LUTHERAN ADOLESCENT SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT: THE EFFECT OF SCHOOL

ATTENDANCE ON SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION INVENTORY TEST SCORES

by

Michael James Weider

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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ABSTRACT

Lutheran schools have been established to nurture and disciple children into the Christian faith. However, empirical evidence is lacking that Lutheran schools are accomplishing this goal. The purpose of this Causal comparative and Correlational study was to determine whether attendance at Lutheran or Public schools made a statistically significant difference on Spiritual Transformation Inventory 2.0 test scores among Lutheran adolescents. Participants (N=129) took the Spiritual Transformation Inventory 2.0 (STI) test which measures spiritual development from an attachment to God perspective. Data was analyzed using a t-test to examine between group differences as well as Spearman's rho to examine the relationship between STI 2.0 scores and the number of years participants attended Lutheran schools. Results showed that there was no significant difference between the STI 2.0 scores of study participants who attended Lutheran schools verses those who attended public schools. In addition, no significant relationship was observed between the number of years students spent attending Lutheran schools and their STI 2.0 scores. However, significant differences were observed between students from two-parent homes and students from divorced homes. Likewise, students who participated in additional ministries within their churches scored higher than individuals who did not participate. These results suggest that more research needs to be conducted on the effect of Lutheran school attendance on the spiritual development of students from divorced homes as well as those who are minimally committed to their church community.

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Second, it goes without saying that my doctoral committee deserves much credit and thanks for their patience, guidance, and help during the past year and a half. Their critique, advice, and correction allowed me to focus my thoughts and shape this study into something useful and presentable. Doctors Lamport, Marino, and Gernant, I would like to thank you very much for your support and assistance.

Finally, God knows that He has sustained me and given me courage when panic and exhaustion rose up within me. Through sleepless nights, stressful days, and the fear that all of my effort might be wasted, God provided people in my life to keep me going. In addition, it is in thankful response to His love for me that I pursued this research project. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Since God has done so much for me in Christ Jesus, I can rejoice in what I learned through this project with thanksgiving.

Soli Deo Gloria

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)

Bell Object Relations Inventory (BORI)

Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR)

Concordia Publishing House (CPH)

Director of Christian Education (DCE)

English Standard Version (ESV)

Faith Maturity Scale (FMS)

Furnishing the Soul Inventory (FSI)

Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS)

Mentoring Role Instrument (MRI)

Moral Therapeutic Deism (MTD)

National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR)

New International Version (NIV)

Religious Status Inventory (RSI)

Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI)

Spiritual Transformation Inventory (STI)

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study will explore the nature of adolescent spiritual development among Lutheran adolescents. Although Christian spirituality and faith development have been studied for almost a century it remains difficult to define these terms and to measure them with any widely accepted theoretical foundations and tools (Gorsuch, 1984; Hancock, Bufford, Lau, & Ninteman, 2005; Heywood, 2008; Piper, 2002). Despite the confusion over how to define spiritual development there is wide agreement that in America, traditional conceptions of religious faith have undergone rapid change in the past 50 years (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999; Kinnaman, 2011). Using a relational definition of spirituality as well as the Spiritual Transformation Inventory 2.0 (STI) instrument, this study will examine Lutheran adolescents to determine what impact Lutheran school attendance has upon their spiritual development (Hall, 2003; Hall, 2004).

Background

In 1839, a group of German Lutheran immigrants settled in Missouri and founded a seminary (Hilgendorf, 2000, p. 29). These Lutherans chose as their first building project a seminary, rather than a church, because of their firm commitment to Christian education. They also believed that this commitment to education was to be the means by which their new church would grow and advance the Gospel (Hilgendorf, 2000). This group would eventually be known as the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) and this church has maintained a consistent focus on the importance of education (Doering & Eells, 2010; LCMS, 2010; Stellhorn, 1963; Stueber, 2008). Today the LCMS operates 2 seminaries, 10 colleges/universities, almost 900 elementary schools, and more than 85 high schools (Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 2012). However, the students attending these schools are a reflection of the spiritual beliefs of the culture in which they live. American's declining religious engagement combined with the

supplanting of traditional Christian doctrine with a secular humanist worldview is significantly

changing the nature of Lutheran education (Arnold & Hall, 2009; Barna Group, 2011).

In a discouraging look at the spiritual lives of protestant teens across the United States

Dean (2010) suggested that most teenagers are quite content with their faith in God but it makes

no deep or lasting connection within their lives. Furthermore, they are open to the traditions of

the Christian church and value its work and place in society. However, they are not committed

to the church and many quickly drop out after high school while still claiming to belong to the

Christian faith. Many have adopted a worldview that Dean calls Modern Therapeutic Deism; a

loveless and superficial commitment to spiritual truths that simply provide religious window

dressing on an otherwise secular life (Dean, 2010).

The LCMS is a part of this trend towards shallow religious tradition without a deep and

abiding love for God. A 1995 Search Institute study concluded that although most LCMS

members have firm orthodox beliefs few of them live out those beliefs in their daily lives

(Roehlkepartain, 1995). In the most recent National Study of Youth and Religion only 48% of

LCMS teenagers felt close to God in spite of an 83% church attendance rate (Schwadel & Smith,

2005). These studies highlight the challenges for Lutheran church members but Lutheran

schools also share these same problems. Although the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has

over 200,000 students in its schools there is an increasing danger that those students may not be

growing spiritually or living out the Christian faith that their schools profess every week in

chapel and theology classes (Arnold & Hall, 2009). The challenge that many Lutheran schools

face is to empirically determine the efficacy of their discipleship training of adolescents.

Lutheran school distinctives. While Lutheran schools share many of the same values

and practices as other protestant Christian schools, Lutheran schools also possess characteristics

that make them unique among private Christian schools. Besides the important distinctions of Lutheran doctrine and Lutheran worldview (Moulds, 2003), the LCMS has another important distinction that sets it apart from Catholic and other protestant Christian schools. The LCMS has developed a church-controlled system for recruiting, training, and certifying teachers for its schools (Verseman, 2002). This system not only meets state requirements for teacher education but also certifies teachers in Biblical knowledge, church doctrine, and Christian worldview. This unique teacher training program includes not only undergraduate Lutheran education programs at the universities of the LCMS but a colloquy program for teachers who did not attend the church's universities but wish to become certified Lutheran educators (Verseman, 2002). More than half of the teachers in LCMS schools are certified by the church for education ministry within its schools (Cochran, 2008; Stueber, 2008).

For the LCMS, education, Christian discipleship, and evangelism have always been considered important functions of Lutheran schools. For the founders of the LCMS preserving true Christian doctrine was an essential task for the synod's schools. As Hilgendorf (1997) explains, "When the Missouri Synod was founded in 1847, Walther advocated that every congregation would establish a parish school. He defined the purpose of the LCMS educational system to promote and protect theology as the foremost branch of knowledge" (p. 3). Along with doctrinal purity the LCMS was concerned about preserving and protecting the faith of its youth. Stellhorn (1963), emphasizing the importance of Lutheran schools, quotes C.F.W. Walther from an 1870 sermon stating, "our only real object was to save our souls, to live our faith over here, to establish here the true and correct public worship, and to maintain a truly Christian school for our children" (p. 243).

That same concern for doctrinal truth and saving faith continues in Lutheran schools today. Doering and Eells (2010) reported that among the LCMS school documents which they examined, 83% indicated that teaching God's word/sharing the Gospel and sharing/developing faith was a fundamental reason for which the schools existed. In addition, they state that, "Lutheran educational institutions are centered on the Gospel and because of that, the main focus in Lutheran schools is teaching students about the love and grace of God…. that all may acknowledge their sinfulness and their need for a Savior" (Doering & Eells, 2010, p. 2). Furthermore, Stueber (2008), president of the Association of Lutheran Secondary Schools, argues, "Integration of faith and learning in all subjects and programs of the high school is central to what great teachers do… all teachers are expected to plan lessons and activities that integrate the faith into the educational experiences of their students" (p. 2). From its founding and continuing today, the LCMS has established schools to protect and preserve Christian doctrine and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ through verbal proclamation as well as Christian mentoring and modeling.

Christian teachers play an extremely important role in nurturing the spiritual growth of students by modeling an authentic and integrated Christian faith and proclaiming the truth of the Gospel (Lanker, 2010; Otto, 2009; Stueber, 2008). However, while essential to holistic faith development, the mere presence of Christian teachers does not ensure that Christian spiritual development will take place. Lutheran schools should not assume that students who attend theology classes and chapel in a school employing Lutheran teachers will become spiritually mature and filled with faith. As other Christian schools have found, too often this is simply not the case (Hull, 2003).

In order to avoid the dangers of Moral Therapeutic Deism and transmit an integrated, faith-filled life, teachers must not only clearly proclaim the Gospel message but also authentically model the Christian life, intentionally mentor students into the Christian faith, and partner with the student's family to create a holistic integration of faith in the student's life (Arnold & Hall, 2009; Hilgeman, 2010; Walker, 2005). Lutheran schools employ testing programs to measure outcomes for academic and physical learning but do they check for spiritual development? As the editorial staff for the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) states, "We develop outcomes for math and science but do we develop outcomes for spiritual formation as well? ...Do we have a way of measuring whether students have attained these outcomes?" (ACSI, 2003, p. 43). While Lutheran schools clearly desire to, and believe they are fostering spiritual development (Doering & Eells, 2010, Stueber, 2008), it remains a difficult challenge to empirically evaluate whether students are growing into a faith-filled and spiritually mature life (Marrah & Hall, 2010/2011).

This study will be grounded in the emerging theoretical field of relational spirituality which traces its foundations to the Bible, Vygotskian socio-cultural theories, and psychoanalytical attachment and object relations theories.

Biblical foundation. Relational spirituality rests on two important assumptions. First, that one's relationship with God is central to spiritual growth and maturity. Second, that one's relationship with others is a reflection of the relationship with God (Atkinson, 2006, p. 4). These are not separate qualities that can be gained in isolation (1 John 4:7-8, New International Version [NIV]) but they work together to form the relational quality of the individual. Jesus stated that those who, "remain(s) in me and I in him" will not only bear much fruit but without that abiding presence they would not be able to do anything (John 15:5). Furthermore Jesus condemnation of

the Pharisees and teachers of the Law as "whitewashed tombs" (Matthew 23:27,) should serve as a clear warning that outward piety and obedience is not a sufficient condition of Christian faith and maturity without a relational love for God and neighbor (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18,).

Paul takes the relational nature of faith further through the theme of the Body of Christ. In Ephesians, Paul argues that God has given specific gifts to his church so that, "…the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature…" (4:11-13). In 1 Corinthians Paul likewise states that every Christian is part of the body of Christ with a unique place and gift which is suitable for the edification of the other parts. In addition, he argues that, "…there should be no division in the body…" and that all the parts of Christ's body, "… should have equal concern for each other." (12:12-27). the church is the body of Christ and through interdependence, loving correction, and care we should love and support one another. Relational spirituality begins with the assumption that people fundamentally need a relationship with God and with their neighbor (Atkinson, 2006, p. 9).

Socio-cultural foundation. Lev Vygotsky's work opposes the classical western developmental psychology of Piaget which focuses exclusively on the development of the individual in isolation. Vygotsky instead proposes that the development of the mind is dependent upon the interactions between the individual and their social and cultural settings (Estep, 2002). Although Vygotsky never mentions spiritual development within his writings there are clear implications to be made to the field of relational spirituality. It is primarily through the interactions of religious families, religious institutions, and religious schools that young children learn the behaviors, beliefs, and values of faithfulness within specific religious traditions (Arnold & Hall, 2009; Court, 2010). Within these settings significant mentors and

mature role models pass on spiritual realities and assist the individual to internalize spiritual truth and meaning (Kim, 2007). This socio-cultural learning is essential to mature spiritual growth. Individuals do not grow in their relationship with God in isolation but in communities of faith as they interact with one another in love, correction, and encouragement (Atkinson, 2006; Estep, 2002; Jaensch, 2008; Steibel, 2010).

Psychoanalytic foundation. The relational traditions within psychoanalytic theory can be most clearly traced to Bowlby's attachment theory and Fairbairn's object relations theory (Hall, 2007). Both theories suggest very similar things about human development; namely that adult human relationships are largely based upon the internalization of early relationships with primary caregivers (Beck, 2006). These early relational imprints become a part of the internalized model that all people use to relate to one another.

Attachment and object relations theories can also be applied to spiritual development. Many psychoanalytic theorists argue that an individual's relationship with God reflects an attachment bond (Atkinson, 2006; Beck & McDonald, 2004; Beck, 2006; Hall, 2004; Hall, Brokaw, Edwards, & Pike, 1998). Furthermore the Bible often uses relational images of parent/child to describe God's relationship with his people (Deuteronomy 32:6; Psalm 68:5-6; Luke 15:11-32; Galatians 4:4-7). The implications of the psychoanalytic relational perspective are profound. If these theories are valid, it may be that individuals do not relate to God in isolation (cf. Piaget) but through the internalized images of their parents, significant adult caregivers, and important role models.

