SINGLE PARENTING AND FAITH: DOES IT HAVE AN INFLUENCE ON THEIR COLLEGE-AGED CHILDREN'S LIFE OUTCOMES?

by

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Abstract

Nearly 60 percent of America's children will spend part of their childhood in a single parent family in one form or another. Past research has examined correlations between spirituality and mental as well as physical health. In addition, there is a marginal amount of study regarding the parental influence of faith on child outcomes in two-parent families. A quantitative study utilizing a cross-sectional design was employed. Data analysis was completed employing a series of multiple regressions to ascertain the correlations of the aforementioned constructs. The study revealed that parental religious commitment to faith was significantly correlated with the development of morality in their offspring for both single and two-parent families. It was also found that family structure significantly correlated with academic attainment, with two-parent offspring having a significantly higher GPA than single parent offspring. However, when the single and two-parent data was separated out and the same analyses ran, it was found that single parent participants faith scores were significantly correlated with both morality and resiliency and marginally with academic attainment. The most significant outcome of this study is that it provides new insights regarding the influence of spiritually (faith) as a mediating factor that could be instilled into current literature and research for the benefit and encouragement of single and two-parent families alike.

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I would like to formally dedicate this paper to my Nana and Gampie who made me feel valuable as a person and told me when I was a child that I could be anything when I grew up, including a lawyer or a doctor, and I believed them because they believed in me.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The single parent household has become an increasingly more common family form (Sabatelli, 2000). The U.S. Bureau of Census reported in 2001 that there are now over 12 million single parent households, approximately 10 million of which are maintained by mothers. Furthermore, citing the reports of Fursternberg and Cherlin (1991) and Lamb, Sternberg, & Thompson (1997), Walsh (2003) notes that even though many divorced single parents are likely to remarry, over half of the children born in the 1990s will spend at least some or all of their childhood in a single-parent household. There are many ways by which single families are formed; some are procreated by force of circumstances while others are formed because it offered the best option for the family's well-being. Golombok (2000) purports that although most result from their parents' separation or divorce, some lose a parent through death and others have had only one right from the start. The effect of single parenthood on the development of the child has been a concern of social scientists throughout the world and has persisted over the years. There are competing claims as to the effect of single parenthood on child development in general with a focus on childrearing. The outcomes for children in single parent families depend to a large extent on the circumstances of their lives post-divorce as more and more cases have proven that within two years, most of the children of the divorced parents are able to cope with the emotional and behavioral problems that come with the separation of their parents (Golombok, 2000). The effects of single parenthood seem also to vary depending on the support of their parents and the environment of the children. For example, most children seem to eventually accept the fact of separation of their parents while others find the separation to be difficult.

Despite the increase in the number of single parents in the United States, the negative stigma associated with single parents and children of single parents continues. Scholars generally find consensus on the nature and magnitude of family structure effects on children (Glen & Sylvester, 2006, p. 11). Although some have come to the conclusion that family structure may negatively affect the development of a child, others have accepted the fact that even in the case of single parenthood, there are evidences that children are fully able to develop emotionally and intellectually despite their circumstances. Hawkins and Eggebeen (1991) bring forth the point that

"In contrast to the stereotyped view of single-parent households as inherently deficient, most single parents provide the structure, values, and nurturance that their children need despite the challenges and criticisms they encounter from society. Their homes are not broken, their lives are not miserable, and their children may have problems, but most eventually thrive" (as cited in Walsh, 2003, p. 123). To caveat this, some argue that successful single parent households challenge the notion that the healthiest family structure requires two parents (Patterson, 2001). In fact, Walsh (2003) purports that the number of single parents continues to grow across all socioeconomic groups, with the greatest increase among affluent and educated. Walsh (2003) reminds us that *family form* has been confused with family substance: Family processes and community connections that strengthen the quality of relationships are crucial for parents and their children to thrive.

The challenges faced by single parent families are many and varied. These challenges can include changes in the level of stress, changes in the family structure, modifications in one's own personal and family identity, and major alterations in how the

household is managed and maintained (Amato, 2003; Hetherington & Kelly, 2003). Household management can be affected by diminished financial resources, changes in a parents' employment status, and changes in a family's residence. Other modifications are likely to occur in the family's emotional environment (Walsh, 2003). It seems that many in the field agree that if single parents have the community support and financial resources, their children's life outcomes are just as favorable as those in two-parent families (Walsh, 2003). This study prompts the question: are there any other mediating factors that increase the chance of success of single parent children?

Recently, interest in spirituality and religious faith as possible mediating factors has increased dramatically both within culture in general and psychology. Past research has shown that faith can and does affect the way people perceive the world and influences both their mental (Miller, 1999; Richards & Bergin, 1997, 2000; Shafranske, 2005; Wright et al., 1996) and physical health states (Gartner, Larson, &Allen, 1991; Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 1996). Furthermore, there is evidence that one's faith or religious considerations are important in psychotherapeutic interventions (Thoreson et al., 1998).

Burton (1992) purports that spirituality and family life are deeply intertwined. Family process research has found that transcendent spiritual beliefs and practices are key ingredients to healthy family functioning and positive consequence (DeFrain & Stinnet, 1985). However, there is only found to be a marginal amount of research which examines the influence of parental faith on child outcomes in two–parent families (Greef, 2008; Hoge, Petrillo & Smith, 1982; Panos, 2007; Snyder, Clements, & Vazsonyi, 2004; Vaaler, 2009; Vucina, 2007). Defrain and Stinnett (1985) suggest that the success of

single parent families rests on a number of factors including good social and family support systems, the family's ability to alter its existing strategies and employ a biblical worldview. Although, one's spirituality has been presented in several life domains as a mediating factor to adverse circumstances, there remains a chasm in the literature that excludes the influence of having faith on successful single parenting.

In fact, no studies to date have examined the mediating effects of parental religious commitment to their faith and their children's success factors in single parent families. For the purposes of this study, the development of resiliency, moral judgment, and academic attainment will be identified as life success factors. Therefore, this study seeks to explore single parenting and its possible influence as a mediating factor on their children's development of resiliency and morality as well as academic attainment in spite of adverse circumstances. This research also endeavors to add to the repertoire of those currently in a counseling practice for the purpose of reinforcing the importance of supporting their client's faith walk and religious commitment for the future benefit of themselves and their children's welfare. The purpose of this research is not only to present data regarding what may influence successful outcomes for children of single parent families but also to explore its counseling implications.

Statement of the Problem

As a group, children of single parents have more documented behavioral and emotional problems than their two-parent counterparts (Amato & Keith, 2001). They have statistically lower academic performance, lower self-esteem, more acting out, and more difficulty with peers (Brodsky, 1999; Walsh, 2003; Wescot & Dries, 1999). In addition, there are findings prevalent in the literature that present that children from

divorced homes suffer from lower life satisfaction and lower marital quality later in life (Chase-Lansdale, Cherlin, & Kiernan, 1995). However, these consequences are statistically no worse than those experienced by children who remain in troubled, conflict ridden two-parent homes across all demographics (Hetherington & Kelly, 2003). In addition, there is evidence that much of the negative impact of divorce on children does not necessarily hold in the long term, especially if children continue to be cared for by a supportive adult (Amato, 2003; Blechman, 1982; Elder, Conger, Foster, & Ardelt, 1992; Friedman & Andrews, 1990; Hetherington & Kelly, 2003; McLaunahan & Booth, 1989; Wallerstein, 2000).

Many studies are based on a cultural deficit model, which by definition is a model based on the negativity associated with certain ethnicities, gender, or socio-economic status and often fails to address individual differences among single parents, some of whom are very successfully raising their children (Brodsky, 1999; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008; Souto-Manning, 2006). In addition, if both parents maintain a positive relationship with their child, resolve their differences regarding the child and provide sufficient financial resources, the negative consequences referenced in many studies are generally not found (Amato, 2002, Hetherington, & Kelly, 2003). The success of single parent families rests on a number of factors including good social and family support systems, the family's ability to alter its existing strategies and employ a biblical worldview (Defrain & Stinnett, 1985). A sole focus on deficits lends itself towards a skewed view of single-parent families and does not help one to understand and/or maximize their resilience and strength, or increase comprehensive understanding as

clinicians, of the factors that make it possible for some parents to respond well to the unique problems and tasks of single parenthood. .

This study proposes that a single parent's faith walk may be a mediating factor that has influence over their children's life outcomes. While researchers have examined correlations between spirituality, mental and physical health in addition to a marginal amount of study regarding the parental influence of faith on child outcomes in two-parent families; no studies to date have examined the mediating effects of parental religious commitment to their faith and their children's development of resiliency, moral judgment, and academic attainment in single parent families.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:
First, does parental religious commitment significantly correlate with their college-aged children's resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment? Second, do other extraneous variables such as SES, other family supports, age, or ethnicity have a significant relationship with college-aged children's resiliency, development of morality and academic attainment? Third, will single parents' religious commitment scores correlate just as highly with their college aged student's development of morality, resiliency and academic attainment as their two-parent counterparts?

Definition of Key Terms

The conceptual model for this investigation builds upon four specific bodies of research; parent religious commitment (IV) and its influence on their college-aged

children's resiliency, moral development, and academic attainment (DV's). These terms are defined via the authors intended usage as:

Academic Attainment: For the purposes of this research study, current GPA of a 2.0 or better will be utilized to ascertain and define academic attainment.

Morality: For the purposes of this research study, the definition of morality will be "the attainment of empathy for other human beings, pro social inclinations, and a mutual view of personal morality that is mutually private, interpersonal and social" (Haan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1976; Shelton,1990).

Religious Commitment: For the purposes of this study, religious commitment will be defined as a high level of commitment to one's faith life. "The degree to which a person adheres to his or her religious values, beliefs, and practices and uses them in daily living" (Worthington, 2003).

Resiliency: For the purposes of this research study, resiliency will be defined as the ability to cope over the long haul (Walsh, 2003) and the "development of positive adjustment in the face of adversity, such as divorce and its aftermath" (Luther, Cichetti & Becker, 2000).

Brief Background

In a review of the literature, a plethora of information linking faith and mental well-being was found (Miller, 1999; Richards & Bergin, 2000; Shafranske, 2005). Qualitative studies are yielding increased knowledge about the role of faith beliefs and

practices in problem construction and solutions (Wright et al., 1996). In addition, quantitative studies have begun to provide much empirical support that spirituality can have a positive influence on mental health (Almeida & Koenig, 2006; Gartner, Larson, & Allen, 1991; Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 1996; Koenig, 2001; Koenig, 2009).

There is also a wealth of research in the field affiliating religion and physical well-being (George, Larson, Keonig, & McCullough, 2000; Koenig et al., 2001, Plante, 2005). Studies of prayer meditation document its influence in reducing stress and blood pressure, improving sleep and mental alertness, managing chronic pain, raising self – esteem, and lowering reactivity in relationships. Religion and spirituality have both been hypothesized to affect both the process and the outcomes (e.g., increased mental and physical health) of counseling (Goldstein, 2010; Koenig, 2007; Richards & Bergin 1997; Rippentrop, 2005, Scott, 2007: Thoresen, 1998, Van Ness & Larson, 2002).

Parental Religious Commitment to Faith

Over this past decade, the mental health disciplines have brought greater attention to religion and spirituality in research and counseling practice (Baetz & Toews, 2009; Sperry & Shafranske, 2005; Steere, 2009). As previously mentioned, studies that specifically examine parental faith and its influence on child outcomes in two-parent families have also made their mark in the field (Greef, 2008, Hoge, Petrillo & Smith, 1982; Panos, 2007; Snyder, Clements, & Vazsonyi, 2004; Vaaler, 2009; Vucina, 2007). In a qualitative study, Greef (2008) explored spirituality and its influence on the successful outcome in two-parent families after experiencing a crisis. He asked families to identify the three most important factors or strengths that had recently helped their family through crisis. The results indicate that spirituality was found to be one of the top

three coping resources. Vucina (2007) studied risk and protective factors for adolescent substance abuse. She found that the ability to manage and regulate emotions, religious beliefs, importance of faith, and components of parenting style were protective factors. This study seems to suggest that when the spirituality is emphasized in the home, the child has a better chance at avoiding pitfalls and having success in life. These studies remind us that parental religious commitment to their faith can and do have a correlation with their children's risk behaviors, development of character traits and life success.

The current trend which appears within research and highlights the significance of the parents as influencing religious tendencies in their children is the study of socialization. Boyatzis, Dollahite, and Mark (2006) as well as Smith (2003) purport that parents are among the most powerful influences on adolescents' religious behavior and their socialization. Specifically, researchers have documented the strong apparent effects of mothers' and fathers' religious affiliation, belief, and practice on the religiosity of young adults (Cornwall 1989; Erickson, 1992; Hoge et al., 1982). In addition, some studies have used earlier religious participation (e.g., during childhood and adolescence) as a proxy for family religious socialization (Stolzenberg et al. 1995). The available evidence suggests that parental religious socialization may influence the religiosity of offspring directly, via communication of explicit religious messages and in the teaching of religious routines and practices, as well as indirectly, through the channeling of youth activities and the selection of friendships (Cornwall, 1987). Parents also have the greatest influence on their children's church attendance (Benson, Donahue, & Erikson, 1990). "The best predictor of what the religious and spiritual lives of youth will look like is what the religious and spiritual lives of their parents look like" (Smith, 2003, p.111). Parental

influence is manifest by socialization and, indirectly, by the way parents relate to their children and the outside influences in their environment. The closer the relationship a child has with his or her parents the more likely the individual will remain within his or her parent's religion. Firstborn children also tend to have a closer relationship with parents than subsequent children and tend to be more religious and remain that way (Argyle & Bait Hallahmi, 1975). Boyatzis, Dollahite, and Mark (2006) also found that parents tend to socialize their children to religion through verbal communication, induction and indoctrination of beliefs, disciplinary tactics, reward and punishment, and behavioral modeling, including embedding religious routines at home. Studies also indicate that clear messages of love and support between parents, consistency between parental words and actions, and frequency of religious activities in the home seem to enhance overt religiousness and warmth in personality in adolescents (Benson, Donahue, & Erikson, 1990).

Parents' age, education, and denomination were found to have some relationship to transmission of creedal assent and religious values to their children (Hoge, Petrillo, & Smith, 1982). Interestingly, these researchers found that the younger the parents, the more successful they were in transmitting religious values to their sons but not significantly to their daughters. They also found that transmission of values improves when the parents agree on religious beliefs. Researchers have also found in most families it is the mother who is the primary figure in the children's' formation of religiosity (Hoge et al.1989). Boyatzis, Dollahite and Marks (2006) suggest this is due to the fact that women tend to be more religious in general than men and attend services more often and that women pray more often. They suggest also that mothers speak to their children more

often than fathers, and are more likely to talk about their emotions and have religious discussions with their children than fathers.

Others in the field have added to the definition of religious commitment. Plante (2008) suggests that spirituality and religious commitment offer an opportunity to secure and develop meaning, purpose, calling and vocation in life. He goes on to state that all religious traditions provide some answers to questions about what someone should do with their life with particular strategies for finding meaning and purpose. Religious and spiritual models such as Jesus, Buddha, Mohammad, as well as more contemporary models such as Gandhi, Mother Theresa, the Dali Lama, and even family members can provide those around them with exemplars to imitate (Oman & Thoreson, 2007). Research has shown that observational learning is a powerful way to learn new skills and behaviors (Bandura, 1986). Having spiritual role models can be a useful way to help motivate and inspire others to “go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37).

Resiliency

Parental faith as a resiliency factor has often been studied in two-parent families. For example, Panos (2007) completed a qualitative study in order to identify themes of survival in refugee families. She found that the resiliency factors of mutual respect, adaptability, problem-solving skills, restoration, faith, and family rituals were prevalent in resilient families. The concept of resiliency has also initiated a recent paradigm shift in the fields of child development and of prevention of unsuccessful outcomes of single parent children (Amato, 2003; Amato & Keith, 2001; Brodsky, 1999; Hetherington & Kelly; Walsh, 2003; Wescot & Dries; 1999). Yet, the conceptualizations of divorce in

negative terms alone, imply harm and damage, have skewed the view of adjustment or resiliency (Amato, 2003; Coltrane & Adams, 2003), and may block recognition of coping mechanisms and capabilities that children and young adults utilize. The shift has moved from decreasing environmental risk factors that leave individuals such as single parent children, more susceptible to the development of maladaptive behavior and psychiatric disorders to the highlighting of resiliency and its promotion. Resiliency, therefore, is viewed as the product of interaction between the individual and environmental factors, something that can be fostered through the developmental years of childhood and adolescence (Lamberte, 2010). Werner (1955) has identified several critical factors associated with resiliency in children to include family support and the personal strengths the child develops like self-esteem, the capacity for self-monitoring and regulation, spirituality, and altruism. Current research has provided valuable insights into how spirituality as a resiliency factor, can be a specific family protective and recovery resource (Connor et al., 2003; Greef, 2004; Walsh, 2003). The studies explain that in a number of different ways, families that have experienced a period of crisis and hardship depended on spirituality to help them stand strong and be able to bounce back.

