief, I believe, spirituality is nature, relationship with</td>
<td>I believe in the afterlife, difference between religious and having a relationship with God. Spirituality is unique. I am okay with God. I am one with Mother Nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement/Questioning</td>
<td>I used to and now, I asked now, change</td>
<td>Do I believe in God? Beliefs are deeper than growing up. God how are you going to use this (pastor husband’s affair)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>connect, relationship with, focus, personal</td>
<td>My relationship with God is very personal, and intimate. I’m comfortable in the water; it’s a place for me to connect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity/Education</td>
<td>Do, practice, meditate</td>
<td>I do daily practices like I said to cultivate an opening to the divine. Meditate. Transcendental meditation. Yoga.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td>husband, wife, we,</td>
<td>My husband and I teach a spirituality class. We attend Global Chant. I please my wife because I love her, I try to please God because I love him.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 2 CONTINUED
Thematic Categories for Spirituality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic Category</th>
<th>Key Terms</th>
<th>Sample responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rites/Rituals</td>
<td>rituals, informal, practices</td>
<td>I don’t do rituals. It’s a relationship with God, it’s not about rituals. We believe the same thing, but it’s the practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>journey, part of life, way of living,</td>
<td>Help others on their journey. It’s not something you do, it’s a way of living. It’s much more part of our life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>attend, church, go to</td>
<td>We go to a <em>Global Chant</em> group. Still attend regularly. We go to a less structured church. We go to church out of our home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation</td>
<td>family, mother, father, children</td>
<td>All of my family is spiritual. My mother passed away and it was the beginning of my spiritual seeking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>worry, seekers, expected assumptions</td>
<td>Every single thing in my life is part of the divine. Wanted only to be with seekers. Expected to act befitting of Christ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>people, community, support</td>
<td>Church is people, not the building. I immediately felt welcomed. You are short circuited if you try to be spiritual on your own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Category</td>
<td>Key terms</td>
<td>Sample responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marriage</strong></td>
<td>marriage, wife/husband,</td>
<td>I’m a firm believer in marriage. We got married in a Catholic church. I was interested in marriage but in no hurry. Many Mormons marry quickly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>married</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>pre-marital sex, sex,</td>
<td>Pre-marital sex is bad. You’re not supposed to have sex until marriage. Focus on emotional, spiritual relationship not physical one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Cohesion</strong></td>
<td>we, spouse, us,</td>
<td>We are both Pisces, so we are both dreamers. My husband and I dedicate the day in prayer before leaving home. We make sure he (the Lord) is everything to us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>having shared beliefs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dating</strong></td>
<td>dating, interracial, interfaith relationships</td>
<td>I was 24 and I had not had any relationships. Dad wanted me to date a Mormon. I dated all types of religions. I dated a white guy before my dad died, he was pissed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family of Origin</strong></td>
<td>parents, taught, Earthly Father, good example</td>
<td>Parental approval was important. Family revolved around church and not in a good way. See Heavenly Father as you see your Earthly Father.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Morals/Values</strong></td>
<td>integrity, values, Golden Rule</td>
<td>Not judging people, not stealing, not lying, just integrity. You have to be transparent with people. Be respectful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>transparency, judgment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 continued
Thematic Categories for Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic Category</th>
<th>Key terms</th>
<th>Sample responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>children, parent, kids</td>
<td>I had my first child before marriage. Kids were baptized. My mother was trapped by kids so I decided early on not to have kids. My kids have to go to church, no choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabitation</td>
<td>cohabited, stayed over,</td>
<td>Living together is bad. Cohabited with white guy, it was weird, even though I was 50. We didn’t technically live together. It was okay because we were engaged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lived together</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td>divorce</td>
<td>My divorce was the biggest time of spiritual growth. I was ashamed because I was divorced not once, twice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy</td>
<td>out of wedlock, pregnant</td>
<td>I had my son out of wedlock. I was pregnant and it devastated my dad...I tried to get rid of it to comply with their wishes. We had a pregnancy scare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contraception</td>
<td>contraception, birth control</td>
<td>The church wouldn’t allow birth control. No discussion of contraception since not supposed to have sex before marriage. It was a taboo.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