Problem Statement

Lutheran education leaders believe strongly that Lutheran schools exist primarily to promote and foster Christian spiritual development within their students (Cochran, 2008;

Doering & Eells, 2010; Toepper, 2003; Verseman, 2002). In the last 15 years research into Lutheran schools has largely fallen into two narrow categories. Some studies have examined the role and beliefs of Lutheran school administrators, teachers, and parents (Doering & Eells, 2010; Inbarasu, 2009; Stueve, 2008). Other studies have broadly explored spiritual development using a cross section of protestant adolescents and have included LCMS students as a subset of protestant youth within their larger survey samples (Cardus, 2011; Schwadel & Smith, 2005). However, no study was found that empirically examined the relationship between Lutheran school attendance and spiritual development. Although Lutheran leaders may desire spiritual growth within their students there is little quantitative evidence to support the contention that such growth is taking place.

A review of Lutheran education journals and texts reveals little empirical evidence that positive Christian spiritual development is actually occurring within the students of Lutheran schools (Peters, 2006). On the contrary, some studies, which did not take into account the impact of Lutheran school attendance, have indicated a lack of spiritual development among Lutheran adolescents (Bensen et al., 1995; Schwadel & Smith, 2005). The average tuition for Lutheran elementary schools is more than $2,700 while the average for high schools is more than $6,500 (LCMS, 2012). In addition, there are almost 18,000 teachers working in Lutheran schools (LCMS, 2012). Parents, churches, and schools have invested significant financial and human resources into promoting the spiritual development of their students (Cochran, 2008; Gehrke, 2008; Verseman, 2002). If Lutheran schools are meeting this goal, it is reasonable to assume that this spiritual development should be empirically verifiable in the students who have spent substantial portions of their lives attending those schools. This study seeks to fill that gap

in the literature by investigating the spiritual development of students who attend Lutheran schools.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this causal-comparative and correlational study is to examine the effectiveness of Lutheran schools in promoting Christian spiritual growth in their students. Spiritual growth will be quantitatively assessed by examining both the difference between Lutheran high school students and Lutheran public school students on the Spiritual Transformation Inventory 2.0 (STI) test as well as the correlation between the students length of attendance at Lutheran schools with their STI 2.0 test scores. The STI 2.0 was specifically designed to measure relational spirituality and has been taken by thousands of Christian adolescents (Hall, 2010). This research will take place through Lutheran churches in and around a large Midwestern city using a sample of youth from within the churches. The independent variable will be the type of school which the students attend, Lutheran or public, as well as the number of years in which they attended. Lutheran primary and secondary schools will be defined as those schools owned and operated by Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod churches or associations. The dependent variable will be defined as the subject's multidimensional scores from the STI 2.0 test.

Significance of the Study

This study seeks to provide initial insight into the effectiveness of Lutheran schools in promoting spiritual development and a relationship with God among their graduates. In particular this study will focus on students who attend Lutheran schools and compare them to Lutheran students who attend public high schools. Although several studies have been conducted on the faith development of Lutheran church members (Barna Group, 2011; Bensen et

al., 1995; Gimbel, 2002; Olson, 2006), the researcher has been unable to find any quantitative studies examining the spiritual development of students who attend Lutheran schools. This study will contribute to the field of Lutheran school research and adolescent faith development within the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

In addition to knowing if Lutheran school attendance makes a statistically significant difference in the spiritual development of their students, this study also seeks to discover how much of a difference is being made. Considering the significant amount of financial and human resources invested into developing and sustaining Lutheran schools it is worthy to consider how much of an impact is being made in developing students' love for and trust in God. This information would be helpful for many different groups. Lutheran school administrators, teachers, parents, and congregations would benefit from knowing the extent of the impact being made upon students' faith development as students attend Lutheran schools.

Research Questions

This study is investigating the following research questions:

Research Question 1: To what extent is there a statistically significant difference between the Spiritual Transformation Inventory scores of Lutheran adolescents who attend Lutheran high schools and attended Lutheran schools for more than six years verses Lutheran adolescents who attend public high schools and attended public schools for more than six years?

Null Hypothesis 1, H_{01}: There is no statistically significant difference between the faith development scores of Lutheran adolescents who attend Lutheran high schools and attended Lutheran schools for more than six years verses Lutheran adolescents who attend public high schools and attended public schools for more than six years.

Hypothesis number one will be conducted with a *t*-test to compare the between groups mean scores of Lutheran high school students with more than six years of Lutheran school attendance and Lutheran public school students with more than six years of public school attendance. This initial test will indicate any statistically significant differences between the two groups.

Research Question 2: What is the extent of the relationship between the number of years students spent attending Lutheran schools and their Spiritual Transformation Inventory scores?

Null Hypothesis 2, H_{02}: There is no statistically significant relationship between the number of years Lutheran adolescents spent attending Lutheran schools and their Spiritual Transformation Inventory scores.

Hypothesis number two will seek to determine the relationship between the STI 2.0 scores and the number of years Lutheran school students attended Lutheran schools. The correlation between these two variables will be determined using Spearman's rho and a scatterplot of the STI 2.0 scores and scale measurement of the number of years in which Lutheran adolescents attended a Lutheran school from kindergarten through grade 12. Scores from students who do not attend Lutheran schools will not be considered for this hypothesis. Hypothesis number two is expected to show a correlation between the numbers of years that Lutheran adolescents attended Lutheran schools and their STI 2.0 scores.

Identification of Variables

The dependent variable for both hypotheses is the students' scores on the five major domains of the Spiritual Transformation Inventory test. The independent variable for hypothesis number one is type of school attended, public or Lutheran, and number of years attended. This consists of nominal scale data in two groups; students who attend Lutheran high schools and who

attended Lutheran schools for at least six years compared with Lutheran students who attend public high schools and who attended public schools for at least six years.

The independent variable for hypothesis number two is the number of years that students attended Lutheran or public schools. This is nominal scale data that will be measured for causal relationships by examining the line of best fit along a scatterplot.

Definitions

Faith/Spiritual Development - Synonymous with Sanctification; Spiritual transformation orchestrated by the Holy Spirit which leads to becoming the person God designed the Christian to be (Mueller, 2005). Koehler (1952) defines sanctification as "the phase of the Spirit's work, by which He incites and directs believers to lead a godly life" (p. 155).

Lutheran Schools - Schools that are owned and operated by a local Lutheran congregation or by an association of congregations affiliated with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (Stueve, 2008).

Lutheran teachers - Teachers who have graduated from a church work program in the Concordia University System or who have completed colloquy are considered ministers of religion and are classified as commissioned ministers of the Gospel (Stueve, 2008).

Relational Spirituality - Defined contextually throughout this research using Hall's (2004) theory. Hall argued that human relationality is based upon internal working models of relational processing and that these models correspond not only to human interactions but also interactions with God (as cited in Sarazin, 2011).

Spiritual Transformation Inventory 2.0 (STI) - A web based, spiritual inventory designed by Dr. Todd Hall of Rosemead School of Psychology in 2004 containing both individual reports

and organizational reports. The STI 2.0 is based on the relational spirituality framework that

explains spiritual growth through relational connectedness (Hall, 2010).

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the literature that forms the background to the study. Four significant topics are reviewed. First, the Lutheran educational system is discussed to provide a specific context for the study. Second, the current state of adolescent spiritual development is examined to better understand the issues within the field of spiritual development. Third, the theoretical frameworks for spiritual development are explored to provide a lens through which to evaluate the research. Finally, tools for quantifying and measuring faith development are examined.

Lutheran Education in America

The Saxon Lutherans, whose leader C.F.W. Walther would later form the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, strongly valued education and schools as an essential tool for developing and nurturing the Christian faith (Wolbrecht, 1947). One sign of this was the choice of these early settlers to construct a school instead of a church as their first building project. In 1847, twelve congregations organized the Missouri Synod and between them operated 14 elementary schools. In the next twenty-five years the number of churches had increased to 446 while the number of schools rose to 472 (Stellhorn, 1963). By 1897 the synod had grown to almost 2,000 churches with more than 1,600 schools (Behmlander, 2011). In most of these early schools the pastor of the congregation was also called to be the primary or sole teacher in the school. These pastor-teachers helped fulfill Walther's goal of primarily teaching and guarding the doctrines of the church (Hilgendorf, 1997, p. 155). Walther believed that the church's schools would cultivate and nurture the faith of their students. He further believed that churches which relied upon the state schools for the education of their youth would not survive long (Walther, 1873/1969, p. 22). The Missouri Synod originally required every congregation

wishing to join to establish a parochial school for the education of their children (Verseman, 2002).

Teacher training. The desire for a strong parochial education system was not limited to establishing schools. The LCMS went to great lengths to ensure that churches, teachers, and students received a quality Lutheran-Christian education. To relieve a significant teacher shortage due to the rapid growth in schools, the church started its first teacher's seminary in Addison, Illinois in 1864. Still unable to meet the need for teachers the synod established a second one at Seward, Nebraska in 1894 (Wolbrecht, 1947). The primary purpose for these schools was to prepare teachers in religious instruction as well as in the normal school subject areas (Verseman, 2002). The LCMS also began to hold teachers' conferences for both pastors and teachers to discuss issues related to education. These conferences not only focused on religious instruction but also on classroom discipline and pedagogical practice in every area of the curriculum (Stellhorn, 1963).

In addition to theologically guided teacher training programs the synod also provided other supports for its parochial school system. In 1864 the Evangelical Lutheran School Journal was established as an official publication of the LCMS to provide opportunities to learn more about teaching and education (Verseman, 2002, p. 14). To preserve its German Lutheran identity and promote a common religious curriculum among its schools, the Missouri Synod established its own publishing house, Concordia Publishing House (CPH), in 1869 (About CPH, 2012). One of the primary purposes for the publishing house was to provide religious curriculum and tools for use in LCMS churches and schools (Verseman, 2002).

LCMS faith distinctives. The LCMS does not exist within a historical vacuum but instead possesses a foundational set of assumptions that guide and direct its theology, decisions,

and actions. In addition, the Lutheran church claims and maintains a strong protestant tradition

extending back to the reformation begun by Martin Luther in 1517. The most fundamental belief

which binds all Lutheran churches together consists of the three Reformation *solas*: *sola gratia*

(grace alone), *sola fide* (faith alone), and *sola scriptura* (scripture alone) (Nafzger, 1994). All

other Lutheran doctrine can be seen as an extension of these three solas (Moulds, 2003, p. 183).

       Sola gratia. Central to the Reformation was Luther's confidence in sola gratia.

Lutheran's believe that, because all people are born into sin and cannot merit God's favor

through their works, salvation is a free gift from God for Christ's sake alone (2 Corinthians

5:21). Although many Biblical passages support this belief, Luther's realization came through

Romans 1:16-17: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to

everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God

is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'the righteous shall live by faith'" (ESV).   God

has redeemed sinners through the vicarious atonement won through the innocent suffering and

death of Jesus Christ (Koehler, 1952, p. 146). This is a free gift which God has offered to all

people and which is appropriated through faith, or trust, in the promise which God has made

(Barry, 1998).

       Sola fide. The promise of sola gratia is offered to everyone but is only received by sola

fide, or faith alone (Moulds, 2003). Faith is a simple trust in God's promise of forgiveness

through Christ. Faith in God's promise makes the sinner righteous in the sight of God and frees

the sinner from the guilt and punishment of sin (Koehler, 1952, p. 148). Lutheran's do not

believe that faith is any kind of work that a person can do for themselves. Instead, as Luther

explains in the Small Catechism, "the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me

with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith" (Concordia Publishing House [CPH],

2006, p. 456). Faith then is a gift of God through the work of the Holy Spirit which allows the sinner to receive personally what God has offered freely to all people. There are several important implications of this belief in sola fide. First, Lutherans believe that conversion is a gift of God and not through the work, decision, or effort of human beings (Moulds, 2003, p. 185). Second, it is only through the proclamation of the Gospel, in Word and Sacrament, that the Holy Spirit gives the gift of faith (Nafzger, 1994, p. 3).   As God acts, in God's world, through the means which God has established, faith is created in the hearts of God's people (Barry, 1998).

Sola scriptura. Sola scriptura completes the sola trio and provides the basis for Lutheran confidence in the first two.   It is trust in the veracity of the word of God that enables Lutheran-Christians to boldly proclaim sola fide and sola gratia. Nafzger (1994) writes, "Luther's insight that salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone cannot be divorced from, 'on the basis of Scripture alone.' For it was directly as a result of his commitment to Scripture that Luther came to rediscover justification by grace alone through faith alone" (p. 4). Luther believed, and the LCMS continues to confess today, that God speaks infallibly through the Bible to His people. It is only through the scriptures that, generally, we can know what God has done in history and, specifically, what God has done to forgive sinners through the grace won by Jesus Christ (The Commission on Theology and Church Relations [CTCR LCMS], 1975).