Morality

Durkheim (1961) proposed that the development of morality is a consequence of parental socialization. Chazen (1985), purports that “for Durkheim, learning is a social process whereby the young are influenced by the adult generation so as to give rise to a group of physical, intellectual, and emotional states that are demanded by social

context”(p. 86). Adults, in the view of Durkeim, are imbued with authority and moral authority is the dominant quality of the educator. In a two parent study, Hoge, Petrillo, and Smith (1982) found that the strongest patterns of morality transmission are found in the areas religious values and sexual ethics. In their study of the four parent-child correlations, the weakest is the father-daughter relationship and the strongest is the father-son relationship; but the pattern varies by topic; on religion the mother-son transmission is strongest, and on politics the father-son transmission is strongest. Theorists from the world of psychology (Kohlberg, 1976; Piaget, 1965; Rest, 2000) and theology (Crabb, 2001; Grenz, 2003; McGrath, 2010; Plantinga, 2002) also offer many differing insights as to how morality is developed and defined but most agree that the parent-child relationship plays a central role in the development of moral constructs.

One’s spirituality invites an expansion of consciousness, along with personal responsibility for and beyond oneself, from local to global concerns (Walsh, 2003). There are some that purport a child’s growing moral awareness evolves out of spiritual belief systems (Coles, 1997). Coles states that parental values, beliefs, and practices are, not surprisingly, the most powerful influences on children's spiritual lives as well as on their daily behavior and development of morality.

Morality involves the activity of informed conscience: the judgment of right from wrong based on principles of fairness, decency and compassion for others (Doherty, 1999, 2006). Children often ask: “How did the universe start? Who is God? What is life? Why are people here? Why am I here? What happens after we die?” How they form answers to these questions, a process which involves both their cognitive processing and their often intense emotional sensitivity, has always depended to a large extent both on

the models provided by parents and other significant adults in their lives as well as their own life experience.

Academic Attainment

In the secular world, academic attainment is one of the most prevalent societal indicators of successful life outcome. The statistics are staggering. The more education one has, the more affluent he or she will be (US Census Bureau Report, 2006). In addition, the dropout rate for students with a family income below $20,000 is over three times that of students with a family income over $50,000 (Shin, 2005) with the median income of single parents in America being $23,031 annually (US Census Bureau Report, 2006) .

The term *achievement gap* denotes a somewhat kinder way of discussing the pervasive racial and socioeconomic disparities in student achievement and what Kozol (1991) terms *savage inequalities* in America's schools. Now, in the midst of another educational crisis and in an era of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the United States faces a sense of urgency in addressing this academic achievement gap. Predicated on race and class divisions, the achievement gap is part of a larger legacy that intertwines individual and family resources along with school quality, social capital, and educational opportunity. While some researchers have blamed schools for disparities in educational outcomes (Kober, 2001; McCombs, 2000) others have focused on the failure of families to adequately prepare youth for the educational challenges that lie ahead (Roscigno, 1999). Therefore, the aforementioned achievement gap is not simply a gap in achievement, but a larger gap in access to positive life outcomes across multiple

dimensions. Eradicating the achievement gap not only means equalizing access to educational opportunity, but also ensuring positive life outcomes for traditionally disadvantaged groups such as single-parent families. Economic, social, and health consequences result from the achievement gap, testifying to the gravity of its persistence (Ainsworth, 2002).

Regardless of where blame is placed, research shows that schools and families can and do make a difference in closing this gap. For example, children from families that are more involved with their child's educational endeavors are more likely to succeed later in life (Kober, 2001; McCombs, 2000). Therefore, regardless of socio-economic status (SES) or family composition, parental participation and social support is paramount to educational success.

The literature also presents data that, outside of demographic characteristics, such as race and ethnicity; it is familial characteristics which shape educational outcomes and these are correlated with standardized test scores and academic attainment (Rothermel, 2004). Children who show signs of academic competence and well-being tend to come from families in which parents (1) show signs of good mental health themselves, (2) have positive past or present relationships with their families of origin, or at least view them in this perspective, (3) have cooperative relationships as a couple, whether they are married or divorced, and (4) have low levels of stress and high levels of social support as a family (Cummings, DeArth-Pendley, Du Rocher Schudlich, & Smith, 2001; Hetherington, 2004). In addition, there is consistent evidence of a correlation between parents' educational achievement and their children's educational attainment (Boocock, 1972). This may also reflect the amount of emphasis that parents place on education. This leads

us again to the fact that the degree of parental involvement in children's educational life can account for some of the disparities in educational achievement (Byrne, 2010; Cowan & Cowan, 2002; Rothermel, 2004; Souto-Manning, 2006).

Highlights and Limitations

The instruments for this study are all self-report in nature, including the parent assessment which will be filled out by the student subjects according to their perceptions of their parents' religious commitment to faith. Reliance on self-report instruments for the measurement of both independent and dependent measures may raise concerns regarding the validity of causal conclusions, and must be considered when reviewing the results of this study. Additionally, the research method for this study will utilize a cross-sectional design, whereas measures will be taken and results recorded only at one point in time of the subject's college career. The construct of parental commitment to faith at the time of the child living in the home is retrospective in nature. In addition, this construct is also the perceived faith of the parent which is being measured, according to the college-aged student. A longitudinal study would have been preferable, as the measures and results would provide information about the continuity or discontinuity of behavior and beliefs over time.

Research Expectations

Researchers have examined correlations between spirituality, mental, and physical health. In addition, there has been a moderate amount of study regarding the parental influence of faith on child outcomes in two-parent families. However, there remains a paucity of research connecting single parent's religious commitment to their children's

life outcomes. This proposed study seeks to determine whether or not there is a significant correlation between parental religious commitment and their children's life outcomes in the areas of resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment.

The mental health disciplines have brought greater attention to religion and spirituality in research and counseling practice (e.g., Shafranske, 2005; Steere, 2009; Woolfolk, 1998). Therefore, most scholars of religion agree that religion often positively affects mental health, but recent questions have become more specific. Who does religion affect both positively and negatively and under what conditions? Worthington et al. (2003) has suggested a model addressing this question. The key variable in his model is religious commitment, which is defined as the degree to which a person adheres to his or her religious values, beliefs, and practices and uses them in daily living and how they affect those around us. The theoretical hypothesis of this study is that single parent's religious commitment will somehow influence favorably, the outcomes of their children later in life. Thus, parent religious commitment to their faith could very well be a factor in mediating the potentially negative life outcomes for their children, in spite of the oftentimes difficult circumstances of living in a single parent home. The purpose of this research paper is not only to present data that offer a possible explanation of what may influence successful outcomes for children of single parent families but also to explore counseling implications.

Conclusion

The many two-parent studies mentioned above in the individual areas of parental faith, development of morality and resiliency, and academic attainment, underscore the need for investigation into specifically how the *single parent's* faith walk can be an

influential mediating factor in their children's life outcomes. Therefore, the main focus of this study is to extend the current research by investigating the relationship between parental religious commitment to their faith and their children's resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment in single parent families. Specifically, this research seeks to ascertain if there are any significant correlations between these constructs. The most significant outcome of this study would be that new insights regarding the influence of spiritually (faith) and its counseling implications could be integrated into current literature and research for the benefit and encouragement of single parents.

Summary

This chapter introduced the relevance of examining the relationship between parental religious commitment to their faith and their college-aged children's life outcomes in the areas of resiliency, morality, and academic attainment. A statement of the problem was presented followed by the empirical research questions. Next, extensive definitions of all constructs involved in this study were presented as well as a brief review of the literature. Highlights and limitations of the study were proposed, followed by research expectations and a conclusion to chapter one.

The following chapter will provide a review of the literature and a presentation of all related research on the constructs of religious commitment, the development of resiliency, the development of morality, and the relevance of academic attainment as indicators of successful life outcome. The influence of parental religious commitment on the aforementioned constructs will be specifically emphasized following each construct.

Chapter three will present an overview of the methodology, data collection, measures, and specific procedures utilized in order to examine the empirical influence of

parental religious commitment on children's resiliency, morality, and academic attainment. The final chapter will present the research findings and a complete analysis of data assessment collected.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In an extensive review of the current literature, it was found that religious commitment to one's faith and spirituality in general, has an influence over several facets of one's being. Numerous qualitative and quantitative studies have linked having faith to mental well-being (Almeida & Koenig , 2006; Koenig, 2001; Koenig, 2009; Miller, 1999; Richards & Bergin, 2000; Shafranske, 2005) and increased physical health (George, Larson, Keonig & MCCullough, 2000; Koenig et al., 2001; Plante, 2005). Over the past few years, the mental health disciplines have also brought greater attention to religion and spirituality in research and counseling practice (Baetz & Toews, 2009; Cornah, 2010; Sperry & Shafranske, 2005; Steere, 2009; Woolfolk, 1998). The connections between parental religious commitment as an influence on child outcomes in two-parent families are marginally supported by the literature and are limited to very few studies examining this relationship (Greef, 2008; Hoge, Petrillo & Smith, 1982; Panos, 2007; Snyder, Clements, & Vazsonyi, 2004; Vaaler, 2009; Vucina, 2007). There are also found to be a few studies which focus on child outcomes as a result of growing up in divorced versus intact homes which are primarily based on a deficit model guided by two commonly held assumptions (Amato & Keith, 1991; Brubeck & Beer, 1992; Cherlin, Chase-Lansdale, & McRae, 1997). First, it is assumed that a two-parent structure is necessary for successful child socialization and second, it was assumed that divorce is always a traumatic event that has severe and enduring deleterious effects on children's adjustment, the focus being on family structure and adverse outcomes. It is a popular view that optimal child-rearing environment occurs within a two-parent structure, although researchers suggest that competent, well-adjusted children can develop in a wide variety family forms (Bornstein, 1995). Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999) suggest that aforementioned deficit-based

studies failed to investigate mediating or moderating factors such as individual parent and child characteristics and family process variables and go on to purport that more studies are needed to assess protective factors. Although, one's spirituality has been presented in several life domains as a mediating factor to adverse circumstances, there remains a paucity of research that examines the influence of having faith on successful single parenting (Abar et al., 2009). The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of single parents' religious commitment to their faith and their college-aged children's life outcomes in the areas of resiliency, morality, and academic attainment.

Religious Commitment

Religious commitment is further defined by Miller (2006) as a longstanding method utilized by people to record their thoughts; having conceived of reality in a way that is not limited to sensory experience or intellectual knowledge. Miller goes onto relay that most generations and cultures have long taken for granted that this is not all there is and that there is a spiritual dimension of reality and of human nature beyond our material world that we may know through our senses. The degree of emphasis on spirituality and one's religious commitment to faith has varied in pendulum fashion over the years. America is known for its extreme materialism, but many hunger for that which gives meaning to life and want a transcendent experience beyond themselves. Belief in the spiritual realm continues to encompass the majority of Americans thought repertoire, be it a belief in a Supreme Being or order, life after death, supernatural beings such as angels or demons, or an ultimate reality, with 95 % stating that they believe in God (Miller, 2006). A substantial minority, describe spirituality as being the most important source of strength and direction in their lives.

Capps et al. (1976) offer a breakdown of six spiritual dimensions within religion: the mythological, ritualistic, experiential, dispositional, social, and directional, proposing that people participate in these dimensions to varying degrees. Miller (2006) suggests two spiritual domains within religious practice: experiences and beliefs. The spiritual dimension of experiences focuses on observable behaviors in which people engage in practices such as prayer, fasting, meditation, and contemplation. Included here would also be participation in specific religious activities such as worship, dance, scriptural study, singing, confession, offerings, and public prayer.

The second domain of spiritual beliefs is quite large, and its content varies within one's culture (Smith, 2009). This domain is hallmarked by beliefs in transcendence, for example the soul and the afterlife, and the reality of a spiritual dimension beyond sensory and intellectual knowledge. Personal mortality and endorsed values are found also to be a part of this domain (Rokeach, 1973). A common quest in many religious practices is to transcend the "me factor" (i.e. I, me, my mine) in personal values (Bracke & Thoreson, 1996). The concept of God and whether or not one sees him as fundamentally loving, indifferent, or punitive towards mankind is also found within this domain.

Walsh (2003) suggests that single parents raising their children in a religiously committed home, experience the aforementioned spiritual dimensions in their own their faith life by engaging in activities such as praying for their children, being a good role model in attending church, living out the biblical principles taught there , and employing spiritual rituals in the home. In addition, single parents are better able to cope with losses occurring as a result of divorce or death of a spouse by obtaining needed support through their church family (Anderson & Stewart, 1994).

In closing, the term spirituality is generally used to denote certain positive inward perceptions and qualities while avoiding implications of narrow, dogmatic beliefs and obligatory religious observances. Religious commitment, as mentioned earlier is defined by Worthington (2003) as the degree to which a person adheres to his or her religious values, beliefs, and practices and employs them in daily living.

Spiritual Parenting

According to Walker (2010), “faith-ful” parenting has moved into the mainstream. He relays this because it is commonly known that divorce and juvenile crime rates are still exorbitant, and that parents, he suggests, are more than ever needing to return back to the basics in their procreation of moralistic values into their children’s lives. Beers (2010) adds that for Christians, Jews, Buddhists, and others, religion and spirituality are integral to life. He goes on to propose that religious commitment is not an ironclad prerequisite for parenting but that this dimension brings greater security to children. Behrman (2010) echoes this opinion, proposing that when one thinks about religion and what it does, it teaches values, ethics and ways of being as good of an example as we can be-that is what religion is all about and that is what parents do. This concern is demonstrated in book titles that range the spectrum of belief systems. Some authors take a nonsectarian approach to the topic of spiritual parenting such as Doe’s (2010) *10 Principles for Spiritual Parenting* and Osborne’s (2010) *Talking to Your Children About God,* an explicitly Christian guide to parental duties like introducing them to the Bible and teaching them to pray. Other publishers have endorsed books on the how parents might enhance their relationships with their children. For example, Fuchs -Kramer (1998) expands on *Parenting as a Spiritual Journey: Deepening Ordinary & Extraordinary*

Events into Sacred Occasions in *Jewish Lights*. Walker (2010) suggests that spiritually-attuned parents are seeking not just theory, but practical advice in the form of nurturing activities and skills to enhance self-protection and to teach their children ways to love others.

The Bible itself offers parenting assistance, advising parents that discipline and instruction are integral parts of good parenting (Touchton, 2009). Proverbs 13:24 states, “If you refuse to discipline your children, it proves that you don’t love them” (trans. Life Application Bible, 1988). Children who grow up in undisciplined households often feel unwanted and unworthy. They lack direction and self-control, and as they get older they rebel as they have little to no respect for any kind of authority, including God’s. Touchton (2009) goes on to endorse that discipline must be balanced with love or children may grow to be resentful, discouraged, and rebellious. Touchton (2009) proposes that Biblical instruction is the responsibility of the parents, and something our society seems to have forgotten. She brings forth the point that we cannot depend on schools alone to educate our children academically nor Sunday school alone to instruct our kids in the Word of God. In Deuteronomy 6, God states through Moses: "These commandments I give you this day are to be upon your hearts, and you shall teach them diligently to your children at all times” (trans. Life Application Bible, 1988). She goes on to suggest that parents have the responsibility to instruct their children in God's word by example and direct teaching. She purports that when godly people raise godly children they make godly decisions and therefore take godly actions that will influence the home and society (Touchton, 2009).

Research examining the association between religiosity and parenting have typically focused on parents of young children and are inconclusive; some having found that religiosity was linked with negative parenting behaviors, for example, utilizing spanking as a behavioral correction as in “don’t spare the rod” (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993). Others in the field have found that parent religiosity was associated with more positive parenting behaviors, for example, hugging and praising (Wilcox, 1998). Gunnoe, Hetherington, & Reiss, (1999) report, alternatively, studies that have examined the relationship between parent religiosity and parenting adolescents that have consistently presented religiosity to be associated with parenting behaviors and parent-adolescent relationships such as increased warmth. However, there is noted a paucity of literature that discussed the importance of parental religion in family interactions (Parke, 2001); even fewer studies have investigated the link between parent religiosity and effective parenting (Mahoney, Paragment, Tarkeshwar & Swank, 2001). In addition, it is difficult to determine the process through which parent religiosity leads to influential parenting. The authors suggest that there exists no clearly defined process in the present literature that explains the association between parent religiosity and actual parent behavior. Mahoney et al., (2003) suggest a number of possible mechanisms that accomplish this, one of which is “sanctification”. They define sanctification as “a psychological process through which aspects of life are perceived by people as having spiritual character and significance” (p.221). According to their perspective, individuals are able to experience God or mature in their spirituality through participation in family relationships, including parent-child relationships. The authors also suggest that when parents viewed their relationships with their children as “spiritual or sanctified”, they would be more likely to

engage in positive parenting practices, such as increasing positive interactions and decreasing verbal aggression with their children. The authors imply that greater sanctification of the parent-child relationship by the parent to be associated with better parenting. Mahoney et al. (2001) explain potential mechanisms that link these two constructs. They suggest that family religious activities facilitate family functioning and that habitual engagement in family prayer and attendance at religious services offers parents routine opportunities to communicate apologies, hopes, and shared goals with their children. This is accomplished within a context overseen by an authority that supersedes even that of the parents. The authors purport that when a family is involved in church activities this possibly reduces parent-child conflict because the parents' social network is composed of families who maintain similar value systems.