Education, discipleship, and evangelism. For the LCMS, education, Christian discipleship, and evangelism have always been intimately connected to one another. As Hilgendorf (1997) explains, "When the Missouri Synod was founded in 1847, Walther advocated that every congregation would establish a parish school. He defined the purpose of the LCMS educational system to promote and protect theology as the foremost branch of knowledge" (Abstract).   Stellhorn (1963), emphasizing the importance of Lutheran schools, quotes C.F.W.

Walther from an 1870 sermon stating, "our only real object was to save our souls, to live our faith over here, to establish here the true and correct public worship, and to maintain a truly Christian school for our children."

More recently, Doering and Eells (2010) found that among the LCMS school documents which they examined, 83% indicated that teaching God's word/sharing the Gospel and sharing/developing faith was a fundamental reason for which the schools existed. Furthermore, they state that, "Lutheran educational institutions are centered on the Gospel and because of that, the main focus in Lutheran schools is teaching students about the love and grace of God…. that all may acknowledge their sinfulness and their need for a Savior" (Doering & Eells, 2010, p. 2). Further promoting the centrality of spiritual development, Stueber (2008), president of the Association of Lutheran Secondary Schools, argues that, "Integration of faith and learning in all subjects and programs of the high school is central to what great teachers do… all teachers are expected to plan lessons and activities that integrate the faith into the educational experiences of their students." These are not isolated voices within the LCMS but represent a fundamental synodical view that education, discipleship, and evangelism are intimately connected with one another in the schools of the LCMS.

In addition to Lutheran education leaders, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod provides official reasons for the establishment of Lutheran schools and the support of education within the LCMS. The objectives for the church are clearly laid out in a formal document titled the *Handbook of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod*. This document contains the constitution, bylaws, and guiding principles for the church as well as the clearest description of the importance which the LCMS places upon education. Section III identifies ten Objectives for the

Synod. From these, reasons three, five, eight, nine, and ten pertain directly to education and/or

teachers:

> 3. Recruit and train pastors, teachers, and other professional church workers and
>
> provide opportunity for their continuing growth;
>
> 5. Aid congregations to develop processes of thorough Christian education and
>
> nurture and to establish agencies of Christian education such as elementary and
>
> secondary schools and to support synodical colleges, universities, and seminaries;
>
> 8. Provide evangelical supervision, counsel, and care for pastors, teachers, and
>
> other professional church workers of the Synod in the performance of their
>
> official duties;
>
> 9. Provide protection for congregations, pastors, teachers, and other church
>
> workers in the performance of their official duties and the maintenance of their
>
> rights;
>
> 10. Aid in providing for the welfare of pastors, teachers, and other church
>
> workers, and their families in the event of illness, disability, retirement, special
>
> need, or death
>
> (LCMS, 2010, p. 13).

Five of the ten objectives for the LCMS specifically mention the support of teachers

and/or schools within the church. Most importantly the fifth objective specifically identifies

Christian education as an important aim of the church.

From its beginning the LCMS has used education as a primary tool for nurturing children

into a mature life of Christian faith as well as a means to share the Gospel with those outside the

church (Verseman, 2002). Today the LCMS operates 2 seminaries, 10 colleges/universities,

almost 900 elementary schools, and more than 85 high schools (LCMS, 2012). One of the

biggest challenges Christian, and specifically Lutheran, schools face is accurately evaluating

whether students are growing into a faith-filled and spiritually mature life (Marrah & Hall,

2010/2011). Surrounded by a rapidly changing culture that is less connected with traditional

Christianity, the schools of the LCMS need to determine if their goal of evangelism and

Christian nurture is being met.

Current State of Adolescent Faith

Religion plays a significant part in the lives of Americans. Although anecdotal

perceptions of spirituality seem to indicate the steadily declining influence of historical Christian

belief, Gallup and Lindsey (1999) found that the percentage of Americans who believe in a god

has not dropped below 90% for more than 50 years. Specifically, Barna (2011) reported that

almost four out of five Americans continue to identify themselves as Christians. The National

Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) (2004) found that two-thirds of 12th grade students do not

seem to be hostile or alienated toward church or religion. In addition, almost 70% of 12th graders

indicated agreement with their parents' ideas about religion (Smith, Faris, & Denton, 2004).

Changes in the church. Although most polls still indicate that a majority of Americans

consider themselves to be Christians, there are many signs of significant change in what

Americans today consider the definition of the word Christian. Whereas previously, those who

called themselves Christian would have regularly attended weekly worship services and engaged

in family prayer, Kinnaman (2011) found that only three out of ten young adults will remain

faithful to church and the Christian faith as they move from their teen years through their

twenties. Barna (2011) found that since 1991 church attendance has declined among self-

identified Christians by 9% and that in 2011 only 47% attend church during a typical week. In a

separate study Barna (2010) reported that the number of teenagers who shared their faith with another person of a different faith with the hope of converting them had dropped from 63% in 1997 to only 45% in 2009.   The research concludes, "Christian teenagers are taking cues from a culture that has made it unpopular to make bold assertions about faith or be too aggressively evangelistic" (Barna Group, 2010, p. 1). These declining patterns of religious engagement indicate that, although American youth still largely consider themselves Christian, a significant change in the traditional understanding of what it means to be a Christian has taken place.

Struggles in the Lutheran church. The challenges for American Christianity described by Barna have had a significant affect upon the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as well. Membership and church attendance in LCMS congregations has declined significantly. More importantly less than 50% of baptized infants are confirmed in the church as teenagers and almost 50% of confirmed teenagers are not active in a Lutheran church by 21 years of age (Kieschnick, 2007). A 1995 Search Institute study concluded that although most LCMS members have firm orthodox beliefs few of them live out those beliefs in their daily lives (Roehlkepartain, 1995). In the most recent National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) only 48% of LCMS teenagers felt close to God in spite of an 83% church attendance rate (Schwadel & Smith, 2005).

The Search Institute (1995) and NSYR (2005) studies highlight the challenges for the members of LCMS churches. However, that challenge includes Lutheran schools as well since Missouri Synod members make up almost one half of the students in Lutheran schools (LCMS, 2012). Considering that the other half of students in LCMS schools are from other churches, or are unchurched, the challenge of effectively evangelizing students and promoting their spiritual growth grows even larger. Although the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has over 200,000

students in its schools there is an increasing danger that those students may not be growing spiritually or living out the Christian faith that their schools profess every week in chapel and theology classes (Arnold & Hall, 2009). With such a significant school network, a historically driven educational mission, and significant numbers of theologically trained teachers, many in the LCMS (Cochran, 2008; Doering & Eells, 2010; Gehrke, 2008; Verseman, 2002) assume that Lutheran schools are making a measurable impact upon the spiritual development of their students. However, recent empirical evidence drawn from a large American adolescent population may cast doubt on the reliability of these assumptions.

Moral therapeutic deism. Smith and Denton (2005), drawing on the research from the National Study on Youth and Religion, coined the term Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD) to describe how modern adolescents describe and define their Christian faith. Dean (2010) describes Moralistic Therapeutic Deism as having the following characteristics:

- A god exists who created and orders the world and watches over life on earth.

- God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.

- The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.

- God is not involved in my life except when I need God to resolve a problem.

- Good people go to heaven when they die. (p. 14)

For those who profess an evangelical or orthodox Christian tradition, these beliefs are not in agreement with Christian conceptions of God, the nature of truth, God's call to obedience, God's sovereignty, or the nature of sin and judgment. Therefore even though many of these adolescents identify themselves as Christians, their beliefs place them outside of the traditional evangelical understanding of Christian doctrine. Smith and Denton (2005), in the NSYR, state

that Moral Therapeutic Deism is "…supplanting Christianity as the dominant religion in American churches" (p. 171).   Smith, in another publication, further states that, "…in a lot of mainline Protestant churches, the emphasis seems to fall on being a good citizen and being a nice person. In some ways, mainline Protestantism almost seems to inoculate its young people against itself. As children, they like it, but they don't see much need for it once they get into their twenties" (Mulder, 2012, p. 4).   The combination of superficial allegiance to the Christian name and faith combined with deep structural conflicts with traditional Christian doctrine inherent in MTD is a cause for concern for the Lutheran church and its schools (Arnold & Hall, 2009; Gehrke, 2008; Kieschnick, 2007).

A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Spiritual Development

In order to quantitatively study spiritual development it is important first to provide an operational definition of that term for use in the social sciences. Unfortunately, there is no consistent or commonly accepted definition of spiritual development within the academic community (Sarazin, 2011; Kim, 2007; Miner, 2008; Sandage & Jankowski, 2010; Thomas, 2008). The definitions that do exist depend largely upon the theoretical foundation of the researchers involved. For example, Allport (1950) has developed a definition of spirituality centered upon critical religious reflection. Applying Allport's view, Miner (2008) states that immature faith is unreflective while mature faith involves an, "…ongoing religious reflection" that enables a believer to critically examine their own faith (p. 222).   Allport and Miner's definitions treat all religious beliefs as the same and analyze only the quality of religious reflection. Similarly, Hindman (2002) defines spirituality as an outward expression of an inward reality that is shaped by our own subjective essential and true nature. In order to grow and develop spiritually according to this definition, he argues that we need, "…love, intimacy, and

trust…" from and to other human beings (p. 169). For Hindman, spirituality is a relational and experiential journey through which we become fully human without any objective or definitive truths to be learned.

These rudderless definitions of spirituality lack any specific *telos* through which to determine ultimate goals and truths of faith and spiritual belief. They are inclusive of almost anything which a person might value. Evangelical Christianity, however, strongly holds to a core of religious belief based upon Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, and Sola Fide. Defining healthy spirituality solely as critical religious reflection or subjective experiential journey ignores the importance of *what* is believed and would therefore be unacceptable for the study of Lutheran-Christian spiritual development. As Stein argues, for a Christian, "Faith is not trust in anything, it is trust specifically in Christ" (Stein, 2011, p. 398).While these may suffice for a pluralistic and religiously uncommitted society, they do not describe anything resembling the Lutheran-Christian faith (Moulds, 2003; Toepper, 2003).

Kim (2007), working from a Christian perspective, suggests that Christian social scientists have often attempted to define spiritual formation from two divergent views; rational or relational. Rational faith is defined as an intellectual trust in God and assumes that Christian faith is a logical and rational process within the mind. Relational faith is defined as the interaction of inter-mental reciprocal relationships person to person and person to God. Kim (2007) argues that neither of these conceptions by themselves accurately represents the reality of Christian faith and spiritual development. If Kim is correct then it seems that even Christians have a difficult time defining faith in a way that is useful for theoretical application in the social sciences. These divergent and conflicting definitions make it difficult to study, measure, and

even talk about faith and spiritual development. Unfortunately, as Sandage and Jankowski (2010) state so succinctly, "Spirituality is complicated to define" (p. 16).

What is needed for research into the spiritual development of Lutheran adolescents is an operational definition of spirituality which is grounded in the evangelical Christian faith perspective as well as guided by accepted theoretical frameworks for study in the social sciences. The emerging field of relational spirituality provides such a framework. The development of relational spirituality can be traced back to three of the most significant theoretical frameworks for understanding spiritual development: Cognitive development theory, socio-cultural learning theory, and attachment and object relations theory. Each of these frameworks has implications for Christian education in both theory and practice. More importantly, each of these provides a unique perspective which contributes to the theory of relational spirituality.

Developmental stage theory. The seminal work in developmental stage theory by Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson argues for stage-based approaches to learning, cognition, and identity formation. Piaget theorizes four significant stages of development: The Sensorimotor, Preoperational, Concrete Operational, and Formal Operational stages. The theory is based upon a biological development assumption that as the brain matures new avenues of thought are made available to the child that were impossible at earlier stages (Miller, 2011).

Eric Erikson (1968) postulated that individuals, in order to develop healthy outcomes and ego strengths, had to negotiate different developmental stages. These stages of development linked the individual's search for meaning with their social and cultural environment (Watson, 2011). These eight stages, including Trust vs. Mistrust, Autonomy vs. Shame, and identity vs. inferiority, exert a significant influence on the fields of child and developmental psychology (Miller, 2011).

Piaget and Erikson said little about faith development but another developmental psychologist, James Fowler, applied many of the concepts of their theories to the study of religious faith (Fowler, 1981). Fowler's faith development theory has made a significant and widespread impact upon the field of spiritual development (Parker, 2006). Fowler's theory assumed that faith followed a seven stage progression model similar to Piaget's model of intellectual development. In addition, Fowler adopted many of Erikson's psychosocial developmental concepts (Watson, 2011, p. 29). Fowler proposed a multi stage model of faith development beginning with stage 0 "Undifferentiated Faith" and ending at stage 6 "Universalizing Faith". As is typical of developmental models, Fowler believed that higher stages were better than lower ones and that no stage could be left out as a person develops (Piper, 2002; Heywood, 2008). When applied, the model presents faith as the consequence of analytic, rational development and physical maturity. This stage development conception confines faith to the analytic sphere and places logic as the primary component of faith (Kim, 2007). The theoretical advantage to Fowler's model is that it universalized belief and can be applied to a very broad definition of "faiths" (Martin, 2008). This makes it very easy to apply Fowler's model within many different faith traditions and even to non-religious expressions of spirituality.