In a study conducted by Snider, Clements and Vazsonyi (2004), 67 college aged students were assessed by asking them to fill out a questionnaire, which asked them to recall their relations with parents at the time that they were living at home. The researchers designed a parent religiosity scale for use in this study which ascertained student's perceptions of parent religiosity. In addition, the students were asked to fill out the Adolescent Family Process measure (AFP, Snider et al., 2003) which measures six different aspects of parenting behaviors to include: closeness, support, monitoring, communication, conflict, and approval. Parenting style was also assessed according to the perceptions of the students. Correlations were found that indicated total parent religiosity was associated with five of the six aspects of the AFP, with the exception of conflict. This suggests that that parents who were also perceived by their students as being more religious, perceived to demonstrate more effective parenting characteristics. The analysis

also indicated that parent religiosity was associated with the child feeling closer (*r*=.31) and supported by the parent (*r*=.21) with a negative correlation in the area of conflict (*r*=-.10). Although this study presents interesting findings, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. Only self report data were utilized. The researchers suggest that future studies should consider adolescent perceptions of parent religiosity separately for mothers and fathers as the impact of parent religiosity on parenting behaviors might differ in important ways for mothers and fathers. Admittedly, despite the observed relationships in this study, it is important to note that the magnitude of these associations were modest.

In a qualitative study, Brodsky (1999) found that the ten single mothers who participated in the semi-structured interviews believed that their neighborhood, having sufficient finances, family, friends, and spirituality were domains which made them successful and assisted them in coping as single parents. Beyond meeting the basics, each of the women described the need to be involved in their children's lives and to teach them the behaviors and values that they will need to survive. When discussing spirituality as an important resource, the women concurred that a private relationship with God or a set of values dictates one's behavior and that church support provided them with material resources and relationship, stating that "faith and action go hand in hand". Although this study adds to the field, limitations to this study include the small number of participants utilized and the cultural deficit of assessing only black single mothers from one neighborhood. The researchers state that single parents could benefit from the encouragement of more that follow in the vein of protective measures as opposed to only studying risk factors.

Ellison et al. (2007) have also explored the detrimental implications of parental divorce on the religious involvement of their offspring, specifically those in young adulthood. Their study addressed several theoretical arguments linking parental divorce with reduced religious involvement in a unique sample of 1,500 young adults aged 18-35. Their results showed that parental divorce is associated with substantially lower self-reported religious involvement in their children. However, the researchers found that there are no effects of parental divorce on non-organizational activities such as prayer or subjective religiousness (feelings of closeness to God). The researchers overtly state that there are sound theoretical reasons to anticipate that offspring of divorce may be less engaged in religious or spiritual pursuits in young adulthood as compared with their counterparts from intact families. They propose, for example, that offspring from divorced families may be less closely tied to organized religion and perhaps less inclined toward private acts of devotion or personal spiritual experience but do not offer an explanation for this view. The researchers ultimately found that the link between parental divorce and attendance in religious activities appears to be due to the lower levels of paternal (father's) involvement in childhood and lack of adolescent religious socialization. Although this study contributes to the literature in several areas, it also has limitations. The researchers concede that since the offspring from intact families were asked to recall accumulated experiences only between the time of divorce and their 18th birthday, it is possible that levels of effects of parental socialization may be overestimated for offspring from intact families. This study, like many that assess divorced and intact families, is based on a deficits model. They suggest that future studies

would benefit also from more precise data on the timing of the divorce and any formation of blended families.

Resiliency

Each of us experiences adversity in life. The "development of positive adjustment in the face of adversity and its aftermath" is called resiliency (Luther, Cichetti & Becker, 2000). Individuals who are resilient regain balance in life and keep going despite adverse circumstances, and find meaning amidst confusion and tumult (Wagnild, 2009). Resilient persons are self-confident and seem to understand their own strengths, abilities, and limitations. They do not feel a pressure to conform to others standards but take pleasure in being unique. Resilient individuals seem to have a confidence in their ability to persevere because they have done so before and anticipate rather than fear change and challenges that come their way. Alternately, for people who are less resilient, adversity can result in many different psychiatric disorders to include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and major depressive disorder. At the very least, less resilient people tend to face harsher life outcomes (Friedrich, et al, 1982; Biafora et al, 1995).

The expression "bouncing back" is often used in relation to having obtained resiliency. To respond to adversity with resilience does not mean that an individual will return to his or her original state, but means that they will ultimately re-establish equilibrium and be able to grow and learn from their experiences. Resilient persons are not immune or hardened to stress; they simply have learned how to deal with life's inevitable difficulties and this ability has set them apart.

Where does resiliency originate from?

Grotberg (2010), states that resiliency comes from one's external and internal resources. People's external resources consist of what they have and their internal resources consist of who they already are and what they can do. For example, individuals with resiliency have people in their lives that they trust, structures and boundaries for their safety, and role models who have set good examples of how to behave and how to deal with a crisis situation. They receive encouragement toward self-efficacy, and their physical, emotional, as well as belonging needs are met.

Children grow a sense of who they are early on and their perceptions are formed by how they are treated by other people; especially by the influence of their primary caregivers (Gabbard, 2005). They are more likely to be resilient and have good coping mechanisms in place by the time they become adults if they see themselves as lovable and appealing, are able to perform kind acts and show concern for others, are proud of their accomplishments, are able to take responsibility for what they do, and are filled with hope, faith, and trust (Grotberg, 2010). Grotberg goes on to state that children are more likely to be resilient if they can communicate well, are able to solve problems, manage their feelings and impulses, understand how other people are feeling, and are able to establish trusting relationships outside of their immediate environment. He concludes that steps can be taken which actively build a child's resiliency. This is done by providing a safe nurturing environment, spending time listening to and playing with the child, teaching them through modeling how to communicate well, allowing the child to make mistakes, involving the child in day-to-day activities and routines, praying with the child,

showing the child they are valued, and using experiential learning in schools (Grotberg , 2010).

Bouncing back after divorce or death of a spouse

Much research into resilience took root in the 1970s, when researchers studied children who managed to progress through normal developments, in spite of living in highly stressful environments such as those found in post-divorce situations or the death of a parent. From detailed observations, Mavis Hetherington wrote more than 200 papers and authored or edited 13 books shedding light on relationships with spouses, non-custodial parents, siblings, grandparents, teachers, and peers.

The largest unexpected occurrence in Hetherington's research, in her opinion, is that most children, instead of being damaged by divorce, are eventually able to cope with their new situations. She reports that although about 75 percent of children in divorced homes do well, most children are distressed for a period of time when their parents go through a divorce. She concedes that even at age 24, the grown-up children of divorce still describe divorce as the most traumatic experience of their lives. She caveats this however, stating that the children are not permanently damaged; they are resilient (Hetherington, 2003). In addition, as previously mentioned, if both parents maintain a positive relationship with their child, resolve their differences regarding the child, and provide sufficient financial resources, the negative consequences referenced in many statistics are generally not found (Amato, 2002; Eldar-Avidan, Haj-Yahia & Greenbaum, 2009; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Hetherington (1999) proposes that much of the early research on divorced is based on a deficit model that assumes that a two-parent family

structure is necessary for successful child outcomes. She goes on to state that most of these studies failed to investigate significant mediating or moderating factors such as time since parental separation and divorce, individual parent and child characteristics, and family process variables.

The rising divorce rate and the growing number of children whose parents divorced since the 1970's reflects wider social changes and has created a shift in the perception and social acceptance of divorce (Gottman & Notarius, 2002; Pinsof, 2002). The role of marriage in coordinating social life has eroded and many children are now being brought up in alternative settings such as the single parent household (Coontz, 2007). Divorce is a complex event and a diversion in the life course, with many personal, social, legal, and financial short and long term effects for both adults and their children. It calls for new roles and relationship patterns to be established as well as an integration of events and emotions (Amato, 2002; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

The Impact of Religious Commitment on Positive Coping and Resiliency

Over the past two decades, resilience has become an important construct in theory and research on one's psychological well-being (Walsh, 2003). Life crises and constant stressors such as single parenting can derail the functioning of a family, causing ripple effects for individual family members and their future relationships. Walsh (2003) has identified key processes in the following three domains of family functioning: family belief systems, organizational patterns, and communication patterns. The key processes that Walsh describes in the domain of family belief systems relate to the manner in which families attach meaning to hardship, the effects of a positive outlook on life, as well as

transcendence and spirituality. Walsh (2003) suggests that resilience is cultivated through shared beliefs that assist family members in attaching meaning to crisis situations and form a hopeful, positive outlook. The strengths and resources of individuals and families empower them to react successfully to crisis and the continuous challenges of life. These shared belief systems, in turn, organize family healing processes and the family's approach to those crisis situations. Spirituality is a key dimension that promotes the adaptation of the family members, as well as the family as a unit (Walsh, 2003). Spirituality can be experienced and expressed through one's religion, which is characterized by beliefs, social organization, and cumulative traditions. Spiritual traditions are optimistic in that they keep hope alive in the midst of hardship so that families may see their way through trauma and tribulation. Fukuyama and Sevig (1999) inform us that spirituality also promotes realistic hope, attachment of meaning, values, inner freedom, belief systems, and peak experiences as well as man's relationship with God.

Many cultures provide for convictions and practices that maintain mental well being and the ability to bounce back, as spirituality to them is not separate to the rest of life (Eck, 2002; Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999). For example, spirituality is deeply imbedded in the development of a healthy life cycle by Africans (Wheeler et al., 2002). Wheeler et al. (2002) suggest that spirituality involves the search for fulfillment and transcendence in the midst of the chaos of life. From a very early age, African people develop an awareness of the spirit that is imprinted on them and reinforced daily. The underlying African-centered value is a sense of connection to their ancestors and the community from a spiritual point of view. Ancestors are the link with the deceased and therefore are

a very important source of support for the African people one they can fall back on in times of hardship (Thomas, 1999). In Thomas' (1999) investigation, participants experienced that God addressed their needs in "a loving and protective manner."

McIntosh et al. (1993) investigated the effects of beliefs and values on the mental well being of Americans. They found that the importance of spirituality was a predictor of better adaptation in parents who had lost a child. Research on individuals who have experienced a serious crisis such as death of a loved one or divorce shows that faith and trust in God, as well as a belief that all things do work together for good, are positively associated with better adaptation (Lowenthal, 2007). Walsh (2003) reminds us that spiritual beliefs also have a direct influence on the way in which adversity is handled; pain and suffering is experienced and meaning is attached to symptoms.

Although spirituality is seen as a private, personal matter for most people, they often have a need to share their experiences with others or to be a part of a support group system (Fukuyama & Sevig, 1999). Lowenthal (2007), states that religion can serve as a protective factor in its own right as a result of the sense of belonging that arises from being religiously affiliated. There is an expectation for most that involvement in any type of religious group increases the availability of potential and actual social support and involvement in religious and spiritual activities results in social integration and support for families in crisis: for example, newly divorced or widowed parents (Lowenthal, 2007). Greef and Human (2004) found that 67% of families in which a parent had died identified religion and spiritual support as important coping mechanisms.

Doherty (2003) indicates that one's spirituality cannot be ignored in counseling those with afflictions, because it is a core aspect of human life. This standpoint does not originate simply from the fact that clients do, at times, have problems with their own spiritual experiences, but also because spirituality is an important resource that can be utilized to overcome problems (Connor, 2003). Families can be encouraged to use their spirituality as an already-present quality that facilitates restoration of the heart and mind and, in so doing, become more resilient. Families thus will be able to emerge stronger and more experienced through their joint effort to overcome adversity in the future. In addition, through effective counseling, family members could possibly discover undeveloped resources and abilities to help them handle new challenges and difficulties, such as those found in single parenting, more effectively (Walsh, 2003).

Much research has been completed in order to present information on how familial spiritual involvement has affected children's mental health outcomes and inadvertently, their resiliency (Greef, 2005; Johnson, 1999; Panos, 2007). In 2005, Greef completed a study identifying individual characteristics utilized as a resource to enhance the resiliency of a family dealing with loss of a parent. Twenty-five single-parent families who had lost a parent between one and four years previously were asked to participate in a qualitative study identifying characteristics of resilience. It was found in the cross-sectional design that there was not the expected positive relationship between personal resiliency (the parent) and family functioning; $p=.24$. The Family Attachment and Changeability Index 8 and the Ego-resiliency Scale were then completed. The small number of families surveyed may be one possible explanation for the lack of a significant correlation. An additional limitation to this study is that the research was completed on a non-

representative sample; South Africans were interviewed exclusively. However, the results indicated that perseverance, faith, expression of emotions, and self-confidence were characteristics of resilience viewed as resources in promoting resilience in these single parent families. The researcher also suggests that the relationship between personal (parent) and family resilience could be further explored.

In 1999, Kenneth Johnson completed a study measuring the spiritual and special attributes of resilience. This study defines the spirit as the force that drives an individual to pursue wisdom and perfection and to seek union with his or her spiritual source of strength. It suggests that as individuals develop their spirituality, they also develop their ability to learn and grow from life's disruptors such as single parenthood. According to Johnson, this is the process known as *resilient reintegration*. A total of 678 adolescents were presented with four scenarios depicting five identified core attributes of intuition, passion, love, hope, and faith. He states that these five attributes identified in resilient individuals are the *core of the spirit*. This study centered on the development of the Spirit Core Scale (SCS), a tool that would measure those attributes in adolescents. This was done in hope that health experts would have another resource that would help both in the preparation of effective intervention with adolescents struggling spiritually and with the measurement of the effectiveness of such an intervention. The SCS was compared with another scale, The Purpose in Life Scale, and it was found that there was a high correlation between the two. This researcher felt it imperative to support the importance of spiritual health as a buffer to life's uncertainties but does not address how parental spirituality might also influence their children's resiliency outcomes. Another limitation

to this study is that subjects polled were explicitly from Utah and Idaho, lending itself to a non-representative sample of mostly Caucasian subjects.

Panos (2007) also studied resiliency factors in two-parent families. In this research study of 676 participants from 216 families, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted and transcripts were made of each interview. The thematic content analysis of each response was conducted utilizing Spradley's domain analysis procedure. The resiliency factors of support, family values and rituals, role models, restoration, faith, and optimism for the future were identified by at least 50% of the interviewed families as contributing to their resiliency and survival in difficult life circumstances.

The National Survey of Families and Households (Vaaler, 2009) recently investigated the influence of parents' religious commitment and involvement on their children's internalizing and externalizing problems over time. In addition, the analyses examined the different forms of family instability and parenting practices that mediate this relationship. The first study to come from this survey showed that children whose parents were religiously unaffiliated exhibited elevated internalizing problems compared with children from faith-based households. The second study showed that children from religiously homogamous families, exhibited lower than average externalizing problems. In addition, father's religious involvement protects their children from externalizing problems, even when accounting for various forms of family instability such as divorce.

In fact, a trend is evolving in the literature to study the father's spirituality and how it influences his children's lives (Dollahite, 1998; Mills & Spaulding, 2006). In 2006, Mills & Spaulding completed a study on "faithful fathering," which was a training

program based on eight determinants of parenting. The purpose of this study was to ascertain whether or not a faith-based training program geared specifically for fathers, would be efficacious or not. The study substantiated both the significance of fathers and the role that spirituality had played in their parenting. The study highlighted spirituality as a factor in successful parenting, and subsequently created a parenting curriculum that teaches essential, research-based components of successful parenting. Dollahite (1998) wrote an interesting article entitled *Fathering, Faith and Spirituality,* which was actually a literature review on the relationship of fathering and religious belief. He states that what is usually overlooked is religion's positive influence on men and support for responsible fathering to include aspects of moral persuasion, personal examples, community support efforts, and explicit teaching of what family life is to be about. His review suggests that men in the United States know that a sense of meaning, direction, solace, and involvement with a caring community are critical to childrearing *and* that religious practice can provide them. There are a number of parallels presented between core concepts of the men's movement and experiential elements of many religious communities. It was concluded in this study that religion, consisting of a covenant faith community with teachings and narratives that enhance spirituality and encourage morality, is the most powerful, meaningful, and sustained influence for encouraging men to be more involved in their children's lives.

It follows from the previous discussion that resilience in the midst of crisis and adversity is not just dependent on individual characteristics, but also on a combination of various family processes. From the aforementioned research, it is apparent that

spirituality is one of the dimensions that contribute to family stability and resilience in crisis and have a positive influence over children's life outcomes.

The Development of Morality

In the field of psychology, initial attempts to explain the origins and development of morality in individuals were grounded in the writings and theories of John Locke, Jean Piaget, and Sigmund Freud.

Locke (1704), defined the self as "that conscious thinking thing (whatever substance, made up of spiritual, material, simple or compounded, it matters not) which is sensible, or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness or misery, and so is concerned for itself as far as that consciousness extends". According to his theory, "the Lockean self" is therefore a self-aware and self-reflective consciousness that is fixed in a body. He explains that the gradual unfolding of the human mind is attributed to man's innate knowledge of basic logical propositions. Locke posits an "empty" mind, a *tabula rasa*, which is shaped by one's experiences, sensations, and reflections.

Jean Piaget (1965), a Swiss psychologist, expanded on Locke's ideas and conceptualized moral development as a part of cognitive development. This developmental process consisted of sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational stages. In his view, moral judgment developed according to an age-regulated timeline that is tied to maturational processes that are unique to the individual. He came to the conclusion that the idea that children learn and internalize the rules and morals of society by being given the rules and forced to adhere to them should be rejected. He recognized through his research on how children formed their judgments

about moral behavior, that children learn morality best by having to deal with others in group situations. He suggested that there is a process by which children conform to society's norms of what is right and wrong, and that the process was active rather than passive.

Piaget (1965) found that there were two main differences in how children thought about moral behavior. He posited that very young children's thinking is based on how actions affected them or what the results of an action were. They also recognize the sanctity of rules. He gives the example that children understand that they cannot make up new rules to a game; they have to play by what the rule book says. Piaget called this part of his theory "moral realism with objective responsibility." His theory explains why young children are concerned with outcomes rather than intentions.

Piaget (1965) posited that older children tend look at motives behind actions rather than consequences of actions. They are able to examine certain societal rules, determining whether they are fair or not, and apply these rules and their modifications to situations requiring negotiation, assuring that everyone affected by the rules is being treated fairly. Piaget (1965) felt that the best moral learning came from these cooperative decision-making and problem-solving events. He also embraced the belief that children developed moral reasoning quickly and at an early age. Others believe that his stage of moral development was thought to be attainable by age twelve or thirteen, which coincidently, is when most children begin to think more abstractly and less concretely (Green, 1989).

Sigmund Freud, known as the “Father of Modern Psychology,” has also been influential on the theories of moral development in two related but distinct ways. He simultaneously developed a theory of how the mind is organized and operates internally, and a theory of how human behavior both conditions and results from his theoretical understanding. He conceptualized that the mind contains three main personality constructs: the Id, Ego, and Superego, around which morality develops. The Id represents our instinctual, primal behaviors to including aggressive and sexual impulses. The Ego, acts as the moderator between the individual’s internal and external world. The Superego is what is thought of as our moral compass or guide and acts as one’s censor. He also postulated that personality is developed by our childhood experiences as well as the influence of parental figures (Franz, 2010).

Kohlberg’s Developmental Stages

Later theorists, such as Lawrence Kohlberg (1976), an American psychologist, extended Piaget’s work in cognitive reasoning into adolescence and adulthood. He believed that moral development was a slow process which evolved over time and that individuals mastered stages of development, one at a time. He posited the importance of not skipping any stages and that the only way to grow through these stages was by discussion of moral dilemmas with support figures. His theory of moral development is comprised of three levels: the preconventional, conventional, and post-conventional; each with associated levels within them.

At the first and most basic level, the preconventional level, the child is concerned with avoiding punishment and getting their needs met. This level has two stages and

applies to children up to 10 years of age. Stage one is the Punishment-Obedience stage. Children tend to obey rules because they are told to do so by an authority figure (parent or teacher), and they fear repercussions if they do not follow rules. Children at this stage are not able to conceptualize someone else's side. Stage two is the Individual, Instrumentation, and Exchange stage. In this stage, behavior is governed by moral reciprocity. Kohlberg (1976) posits that a child will follow rules if there is a known benefit to him or her and that children at this stage tend to also mete out justice in an eye-for-an-eye manner or according to the “Golden Rule logic.” For example, if one child hits another, the injured child will hit back in retaliation. This is to be considered equitable justice. He suggests that children in this stage are very concerned with what is fair and just.

Children often will make deals with each other and even adults. They will agree to behave in a certain way for a payoff. "I'll do this, if you will do that." At times, the payoff is in the knowledge that behaving correctly is in the child's own best interest. They receive approval from authority figures or admirations from peers, avoid blame, and behave in accordance with their concept of self.

At the conventional level, the child begins to broaden his scope of wants and needs. Children at this level are mainly concerned about being accepted by others and living up to their expectations. This stage begins around age 10 but lasts well into adulthood, and is the stage most adults remain at throughout their lives. Within the Conventional level is stage three and four. Stage three, Interpersonal Conformity, is sometimes called the "good boy/good girl" stage. In this stage, children do the right thing because it is good for the family, their peer group, team, school, or church. They

understand the concepts of loyalty, trust, and gratitude. They abide by the Golden Rule as it applies to others around them. Morality, in this stage, is acting in accordance to what the social group says is right and moral. Stage four is the Law and Order, or Social System and Conscience stage. Children and adults at stage three follow the rules of the society in which they live, work, and play. These laws and rules become the platform for all right and wrong actions. Children and adults feel compelled to be responsible and show respect for authority. This continues to be moral behavior based on authority, but reflects a shift from the social group to the society at large.

At the post conventional level, some teens and adults move beyond conventional morality and come to morality based on reason, examining the relative values and opinions of the groups with which they interact. Few adults reach this stage. Implicitly correct behavior is governed by the sixth stage, the Social Contract and Individual Rights stage. Individuals in this stage have an understanding that codes of conduct are mainly relative to their social group. Kohlberg (1976) posits that the individual enters into a contract with fellow human beings to treat them fairly and kindly and to respect authority when it is deserved and equally moral. They also agree to obey the laws and social rules of conduct that promote respect for individuals and value the few universal moral values that they recognize. In this stage, moral behavior and moral decisions are based on the greatest good for all.

Stage six is the Principled Conscience or the Universal/Ethical Principles stage. In this stage, individuals examine the validity of society's laws and govern themselves by what they consider to be universal moral principles, usually involving equal rights and

respect. They obey laws and societal rules that fall in line with these universal principles, but not others that they deem as aberrant. Adults in this stage are motivated by individual conscience that transcends cultural, religious, or social convention rules. Kohlberg (1976) recognized this last stage but found so few people who lived by this concept of moral behavior that he could not study it in detail.

In an interesting study, Hawkins (2005) found that Permissive style of parenting was most significantly tied to their children's level of morality as opposed to the researchers' hypothesis of Authoritative parenting style being more closely tied to children's morality. 200 college aged students were asked to fill out the Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991) according to their perceived parental style exercised by their parent. They were also asked to fill out the Defining issues Test-II (Rest, 1999) to determine their level of moral judgment. A simple linear regression was calculated predicting the subject's moral development level based on their perceived parental style and a significant correlation was found (r=.031). Additionally, a regression was calculated for each of the groups of subjects who reported an experience of permissive, authoritative or authoritarian parenting style and it was found that permissive parenting style was most highly correlated with the level of moral judgment. The researcher concedes that there were limitations to this study. They include the fact that there are most likely many other variables that might account for a higher level of moral development in college aged students besides parenting style. An additional limitation is the fact that the research only assessed Christian students and not also secular students with a larger number of respondents.

The Impact of Religious Commitment on the Development of Morality

According to Franz (2010), religious development often goes hand in hand with moral development. It seems children's concepts of divinity, right and wrong, and who is ultimately responsible for the world's woes are shaped by the family and by the religious social group to which the child belongs. These concepts mirror cognitive and moral developmental stages (Kohlberg, 1976). For example, in the earliest developmental stage (up to two years of age), the child knows that religious objects and books are to be respected. The concept of a divine being is ambiguous to them, but the child enjoys the regularity of family religious rituals such as prayer.

According to Franz (2010), in the next stage (from two to 10 years), children begin to orient religious concepts to themselves as in the catechism litany, "Who made you? God made me." Around age six, the concept of a divine being is usually described in anthropomorphic ways. That is, children tend to perceive God to look like a human being only bigger or living in the sky. At this stage, God is perceived as physically powerful and often is portrayed as a superhero. God may also be seen as the wish-granter and the One who can fix anything. Children truly embrace religious holidays and rituals during this stage.

In the Intermediate Stage, which is considered to be pre-adolescence, children are considered to be in the pre-religious stage. The anthropomorphized divinity is seen as being very old and wise and God is thought of as doing supernatural things and having a halo, floating over the world, or performing miracles. Children in this stage understand that religious or divine beings fall within their religious belief system. For example,

Christian children will often distinguish between God and Jesus and the disciples or saints.

The last stage of religious development occurs during adolescence and focuses on personalizing religious rituals and drawing closer to a divine being. Young adults begin to think of God in abstract terms and look at the mystical, supernatural side of religious experience. At this time, they may also rebel against organized religion as they begin to question the world and the rules around them and begin to form their own moral judgments (Kohlberg, 1976).

Adolescents' search for identity is commonly described as a search for meaning. G. Stanley Hall posits adolescence to be *a stage of conversion*, or a shift from concern with only oneself to a concern for others and a search for the meaning of life (Ream & Savin-Williams, 2003). The findings of contemporary researchers have supported this suggestion, discovering positive relationships between adolescents' religious identity, their quest for personal meaning, and their concern for others (e.g., Furrow, King, & White, 2004). Faith, spirituality, and religion are seen as related systems of meaning through which adolescents seek to understand their reason for being and their place in the universe. Faith-based practitioners, developmental researchers, as well as religious educators use different, but related, constructs to describe a person's process of self-discovery. According to Fowler (1981), faith is typically defined as a way of finding shared meaning and purpose in life, an orientation of the person toward values and beliefs, and a capacity to acknowledge and commit to a higher power in a quest for the universal.

Similarly, in adolescence, spirituality is usually characterized as a personal and subjective feeling or an experience of connectedness/relationship/oneness with a higher power or transcendent reality (e.g., God or Nature). Spirituality has also been explained in terms of integrating one's values or belief system with one's behavior in daily life; attaining a desirable inner affective state such as comfort, anxiety reduction, or security; as well as obtaining personal growth, actualization, mastery, or self-control (Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Cole, 1997). On the other hand, developmental theorists have cautioned against an artificial separation of constructs such as spirituality, faith, and religion, especially since worldwide data show that most people see themselves as both spiritual and religious (e.g., King & Boyatzis, 2004). Among both adolescents and adults, in actual practice, much overlap exists (Benson, 2004). For example, about 95% of American youth aged 13 to 17 believe in God; 42% of youth frequently pray; 36% regularly attend a church youth group; and 23% participate in faith-based service projects (King & Boyatzis, 2004). According to Monitoring the Future, a U.S. national survey collected annually since the 1970s, 47% of high-school seniors report that religion is very important in their lives (Kerestes & Youniss, 2003). It is commonly thought that children from religious families are most likely to be given the traditional answers of their particular religion; children from agnostic or atheistic families are typically given the parents' own thoughts (or doubts) about the questions, along with the moral and ethical guidelines of their own culture (Coles, 1997). Nevertheless, faith, spirituality, and religion, as an influence, have all been relatively neglected areas in developmental research (Benson, 2004; King & Boyatzis, 2004).

Academic Attainment

Academic Attainment as a Life Outcome Indicator

Numerous past studies have shown that educational attainment plays a major part in determining an individual's future economic disposition (Caspi et.al, 1998;Harvard Family Research Project, 2006; Hepburn & White, 1990; Lavin-Loucks, 2006). Personal income varies greatly according to an individual's education, as does household income. The income for those employed, full-time, and over the age of twenty-five ranged from $20,826 for those with less than a ninth grade education to $100,000 for those with professional degrees. The median income for individuals with doctorates was found to be $79,401. These statistics imply that the majority of those employed full-time with professional or doctoral degrees are among the overall top 10% (15%, if including those who work part-time) of income earners. Of those with a master's degree, nearly 50% were among the top quarter of income earners (the top third if including those who work part-time) (US Census Bureau, 2010).

Ethnicity and socioeconomic status also plays a part in academic achievement. The Harvard Family Research Project (2006) emphasizes that African Americans from low-income families whose parents participate in their educational experience are far more likely to have successful high school careers and reach graduation. High-achieving Latino report high levels of parental encouragement and familial values that highly stress education as a means to breaking the cycle of poverty (Harvard Family Research Project, 2006). Additionally, the ability of parents to reinforce skills obtained in formal education and promote learning outside of school is critical to their child's school success.

One of the main direct effects of the academic achievement gap is the disproportionately elevated school dropout rate; that is, minority and low-income students are more likely to drop out of high school. In turn, dropping out of high school is related to a number of negative social outcomes, including the higher likelihood of unemployment (Caspi et.al, 1998; Hepburn & White, 1990), lower wages, and diminished earning power (Census, 2004). Nationally, individuals who do not possess a high school diploma earn an average of $18,734 annually, compared with $27,915 for those with a high school diploma, and $51,206 for those with a baccalaureate degree. High school dropouts are also more likely to be welfare dependent and utilize other social services, propagating the cycle of poverty (Rumberger, 1987). Although some researchers have reported that higher intelligence and standardized test scores may predict a lack of drug use (Fleming, Kellam, & Brown, 1982), poor school performance is also related to increased drug use. In other words, low levels of commitment to education and poor educational achievement bear a direct relationship on drug abuse, as does one's failure in school (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992). High-risk activities, such as drug and alcohol abuse, can also be seen as a precursor to school failure, as engaging in such risk behaviors can lower commitment to education.

These high-risk activities have covert health consequences as well, suggesting that educational outcomes, high-risk behaviors, and health outcomes are interrelated. Research demonstrates that socioeconomic status, which is measured by income and education levels, as well as other indicators, is a consistent predictor of health outcomes, including mortality rates and rates of disease. This research implies that the achievement

gap also produces a gap in health, as those with higher income and better paying job will most likely also have health insurance (Cross et.al, 1989).

In addition, social status and opportunities abound for those who are more affluent (Wilkenson, 2002). It seems members of a *social* group interact mainly within their own affiliates and to a lesser degree with those of a lower *status*. Social mobility is considered to be a change of position within the stratification system and can occur through higher education, regardless of the ethnicity or socio economic status in which one began, According to Wilkenson (2002), social mobility allows a person to move to another social status other than the one he or she is born into. Wilkenson (2002) concedes that social mobility is more frequent in societies where achievement rather than ascription is the primary basis for social status. Alternatively, poor social affiliations and low status carry high population attributed risks. The author believes that the more unequal societies are, the more they will suffer from relative deprivation. In addition, they tend to have lower rates of trust and community involvement and more violence. Wilenson (2002) goes on to state that unequal societies will be more differentiated by social rank into relations of dominance and subordination and less able to enjoy more egalitarian and inclusive relations consistent with higher social capital and less class differentiation. Therefore, as previously mentioned, a lack of academic attainment is not only a gap in achievement, but a larger gap in access to positive life outcomes across multiple dimensions. Many economic, social and health consequences are affected by one’s prowess in the academic arena.

Single Parenting and Academic Attainment

What is known about the well-being of children raised in single-parent families is complex, with considerable disagreement as to what impact there is and in what areas of their life will be impacted, as well as whether or not it has a lasting influence (Allison & Furstenberg, 1989; Demo & Acock, 1988; Hetherington, 2003). It has been formerly noted that certainly as a group, children of single parents have more than their fair share of emotional and behavioral issues. They typically have lower academic performance, lower self-esteem, more acting out, and more difficulties with peer relations (Amato & Keith, 1991; Hetherington, 2003). However, later research has also found that children, who live in two-parent families with much conflict in the home, fare no better in the world of academia (Harold & Aitkin, 2007). These findings purport that the attributional processes found in children who live in households shown to have high levels of hostility and inter-parental conflict have important implications for their long-term academic success as well. Research has also shown that parenting style is correlated with academic achievement (Bradley 2006; Melby & Conger, 1996). Specifically, authoritative parenting is most strongly related to higher academic attainment.

Authoritative parenting involves three components which include acceptance of failures and successes of their children, psychological autonomy for their children (the freedom to think what they want), and behavior control (strict rules and supervision). Steinberg et al. (1989) found that students reporting high acceptance from parents, high psychological autonomy, and moderate behavior control from parents not only have a higher perceived academic performance, but have higher

Grade point averages as well. As a result, not only do the students *feel* they perform better in school, they actually do perform better.

On the other hand, authoritarian parenting 9highly demanding, directive, and disciplinary parenting, but unresponsive to their child's needs), permissive parenting 9overly lenient, not requiring mature behavior, allowing considerable self-regulation, and avoiding confrontation), and inconsistent parenting (a mixture of different parenting styles) negatively correlates with academic achievement. Children of parents who exhibited these kinds of parenting behaviors also had a low perceived academic success. In other words, children who have parents who are permissive, authoritarian, or inconsistent are more likely not only to feel they perform poorly in school, but actually do perform poorly (Bradley, 2006).

Past two-parent studies have also examined how other variables, such as parental education, per-capita income level, gender, and ethnicity correlate with student achievement (Melby &Conger, 1996). In their hallmark study, Melby and Conger (1996) researched parental behaviors and adolescent performance in a longitundal analysis, collecting data on 347 seventh graders and their parents that examined the relationship of two types of parental behaviors (involved parenting and hostility) to adolescent academic performance. Results showed that parental education was most strongly correlated with academic achievement. More specifically, the higher the parents' education, the higher their child's grades were. A possible explanation for this relationship might be explained by parents' prior

knowledge of certain subjects to help their child on school homework. Melby and Conger (1996) also found that per-capita income had a positive correlation with student achievement. This relationship might be explained by access to monetary resources that could be utilized to obtain tutors or studying aids. Poverty is perhaps the most overwhelming influence on single parents and their children's life outcomes (Conger et al., 1992). Studies suggest that it accounts for more of the variance in both child outcomes and parental functioning than single parenthood itself (Brooks-Gunn, 2004). Limitations of Melby and Conger's 1996 study include that it was limited to adolescents from rural, white, intact families, making this non-representative sample. Moreover, the researchers recognize the importance of examining other variables that my impact adolescent academic performance such as parental employment and parental values.

Past studies have also closely examined the relationship between parenting style and academic achievement and found that psychosocial maturity (expansion of social knowledge and well-being) serves to mediate the parent-child relationship (Greenberger et al., 1974). In other words, authoritative parenting impacts psychosocial maturity, which, in turn, influences how their student performs in school. Psychosocial maturity was measured by self-reliance (control over life), work orientation (students work skills and work goals), and self-identity (self-esteem and life goals). Each of these variables, both separately and collectively, was found to positively correlate with higher grades. Authoritative parenting was also found to correlate with each of the three indicators of psychosocial maturity. It was found that authoritative parenting tends to be related to academic success as well as very few externalizing behavior problems, when compared

to authoritarian and permissive parenting (Jones, Forehand, & Beach, 2000; Morrison et al., 2003).