However, there are some significant limitations to Fowler's conception of faith development. Most of the developmental theorists, such as Piaget and Erikson, who have made a significant impact upon education and human developmental theory in the western world, have focused their attention on the individual in isolation without consideration of the wider social and environmental influences on development (Miller, 2011, p. 165). Their theories often ignore the influence of familial, social, or cultural context (Miller, 2011). As a result, when Fowler applies their rational cognitive theories to his study of faith development, an individualistic view of

spiritual development is put forth that is unable to capture the wider social, emotional, and relational contexts in which faith develops with in the individual (Kim, 2007, p. 310).

Additionally, because of Fowler's reliance on the concrete stage model, his theory contributes to a deterministic and reductionist view of faith (Kim, 2007, p. 311). If faith develops along a fixed continuum based upon intellectual maturity and is the product of ever increasing levels of analytic ability then it is also dependent upon these qualities. As Kim (2007) states, "analytical knowledge becomes a dependent cause of faith, and the human capacity for conscious and logical judgment enthrones itself as a singular determinant of faith formation" (p. 312). As Heywood (2008) states, Fowlers overreliance upon Piaget produced an idea that, "…human meaning-making can be described as going through a series of stages which are invariant, hierarchical, sequential and consist of structural wholes… must for that reason be held as extremely doubtful." This faith conception excludes the relational aspects of faith that many other theorists have argued must be included in any comprehensive model of spiritual development (Beck, 2006; Hall, 2004; Simpson et al., 2008).

Furthermore, its reliance upon logic and analytical knowledge contradict important Lutheran-Christian beliefs that the Holy Spirit can indwell and sanctify a person of any age, education level, or intellect. The New Testament contains examples of individuals from a variety of educational and societal backgrounds, including the magi (Matthew 2), little children (Matthew 19), a five time divorcee Samaritan woman (John 4), and learned Athenian philosophers (Acts 17) who came to believe that Jesus was their savior. As Jesus stated, Christians should have faith, "like a child" (Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17) in order to enter the kingdom of heaven.

A final problem for an evangelical application of Fowler's model is that it largely ignores the content of the individual's spiritual beliefs and instead focuses upon the cognitive and emotional development that supports the beliefs (Parker, 2006; Ratcliff, 2007). While some researchers might appreciate Fowler's theory for its utility in examining many different faiths and even non-religious faith, many orthodox Christians would argue that the content of one's beliefs about God are essential to evaluating the quality of one's spiritual maturity (Ratcliff, 2007, p. 226). In addition, Fowler's stage 6 proposes that at the highest levels of faith attainment individuals can rise above specific religious traditions to discover a meta-faith narrative which is universal in nature and which contains a universal truth to which all religions lead (Watson, 2011). This makes Fowler's model an explicitly pluralistic one which normalizes a Universalist goal for all spiritual growth (Heywood, 2008). From this perspective Fowler's theory is at odds with the traditional, Christ-centered beliefs of the Christian-Lutheran faith.

Socio-cultural theory. In contrast to developmental stage conceptions, Russian philosopher Lev Vygotsky focused his research on the influence of culture and human-social interactions on the individual. Vygotsky proposed a dialectical model of cognitive development that involved a thesis (or original idea), anti-thesis (an opposing idea), and synthesis (the resolution of the tension between the two ideas) (Levykh, 2008). This dialectic dialogue between the individual and the social world into which they are placed is what causes human development to occur (Miller, 2011).

A key part of the theory which Vygotsky described was the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD describes the additional achievement and learning that is possible for an individual with the assistance of a more capable peer or adult (Shabani, Khatib, & Ebadi, 2010). The ZPD theory suggests that every individual has a potential range in which they

can grow and learn. However, without assistance from a more knowledgeable person, the individual cannot achieve significant learning. Levykh (2008) argues that "Vygotsky believed that the process of cultural development is manifested in the appearance of higher mental functions that reflect the social origin of the child's interaction with his or her environment (teachers, peers)" (p. 89). Vygotsky theorizes that learning is dependent upon significant adults and peers to assist in its growth.

Vygotsky's theory has significant implications for understanding faith development. The Vygotskian concept of faith formation is rooted in the importance and necessity of human relationships for learning and cognitive development. As individuals interact spiritually with one another, significant mentors, and even God, their faith continually develops and grows as new ideas and challenges are encountered. The dialectical tension encountered in these interactions creates an evolving concept of faith and spiritual relationship with God (Kim, 2007, p. 313). People need spiritual models to visualize what faith looks like and how to incorporate Biblical and doctrinal concepts into their personal lives. Kim (2007) states that, "…what bridges knowledge and faith is the influence that significant others have on the learner through (social) encounters" (p. 314). Adolescents in particular need to see what faith looks like in practice from adult models so that they can internalize it and move from an intellectual knowledge to an applied faith (Mulder, 2012, p. 4).

Vygotsky's theoretical influence on faith development can be seen in the number of modeling, peer counseling, mentoring, and immersion activities in churches and Christian schools that have focused on faith formation (Campolongo, 2009; Jaensch, 2008). It is the socio-cultural interaction between the student and their peers, the student and their teachers, the student and the culture of their school and home that forms the basis for learning and enculturation of

significant (spiritual) concepts (Levykh, 2008). Perhaps Vygotsky himself stated it most clearly

when he said "What the child can do in cooperation today, he can do alone tomorrow"

(Vygotsky, 1934, p. 29).

Attachment and object relations theory. John Bowlby was a psychologist whose early

work took place within the British Psychoanalytic Society after the Second World War (Hall,

2007). Bowlby studied children who were orphaned and he discovered that in the absence of

nurturing maternal care and bonding children developed significant difficulty in forming healthy

relationships with others. He concluded that early in every child's life attachment bonds are

formed with a parental caregiver. These attachments can be nurturing and supportive or

distressing and traumatic depending upon how the parent relates to the child. Furthermore, this

attachment bond creates a behavioral control system within the child that guides their

expectations and assumptions about all future relationships (Hall, 2007).

Beck (2006), reporting on the work of Mary Ainsworth, reports significant features that

characterize an attachment bond. First, the caregiver provides a safe place from which a child

can explore the world and to which the child can turn to for comfort and security. Second, when

children cannot remain close to or locate their caregiver they experience separation anxiety.

Applied to adult relationships these can be simplified to two significant themes: Anxiety about

abandonment and avoidance of intimacy (Beck & McDonald, 2004).

Attachment theory has significant implications for the study of faith development. If

children experience consistent and supportive relationships with caregivers then they should

internalize a healthy and stable representation of self and relationships in general. Since children

are not able to relate to God directly Beck (2006) argues that the attachment and object relations

schema of God is formed initially through relationships with others. As Beck (2006) explained,

"Given that relationship with God in the Judeo-Christian tradition is often described as either a parent/child relationship or a spousal relationship; it seemed natural to psychology of religion researchers that attachment theory could provide a means for describing relationship with God" (p. 46). Simpson et al. (2008) noted that, "for Christians, one's relationship with God is significantly related to relationships with others" (p. 130). However it is important to note that the attachment and object relations schema of God which children develop are not based solely on parents but also on their "…spiritual communities and private moments of transcendent or mystical experience" (Beck, 2006, p. 46). Due to its theoretical consistency, empirical evidence, and biblical correspondence, attachment theory has become a popular and widely employed theoretical framework from which to explore faith formation and spiritual development.

Relational spirituality in the social sciences. Relational spirituality research within the social sciences has developed from multiple divergent theoretical perspectives and disciplines which began to converge over the past half century (Hall, 2007a; Hall, 2007b). These perspectives include, among others, the convergence of object relations and attachment theory (Hall, 2007), the emerging field of interpersonal neurobiology (Siegel, 2001), and Vygotsky's socio-cultural learning theory (Kim, 2007). From these theoretical foundations a number of scholars have developed a theoretical framework for spirituality that is based upon human relationality and which has come to be called "relational spirituality" (Desrosiers, Kelley, & Miller, 2011; Hall, 2004; Sandage, Jankowski, & Link, 2010; Simpson et al., 2008). Hall (2004) developed a relational spirituality theory based around five central organizing principles. The first principal, in the words of Hall (2004) is that human beings, "are fundamentally motivated by, and develop in the context of emotionally significant relationships" (p. 8). The next four are summarized by Sarazin (2011),

(Hall's) theory proposed that there are two distinct ways of knowing and processing

relational experiences and two corresponding forms of memory (principal 2): explicit

knowledge/memory and implicit relational knowledge/memory. Implicit relational

knowledge (Stern et al., 1998) refers to one's "gut-level" sense of how significant

relationships work. Patterns in people's implicit experiences with attachment figures

become "internalized" in implicit memory, as (implicit) templates (principle 3) through

which the meaning of future relational experiences are evaluated (principle 4). These

templates have been variously referred to as emotion schemas (Bucci, 1997), mental

models (Siegel, 1999), object representations in object relations theory (e.g., Fairbairn,

1952), and internal working models in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973), all of which

point to representations of relational experiences that are encoded in implicit memory,

which form the foundation of the self because they are processed automatically and

nonconsciously (principle 5). (p. 130)

It is through relationships with significant others that our working models for human interaction

are developed. Hall goes on to state that "relationships provide the context of being for humans,

or stated differently, the context for being human" (Hall, 2004, p. 8). If Hall's theory is correct,

then relational interactions between young people and their significant caregivers, models, and

mentors will have fundamental effects upon the ways in which those individuals interact with

everyone throughout their life.

However, human beings do not search for relationality only with other people. Many

psychologists have argued that people are predisposed towards communication and a relationship

with the divine (Fowler, 1981; Simpson et al., 2008). Others have recently begun to suggest

what the Judeo-Christian worldview has taught for thousands of years; that individuals can have

a relationship with God just as they would another human being (Desrosiers et al., 2011; Hill &

Hall, 2002; Sandage & Shults, 2007). Psychologist David Benner, quoted by Simpson et al.

(2008), explains the Christian's relationality to God by stating:

> We do not have a part of personality that relates to God or years to be in such
>
> relationship. The totality of our being yearns for and responds to such a relationship.
>
> Furthermore, our relationship with God is mediated by the same psychological process
>
> and mechanisms as those involved in relationships with other people…. Psychological
>
> and spiritual aspects of human functioning are inextricably interconnected…. Efforts to
>
> separate the spiritual, psychological, and physical aspects of persons inevitably result in a
>
> trivialization of each. (p. 125)

Christians, created in the image of God, are made by God to find relationship, rest, and rejoicing

in their creator. Hall's relational spirituality takes seriously the unified nature of the human soul,

intellectual, emotional, and spiritual, and argues for a holistic view of what it means to be a

human being.

Applied to spiritual development, Hall's relational spirituality has immense implications

for understanding how individuals relate to God. Hall's model suggests that "it is not possible to

separate implicit relational processes from spiritual processes as they are seamlessly woven

together" (Hall, 2013, p. 4). In other words, an individual's internal working model for relational

interactions with other people is the same model used for interacting with God (Sarazin, 2011, p.

10).

A Biblical Lutheran framework for relational spirituality. It is essential at this point

to make an explicit connection between the social science definitions of relational spirituality

supplied by psychologists and sociologists and the Biblical-Lutheran framework in which the

current research takes place. Defining spiritual development within the social sciences requires a well-established theoretical framework in which to place assumptions and scaffold new ideas. Placing the theoretical framework of relational spirituality within the Lutheran tradition requires the support of an established *theological* framework based on accepted definitions, clear Biblical textual support, and a shared doctrinal framework. As previously discussed, there are three fundamental pillars, sola fide, sola gratia, and sola scriptura, upon which the Lutheran understanding of Christianity is built. The Biblical-Lutheran framework for relational spirituality is based on two additional pillars; the Apostle's creed and the Lord's Prayer.

God the father. Luther's catechism divides the Apostles Creed into three articles each pertaining to a specific member of the trinity. The first article specifies the role of God the Father: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." Luther, in the Small Catechism, explains the first article by describing all the things that God provides for us every day including house, home, spouse, land, possessions, and goods. Luther then concludes by stating, "He does all this out of pure, fatherly, divine goodness and mercy" (CPH, 2006, p. 455). God is our Father. This statement from the Creed establishes a first article relational context for our existence and disposition towards God the creator. Similarly, the Lord's Prayer describes God as a Father when it begins with the words, "Our Father who art in heaven". Luther states that "By these words God would tenderly encourage us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that we may ask Him confidently with all assurance, as dear children ask their dear father" (CPH, 2006, p. 457).