In a study researching the effects of divorce (single parenting) and non-divorced (two-parent) on student's grade point average, Beer and Brubeck (1992) studied 131 high school participants whose GPA was taken from their files. It was found that students from divorced homes scored significantly lower than students from non-divorced families with a 2.35 GPA as opposed to a 2.93. This study had a few limitations however. One being that the number of divorced family students studied was 33 and students from two-parent families numbered 92, which most likely skewed the end results.

The Impact of Religious Commitment on Academic Attainment

Past studies have found that spirituality forms a part of achievement motivation (Oshodi, 1999). Oshodi proposes that, within the past ten decades, the boundary between psychology as a science and its need to control human nature is in conflict with the influence of one's spirituality on their nature and being and their ability to be achievement-oriented. A more recent study has found a relationship between the child's and parent's religiosity, and the child's academic achievement (Abar et al, 2009). This study explored relations between religiosity, both the parent's and the student's, and maternal parenting style (a single parent study) as well as student academic self-regulation, academic achievement, and risk behavior among African-American youth attending a parochial college. Eighty-five students completed the self-report survey measures of religiosity, self-regulation, academic achievement, and risk behavior. Participants were asked to complete youth report measures of parental religiosity and correlational analyses showed authoritative parenting to be associated with high levels of

academic performance and study skills. Subsequent correlations revealed that highly religious students tend to perform well academically, study better, and engage in fewer risky behaviors than youth less committed to religion. Additionally, it was found that maternal parenting style moderates relations between parental and student religiosity but the researchers report no correlation between parent religiosity and their student's academic attainment. The researchers bring forth the point that parental values and religious beliefs are known to play important roles as both moderators and mechanisms for their children's success. There are several limitations of this study that the researchers admit could be addressed in future studies to include utilizing a more heterogeneous sample to include all ethnicities and a larger sample in order to insure external validity. (Abar et al.,2009).

Additional research has purported that self-regulation during the adolescent years has been construed in a variety of ways, particularly that self-regulation during adolescence involves the ability of the youth to function as an autonomous individual (Patock-Peckham, Cheong, Balhorn, & Nagoshi, 2001). The researchers found that one key feature of autonomy is the ability to make appropriate decisions and that a self-regulated individual sets attainable goals and takes appropriate actions to achieve these goals by utilizing their resources while remaining aware of their limitations (Miller & Byrnes, 2001). These individuals are able to show control over their psychological processes and the ability to adapt to their environment. One of the domains of adolescents' lives that have been examined through the lenses of self-regulation theory is academic achievement (Abar et al., 2009). According to their research, academic self-regulation can be defined as self-regulated learning; that is, the motivational and

behavioral processes that allows individuals to activate and sustain cognitions, behaviors, and emotions in a systematic way toward the attainment of their own learning goals.

Schunk & Zimmerman (1994) and Rohrkemper (1989) have referred to self-regulated learning as a process of adaptation, in that the self-regulated learner is one who takes charge of his/her own behaviors and emotions to facilitate the act of learning. According to the researchers, a self-regulated learner is also an individual who understands the motives and strategies that are necessary for learning to occur (Boekaerts, 1996; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994; Wolters, 1998). The example is given that, when faced with difficult academic challenges, self-regulated learners understand when and how to use strategies that increase persistence and performance while other, less self-regulated students tend to give up (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994).

In terms of mechanisms of internalizing parental behavioral standards and becoming more self-regulated, religion or one's spirituality is a potential vehicle for internalization that has been largely overlooked in the research (Flor & Knapp, 2001). Topics of much concern both for religious parents and researchers are how parental religious beliefs, values, and behavioral standards are internalized and adopted by their children. Kochanska, Coy, & Murray (2001) suggest that the processes involved in the internalization of religion may be the same as those at play in the internalization of self-regulation, conscience, and other behavioral standards.

Religious and moral values are typically communicated early on in the socialization process between parents and children and there is a gradual transition made between other-regulated religions to self-regulated and fully internalized religion (Buzzelli, 1993;

Nucci & Turiel, 1993). Abar et al., (2009) posit that parents are most successful using authoritative practices in promoting self-regulated behavior for their children in the academic and behavioral domains and the same may be the case for parenting practices that foster internalized, self-regulated religion. As previously mentioned, parents are most successful when they use a small amount of power assertiveness in combination with reasoning or induction in their parenting style as opposed to being overly strict and rigid or overly permissive (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Okagaki & Bevis, 1999; Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993). In the context of religion there is also the added challenge for successful child internalization in that often the families that are the most religious are also the families that are the strictest, most rigid, and authoritarian, and therefore less likely to be using authoritative child-rearing practices (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993). For example, many religious parents may be fearful that if they loosen the reins on their child and lose a bit of control, their child will be exposed to too many other options and will choose another path. Self-determination theory states that there is a core human need for personal autonomy in decision-making and self-regulation of behavior (Deci, 1980; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). The research suggests that there is a continuum in the extent to which behavior is self-determined and autonomously regulated from external motivation or regulation. For example, children often engage in activities purely because of external pressure or contingencies from their parents. They advance to introjected (internalized rules or demands that pressure an individual to behave in a certain way), and finally to identified and fully integrated regulation (where individuals do things because they are a central part of their own identity and goals-such as academic attainment). The authors state that the ultimate goal for the successful internalization of

religious values is that children get to the integrated level of intrinsic religion, where an individual's beliefs are incorporated into his/her own notion of the self. Ryan et al. (1993) imparts that when there is little self-determination in the area of religious values, youth report poorer life satisfaction, lower self-esteem, and a diminished sense of meaning in life.

The adolescent and young adult years procreate another unique challenge to the internalization of parental religious values. Peak occurrence of dropping out of the church typically occurs during late adolescence and the young adult years (Dudley, 1993; Ellison & Sherkat, 1993). As children enter adolescence, personal autonomy, independence, and identity formation become of considerable importance (Feldman & Elliott, 1993) and the search for one's identity as separate from others often lead adolescents to reject and rebel against parental values (Markstrom-Adams & Smith, 1996; Sabatelli & Mazor, 1985). In 1987, Ozorak investigated the likelihood that adolescents would change, expand, or abandon their religious beliefs during adolescence and found that the reasons youth flee from religion are typically related to authority figures in general and specific undesirable religious practices that are required of them, and not due to their own fundamental spiritual beliefs. He posited that adolescents who begin to reject religion may be rejecting patterns of authority more than the religion itself, suggesting that it is important to understand the specific religious socialization practices used by adults in counseling situations.

Brody, Stoneman, and Flor (1996) examined the links between parental religiosity and children's academic and socioemotional competence during early adolescence among rural African-American families. They found that parental religiosity was related to

cohesive family relations, lower levels of inter-parental conflict, and fewer externalized and internalized problems among adolescents. Their study found that religiosity was indirectly linked to adolescent self-regulation primarily through its positive relationship with family cohesion and negative relationship with inter-parental conflict (Brody et al., 1996). Further, Jeynes (2003) found that strong religious affiliation for African-American students appears to be positively related to academic performance.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the literatures relevant to this study. In this first section, the literature related to a further definition of religious commitment was examined at length (Anderson & Stewart, 1994; Capps et al, 1976; Hicks & King, 2007; Miller, 2006; Rokeach, 1973; Walsh, 2003; Worthington, 2003). Subsections included were spiritual parenting and its effects on their children's life outcomes (Beers, 2010; Behrman, 2010; Does, 2010; Touchton, 2009; Walker, 2010). Much research that has examined the relationship between parent religiosity and parenting adolescents has consistently demonstrated that religiosity was associated with parenting behaviors and parent-adolescent relationships such as increased warmth (Gunnoe, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1999). Overall, however it was found that there is a dearth of literature that discussed the importance of parental religion in family interactions (Parke, 2001); even fewer studies have investigated the link between parent religiosity and effective parenting with the exception of (Mahoney, Paragment, Tarkeshwar, & Swank, 2001). Snider et al. (2003) introduced a scale that measures six different aspects of parenting behaviors to include: closeness, support, monitoring, communication, conflict, and approval. Correlations were found that indicated total parent religiosity was associated with five of

the six aspects of the AFP, with the exception of Conflict. This suggests that that parents who were also perceived by their children as being more religious perceived to demonstrate more effective parenting characteristics. Brodsky (1999) found that single mothers who participated in the semi-structured interviews believed that their neighborhood, having sufficient finances, family, friends and spirituality were domains which made them successful and assists them in coping as single parents. Ellison et al. (2007) have also explored the detrimental implications of parental divorce on the religious involvement of their offspring, specifically those in young adulthood.

In the second section of this chapter, the development of resiliency was expanded upon. Several studies were noted that explain how resilient persons easily “bounce back” from adverse circumstances (Luther, Cichetti, & Becker, 2000; Wagnild, 2009). Studies were presented that propose how resiliency develops in the individual (Gabbard, 2005; Grotberg, 2010). Children of divorce were discussed and as previously mentioned, if both parents maintain a positive relationship with their child, resolve their differences regarding the child and provide sufficient financial resources, the negative consequences referenced in many statistics are generally not found (Amato, 2002; Eldar-Avidan, Haj-Yahia, & Greenbaum, 2009; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Alternatively, for people who are less resilient, it was proposed that adversity can result in many different psychiatric disorders to include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depressive disorder and, at the very least; less resilient people tend to face harsher life outcomes (Biafora et al., 1995; De Wilde, 2002; Friedrich, et al., 1982).

Resilience as an important construct in theory and research on one’s psychological well-being was examined (Walsh, 2003). The etiology of one’s resiliency was also

discussed with Grotberg (2010), stating that resiliency comes from one's external and internal resources and that children grow a sense of who they are early on and their perceptions are formed by how they are treated by other people (Gabbard, 2005). Finally, in this section, the impact of religious commitment on positive coping was expanded upon (Eck, 2002, Fukuyama, & Sevig, 1999; Wheeler et al., 2002). Much research was also found in the area of how familial spiritual involvement has affected children's mental health outcomes, and inadvertently, their resiliency (Dollahite, 1998; Greef, 2005; Johnson, 1999; Lommen, 2009; Mills & Spaulding, 2006; Panos, 2007; Thomas, 2006; Vaaler, 2009).

In the third section of this chapter a discussion on the development of morality and the theorists involved in the theories built around this construct is found (Freud, 1936; Kohlburg, 1976; Piaget, 1965). Most postulated that personality is developed by our childhood experiences in addition to the influence of parental figures (Franz, 2010). In an interesting study, Hawkins (2005) found that Permissive style of parenting was most significantly tied to their children's level of morality as opposed to the researchers' hypothesis of Authoritative parenting style being more closely tied to children's morality**.** In the last subsection, the impact of religious commitment on the development of morality was backed by several studies (Fowler, 1991; Furrow, King, & White, 2004; Ream & Savin-Williams, 2003). The findings of other contemporary researchers have also supported this notion, discovering positive relationships between adolescents' religious identity, their quest for personal meaning, and their concern for others. Faith, spirituality, and religion are presented as related systems of meaning through which adolescents seek to understand their reason for being and their place in the universe

(Benson, 2004; Kerestes & Youniss, 2003; King & Boyatzis, 2004; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Cole, 1997).

In the final section, Academic Attainment was discussed as a life outcome indicator. Numerous studies showed that educational attainment plays a major factor in determining an individual's future economic disposition (Caspi et.al., 1998; Harvard Family Research Project, 2006; Hepburn & White, 1990; Lavin-Loucks, 2006). Also presented was a subsection on single parenting and academic attainment (Allison & Furstenberg, 1989; Demo & Acock, 1988; Hetherington, 2003). Some research proposed that single parent children have lower academic performance, lower self-esteem, more acting out, and more difficulties with peer relations (Amato & Keith, 1991, Hetherington, 2003). However, it was also noted that later research found that children who live in two-parent families with much conflict in the home fare no better in the world of academia (Harold & Aitkin, 2007). The findings suggested that the attributional processes engendered in children who live in households marked by high levels of inter-parental conflict and hostility have important implications for their long-term academic success. Research was also presented that supports parenting style as correlating with academic achievement (; Abar, 2009; Melby & Conger, 1996). Finally, research connecting religious commitment and academic attainment was examined, finding that parental religiosity was related to cohesive family relations, lower levels of inter-parental conflict, increased self-regulation (Deci, 1980; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Kochanska, Coy, & Murray, 2001; Shrunk & Zimmerman), and fewer externalized and internalized problems among adolescents (Brody et al., 1996; Jeynes, 2003).

The Present Study

The aforementioned studies underscore the need for further investigation regarding how the single parent's religious commitment may influence their college-aged children's development of resiliency, morality, and academic attainment. Very little research exists in this specific area, and the few studies which have been conducted thus far have just begun to reveal the dynamics between single parent religious commitment to faith and the aforementioned life outcome constructs. Many studies comparing single parents with two- parent family outcomes are based on a family structure and cultural deficit model and utilized non-representative, ill-defined samples; some relying on very small subject pools and limited un-validated measures. The biggest detriment of many studies on single parents and their children is that most fail to investigate significant mediating factors that may make single parenting more successful. These factors include individual and child characteristics, as well as family process variables such as religious commitment to faith and whether or not it influences other areas of life other than their children's faith walk alone.

The purpose of this study is to extend the limited current research in this area by investigating the relationship between single parent religious commitment and its influence on their college aged children's development of resiliency, morality, and academic attainment utilizing a mixed sample of undergrad psychology majors. One-half of which will be attending an evangelical university and one-half will be attending at a secular university. This study utilizes a cross sectional correlational research design in which college students will be administered measures of resiliency, morality, and academic attainment, as well as the parent inventory of perceived religious commitment.

In the next chapter the research study is further introduced and the research method is expanded upon.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter the methodology, empirical design and measures, research procedures, data processing and analysis, and the researcher's hypothesis is explained. The population from which this sample was drawn consisted of a convenience sample of 286 university students between the ages of 18-30. Quantitative research was utilized to measure how religious commitment to faith influences the aforementioned life outcome constructs in single parent families. The purpose of this research paper was not only to present data regarding what may influence successful outcomes for children of single parent families but also to explore its counseling implications.

Research Design

The literature reviewed in Chapter two explained that religious commitment to one's faith and spirituality in general, has an influence over several facets of one's being. Over the past few years, the mental health disciplines have brought greater attention to the importance of exploring religion and spirituality in research and counseling practice. However, it was found that the connections between parental religious commitment as an influence on child life outcomes in two-parent families are only marginally supported by the literature and are limited to very few studies examining this relationship. Also acknowledged was the fact that there remains a paucity of research that has studied the correlations of parental religious commitment to faith and their children's life outcomes in the areas of morality, resiliency and academic attainment in single parent families.

This study sought to answer two main questions. First, is there a correlation between parental commitment to faith and their college-aged student's resiliency,

development of morality, and academic achievement? The first hypothesis stated that there will be a positive correlation found between the aforementioned constructs. Secondly, does family structure (being raised in a single parent versus two-parent home) impact the strength of the relationship between parent's religious commitment and student scores of resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment? The second hypothesis stated that there will be no statistically significant difference in the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment scores and student scores of resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment based on family structure. To answer these questions involving the investigation of a statistical relationship between variables, a cross-sectional design was utilized with a one-time assessment utilizing self-report measures and employing a series of multiple regression correlation analysis (MRC) for each dependent variable; resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment.

Selection of Participants

There were a total of 286 participants assessed for the purposes of completing this study. Participants were recruited from both a Christian and a secular university from a Midwestern state. The population sample selected was 60 undergraduate psychology students, aged 18-30, from each university. This sample was considered to be a convenience sample as college students are found to be present and captive in a convenient location (a university). The benefits to utilizing such a sample is ease of procurement of assessments and most often, the amenability of the students to participate. Limitations to utilizing a convenience sample include the onus of the researcher to be able to evaluate and discuss whether unique features of those sampled contribute to the

results and the ability to generalize to other populations. The sample was then stratified into four equal groups consisting of Christian students who have lived in a single parent home more than half of their developmental years (ages 0-18), Christian students who have lived in a two-parent family for more than half of their developmental years (to include step-parents), secular students who have lived in a single parent home more than half of their developmental years, and secular students who have lived more than half of their developmental years in a two-parent family. Professors of these classes invited students to participate, and those agreeing to do so were asked to sign an informed consent at the time that the study was conducted.

The sample size noted was derived by employing a power analysis that utilized a .95 statistical power, with a .05 alpha value and a moderately high effect size to be set at .15 (f2) on the F-test for multiple regression correlation analysis (MRC). The .05 alpha value ensured that there is a 95% chance that this researcher had arrived at the right conclusion and only a .05% chance that this researcher had arrived at the wrong conclusion. The sample analysis revealed that at least 107 subjects would be needed in order to find a statistically significant result. In order to obtain even numbers of participants for each group, a total of 120 subjects were utilized in data analysis, with the first 30 assessments from each group recorded. This was done because the smallest numbered group was 30, from the single parent Christian university.

Measures

The independent variables were family structure and parent religious commitment to faith. For the purposes of this study family structure was defined as either having lived

in a single or two-parent home during the developmental years. Subjects recorded this in the demographics section of the identifying data sheet that they filled out prior to the assessment. The parental religious commitment was measured by the Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10); a 10 item Likert scale (Worthington et al., 2003). This instrument was completed by the students according to their perceived parental religious commitment to faith.

Dependent variables (assessments) completed by students included:

1. Resiliency- which was measured by The Resilience Scale (Wagnild, 2009).

2. Development of morality-Visions of Everyday Morality Scale (Shelton, 1990).

3. Academic attainment which was measured by the student's grade point average (This was ascertained in the demographics section of assessment).

Instrumentation

The Religious Commitment Inventory- 10

The RCI-10, the Religious Commitment Inventory-10, is a 10-item version of the original 20-item commitment subscale from the Religious Values Scale (RVS, Worthington et al., 2003). The RVS had a commitment scale of 20 items and 6 subscales for authority of sacred writings, leaders and religious identification and tolerance for differences in the three constructs. The RCI-10 contains a 5-point Likert scale, which will be utilized to collect data on the perceived parent responses, with scores ranging from Not True at All (1) to Totally True of Me (5). The higher the score, the higher the religious commitment of the parent. The lower the score, the lower the

religious commitment of the parent. This method of data collection, which is asking the subjects to record their perceived parent response, has been utilized in other studies (Abar, 2009; Hawkins, 2005; Snyder, Clements, & Vazsonyi, 2004). This method was utilized in this study for the purpose of eliminating the issue of non-compliance in returning this assessment.

At the time this instrument was developed, Worthington et al. (2003) hypothesized that highly committed religious people behaved fundamentally differently than moderately or less committed people. Therefore, measuring religious commitment accurately became the primary focus. The primary variable in Worthington's (2003) model is *religious commitment*, which is defined as the degree to which a person adheres to his or her religious values, beliefs, and practices and uses them in daily living. His supposition was that a highly religious person will evaluate the world through religious schemas and thus will integrate his or her religion into much of their life. Through his research, he found that highly religious people are those who are within the most religiously committed 15% of the population (i.e., at least one standard deviation above the mean). Differences have been found between such persons and those who are moderately to less religiously committed to their faith (Worthington et.al, 1996).

The RCI-10 has demonstrated high internal consistency (a=.94) and is strongly correlated with other measures of religious motivation and belief: the Rokeach Value Survey (Rokeach, 1967), the Visions of Everyday Morality Scale (Shelton & McAdams, 1990) and the Religiosity, Spirituality, and Demographic questionnaire (Gorsuch, 1984). Worthington et al.,(2003) reports that the development of the RCI-10 was based on six different studies utilizing college-aged subjects; the first of which was Worthington's

(1988) model of religious values in counseling which was constructed to be both a brief screening assessment of religious commitment and an ecumenical assessment of religious commitment. Earlier studies included an RCI with 62 items (Sandage, 1999); a 20-item RCI (McCullough & Worthington, 1995; Morrow, Worthington, &McCullough, 1993, 1993), the 17-item version (RCI-17; McCullough, Worthington, Maxie, & Rachal, 1997) and the final RC-10 version (Worthington, 2001).

Construct validity was assessed by using participants' endorsement of salvation on Rokeach's Value Survey as the IV and scores on the RC-10 as dependent variables. Scores on the full-scale RC-10 were significantly higher than for non-religious individuals. Scores on the RCI-10 had strong internal consistency (mean *a* =.78). Discriminant validity was examined by calculating three Pearson correlation coefficients-one for each full scale RCI-10, Intrapersonal Religious Commitment, and Interpersonal Commitment with scores on the *Visions of Everyday Morality Scale* (Shelton & McAdams, 1990); with the results of *r* (154) =.09, *p*=.26, *ns;* Intrapersonal Religious Commitment, *r*(154) =.10, *p*=.26, *ns;* and The Interpersonal Religious Commitment, *r*(154) = .07, *p* = .42, *ns*. The RCI-10's underlying factor structure was examined by factor analysis in a three week and five month test-retest reliability of the scores with a result of *a* =.87.

The RC-10 is presently being utilized in research, in health psychology and counseling settings. Exploring one's spirituality is important in counseling and in referring highly religious clients. Therefore, having a measure with reliable and valid scores was imperative. In today's climate of brief therapy, having a brief measure is also beneficial. In addition, this instrument continues to be utilized often in research studies

today because of its time efficiency and because it is one of the few instruments in the field that venture to measure religious commitment.

The Resilience Scale

The Resilience Scale was the first instrument designed to measure resilience directly (Wagnild & Young, 1993). Since 2006, the Resilience Scale has been utilized in more than 2500 studies with a variety of populations from adolescents to the elderly. The original Resilience Scale was based on a 1987 qualitative study of older women who had successfully adapted after having survived a major life event and a complete review of the literature on resilience up to that time (Wagnild &Young, 1990). In earlier theory research, Wagnild and Young (1990) identified five underlying characteristics of resilience, which serve as the core conceptual foundation for this scale. The five characteristics are as follows: self-reliance, meaning in life, equanimity, perseverance, and existential uniqueness.

The initial Resilience Scale consisted of 50 items, each being a verbatim statement from the original study. After initial analysis, the scale was reduced to 25 items and later to a 14 item scale, both of which reflect the aforementioned five characteristics. As assessment time is limited, the 14-item scale will be utilized for the purposes of this study. The scale ratings that subjects will find are on a Likert Scale with seven numbers, ranging from "1" (Strongly Disagree) on the left to "7" (Strongly Agree) on the right. Subjects circle the number which best indicates their feelings about that statement. The directions given are as follows: “If you strongly disagree with a statement, circle "1". If you are neutral, circle "4", and if you strongly agree, circle "7", etc.

The Resilience scale has been shown to have good instrumentation as well as construct validity. Items from the Health Promoting Lifestyle Profile (HPLP) (Walker, Secrist, & Pender, 1987) were used to document convergent and discriminate validity of the Resilience Scale. To support convergent validity of the Resilience Scale, it was found that correlations between the Resilience Scale and the HPLP domains of stress management, self –actualization and health responsibility were highly correlated; r = 0.62. Constructs with which the Resilience Scale have been positively correlated with other related measures in the field ; to include optimism, morale, self-efficacy, self-reported health, health promoting behaviors, forgiveness, self-esteem, a sense of coherence, effective coping, and life satisfaction.

The Resilience Scale has been consistently reliable with alpha coefficients ranging from .84-.94. Factor analysis has indicated that this scale has two major factors: “acceptance of self and life” and “personal competence” (Wagnild & Young, 1993); each reflecting the theoretical definition of resilience. “Acceptance of self and life” represents adaptability, flexibility, and having a balanced perspective of life and “personal competence” suggests self-reliance, independence, determination, mastery, and resourcefulness. The instrument was easy to use, time-efficient, and easy to score.

The Visions of Everyday Morality Scale

The Visions of Everyday Morality Scale (VEMS) was designed to explore an empathic foundation for morality and to measure moral thinking associated with everyday life (Shelton & McAdams, 1990). The VEMS scale focuses on empathy and concern for others. Some service learning activities, especially those utilizing face-to-face

interactions, are likely to have an effect on empathy, and this scale could be used as a moderator variable or a pretest/posttest measure. The types of situations presented are quite realistic and provide a broad sample of potential moral conflicts and known groups previously studied by Shelton and McAdams (1990), were comprised of students who were involved in service projects such as Food Drives, military support, and helping the homeless. It was found that these particular students had scored significantly higher on the VEMS than students not involved in service activities.

The VEMS is comprised of three subscales:

1. Private: prosocial behavior that occurs without beneficiary awareness of the behavior or no relationship existing between the benefactor and the beneficiary of this behavior.

2. Interpersonal: prosocial behavior that is aimed toward a known beneficiary, and

3. Social: prosocial behavior that is aimed at addressing societal concerns.

Participants are asked to rate their response to 15 situations, seven from each of the aforementioned domain areas. Ratings are given on a seven point Likert Scale ranging from "*I would definitely do what the statement says"* to "*I would definitely not do what the statement says."* Scores for each subscale and the overall scale are computed from the sum of the ratings.

In past research, convergent validity has found that a significant correlation (.42) occurred between the VEMS score and the Interpersonal Reactivity Index, another commonly utilized measure of empathy (Davis, 1983). Discriminant validity shows that the VEMS is not highly correlated with the *Moral Authority Scale* (White, 1997), which

suggests that although both scales measure morality, they each tap into different dimensions. The Moral Authority Scale taps into how one makes decisions based on how one acts when authority is present and the VEMS measures how one reacts in different settings and not only when someone is watching. As mentioned earlier, in the present study, the VEMS was modified to 15 items (5 items taken from each of the three morality domains). This modified assessment was the one utilized in Worthington's (1988) original study on religious commitment to faith and it was found that it had an estimated moderate-to-strong internal consistency (mean $a = .78$).

The reliability and normality of four instruments were examined prior to data analysis utilizing the Visions of Everyday Morality Scale singularly. The reliability of the measures was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and each was shown to approximate the psychometric robustness of previous research. Internal consistency reliability for the 53-item Self-Report Altruism Scale (SRAS) was .91, and .73 for the 20-item Multicultural Attitude Survey (MAS). Likewise, the alpha coefficients for the Benevolence & Universalism (Respectfulness) value types on the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS) were .75 and .84, respectfully, and .88 for the 30-item Visions of Everyday Morality Scale previously utilized with a sample of 181 high school students. In addition, each of the measures demonstrated both skewness and kurtosis values indicative of no significant departure from normality.

Although the VMS, has items that refer to high school, Shelton and McAdams (1990) concede that it could be easily adapted to accommodate a college-aged audience. The types of situations presented within the narratives in the instrument are quite realistic and provide a broad sample of potential moral conflicts. This instrument is very brief and

therefore time efficient, can be utilized on many different populations, and is simple to use and interpret.

Basic Demographics

Basic demographics were ascertained by asking subjects to record their date of birth, gender, ethnicity, current GPA, family status at the time of living at home, and any other supports besides parents at the time of living at home and socioeconomic status.

Research Procedures

Permission was sought from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board to conduct this research study (Appendix A). Permission to conduct this study was received from the Colorado Christian University Review Board on February 3, 2010. On April 2, 2010, permission was obtained from the University of Colorado to conduct this research onsite with their students. Instructors from several undergraduate psychology courses from CCU and CU were asked to allow this investigator to come into their classrooms on a specified date and time to allow for 15-20 minutes of testing time.

The researcher described the voluntary nature of participation and the provision of absolute confidentiality to the participants in order to assure participants that individual information and assessment scores would not be shared with any outside parties that are not relevant to this research. Participants were asked for any identifying information other than their gender and were be informed of their right to decline participation. Ethical considerations, besides anonymity for participants, included several items. Prior to the administration of assessments, the university's counseling services were offered, in the case that assessment questions prompted a distressful reaction for any of the students.

Each assessment was described briefly and follow-up information was offered along with contact information for any participants that would like further explanations regarding the purposes of the study. (The proceeding ethical guidelines were obtained from Kazdin, 2003). After an Informed Consent (Appendix B) was signed, the researcher administered an assessment packet to all willing participants. Each packet was numbered and this identification was utilized to differentiate each subject.

A total of 286 volunteers from six undergraduate psychology class sections participated in providing the data for this study. The assessments collected after each class were disseminated according to single parent and two parent status and counted until sufficient numbers in each group were reached (#30). Basic demographics were ascertained from students at the time of their signing the consent to study them. This included a question regarding other supports available to the student at the time of being a child in a single or two-parent home: i.e. the single parent's dating partners, youth group pastors and workers, and supportive extended family members. In addition, each was asked to provide his/her gender, current age, current GPA, ethnicity, and whether they had lived in a single parent or two parent home for more than half of their developmental years (0-18).

In addition to the consent and basic demographics questionnaire, students were asked to fill out a parent inventory, the RCI-10 (Worthington et al., 2003), according to their *perceived* parental commitment to faith during the time they either lived mainly (more than half of their developmental years) in the single or two-parent home. Students then completed the Resilience Scale (Wagnild & Young, 1993) and Visions of Everyday Morality Scales (Shelton, 1990) in the single class session. Approximately 20 minutes

was given to complete all assessments. The data was collected and processed immediately after the study. It was securely stored after entering and processing results at Colorado Christian University in the office of Dr. Laverne Jordon and will remain there for a five year period.

Data Processing and Analysis

This study sought to answer the following primary research questions:

Does parental religious commitment significantly correlate with their college-aged children's resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment? Second, does family structure (being raised in a single parent versus two-parent home) impact the strength of the relationship between parent's religious commitment and student scores of development of morality, resiliency, and academic attainment? The research questions were answered utilizing MRC, multiple regression correlation analysis. MRC analysis was chosen as the researcher has two predictor variables; parental faith and family structure which were correlated with the three dependent variables of resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment in 3 separate analyses. It was further ascertained as to which dependent variable correlated highest with the separate independent variables. The demographic variables were surmised also have an influence on the aforementioned dependent variables and this influence was ascertained for relevance after the main hypotheses were tested.

Hypotheses and predicted correlations are as follows:

Research question #1: Does parental religious commitment significantly correlate with their college-aged children's resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment scores?

H-1o: The null hypothesis is that there will be no statistically significant correlation between parental religious commitment scores to faith (RC-10) and student scores of resiliency (The Resilience Scale).

H-1A: The alternative hypothesis is that there will be a statistically significant correlation found between parental religious commitment and student scores of resiliency.

H-2o: The null hypothesis is that there will be no statistically significant correlation between parental religious commitment scores to faith (RC-10) and student scores of morality (VMS).

H-2A: The alternative hypothesis is that there will be a statistically significant correlation found between parental religious commitment and student scores of morality.

H-3o: The null hypothesis is that there will be no statistically significant correlation between parental religious commitment scores to faith (RC-10) and student scores of academic attainment (GPA).

H-3A: The alternative hypothesis is that there will be a statistically significant correlation found between parental religious commitment and student scores of academic attainment.

Research Question # 2 Does family structure (being raised in a single parent versus two-parent home) impact the strength of the relationship between parent's religious commitment and their college-aged children's scores of resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment?

H-1o: The null hypothesis is that there will be no statistically significant difference in the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment scores and student scores of resiliency based on family structure.

H-1A: The alternative hypothesis is that the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment scores and student scores of resiliency will differ significantly based on family structure.

H-2o: The null hypothesis is that there will be no statistically significant difference in the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment and student scores of morality based on family structure.

H-2A: The alternative hypothesis is that the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment scores and student scores of morality will differ significantly based on family structure.

H-3o: The null hypothesis is that there will be no statistically significant difference in the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment scores and student scores of academic attainment based on family structure.

H-3A: The alternative hypothesis is that the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment scores and student scores of academic attainment will differ significantly based on family structure.

After the data was collected, it was entered into SPSS software by this researcher for analysis. Ordinal data were utilized in order to code all data to include scores from the 4 assessments and demographic information such as gender with numbers. For example,

male/female was coded 1 and 2. Inferential analysis was completed as the nature of this study was driven by hypotheses regarding the interaction of the independent and dependent variables. A statistical consultant was asked to verify how the data was to be coded and entered for accuracy. As mentioned previously, the researcher utilized a *p* value of .05 because this particular *p* value is the one utilized most often in social science research and is sufficiently stringent to avoid accepting too large a number of insignificant results as significant, while at the same time, not being too difficult to achieve (Isaac & Michaels, 1997). There was a relatively low likelihood of negative consequences occurring to participants should a Type 1 error occur as a result of this present study. Therefore, the present research was enhanced in statistical power by utilizing the .05 level in place of more conservative options such as the .01 level.

Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the methodology, data collection, measures, and specific procedures utilized in order to examine the empirical influence of parental religious commitment on children's resiliency, morality, and academic attainment. Ethical considerations were presented within the research procedures section and a detailed explanation of the power analysis completed was explained in the data processing section. The proceeding chapter will present the research findings and a complete analysis of data assessment collected.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

Although there have been questions posed to the efficacy of single parenting, Hawkins and Eggebeen (1991) purport that most single parents are able provide the structure, values, and nurturance their children need despite the challenges and criticisms they face from society. Therefore, many studies have focused on what parental behaviors influence a successful life outcome for their offspring. However, there are only a handful of studies which address parental faith as a possible mediating factor in their offspring's success and the majority of these are based on two-parent families. Abar et al. (2009) found that parental religiosity was positively associated with increased academic achievement in their children. Greef (2008) and Panos (2007) completed studies on how spirituality in the family supports growth of resiliency in the offspring. In addition, Panos (2007) presents the spirituality of the family as a mediating factor in survival of refugee families. Vucina (2007) found that family faith had a correlation with adolescent substance abuse and academic achievement. Their main focus was to present the faith of the family as having a protective role in child outcomes. Mahoney et al. (2001) found that greater parent religiousness relates to more positive parenting and better child adjustment. They suggest that parents may "sanctify" their children by viewing them a holy gift and see parenting as a co parent alliance with God.

The purpose of this study was to present data that would further support the idea that parental faith may act as a mediating factor in increasing the chances of successful life outcomes for their children. This study investigated parental religious commitment to their faith and its influence on their college aged student's resiliency, development of

morality and academic attainment. This study also ascertained what other factors might influence college aged students to have successful life outcomes.

Demographic Data

A convenience sample of undergraduate psychology students from both a secular and Christian university was utilized. This study used a cross-sectional correlation research design in which college students were administered assessment measures of their perceived parent commitment to faith, their resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment. Although 286 students total were assessed, only 120 assessments were entered into the final data analysis. This was done because the Christian university single parent group had the smallest number of participants at n=30. Therefore, each of the four groups of students, that is the single parent secular university student group, the two-parent secular university student group, the Christian university single parent student group, and the Christian university two-parent student group also had 30 participants. One hundred and seven participants were needed to meet the standards of the initial power analysis.