These fatherly explanations find ample support throughout the Bible. In Matthew's gospel Jesus calls upon his hearers to be perfect just as God, "your father" is perfect (Matthew 5:48). Paul, in his letter to the Roman Christians, states that Christians have received a spirit of

adoption and are now "sons of God" who may call out to God "Abba Father" (Romans 8:14-15).

Jesus states that if anyone loves him (Jesus) then "my Father will love him, and we will come to

him and make our home with him" (John 14:22-23). When Abraham believed God and it was

credited to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6) Isaiah and James state that Abraham was called

the friend of God (Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23).   The Bible repeatedly appeals to people to

relationally know God as their perfect heavenly father who cares for their needs and who desires

to guide and direct them as a good earthly father would. The Bible makes clear that God relates

to people in many of the same ways, including love, anger, compassion, and discipline, in which

a father relates to his children.

  God the son. While the first article of the Apostles Creed provides a relational context for

God the Father, the second article of the Apostles Creed provides a similar relational context for

understanding a Christian's response to Jesus Christ. The second article describes the earthly

birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as well as a description of his second coming for

judgment:

> And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born
>
> of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He
>
> descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven
>
> and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence he will come to judge
>
> the living and the dead (CPH, 2006, p. 455).

Luther explains the second article by reminding Christians that God has redeemed and purchased

them from their sins through Jesus' own innocent suffering and death. However, from a

relational perspective, it is Luther's description of why Jesus has done this that is most

enlightening. Luther argues that Jesus accomplished this "…so that I may be His own, live

under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness" (CPH, 2006, p. 456). Christians have been redeemed, according to Luther's explanation of the second article, so that they may enter into a relationship with Jesus as his own treasured possession and as the people in his kingdom.

While the second article by itself does not explicitly describe a relational connection with Jesus Christ, other than as future judge, the Bible once again provides extensive support for the Christian's relationality with God the son. In the Gospel of John Jesus refers to the disciples as his friends saying "I no longer call you servants… instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15). Jesus encourages the disciples by telling them that their status before him has changed; they are now called friends of God. In the book of Revelation, Jesus, speaking to the church in Laodicea, invites Christians into a relationship when he states "I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me" (Revelation 3:20). Jesus invites people to fellowship with him in the relational context of a joyful meal. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus affirms that the disciples and anyone else who does the will of God are his true family; his brother and his sister and his mother (Matthew 12:48-5). Paul argues that those who have been redeemed by God in Christ are now adopted into the family of God and heirs of all the glory of God's kingdom (Romans 8:16-17). Just as in God the Father Christians find a relational faith, so too in God the Son do Christians find an invitation to be in fellowship with Jesus.

God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force or energy from God but is instead God himself who dwells within us (Koehler, 1952, p. 31). It is in and through the Holy Spirit that Christian relationality with God the father and God the son are possible. The second

article states "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting" (CPH, 2006, p. 456). Luther argues, in his explanation of the creed, that it is impossible for man to know Jesus Christ in any way without the calling and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In the Large Catechism, Luther equates the indwelling of the Holy Spirit with sanctification and states that it is through the proclamation of the Gospel within the "communion of saints", known as the church, that the Holy Spirit Sanctifies us (CPH, 2006, p. 570). Koehler (1952) explains sanctification by comparing man's natural sinful heart, which is an enemy of God, with the heart of the Christian in which "…there is created in his heart a gratitude and a love of God" (p. 155). The relational dimension is fundamental to this article of the Apostles Creed. The gospel is proclaimed through a relational community of saints, the church, and by that good news the Holy Spirit of God comes to dwell relationally within man so that man can and does now love God.

The Bible also supports this understanding of the Spirit's work. Paul's letter to the Corinthians states that we were washed, sanctified, and justified by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:11). Paul goes on to argue that we are completely relationally dependent upon the Spirit because without his presence we cannot even proclaim Jesus as Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3). Psalm 139 proclaims that where God's spirit dwells, God is present there also and there is nowhere we can go where God is not with us (Psalm 139:7-12). In Ezekiel 36 God proclaims "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws… you will be my people, and I will be your God" (Ezekial 36:26-28).

It is God's Spirit dwelling within us that enables us to walk with God, to be in fellowship with God, to have a relationship with God. In John 14 Jesus promises to ask the Father "and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever- the Spirit of truth…. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:16, 17, 26). The Holy Spirit enables us to hear the word of God, to talk with God, to dwell with God, to live for God, to be the people of God.

The theoretical foundations for relational spirituality are built on several important scaffolds. First, Vygotsky's socio-cultural learning theory argues that individuals do not develop or learn in isolation but only with the context of relationships and community. Lutheran schools have been established to provide just such a community. Second, Attachment theory argues that it is through the influence of significant attachment figures, mainly parents but also significant mentors and role models, that individuals learn relational patterns. These patterns become internal working models which people use to relate to others as well as God. Lutheran schools are equipped with Lutheran teachers and pastors who should become mentors, role models, and even attachment figures for their students. Finally, the theological basis for relational spirituality in the context of Lutheran education is based upon the Apostles Creed, Luther's Large and Small Catechism, and all of the Biblical scriptures upon which they are built. These form the theological foundation for understanding and applying relational spirituality in the context of Lutheran education.

Empirical Reviews and Measurement of Relational Spirituality

The research studies included in this section have been chosen to provide empirical support to the theoretical relational spirituality construct. In the first section four studies are

examined that support attachment theory's correlation with relationship with God. The second section includes three studies which indicate primary factors influencing adolescent spirituality. The final section includes an analysis of measurement difficulties for Christian spirituality and then a review of two recent measurement tools for use in empirically exploring relational spirituality from a Christian theoretical framework.

Attachment and relational spirituality. As discussed previously, attachment theory has been extensively applied in recent years to research in spirituality. Hall, Brokaw, Edwards, and Pike (1998) conducted a study exploring the positive relationship between spiritual maturity, defined relationally, and the individuals' level of object relations development. The study sample (N=76) consisted of subjects recruited from a spiritual direction training program (n=26), undergraduate psychology students (n=39), and outpatient clients at Biola University (n=11). The sample included 49 female subjects (64.5%), and 25 male (32.9%) with a mean age of 33. The participants in the study took the Bell Object Relations Inventory (BORI) in order to measure their object relations levels. Their Spiritual development was measured using the Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI) and the Religious Status Inventory (RSI).

The study found significant correlations between participants object relations levels and each of the religious statuses. In addition, the level of object relations was significantly related to the awareness of spirituality (p<.05), and the quality of spirituality was even more significantly related (p<.01). The authors concluded that there is a strong statistically significant relationship between spiritual maturity and psychological maturity. This in turn provides good evidence that "…the individual's level of object relations development is highly associated with the nature and quality of one's relationship with God" (Hall et al., 1998, p. 312).

Several limitations of the study must be taken into consideration. First, the authors used self-report data which depends upon people's perceptions of themselves. Although self-report is a common tool in the field of psychology this type of data can raise questions about reliability among participant responses. Second, the study was predominantly female and Caucasian with a fairly small sample size. Transferability of the findings may be problematic given the narrow demographic sample variance. Despite these concerns the study provides strong support for the positive correlation between an individual's object relations scores and their spiritual maturity and relationship with God.

TenElshof and Furrow (2000) conducted a research study to examine the relationship between secure attachment styles and their influence on spiritual maturity. In particular the authors examined the relationship between secure childhood attachment and secure adult attachment with participants' relationship to God and service towards others. The study used a convenience sample (N=216) consisting of students from Biola University's Talbot school of Theology. Within the sample there were 139 males and 77 females. Most of the participants were either Caucasian (n=105) or Asian (n=81). Participants in the study took the Faith Maturity Scale (FMS), the Parental Bonding Instrument, and the Attachment Style Questionnaire.

Results from the study indicated a positive relationship between secure adult attachment and total faith maturity (r =.46, p<.01), relationship with God (r =.50, p<.01), and service towards others (r =.19, p< .01). Participants who reported secure adult attachments predicted increases in each measure of faith maturity. Limitations to the study included the self-report concerns mentioned previously as well as the predominant use of male participants (64%). Even with the limitations the study provides strong support for the connection between attachment

theory and spiritual maturity. Adult attachment styles do correspond with an individual's relationship with God.

Cassibba et al. (2008) looked at the relationship between attachment to God in members of the Catholic clergy and religious orders compared with lay members of the Catholic Church. The sample (*N*=60) was drawn from southern Italy, equally divided by gender, and split between a group of lay Catholics (*n*=30) and members of Catholic religious institutions consisting of priests (*n*=5), nuns (*n*=5), novices (*n*=10), and seminarians (*n*=10). Each subject took the Adult Attachment Interview to establish their adult attachment style. Researchers expected to find more secure attachment styles among the religious vocation group.

The results of the research indicated a correlation between religious vocation and secure attachment style. The research revealed that a significant majority (73%) of the religious group reported a secure attachment style in comparison with less than half (43%) of the lay group. On the other hand only 27% of the religious vocation group was identified as having an ambivalent attachment to God compared with 53% of the lay group. Furthermore, the researchers found a significant correlation between maternal attachment and attachment to God. The maternal attachment among the religious vocation group was found to be stronger than the lay Catholic group indicating that strong parental attachment corresponds to religious attachment with God.

Several significant limitations to the study should be addressed. First, the authors assumed that the religious vocation group corresponded with an attachment-to-God without validating that assumption through any statistical measures. Since the actual levels of attachment to God are unknown it is possible that results may be skewed or invalid; especially for the lay population. In addition, the small sample size for each group raises questions of transferability and caused low statistical power throughout the study. Nevertheless, the study does support a

link between intense religious practice and higher levels of secure attachment. It also provides evidence that the internal working models, which come from parental relationships, have an effect upon people's perceptions of, and relationship with, God.

Hall et al. (2009) tried to determine whether attachment patterns with God correspond with individuals' attachment to patterns to other humans or whether attachment to God acts as a compensation, and substitute, for poor human attachment relationships. The study sample (*N*=483) consisted of undergraduate students from a protestant university with a mean age of 18.06. The largest groups in the survey consisted of Caucasians (84%) and non-denominational protestant Christians (39%). Participants in the study took ten different measurement tools designed to assess a variety of components including adult attachment, attachment to God, spiritual engagement in community, forgiveness, and purpose in life.

Results were divided between secure attachment groups and preoccupied/fearful attachment groups. The research hypothesis, that the secure group desires close relationships and has more positive relational experiences, was supported. In addition, the preoccupied/fearful groups reported higher levels of anxious attachment to God than secure groups. Overall the study concludes that attachment to God corresponds to internal working models of relationships and that psychological and spiritual functionality cannot be separated

Limitations to the study include its reliance upon relatively young college undergraduates. Additionally, the study group consisted of an overwhelmingly white, protestant population. Most psychology of religion research draws from the same undergraduate demographic pool due to the ease of recruitment and availability of subjects. However, transferability to other demographic or racial groups may be limited. In spite of these limitations the research provides further evidence for what many other research studies have found; an

individual's relationship, or attachment, with God is influenced by their internal conceptions of how human relationships should function.

Important factors corresponding to adolescent spirituality. In light of the studies mentioned above it is important to isolate the factors have been identified by recent scholarship that make a significant difference in adolescent spiritual maturity. Most recently Desrosiers et al. (2011), in a wide ranging study involving 615 adolescent and young adult subjects, sought to identify correlations accounting for relational spiritual maturity. The sample group was chosen from several cities across the U.S. from churches, youth organizations, schools, and camps and attempted to reflect diversity in religious affiliation, ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic status. Participants filled out four separate measures including the Parental Bonding Instrument, Parental Spiritual Support Scale, Friends Spiritual Support Scale, and Relational Spirituality Scale.

The study revealed many significant findings. Relational spirituality was significantly positively correlated with Maternal care (r=.14, p<.01), paternal care (r=.22, p<.01), paternal spiritual support (r=.36, p<.01), and friends spiritual support (r =.29, p<01). Additionally, maternal spiritual support was also significantly positively correlated with friends spiritual support (r=.33, p<.01). Likewise, paternal spiritual support was significantly positively correlated with friends spiritual support (r=.31, p<.01). Finally, maternal spiritual support, paternal affection, friends spiritual support explained 21% of the variance in relational spirituality scores (R^2=.21).

Previous studies have been conducted which have shown the effect of parents on their children's spiritual practices and/or beliefs. However the unique contribution of this study is its focus on factors among adolescents that influence relational spirituality. Taken together these

findings indicate that relational spirituality among adolescents is associated with positive and nurturing parental relationships with both mothers and fathers. In addition, having spiritually supportive friends is significant in adolescent development of spiritual maturity.

There are several limitations in the study which must be taken into account. First, as with most cross-sectional research causality cannot be ascertained. Although it seems unlikely, it could be the case that adolescents who have high levels of relational spirituality are more likely to maintain positive relationships with their parents rather than parents directly influencing spiritual development. Additionally, as with all self-report surveys the results allow for self-presentation bias. Finally, although the survey includes participants from a wide cross section of racial, religious, and socioeconomic levels the sample was not matched to any real demographic patterns within the U.S. and therefore may not be generalizable.

The findings of this research study are an important contribution to the study of the factors that correlate with relational spiritual maturity. The findings concerning peer influence provide support for Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of learning when applied to spiritual formation. The findings concerning maternal and paternal influence support the attachment theory of relational spirituality. Family and peer community both make important contributions to relational spiritual maturity.

Another important research study was conducted by Shepson (2010) and sought to determine the effect of mentoring upon relational spirituality in college students. The study sample (N=191) consisted of students aged 18-23 years old who attended five small Christian colleges and universities in the Southeastern U.S.. In addition, the sample consisted of 79.7% Caucasian (n=152), and 59.7% evangelical or fundamentalist (n= 114) subjects. Study

participants completed two main survey instruments; the Furnishing the Soul Inventory (FSI) and the Mentoring Role Instrument (MRI).

The authors expected to find that the presence of faculty mentors would correspond positively with FSI results. Survey data did not support the rejection of the null hypothesis. However, while faculty mentors did not by themselves correspond to FSI scores, survey results did indicate significant positive correlations and large effect size ($d=1.09$, $p<.001$) between the levels of relationality with *any* active mentor and FSI relational spiritual maturity scores. The opposite was also true: low MRI levels of mentoring corresponded with low levels of connecting with God on the FSI.

Limitations to the study include the aforementioned self-report cautions as well as the strong Caucasian, protestant homogeneity of the sample population. In addition, results must also be carefully interpreted to avoid assuming causation between the corresponding MRI and FSI variables. It is unclear whether the relational spirituality impact of mentors represents the effect of an attachment bond or the socio-cultural influence that Vygotsky describes. Despite the uncertainty of theoretical causation the authors postulate that feeling involved and belonging to a spiritual community with the presence of spiritual mentors has a positive effect upon student's relational spiritual development regardless of the specific type of mentoring.

Black (2008) conducted a mixed methods survey that included an extremely large quantitative survey sample ($N=1362$). One hour small group interviews were also conducted with young adults who were active in church ($n=198$) as well as non-active young adults ($n=72$). Interviews consisted of open-ended questions about life, parental relationships, friends, opposite sex, life priorities, worries, goals as well as the role of faith in young adult lifestyles. Each of the 60 item quantitative survey questions were compared with a demographic item that asked about

church attendance to determine if there were any significant relationships. A Chi Square test was used to determine significance.

Black's research conclusions, based upon the quantitative survey results as well as the qualitatively coded responses from the research interviews, revealed four significant domains that influenced young adult participation in church activities. The four domains are: relationships, discipleship, family influence, and intergenerational mentoring relationships. Both the quantitative survey and the interviews indicated the most significant correlation affecting church attendance was whether the individual's closest friends participated in church activities. Interview responses revealed that lifestyle and choice of friends play a significant role in church attendance. Negative correlations for church attendance included the presence of hurtful church experiences or negative relationships in church.   Interestingly, the top three negative correlations to church attendance in the quantitative survey consisted of relational responses: Fake/hypocritical Christians, other life priorities, and the necessity to change lifestyle.

Another interesting finding from Black's research was the influence of parents on church attendance after high school. Parental church attendance along with spiritual depth of Mothers and level of volunteer leadership of fathers were significantly correlated with young adult church attendance. The survey also revealed that teenagers who ate meals with and talked about spiritual matters with their families were more likely to attend church than those who did not. Finally, the survey also revealed the importance of mentors in the life of young adults. Teenagers who reported the presence of a close adult (non-parent) mentor and teens with adult Christian friends were more likely to attend church than those who did not.

There are many limitations to Black's study that question the reliability of the results. First, the study did not indicate whether quantitative survey was tested for external or internal

validity. The research also failed to detail any demographic information among the study participants and therefore it is not known who the subjects were or if they were representative of any larger population. Finally, Black did not disclose the qualitative coding procedures used to analyze the interview sessions which makes it impossible to replicate the survey without receiving more information.

In light of these weaknesses caution must be taken when interpreting any results. However, the purpose of Black's research was to get a snapshot of the factors relating to adolescent church attendance. Black's results include an extremely large sample population both for the quantitative and qualitative portions of his study providing substantial anecdotal evidence to support his conclusions. Finally, the results correspond with other researcher's findings, including the studies listed in this literature review. In spite of the questions left unanswered by Black's research his results continue to support the conclusion reached by many others; families of origin (attachment theory) and social-friend interactions (Vygotsky) make an impact upon the spiritual development of adolescents.

Measuring relational spirituality. In an effort to quantify spiritual development the psychology of religion and spirituality field has been searching for and testing empirically verifiable, consistent, and meaningful measures of spiritual development for more than 25 years. Gorsuch (1984) argued that measurement tools were of great benefit to the field because they provided basic, reliable, and predictive validity. However, Gorsuch also believed that there was enough focus on measurement tools but more work was needed on developing theoretical frameworks through which to interpret the results of these measurements. Gorsuch was concerned that a focus on measurement was holding the field of psychology of religion back from delving deeply in the substantive questions of spirituality. The field did continue to expand

its theoretical base for understanding and describing spirituality and faith but it also rapidly increased the number of tools available for measurement (Sarazin, 2011).

Gorsuch's observations remain valid today and little has changed. In 1978 there were 78 measurement scales available (Gorsuch, 1984). Sarazin (2011) estimated that today the number has grown to more than 200. They attribute this growth to the lack of a broad theory to guide measurement and research across the field. This critique echoes Gorsuch's warning that the practice of measurement must follow theoretical research rather than be seen as an end in itself. In addition, any valid assessment must decide at the beginning what it desires to measure (Hancock, Bufford, Lau, & Ninteman, 2005). Without a clear theoretical foundation any convenient measurement tool will suffice. Researchers from a traditional Christian worldview are left with a serious void; Christian research requires not only a specific theoretical paradigm that is consistent with a Biblical Christian worldview, but also an instrument which is reliable and valid in its measurements. While there are several major divisions within the field of psychology of religion, relational spirituality has made progress in providing a theoretical basis as well as reliable measurement tools.

Spiritual Assessment Inventory. Hall (2004) proposed that healthy, mature faith is best explained though a relational lens and interpretive framework. Hall (2004) argued, "…the processes that govern one's relationship with God…are the very same processes… that govern one's relationships with self and others" (p. 22). From this theoretical basis Hall and Edwards (1996) developed a theoretically based assessment tool for measuring spiritual maturity from a Judeo-Christian perspective called the Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI). The SAI was developed to assess two dimensions of relational spirituality: awareness of God and quality of relationship with God (Hall & Edwards, 2002). Conceived as a way to measure a healthy

relationship with God from an object relations framework, the SAI contains both a Biblical basis as well as credible psychological foundations.

Several studies provide empirical support for the link between psychological and spiritual maturity. Brokaw's (1991) dissertation research found a significant, positive correlation between God-image and object relations development. Hall, Brokaw, Edwards, and Pike (1998) found a strong conceptual link between spiritual maturity and level of object relations development. They also found that the quality of a person's relationship with God correlated to their quality of relationships with others. These findings provided preliminary evidence to support the theoretical framework of relational spirituality grounded in object relations theory.

From these initial studies the SAI was developed to further test this correlation. The SAI was initially tested with 40 items from a sample of 193 subjects. Further revisions were tested using 63 items and a sample of 470 student subjects. Results from the initial study suggested reliability and validity for the SAI (Hall & Edwards, 1996). A follow up study conducted by Hall and Edwards (2002) further supported the construct validity of the SAI when correlated to five other spiritual assessment tools. The SAI has since been used in more than 100 empirical studies, dozens of published research articles, and many dissertations (Sarazin, 2011).

Spiritual Transformation Inventory. The Spiritual Transformation Inventory 1.0 (STI), recently renamed the STI 2.0, was developed by Hall (2003) based upon the results and theoretical construct of the SAI. The original SAI design was useful to assess spiritual development. Hall decided, however, that advances in relational theories of spirituality required an updated measurement tool (Sarazin, 2011). The STI 1.0 possesses four important components necessary to support effective measurement and application. First, it is based on a strong attachment based relational framework. Second, it provides norms against which to understand

the spiritual strengths and weaknesses of students. Third, it can be enabled to provide

personalized feedback to students to encourage their spiritual development.   Fourth, it provides

disaggregated data reports to colleges and universities to enable planning and implementation of

structural and curricular changes (Sarazin, 2011, p. 19).

The STI 1.0 was designed to measure five domains: Connecting to God, The Knowledge

Spiral, Attachment Filters, Spiritual Tipping Points, and Relational Structures. Sarazin (2011)

provided a detailed description for each of the dimensions. The first dimension, Connecting to

God, examines one's ability to express thankfulness to God, connect with God and experience

closeness with him, finding meaning and purpose in life, and awareness of God's presence. The

Knowledge Spiral assesses spiritual practices and prayer habits as a means of measuring

closeness to God. The third dimension, Attachment Filters, examines whether the subjects'

relationship with God is characterized by secure, anxious or distant attachment styles. Spiritual

Tipping Points measures a person's ability to interpret difficult struggles and suffering as

potential opportunities for spiritual growth. The fifth and final dimension, Relational Structure,

examines the intentional efforts toward spiritual growth that one makes through prayer, spiritual

practices, participation in spiritual community, and service towards others (p. 23).

A construct validity study was undertaken in 2003 with data collected from 483

undergraduate students from a Protestant university (Sarazin, 2011, p. 38). The sample was

overwhelmingly Protestant Christian (91%) with most participants identifying themselves as

non-denominational. The STI 1.0 scales reported excellent internal consistency with 18 of the 19

subscales reporting alpha coefficients of .70 or higher with twelve at .80 or higher. This internal

consistency provides strong empirical support for clinical and research uses for the STI 1.0.

Table 1 reports the alpha coefficients for the initial construct validity study.

Table 1

STI 1.0 Initial Construct Variables and Alpha Coefficients

Variable Names	# Items-Final Scales	Alpha's-Final Scales
Spiritual Perspective	11	.87
Commitment	13	.87
Spiritual Meaning	7	.87
Awareness	5	.82
Disappointment	5	.89
Realistic Acceptance	5	.85
Instability	3	.73
Secure God Attachment	10	.83
Dismissing God Attachment	12	.52
Preoccupied God Attachment	6	.76
Intimacy with God	6	.90
Forgiveness with God and Others	7	.77
Spiritual Practices Scale-Frequency	15	.73
Prayer Type Frequency	6	.89
Spiritual Service Scale	8	.85
Agape Love	5	.74
Spiritual Community Scale-Participation	13	.91
Transformational Suffering Scale	7	.92
Spiritual Openness Scale	6	.78

The primary weakness of the STI 1.0 construct validity study was its overwhelming homogeneity of white, Protestant subjects. The STI 1.0 was designed to be used in a wide variety of Christian settings; however since the construct validity study focused on a narrow band of Christian practice other Christian traditions, such as Pentecostalism and Catholicism, were not represented.

Following its initial development the STI 1.0 was norm referenced with data from religiously oriented colleges from around the United States as well as more than 3000 students from the Association of Christian Schools International. This normative data is currently used to provide comparative data to colleges and high schools desiring to assess their student bodies (Sarazin, 2011). The main advantage of the STI 1.0 is its adaptability to clinical, educational, and individual settings. It is also an excellent tool for conducting research in the area of relational spirituality (Sarazin, 2011).

The STI 1.0 was used until Fall 2011 when it was extensively revised and a new version, the STI 2.0, was developed (Hall, 2013). Although the underlying theory of relational spirituality remained the same, the framework for the domains and scales was reorganized to include five major domains: Connecting to God, Connecting Self to Others, Connecting to Spiritual Communities, Connecting to Spiritual Practices, and Connecting to the Kingdom. In addition, 31 subscales were developed and divided among the five domains. The construct validity study for the STI 2.0 included 1317 participants from 12 Christian Colleges and seminaries across the U.S. and Canada (Hall, 2013, p. 26). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 70 with a mean age of 24.53. The study sample was closely divided between male ($n = 652$) and female ($n = 599$) participants. In addition, the sample was composed of mostly European Americans ($n = 802$) followed by Asian American ($n = 85$), Latino ($n = 58$), and African American ($n = 53$). A sizable percentage of participants, 20%, indicated their race as "other" ($n = 252$).

Table 2 reports the alpha coefficients for each of the 31 subscales as well as their placement within the five major domains of the STI 2.0.