The students were fully informed volunteers who had been given advance permission from their instructors to participate in this study. Prior to participation, students were informed of the nature of this study and were assured of their anonymity. Students who participated first signed a statement of Informed Consent. Students had to meet one criterion of being aged 18-30 at the time of assessment and were advised to fill out the parent questionnaire according to their perceived parental religious commitment to faith during their developmental years when they lived in the parental home.

The findings inform us that most participants were Caucasian equaling (95), with the number of Hispanics equaling 14. The average age of participants was 22.7. Participants were comprised of 81 females and 39 males. Most students from single parent upbringing had experienced a poor to moderate socioeconomic status with most all their two-parent cohorts having had a median income status.

There were two primary research questions this study sought to answer. First, is there a correlation between parental religious commitment to faith and their college-aged student's resiliency, development of morality, and academic achievement? Secondly, does family structure (being raised in a single parent versus two-parent home) impact the strength of the relationship between parent's religious commitment and student scores of resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment? This researcher also sought to ascertain whether or not other independent variables such as gender, supports, age , ethnicity, socioeconomic status and university status, either secular or Christian, had an influence on student's resiliency, morality and academic attainment. These questions were addressed by utilizing a series of multiple regression correlation analyses.

RESULTS

Research Question One

The first research question, does parental religious commitment significantly correlate with their college-aged children's resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment scores was addressed utilizing a series of multiple regression analyses, one for each of the dependent variables, resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment (GPA). Each analyses included a descriptive means section and

a correlation matrix displaying the three dependent variables and their relationship with their perceived parent's religious commitment to faith (the RC-10 assessment scores). Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to determine the degree and direction of the linear relationships of each of the dependent variables and parent religious commitment to faith. Because specific predictions were made about the direction of the correlations, a one-tailed test with an alpha level of 0.05 was utilized to determine whether or not a correlation between variables existed.

1. The first hypothesis for question one stated that there would be a statistically significant correlation between the parental commitment to faith and the dependent variable of resiliency.

2. The second hypothesis stated that there would be a statistically significant correlation between the parental commitment to faith and the dependent variable of morality

3. The third hypothesis stated that there would be a statistically significant correlation between the parental commitment to faith and the dependent variable of academic attainment.

Hypothesis 1. A marginal correlation was found between the perceived parent's religious commitment to faith scores (RC-10) and Resiliency (r = .158, p = .084).

Hypothesis 2. It also was found that there was a statistically significant correlation between the perceived parent's religious commitment to faith scores (RC-10) and the variable of morality (r = .218, p = .017).

Hypothesis 3. A marginal correlation was found between the RC-10 scores and academic attainment (GPA scores); (r = .174, p = .057). See Table 1 below.

Table 1

Correlations of Religious Commitment to Faith and Family Structure with Grade Point Average, Resiliency and Morality

Measure	GPA	Resiliency	Morality
FS	.231*	.068*	.018*
RC10	.174	.158	.218*

*p = .05

FS=Family Structure; RC10= Parental commitment to faith; GPA=Grade point average

Beta Weights:

Three separate multiple regression analyses were run, one for each of the dependent variables of resiliency, morality and grade point average with the independent variables of Family Structure and Religious Commitment to Faith which were entered stepwise. In reviewing the regression analyses it was found that for the first dependent variable, resiliency, the independent variables of religious commitment to faith and family structure were excluded. For the dependent variable of morality, the independent variable of family structure was excluded, meaning it had no significant influence on morality. For the dependent variable of grade point average, the independent variable religious commitment to faith was excluded, meaning it had no significant influence on grade point average. In an examination of the Beta weights in each regression analysis, it

was revealed that religious commitment to faith was a significant predictor of morality (β = 0.218. t = 2.243) and family structure was a significant predictor of grade point average (β = 0.231, t = 3.002). Neither religious commitment to faith nor family structure was a significant predictor of resiliency. See Table 2 below.

Table 2

Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Resiliency, Morality, and GPA From Religious Commitment to Faith and Family Structure

DV Morality

Step and predictor variable	*R*	R^2	*F*
Step 1 Religious Commitment to Faith	.218	.047	5.871

p=.05 (IV Family structure excluded in this analysis)

Predictor variables	Beta	t
Religious Commitment to Faith	0.218	2.243
Family Structure-excluded	-	-

p = .05

DV GPA

Step and predictor variable	*R*	R^2	*F*
Step 1 Family Structure	.231	.053	6.658

p=.05 (IV RC10 excluded in this analysis)

Predictor variables	Beta	t
Family Structure	0.250	3.002
Religious Commitment to Faith-excluded	-	-

p = .05

As predicted in the first hypothesis, parental commitment to faith was found to be positively correlated with the dependent variables of resiliency, morality, and academic attainment, although only significantly with one of them, morality. Thus, individuals whose parents were more committed to their faith walk appeared to have a greater influence on their development of morality.

Research Question Two

The second research question; does family structure (being raised in a single parent versus two-parent home) impact the strength of the relationship between parent's religious commitment and student scores of resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment. This question was addressed by utilizing a series of multiple regression analyses, one for each of the dependent variables, resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment (GPA). A descriptive means section and a correlation matrix displaying the three dependent variables and their relationship with family structure status; either single parent offspring, that is having lived for at least one half of their developmental years (aged 0-18) in a single parent home or two-parent offspring, that is having lived in a two-parent home at least one half of their developmental years.

1. The first hypothesis for question two is that the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment scores and student scores of resiliency will differ significantly based on family structure.
2. The second hypothesis is that the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment scores and student scores of morality will differ

significantly based on family structure.

3. The third hypothesis is that the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment scores and student scores of academic attainment will differ significantly based on family structure.

Hypothesis 1. In reviewing the influence of parental RC10 scores on resiliency, it was found that the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment faith scores and student scores of resiliency did not differ significantly based on family structure (r = .068, p = .462).

In comparing the mean scores of resiliency of the single parent to two-parent offspring, it was found that the single and two-parent offspring scores were not significantly different from each other, with mean score of single parent offspring being M = 80.0 and the mean score of two-parent offspring being M = 81.2 with F = .545, p = .462. Therefore, family structure did not add any predictive value to this analysis.

Hypothesis 2. It was found that that the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment scores and student scores of morality did not differ significantly based on family structure (r = .018, p = .847). In comparing the mean scores of morality of the single parent to two-parent offspring, it was found that the single and two-parent offspring scores were not significantly different from each other, with mean scores of single parent offspring being M = 76.8 and the mean score of two-parent offspring being M = 77.18 with F =.037, p = .847. Therefore, family structure did not add any predictive value to this analysis.

Hypothesis 3. It was found that the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment scores and student GPA did differ significantly based on family structure (r = .231, p = .011). See Table 1 above.

In comparing the means of single parent offspring's GPA scores to two-parent offspring's scores, it was found that two-parent off spring had a significantly higher GPA (3.4668) than did their single parent counterparts (3.2452); with an F value of 6.558, p = .011, indicating that the single parent and two-parent offspring scores do indeed differ significantly on GPA scores. See table 3 below.

Table 3

Mean GPA, Resiliency, and Morality Scores for Single Parent and Two-Parent Offspring

Dependent Variables	Single Parent	Two-Parent
GPA	3.2452	3.4668
Resiliency	80.00667	81.7333
Morality	76.8000	77.1833

In order to further answer the question, does family structure impact the strength of the relationship between parent faith and the dependent variables, a partial correlation was also run. It was found that even though RC-10 and resiliency were marginally correlated, r = .158, p = .084; the partial correlation between RC-10 and resiliency when controlling for FS was not sig, r = .149, p =.107. RC-10 and morality correlated significantly, r = .218, p = .017 and the partial correlation between RC-10 and Morality while controlling for FS was still significant, r =.218, p =.017.3. RC-10 and GPA were marginally correlated, r =.174, p = .057; but the partial correlation between RC-10 and

GPA when controlling for FS was not sig, r = .137, p = .137. Therefore, from this analysis, we can conclude that family structure had no bearing on the impact of the strength of the relationship between parent faith and the dependent variables.

However, when two parent and single parent data were separated out and the same analyses ran, it was found that for the two-parent participants, the RC-10 and morality scores correlated only marginally at r =.156, p = .116. The RC-10 and GPA scores again correlated marginally at r = .145, p = .135 with no significant effects between RC-10 scores and resiliency scores (r = .021, p = .438). It was also found that single parent participant's RC-10 scores were significantly correlated with both morality (r = .275, p = .017) and resiliency (r = .222, p = .044) and marginally with academic attainment (GPA) (r = 130, p = .161). See Table 4 below.

Table 4

Comparison of Single–parent and Two-parent Correlations RC10 with DV's

Measure	Single Parent	Two-Parent
GPA	.130	.145
Resiliency	.222*	.021
Morality	.275*	.156

$p < .05$

Supplemental Analyses

Supplemental analyses were ran for the explicit purpose of attempting to show what other independent variables may have also had a significant influence on the

dependent variables of resiliency, morality, and academic attainment besides religious commitment to faith and family structure. (See Table 5 below for all correlations).

Table 5.

Correlations of Independent Variables with Dependent Variables

Measure	Resiliency	Morality	GPA
RC10	.158	.218**	.174
DOB	.050	.256**	.353**
Gender	-.041	-.242**	-.006
Ethnicity	-.076	.002	-.084
FS	.068	.018	.231*
Supports	.116	.262**	.026
School	.012	.231*	.247**
Group	-.019	.199*	.177
SES	.085	.086	.077

*$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

A multiple regression analysis for the dependent variable Morality with the independent variables of religious commitment to faith, family structure, supports, gender, date of birth, ethnicity and participant's school (Christian or secular) was completed, with variables entered stepwise. See Table 6 below.

Table 6.

Multiple Regression Analysis for Dependent Variable Morality and all Independent Variables

Step and predictor variable	R	R_2	F

Step	1 Supports	.262	.061	8.696
Step	2 Supports, Gender	.364	.132	8.935
Step	3 Supports, Gender, DOB	.413	.171	7.964

p = .05

The variable supports were found to have the greatest influence of all variables on the dependent variable of morality (*r* =.262, *p* = .01), followed by gender (*r*= -.242. *p* =.01) and age of the participant (*r* =.256, *p* = .01). Examination of the Beta weights reveal that the variables of supports, gender and age were all significant predictors of morality. Therefore, the more support one had while growing up, the higher the sense of morality developed. See Table 7 below.

Table 7.

Beta Weights for Predictor Variables with Morality

Step 3 and predictor variable	Beta	t
Supports	.262	2.949
Gender	-.253	-2.935
DOB	.213	2.397

p = .05

It was also found that single parent participants from the Christian university named the most supports at 77, with pastors (19) and grandparents named most often (18) of all supports and the least amount of supports were named by two-parent participants from the secular school (62), with grandparents named as the number one support most often (21). See Table 8 below.

Table 8

Number of Supports in each Category

School/Group	*Pastors*	*YW*	*Grparents*	*Neighbors*	*Coaches*	*Fam Friends*	*Step-parent*
UCCS 2P	6	1	21	9	9	14	2
UCCS SP	2	2	18	5	5	10	10
CCU 2P	17	17	19	6	8	18	3
CCU SP	19	15	18	8	11	17	6

YW = youth workers.

A multiple regression analysis for the dependent variable GPA, grade point average, with the independent variables of religious commitment to faith, family structure, supports, gender, date of birth, ethnicity and participant's school (Christian or secular) was completed, with variables entered stepwise. See Table 9 below.

Table 9

Multiple Regression Analysis for Dependent Variable GPA and all Independent Variables

Step and predictor variable	*R*	R_2	*F*
Step 1 DOB	.353	.125	16.845
Step 2 FS	.433	.187	13.499

p =.05

The variable of age was found to have the greatest influence of all variables on the dependent variable of grade point average(r =.353, p = .05), followed by family structure of the participant(r = .231, p = .05). Examination of the Beta weights reveals that the variables of age and family structure were significant predictors of grade point average.

Thus, the older one was at the time of assessment, the higher their GPA. As stated previously, in comparing the means of single parent offspring's GPA scores to two-parent offspring's scores, it was found that two-parent off spring had a significantly higher GPA (3.4668) than did their single parent counterparts (3.2452); with an F value of 6.558, $p = .011$, indicating that the single parent and two-parent offspring scores do indeed differ significantly on GPA scores. Therefore, family structure is a significant predictor of grade point average. See Table 10 below.

Table 10

Beta Weights for Predictor Variables with Grade Point Average

Step 3 and predictor variable	Beta	t
DOB	.353	4.104
Family Structure	.250	3.002

$p = .05$

(The dependent variable resiliency was an excluded dependent variable when considering only RC-10 and Family Status).

Independent Variable: RC-10:

In addition to the finding that the RC-10 positively correlated with resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment, it was also found that the RC-10 was significantly correlated with the age of the participant. It was found that the older the participant, the higher they scored their perceived parental commitment to faith. The RC-10 was also highly correlated with having supports to the family during the developmental years of participants, ($r = .440$, $p = .01$). In fact, of all supports listed in this study to include pastors, youth workers, grandparents, neighbors, coaches, family friends,

and stepparents, 26 % were pastors and youth workers. Family friends (23%) and Grandparents (22%) were also highly rated as support systems; with neighbors at 13%, coaches, 12% and step-parents at 8%. Not surprising was the significant correlation of the RC-10 scores (r =.375, p =01) with the school the participant attended. Those participants attending the Christian based university had significantly higher parental commitment to faith scores than did their secular counterparts. See Table 5 above.

Independent Variable: Family Structure (single parent or two-parent offspring):

Family structure and the RC-10 were also found to be significantly correlated (r =.187, p = .05), with the mean RC-10 score at 31.9666 for single parent offspring and the two-parent offspring mean RC-10 score at 27.133. Thus, single parent offspring scored their parents significantly higher than did their two-parent counterparts on the religious commitment to faith inventory. Family structure was also found to be significantly correlated with grade point average, (r = .231, p = .05). In addition, it was found that the Christian two-parent offspring had the highest mean morality scores, M = 80.63; Christian single parent offspring, M = 78.33; secular two-parent offspring, M= 73.73; and secular single parent offspring, M = 75.26, respectively. See Tables 5 above and 13 below.

Family structure also significantly correlated with socioeconomic status, (r = .370, p = .01). It was found that single parent offspring participants leaned toward having a poor affluency status more often than did two-parent offspring. which leads to the conclusion that single parent offspring lean toward having a poor affluency status as they are working with only one income and two-parent offspring lean toward the median income status, most likely working with two incomes. Family structure was also found to

have a relationship with Ethnicity, (r = -.188, p = .01) with the majority of single parent and two-parent offspring falling into the category of Caucasian (79.2 %) and a few two-parent offspring also falling under the categories of Hispanic (11.7 %), African American (5.8 %), Asian (.8 %) and other (2.5 %). See Table 12 below.

Independent Variable: Gender

The findings also reflect that there is a significant relationship between the variables of gender and morality, (r =.-242, p = .01). It was revealed that female participants had significantly higher morality scores (M = 78.8) than did their male counterparts (M = 73.23). See Table 5 above.

Independent Variable: Group/School

It was also found that the group participants belonged to, that is secular two-parent, secular single parent, Christian two-parent, and Christian single parent, was significantly correlated with morality, (r = .199, p =.05). It was revealed that Christian university participants had a significantly higher mean morality score of 80.6333 than secular school participants; M = 73.7333**.** In addition, Christian two-parent participants had the highest GPA's, M = 3.59, with secular school two-parent participants having the lowest GPA scores at M = 3.13, a mean score which was lower than both the Christian and secular single parent groups, M = 3.35 and M = 3.34, respectively. See Table 11 below.

Independent Variable: Supports

Also found was that the independent variable of supports significantly correlated with the school one attended, either Christian (CCU) or Secular (UCCS); (r = .493, p = .01) and group, (r = .493, p = .01). The secular school participants named 112 supports total and the Christian school participants named 181 supports, a substantial difference. This alludes to the fact that the Christian participants reported that family supports were more prevalent in their developmental years than in the developmental years of their secular counterparts. See Table 5 and 8 above.

Independent Variable: Age

In addition to the findings that age had a significant correlation with GPA, r = .353, p = .01, it was also revealed that it had a significant correlation with Morality, (r =.256, p = .01). The findings reflect that the older one is, the higher their grade point average and morality score (See Table 5). See Table 13 below.

Table 11

Mean Scores of GPA, Resiliency, Morality, and RC10 for the Four Groups

	UCCS 2P	UCCS SP	CCU 2P	CCU SP
GPA	3.3400	3.1353	3.5937	3.3550
Resiliency	81.2000	80.3000	82.2667	79.8333
Morality	73.7333	75.2667	80.6333	78.3333
RC10	29.9000	22.5000	37.0333	31.7667

Table 12

Means for Single Parent and Two-Parent Participants on SES, Ethnicity, Group, and RC10

	SES	Ethnicity	Group	RC10
Single Parent	1.7500	1.4000	3.0000	27.1333
Two-Parent	2.0667	1.3167	2.0000	31.9667

Table 13

Age of Participants and Mean Scores on Resiliency, Morality and Academic Attainment

	Resiliency	Morality	GPA
Age			
18	75.7500	74.7500	2.3727
19	82.0833	73.7083	3.3375
20	78.8824	72.7059	3.0300
21	79.2857	78.2857	3.3507
22	82.8333	78.6667	3.84.06
23	86.2000	81.4000	4.0648
24	86.6667	79.6667	3.6076
25	81.4286	72.4286	3.9680
26	83.2857	79.1429	3.8383
27	80.8333	85.3333	3.9642
28	72.3750	75.0000	4.0027
29	84.7500	87.5000	4.2288
30	84.6250	82.5000	3.4431

Conclusion

In the first research question , does parental religious commitment significantly correlate with their college-aged children's resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment scores, it was found that there was a statistically significant correlation between the perceived parent's religious commitment to faith scores (RC-10) and the variable of Morality (r = .218, p = .05). Thus, individuals whose perceived parental commitment to faith was high also had a high morality score. This is plausible because parents who have a strong commitment to their faith walk would be most likely to influence their offspring's development of moral ideals through teaching and modeling.