Table 2

STI 2.0 Construct Domains and Variables with Alpha Coefficients

Domain and Subscale	# Items-Final Scales	Alpha's-Final Scales
CONNECTING THROUGH SPIRITUAL PRACTICES		
Christ-centeredness	5	.91
Spiritual Practices Frequency	5	.85
Prayer Frequency	5	.87
Transformational Trials	5	.94
Positive Spiritual Coping	5	.91
Negative Spiritual Coping	5	.91
Spiritual Openness	5	.75
CONNECTING TO GOD		
Awareness of God	5	.92
Intimacy with God	5	.91
Experiencing God in Spiritual Practices	5	.83
Experiencing God in Prayer	5	.88
Gratitude	5	.88
Secure Connection to God	5	.82
Anxious Connection to God	5	.84
Distant Connection to God	5	.85
CONNECTING TO SELF & OTHERS		
Forgiveness	5	.75
Agape Love	5	.86
Spiritual Self-Awareness	5	.79
Secure Connection to Others	5	.85
Anxious Connection to Others	5	.85
Distant Connection to Others	5	.87
CONNECTING TO COMMUNITY		
Spiritual Friendship	5	.91
Spiritual Community Involvement	5	.91
Secure Connection to Community	5	.87
Anxious Connection to Community	5	.90
Distant Connection to Community	5	.88

Spiritual Perspective	5	.89
Spiritual Meaning	5	.93
Service to the Local Church	5	.92
Service Outside the Local Church	5	.89
Evangelism	5	.83
Total Number of Items	155	

Note. Adapted from "STI 2.0 Technical Report" by T. W. Hall, 2013, p. 16.

All of the alpha scores were in the acceptable range and most were in the good to excellent range (Hall, 2013). The mean alpha for all scales was .89 and they ranged from .75 to .95. These scores indicate a high degree of internal consistency and support the reliability of the STI 2.0. Like the STI 1.0, the overwhelming majority of respondents to the construct validity study self-identified as Evangelical Protestant ($n = 938$, 75.9%) which included three primary sub-groups: non-denominational ($n = 435$), Evangelical Methodist ($n = 206$), and Baptist ($n = 188$). Altogether, participants who identified as Catholic, Orthodox, and Mainline Protestant comprised only 22% of the sample.

Summary

The faith and spiritual lives of Americans has been changing rapidly over the last quarter century. While most survey respondents still refer to themselves as Christians, the definition of what it means to be and live as a Christian is often not synonymous with the core beliefs of Biblical Christianity. In particular, the lives of adolescents are more likely to be lived as followers of Moral Therapeutic Deism than as followers of the crucified and risen Christ. This poses a particular challenge to church and educational leaders.

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has used its school network to develop the faith and spiritual lives of adolescents for more than 150 years. However, those schools are being influenced by the same factors at work in the larger society; Lutheran schools are not immune.

Attempting to measure, define, and describe the Christian faith of adolescents is difficult without a proper theoretical lens. There are three developmental theories that are particularly well suited for understanding faith development among Christian adolescents.

Stage development theory provides a lens through which to understand the importance of developmentally appropriate curriculum. Vygotsky's socio-cultural learning theory helps Lutheran schools understand the importance of communities of believers who assist one another in living faithfully in a Christian community. The Zone of Proximal Development can also be used to emphasize the importance of Christian role models including teachers as well as coaches and activity sponsors. Finally, attachment theory and relational spirituality highlight the importance of caring adults who take a personal interest in students' lives. These teachers, coaches, and other caring Christian mentors can become attachment figures that enable adolescents to "see" God in another person.

Measuring spiritual development allows researchers to attempt to quantify and examine the ways in which God works in the lives of his people. The Spiritual Transformation Inventory 2.0 is a newly developed tool that allows the Christian faith to be examined from several important perspectives. With the norms provided by previous research the STI 2.0 can provide Lutheran schools with comparison data and a snapshot of the spiritual development of their students.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to determine if Lutheran schools made a statistically significant difference in the faith development of their students when compared with similar Lutheran adolescents who attended public schools. The study used the Spiritual Transformation Inventory 2.0 test, developed by Hall (2003) to measure students' faith development. This chapter will describe the research design chosen for the study. It will also describe the participants, setting, STI 2.0 instrument, research procedures, and data analysis methods.

Proposed Research Design

This research study used non-experimental causal-comparative and correlational designs. This research design did not use random samples and did not seek to manipulate the experimental variables in any way. Hypotheses one used a causal-comparative research design. Hypothesis number two used a correlational research design. These ex post facto research designs were chosen because it would not have been possible to manipulate the primary independent variable, Lutheran or Public school attendance. Convenience sampling was used to select the sample because it would have been prohibitively expensive and time consuming to gather a random sample from the population of Lutheran Christians from across the United States. Given these limitations the ex-post facto design was chosen to examine the relationship between the variables.

The causal-comparative portion of this study compared two groups of students: 1. Students who attended Lutheran schools for six or more years and who currently attend Lutheran high schools; 2. Students who attended public schools for six or more years and who currently attend public high schools. The correlational portion of this study sought to determine the

relationship between the numbers of years a student spent attending Lutheran schools with their scores on the STI 2.0 instrument.

Research Question and Hypotheses

This study investigated the following research questions and hypotheses:

Research Question 1: To what extent is there a statistically significant difference between the Spiritual Transformation Inventory scores of Lutheran adolescents who attend Lutheran high schools and attended Lutheran schools for more than six years verses Lutheran adolescents who attend public high schools and attended public schools for more than six years?

Null Hypothesis 1, H_{01}: There is no statistically significant difference between the faith development scores of Lutheran adolescents who attend Lutheran high schools and attended Lutheran schools for more than six years verses Lutheran adolescents who attend public high schools and attended public schools for more than six years.

Research Question 2: What is the extent of the relationship between the number of years students spent attending Lutheran schools and their Spiritual Transformation Inventory scores?

Null Hypothesis 2, H_{02}: There is no statistically significant relationship between the number of years Lutheran adolescents spent attending Lutheran schools and their Spiritual Transformation Inventory scores.

There is only one dependent variable used throughout the study; students' scores on the five domains of the Spiritual Transformation Inventory test. This study analyzed several different independent variables. The primary independent variable was the students' attendance at public schools or Lutheran schools. Participants in the study who attended private non-Lutheran schools or who were homeschooled were not the primary focus of this study and therefore, responses from these study participants were not considered.

A second independent variable was also based upon Lutheran school attendance. This variable was analyzed using data based upon the number of years of attendance in Lutheran schools including elementary and secondary.

Participants

This study used convenience sampling. The sample for this study was capped at a maximum of 200 Lutheran adolescents from churches around the United States Midwest. The study analyzed the scores of LCMS adolescents attending Lutheran high schools and LCMS adolescents attending public high schools.

Recruitment of study participants took place over a seven month period from January 2013 to July 2013. Initially, the researcher made contact with pastors and youth leaders at ten large LCMS churches in and around the metropolitan area of a targeted Midwestern city. The study was explained to the congregational and youth leadership and approval was sought from each individual congregation. After receiving approval from the leadership of the congregation, adolescent members were recruited through several steps. First, the congregational youth leadership adult provided a brief description of the survey during a Sunday morning class, a regular youth event, or another standard advertising method used regularly by the church. Second, an invitation was given to potential participants with the formal study description attached. Third, Parental Consent and Participant Assent forms were distributed, through existing Sunday morning distribution channels, email, or through direct mailing. Fourth, the researcher offered to be available to answer questions from interested parents and adolescent participants at a convenient day and time selected by the church.

Parents that were willing to allow their children to participate indicated their consent by signing the Parental Consent form. Adolescents were also asked to provide their assent to

participate by signing the Participant Assent form. Both forms needed to be signed and submitted before adolescent volunteers were allowed to participate in the study.

After receiving all required consent and assent forms, a date was set when study participants were invited to fill out the survey. Churches were given the option to have participants take the survey at home using a secure web-based hyperlink or taking the survey at church either online or in a paper-based format. No incentives were offered to churches or participants in the survey.

The sample group was delimited using two different criteria. First, students included in the sample were limited to members of LCMS churches. This is because the study attempted to isolate the faith development of a specific population of adolescents; primarily LCMS adolescents that attend public or Lutheran high schools. A second delimitation was the inclusion of students in grades 9 through 12. The study did not include high school graduates, elementary, or middle school students since one of the primary purposes of the study was to examine the effect of longer term school attendance upon adolescent spiritual development.

Setting

This study took place at eight Lutheran churches in and around the Midwestern United States. The churches were all members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The adolescent population of these churches consisted almost entirely of Caucasian, middle income, and religiously conservative students. The sample population included residents of the Midwest located in suburban and urban areas. The population for the study consisted of the adolescent members of larger urban and suburban churches.

Instrumentation

The instrument administered for the study was the Spiritual Transformation Inventory 2.0 test. An earlier version of the test, the STI 1.0, was originally developed in 2003 but was significantly redeveloped in the Fall of 2011 and renamed the STI 2.0 (Hall, 2013). While the underlying framework of relational spirituality remained consistent, the organizational structure of the test was updated with new domain names and 31 subscales (Table 2). A construct validity study indicated a high degree of internal consistency and reliability (Hall, 2013).

The STI 2.0 test includes two main sections. The first section of the test asks subjects to answer a set of demographic questions including gender, age, race, religious and denomination affiliation, length of attendance at Lutheran schools, frequency of church attendance, and frequency of family prayer. The second section of the test contains 155 questions comprising 31 subscales and five major domains: Connecting to God, Connecting to Self and Others, Connecting to Spiritual Communities, Connecting to Spiritual Practices, and Connecting to the Kingdom. Participant's answers are scored on several Likert scales with responses such as "not true of me" and "very true of me". The STI 2.0 is a proprietary and copyrighted instrument.

Data Collection Procedures

The STI 2.0 is an online survey instrument to which access is granted through a web link which is emailed to selected study participants. In order to facilitate the collection of data and answer any questions which study participants may have, the researcher spent time explaining the mechanics of the web-based STI 2.0 through both phone conversations and email instructions. The study was administered by an on-site Director of Christian Education (DCE) or the church pastor. Each church was asked to decide a date and time that would work best complete the survey instrument. Student directions are standardized for the STI 2.0 so

instructions were clear and brief. Students were given as much time as they needed to complete the instrument with most completing the survey in less than one hour.

An Application to conduct Human Research was submitted to the Liberty University Institutional Review Board. Participants in the research study were all minors and therefore the study included the following safeguards to ensure privacy and voluntary participation. A form was given to students and parents explaining the study with its risks and purpose. Parental permission was required for all adolescent minors participating in the study. Before being allowed to take part in the study, participants were required to return the signed parental consent form. Subjects were also given an assent form to sign which detailed the intent and purpose of the research study. Participants were clearly informed that they could choose not to participate without any penalty or disadvantage. Study subjects were also assured that the research had no effect upon their church membership or youth group participation. No student identifying information was collected in the survey data. Survey data was collected anonymously and was not attached to any student names, consent or assent forms, or identifying markers. The STI 2.0 survey was either completed anonymously online through the use of an email hyperlink that will not be tied to student identifying information or through paper surveys which did not ask for identifying information.

The risk to benefit ratio for this research was low. Although there was no direct student benefit to completing the STI 2.0, there were also no documented or known harms associated with the instrument. The students were informed that their answers would assist the researcher and their church to better understand adolescent faith development and important factors that may assist with the faith development of high school students.

Data collection and analysis required eight months to complete. Initially, ten large churches were contacted in January 2013. However, only four churches agreed to participate at that time. Therefore, another 30 churches were contacted between February and May 2013 with a total of 15 churches agreeing to participate in the study. Only eight churches submitted the necessary written permission letters agreeing to administer the study. By August 2013 these eight churches had submitted 129 surveys to the researcher with the signed parental consent and participant assent forms included.

The participant data was entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software program. First descriptive statistics were analyzed and then the mean scores for the five domains of the STI 2.0 were calculated. Finally, statistical tests were conducted to determine what effect Lutheran school attendance had upon the participants' STI 2.0 scores.

Data Analysis

Conclusions from this research were based upon the data collected in the survey instrument. The dependent variable for every hypothesis was based upon the interval scale scores of the Spiritual Transformation Inventory test. The STI 2.0 scores were assessed by calculating the 31 separate subscale scores and then calculating the five STI 2.0 domain scores: Connecting to God, The Knowledge Spiral, Attachment Filters, Spiritual Tipping Points, and Relational Structures. The mean scores of each of these domain scores was tabulated and compared across the independent variables. SPSS 19 was used to collate and analyze the data as well as conduct appropriate assumption tests for normality.

The two research question hypotheses each required their own data analysis procedures. Hypothesis number was analyzed using a *t*-test to compare the between groups mean scores of participants attending Lutheran high schools with more than six years of Lutheran school

attendance and participants attending public schools with more than six years of public school attendance. This initial test explored statistically significant differences between the two groups.