In the second research question, it was found that only one of the dependent variables directly correlated significantly with family structure; academic attainment (student's current GPA), r =.231, with offspring from two-parent families having a significantly higher GPA than their single parent counterparts and rejects the hypothesis that there would be no statistically significant difference in the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment scores and student scores of academic attainment based on family structure. However, when the single parent and two-parent data were separated out it was found that for single parent offspring, there was a significant correlation between parent faith and morality as well as resiliency and a marginal correlation with GPA. For two-parent participants, there was found to be only marginal correlations between parent faith and morality and GPA and no significant correlation between parent faith and GPA. Thus, again rejecting the hypothesis that family structure made no difference.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Research Question One

The first research question examined whether or not parental commitment to faith was correlated with their college-aged students' resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment (GPA). Separate correlation analyses were completed for each dependent variables and it was found that all were correlated with parental commitment to faith, however only significantly with one of the dependent variables, morality.

There were three basic hypotheses regarding parental commitment to faith and resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment. First it was hypothesized that offspring resiliency would significantly correlate with their parent's faith walk. This hypothesis was supported in that resiliency marginally correlated with parental commitment to faith. The second hypothesis stated that there would be a statistically significant correlation between the parental commitment to faith and the dependent variable of morality. It was found that there was a statistically significant correlation between the perceived parent's religious commitment to faith scores (RC-10) and the variable of morality. The findings indicated that those participants, whose parents had a closer walk with God, had a higher score of development of morality. The third hypothesis stated that there would be a statistically significant correlation between the parental commitment to faith and the dependent variable of academic attainment. A marginal correlation was found between the RC-10 scores and academic attainment (GPA scores).

Research Question Two

The second research question sought to determine whether or not the family structure of the participants, that is growing up for more than one half of their developmental years in a single parent or two-parent home, impacted the strength of the relationship between their perceived parent's religious commitment and their college-aged children's scores of resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment. This question was addressed by utilizing a series of multiple regression analyses, one for each of the dependent variables, resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment (GPA).

The first hypothesis stated that that there would be no statistically significant difference in the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment scores and student scores of resiliency based on family structure. This hypothesis was supported as there was no significant difference in the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment scores and student scores of resiliency. The second hypothesis stated that that there would be no statistically significant difference in the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment scores and student scores of morality based on family structure. This hypothesis was supported as there was no significant difference in the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment scores and student scores of morality based on family structure. The third hypothesis stated that that there would be no statistically significant difference in the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment scores and student scores of academic attainment based on family structure. This hypothesis was not supported as family structure did have a significant relationship with academic

attainment. In fact, in comparing the means of single parent offspring's grade point average scores to two-parent offspring's scores, it was found that two-parent offspring had a significantly higher grade point average than did their single parent counterparts. In comparing the mean scores of morality and resiliency of the single parent to two-parent offspring, it was found that the single and two-parent offspring scores were not significantly different from each other. This supports the hypothesis that the parental commitment to faith influence on resiliency and the development of morality in their offspring is comparable for both single parent and two-parent families. According to Mahoney et al. (2001) individuals are able to experience God and mature in their spirituality through participation in family relationships, especially the parent-child relationship. They suggest that family religious activities facilitate family functioning and that habitual engagement in family prayer and attendance at religious services offers parents routine opportunities to communicate apologies, hopes, and shared goals with their children. In addition, single parents are better able to cope with losses occurring as a result of divorce or death of a spouse by obtaining needed support through their church family (Anderson & Stewart, 1994).

Furthermore, when two parent and single parent data were separated out and the same analyses ran, it was found that for the two-parent participants, the perceived religious commitment to faith scores and morality scores correlated only marginally. The perceived parental commitment to faith scores and grade point average scores also correlated marginally. No significant effects were found between perceived parental commitment to faith scores and resiliency scores. For single parent offspring, it was found that single parent participants perceived parental commitment to faith scores

significantly correlated with both morality and resiliency and only marginally with academic attainment. The findings in this present study could be attributed to the possibility that single parents may depend more on God and their church supports as their helpmates in raising their children to become successful adults than their two-parent counterparts who have each other to depend on. These findings are further supported by Walsh (2003), who suggests that resilience is cultivated through shared beliefs that assist family members in attaching meaning to crisis situations such as divorce and death of a spouse and form a hopeful, positive outlook. He purports that spirituality is a key dimension that promotes the adaptation of the family members. Psalm 68:5 states that God is a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, and he is himself a holy dwelling. Snider, Clements and Vazsonyi (2004), who found that parent religiosity was correlated with their offspring's feeling closer to and supported by the parent with a negative correlation in the area of conflict. Brodsky (1999) found that single mothers who participated in his study identified several family protective factors to include having sufficient finances, family support, friends, and spirituality which made them successful and assisted them in coping as single parents. Beyond meeting the basics, each of the women described the need to be involved in their children's lives and to teach them the behaviors and values that they would need to survive. When discussing spirituality as an important resource in the successful raising of their offspring, the women concurred that a private relationship with God or a set of values dictates one's behavior and that church support provided them with material resources and relationship, stating that "faith and action go hand in hand". This also lends itself to the suggestion that single parents who

have a strong faith do have an influence on their offspring's development of resiliency and morality.

Limitations and Possibilities for Future Study

There were a few limitations to this study that must be considered when reviewing the findings. First, this particular study utilized a cross sectional design whereas a longitudinal design may have provided more information regarding the changes in development of resiliency, morality and academic attainment for the participants. While most existing research in the areas of religious commitment to faith, resiliency, and the development of morality, and academic attainment utilize a cross-sectional design, future studies could utilize a longitudinal approach. This would entail assessing participants from different age groups in order to ascertain whether or not the participants' perceived view of their parents faith influence remained constant over a lifetime. However, the cross-sectional design of this study was found to be more cost-effective than the longitudinal. Secondly, this study was limited to a population of university students and cannot be generalized to the greater population. It is possible that university students, that is those who seek a higher education, may have had more family support in the form of family and friend's encouragement and additional finances which may also lead to successful life outcomes. Future studies could examine other populations of offspring such as high school graduates who go directly into the work world and college students living in other cultures across the world.

All of the measurement instruments utilized in this study were of self report in nature, relying upon the honesty and accuracy of the sample participants. The results of

this study are only accurate to the degree that the sample population honestly answered the questions presented. In addition, the RC-10 results relied on the accuracy of the student's reported parental commitment to faith and therefore the answers may not have been an accurate reflection of what the parent may have personally reported. Finally, the scoring on the RC-10 may have lent itself towards some skewdness on scores, as Christian University students scored their parents higher than did their secular counterparts.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings in this study presented that the parent's perceived religious commitment to faith was positively correlated with resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment. However, only one variable was significantly correlated with religious commitment to faith; morality. This may be attributed to the individuation process of the participants during this age range 18-30. Jung (1977) informs us that young adults go through an open-ended process of psychological maturity which is measured by the level of happiness and vitality, mental stability, and resiliency of the individual. Furthermore, many young adults may have developed resiliency and good study habits outside of a faith-ful parenting experience attributed to specific personality traits. Costa & McCrae (1992) have identified several personality traits that influence how successful one is in life to include openness to new experiences such as attending college, extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness. In addition, as the findings of this study reflect, there was also found to be little variability in the resiliency scores for participants. This may be attributed to the fact that they are all highly motivated persons

who made it into college and that their own personal levels of resiliency played a part in this success.

In the supplemental analyses, it was found that perceived parental faith was also significantly correlated with the age of the participant. Thus, the older a participant was, the higher they scored their perceived parental commitment to faith. The age range (18-30), was selected not only to assist participants in their memory recall of parental influence in this area but also falls in line with Erickson's stages of development (1968). Erikson (1968), proposed that adolescents (up to age 18), achieve a sense of identity in occupation, roles and develop their own beliefs about religion and that young adults (aged 19-40), must develop intimate relationships and may be referencing the influence of their parental teachings when doing so. This could also be attributed to older participants typically having older parents. As one ages, perhaps one has a tendency to develop a deeper relationship with God and therefore may influence their children in an even greater capacity. In addition, older participants may have accumulated more knowledge of their parent's faith walk at the time of this study than their younger counterparts.

Perceived parental commitment to faith also was highly correlated with having supports to the family during the developmental years of participants. In fact, 71% of all participants claimed having had family supports during their developmental years. Of all supports listed in this study to include pastors, youth workers, grandparents, neighbors, coaches, family friends, and stepparents, most often chosen were pastors and youth workers. This relays the importance of mentorship training in churches so that single parent families might feel more supported in not parenting their children alone. This may

include cultivating personal relationships with single parents within the congregation through the procreation of small groups and accountability partners for their children.

Not surprising was the significant correlation of the RC-10 scores to the school that participants attended. Students attending the Christian university had higher perceived parental commitment to faith scores than did their secular counterparts. This was most likely due to the fact that Christian university students were more likely to have had a Christian upbringing. It was previously suggested that single parents raising their children in a religiously committed home experience spiritual dimensions in their own their faith life by engaging in activities such as praying for their children, being a good role model in attending church, encouragement of living out the biblical principles taught to their children, and employing spiritual rituals in the home (Walsh, 2003). The correlation between parental commitment to faith and its influence on their children's faith walk is something that could be further studied in future research.

Family structure was also significantly correlated with morality, and with what group the participants fell into. It was found that the Christian university two-parent offspring group had the highest mean morality scores, followed by the Christian university single parent offspring, secular university two-parent, and secular university single parent groups, respectively. This could allude to the fact that Christian upbringing does indeed have a greater influence on the development of morality in offspring and that having the support of two parents in a Christian home increases one's development of morality even more so. Future studies might also examine the life outcomes of offspring from a specified non-Christian upbringing in order to ascertain the differences in success factors with their Christian counterparts.

Not surprising, family structure also significantly correlated with socioeconomic status. It was found that single parent offspring mean scores on SES were mostly found to be between poor and median income status and most all of the two-parent offspring leaned toward having had a median income. Family structure was also related to the ethnicity of participants in that the data reflected a negative correlation between the two variables. The findings of this study inform us that most participants (95) were Caucasian, with the number of Hispanics equaled 14. Future studies might focus on the demographics of concentration of different ethnicities across the continental United States.

In this study, it was also found that two-parent offspring had a significantly higher grade point average than did their single parent counterparts. Previous research has suggested that the factor that has the greatest impact on student achievement (GPA) is not family structure but family income (Battle, 1998; Knox, 1996; Thompson et al., 1994). These studies considered the influence of both family configuration and income and also found that there is little difference in the academic performance of children from two-parent and single parent homes when family income is equal. In this study, it was found that most single parent offspring had recorded having had a poor to median income status and that two-parent offspring most often recorded a median income status.

The findings reflected that the gender of participants had a significant negative relationship with morality. It was revealed that female participants had significantly higher morality scores than did their male counterparts. In addition, it was found that the independent variable of supports significantly correlated with the participants' school, group, and scores of morality. In fact participants named a total of 262 supports to their

family during the developmental years. The supports were broken down into several categories to include pastors, youth workers, grandparents, neighbors, coaches, family friends and step-parents. Single parent participants from the Christian university named the most supports at 77, with grandparents named most often (18) of all supports and the least amount of supports were named by two-parent participants from the secular school (62), with again, grandparents named as the number one support most often (21). The findings also inform us that the more supports one had named, the higher their score on morality. This suggests that during the developmental years, other persons besides one's parents may also be highly influential on the moral choices one will make as an adult. Finally**,** it was found that resiliency and morality had a significant correlation. Thus, informing us that the higher one's level of resiliency, the higher the level of morality. This information could also lead to future study of whether or not being more resilient assists one in making better life choices or if living a morally upright life helps one to become more resilient.

Future outcome studies might also include research looking into the specific ways that parents influence their offspring spiritually. For example, what behaviors in their children do parents promote through family prayer life and how do Christian parents handle family crisis differently than non-Christian. Further study might also find answers to the questions: do parents promote their children's spiritual life and therefore their life outcomes by encouraging them to go to youth group, Christian camps, and further their education at Christian universities?

Conclusion

This study extended the research regarding the relationships between parental commitment to faith and their offspring's resiliency, development of morality, and academic attainment. In this study, it was found that in this sample population, parental religious commitment to faith was strongly correlated to the development of morality in their adult children and that the other two dependent variables of resiliency and academic attainment partially correlated with parental commitment to faith. This supports the first hypothesis that parental religious commitment to faith does appear to have an influence on offspring resiliency, their development of morality as well as their academic attainment.

It was also found that family structure had a direct significant correlation with only one of the dependent variables, academic attainment. In comparing the means of single parent offspring's GPA scores to two-parent offspring's scores, it was found that two-parent off spring had a significantly higher GPA than did their single parent counterparts indicating that the single parent and two-parent offspring scores do indeed differ significantly on GPA scores. Therefore, the second hypothesis was refuted as there was found to be a statistically significant difference in the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment scores and student scores of academic attainment based on family structure.

Further investigation in comparing the mean scores of morality and resiliency of the single parent to two-parent offspring found that the single and two-parent offspring scores were not significantly different from each other. Therefore, this finding confirmed

the hypothesis that there would be no statistically significant difference in the strength of the correlation between parent's religious commitment scores and student scores of resiliency based on family structure. However, when two parent and single parent data were separated out and the same analyses run, it was found that for the two-parent participants, the perceived religious commitment to faith and morality scores correlated only marginally. The perceived parental commitment to faith and grade point average scores also correlated marginally with no significant effects found between perceived parental commitment to faith scores and resiliency scores.

For single parent offspring, it was found that single parent participants perceived parental commitment to faith scores significantly correlated with both morality and resiliency and marginally with academic attainment. This leads us to the possibility that single parents may more often rely on a higher power to assist them in raising their children and therefore influencing them in the ways eternal in their major life decisions and how they live their lives. Because single parents appear to face more than your average challenges in raising children, spirituality in the life of the parent may provide a beneficial model for how to weather the many storms of life in a different capacity and children learn how to become more resilient in this process.

The findings regarding the importance of parent's faith influence on their children's life outcomes are valuable from a number of standpoints. With this new research in this area, it was found that the parent's faith walk does make a difference in lives of their offspring in assisting them to become more resilient, develop a beneficial moral core and to do the best they can in whatever they endeavor, in this case academics,

which has its own intrinsic benefits of being able to better afford a lifestyle of their choosing for this world and afford a safe environment for their own children.

This study also raises important implications for religious leaders and the way the church provides direction and guidance for young parishioners. First, churches should advertise and welcome single parent families into their fold and be careful not to ostracize them as if it were their fault that they are not the idealistic family structure. Secondly, churches need structured teaching groups around the biblical principles of raising single parent children and be willing to emphasize how important and beneficial it is to have other parishioners rally around them to give them extra emotional support and mentorship for their children.

It is also imperative that Christian counselors begin to incorporate concepts of spiritual parenting in the process of building a treatment plan for their clients. They should try to incorporate the ideas from a risk and protective factor model stance, in that this model does not regard single parent families as irregular because the foundation for this model is that all families have strengths and weaknesses. It is important that those in the field of healing assist families in identifying protective factors, which are simply those characteristics and events that positively influence children and help limit the impact of risk factors, for example, having a solid spiritual belief base and a variety of support systems. Christian counselors have the specific task to encourage and mentor single parents in the usefulness of relying on their spirituality and God in providing for their children's emotional, financial and most importantly addressing their spiritual needs. Finally, counselors need to reinforce the importance of setting a good spiritual life

example for their children and promote the idea of acknowledging Him in all their ways, especially in the blessing and business of parenting.

The main purposes of completing this study in particular was to give single parents and their offspring hope for their futures and to focus on parental religious commitment as possibly being a mediating factor in their offspring's life success. Walsh (2003) states that *family form* has been confused with family substance: Family processes and community connections that strengthen the quality of relationships are crucial for parents and their children to thrive. Burton (1992) purports that spirituality and family life is deeply intertwined. Family process research has found that transcendent spiritual beliefs and practices are key ingredients to healthy family functioning and positive consequence (DeFrain & Stinnet, 1985).

In previous studies it was found that one's health, both mental (Miller, 1999; Richards & Bergin, 1997, 2000; Shafranske, 2005; Wright et al., 1996) and physical (Gartner, Larson, &Allen, 1991; Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 1996) are improved by having a faith walk, thus being a mediating factor in one's well-being. It was the intention of this author to present information that relayed that the proactive spiritual life of the parents, both single and two-parents may act as a mediating factor in dealing with the difficulties of parenting during the developmental years as well as having a positive influence on their offspring's life success outcomes. It was also the intent of this author to present research that may assist in normalizing the family structure of the single parent for the benefit of their families in the church and in the secular world.

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