Hypothesis number two sought to determine the relationship between participant STI 2.0 domain scores and the number of years Lutheran students attended Lutheran schools. The correlation between these two variables was determined using a simple scatterplot of the STI 2.0 scores and the ordinal scale measurement of the number of years in which Lutheran high school students attended a Lutheran school from kindergarten through grade 12. Scores from students who did not attend Lutheran schools were not considered for this hypothesis. Hypothesis number two was expected to show a correlation between the numbers of years that participants attended Lutheran schools and their STI 2.0 scores.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this causal-comparative and correlational study was to explore the effect of secondary schooling upon Christian spiritual growth among Lutheran adolescents. Spiritual growth was quantitatively assessed by examining the difference between Lutheran adolescents who attended Lutheran high schools and Lutheran adolescents who attended public high schools using the Spiritual Transformation Inventory 2.0 (STI) test. Additionally, this study explored the correlation between Lutheran adolescents' length of attendance at Lutheran schools with their STI 2.0 test scores. This chapter describes the results of that study.

Data was collected through the use of convenience sampling obtained through churches that agreed to administer the survey to their youth. Participation was limited to those churches which were members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and which provided written approval agreeing to take part in the study. In addition, adolescents were required to submit both a signed personal assent form as well as a signed parental consent form before completing the survey. In order to increase the sample size, over 40 LCMS churches around the United States were invited to participate in the research. Although 15 churches initially agreed to participate in the study, only eight churches provided written authorization and administered the survey to their youth. Specific response data from individual churches cannot be disclosed but all of the churches were located in the U.S. Midwest. This chapter is organized to provide a clear explanation of the research results. First, the descriptive statistics and demographic information is presented. Second, an analysis of each hypothesis is reported. Finally an overall summary of the research is offered.

Descriptive Statistics

In this study data was collected from eight churches in the U.S. Midwest. The survey was administered by the church either online through a confidential web link or using a paper version of the survey. A total of 129 surveys were collected through the combination of both versions. However, because this research is a comparison between Lutheran adolescents enrolled in Lutheran and Public high schools, surveys from students enrolled in private non-Lutheran ($n = 5$), homeschool ($n = 5$), or whose school choice was not indicated ($n = 2$) were excluded. The remainder of the surveys ($n = 117$) were used for statistical analysis. Females represented a larger portion of the survey (54%; $n = 63$) than males (46%; $n = 54$). The collected data included a slightly higher number of Lutheran adolescents who attended Lutheran schools (52%; $n = 61$) than those that attended public schools (48%; $n = 56$). The vast majority of participants self-identified their ethnicity as Caucasian ($n = 105$) while the remainder indicated Asian-American ($n = 2$), Latino ($n = 1$), Native-American ($n = 1$), and "Other" ($n = 7$). The participants' school class ranged from 9th grade (28%; $n = 33$), 10th grade (20%; $n = 23$), 11th grade (20%; $n = 23$) and 12th grade (15%; $n = 17$), although 18% ($n = 21$) did not indicate. The respondents ranged in age from 14 to 18 years ($M = 16.2$). Since the majority of the subjects were minors all participants were required to submit both a participant assent form as well as a signed parental consent form in order to participate.

The Spiritual Transformation Inventory test was administered to all of the eligible students with some students taking the online version ($n = 26$) and the remainder taking the paper version ($n = 91$). The questions were identical on both tests. The STI 2.0 consists of 155 individual questions arranged into 31 subscales. The subscale scores are then arranged into five major domains. These domains include Connecting to God, Connecting Self to Others,

Connecting to Spiritual Communities, Connecting to Spiritual Practices, and Connecting to the

Kingdom.   Table 3 lists the descriptive statistics for the five major domains for all participants

including the number of usable responses, minimum and maximum scores, as well as the mean

and standard deviations.

Table 3

STI 2.0 Major Domains

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Connecting to God	117	2.03	5.40	4.21	.67
Connecting Self to Others	116	2.20	5.40	3.96	.53
Connecting to Spiritual Communities	112	1.92	6.00	3.96	.75
Connecting to Spiritual Practices	115	2.23	6.17	4.27	.82
Connecting to God's Kingdom	117	1.36	5.96	4.13	.79

Data Analysis

This study was designed to explore the effect that attendance at a Lutheran high school

had upon STI 2.0 test scores. The following research questions and their corresponding

hypotheses guided this study:

Research Question 1: To what extent is there a statistically significant difference between

the Spiritual Transformation Inventory scores of Lutheran adolescents who attend Lutheran high

schools and attended Lutheran schools for more than six years verses Lutheran adolescents who

attend public high schools and attended public schools for more than six years?

Null Hypothesis 1, H_{01}: There is no statistically significant difference between the faith

development scores of Lutheran adolescents who attend Lutheran high schools and attended

Lutheran schools for more than six years verses Lutheran adolescents who attend public high schools and attended public schools for more than six years.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between the number of years students spent attending Lutheran schools and their Spiritual Transformation Inventory scores?

Null Hypothesis 2, H_{02}: There is no statistically significant relationship between the number of years Lutheran adolescents spent attending Lutheran schools and their Spiritual Transformation Inventory scores.

Research Question 1

An independent-samples t-test was utilized to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores on the five domains of the STI 2.0 of Lutheran adolescents who currently attend Lutheran high schools and have attended Lutheran schools for at least six years ($n = 57$) and Lutheran adolescents who attend public high schools ($n = 38$) and have attended public schools for at least six years. The STI 2.0 test score served as the dependent variable and current school enrollment was the independent variable. Table 4 provides the descriptive statistics used to conduct the t-test.

Table 4

STI 2.0 Major Domains Descriptive Statistics

	Lutheran Schools 6 > years			*Public Schools 6 > years*		
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	*N*	Mean	Std. Dev.
Connecting to God	55	4.15	0.66	35	4.21	0.76
Connecting Self to Others	55	3.91	0.46	35	4.02	0.54
Connecting to Spiritual Communities	55	3.90	0.71	35	4.03	0.82
Connecting to Spiritual Practices	55	4.24	0.75	35	4.18	0.95
Connecting to God's Kingdom	55	4.03	0.73	35	4.23	0.95

Before conducting a *t*-test several assumptions must be confirmed about the data being analyzed. Although *t*-tests are usually robust the following Figures display histograms for each of the five STI 2.0 domains for both the Lutheran and public school participants in the survey. Based upon the visual inspection of the histogram distributions for each of the scores, normality is assumed.
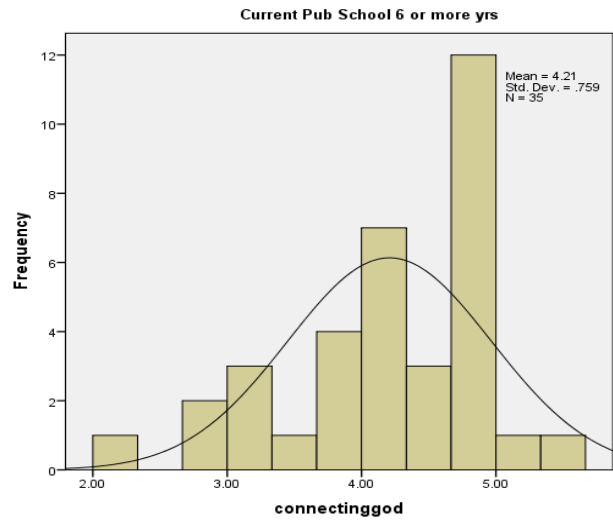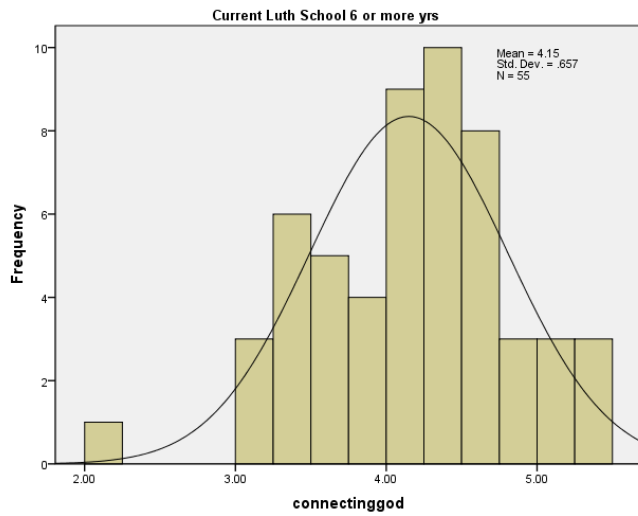
Figure 1. Histograms for STI 2.0 Connecting to God Domain for Current Lutheran and Current Public School students.
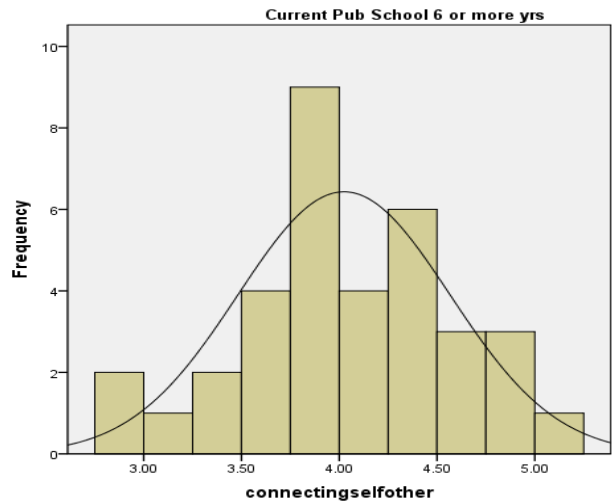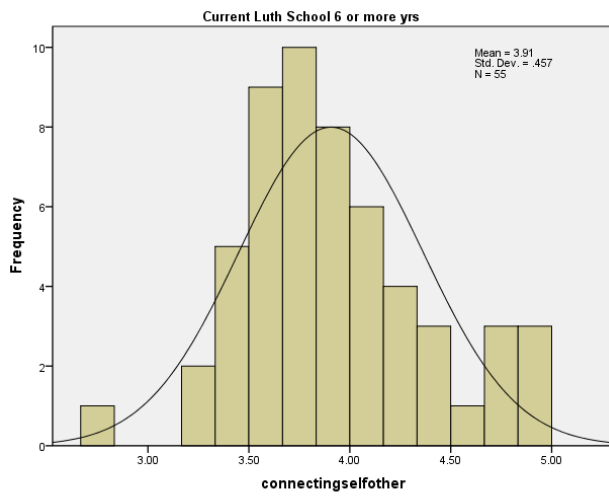

Figure 2. Histograms for STI 2.0 Connecting Self to Others Domain for Current Lutheran and Current Public School students.
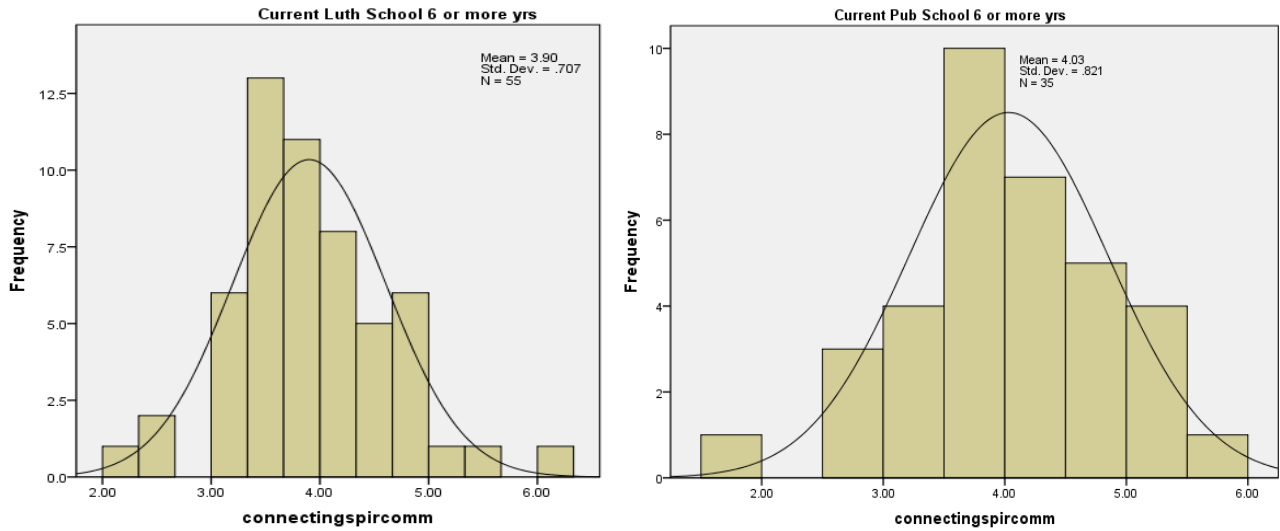
Figure 3. Histograms for STI 2.0 Connecting to Spiritual Communities Domain for Current Lutheran and Current Public School students.
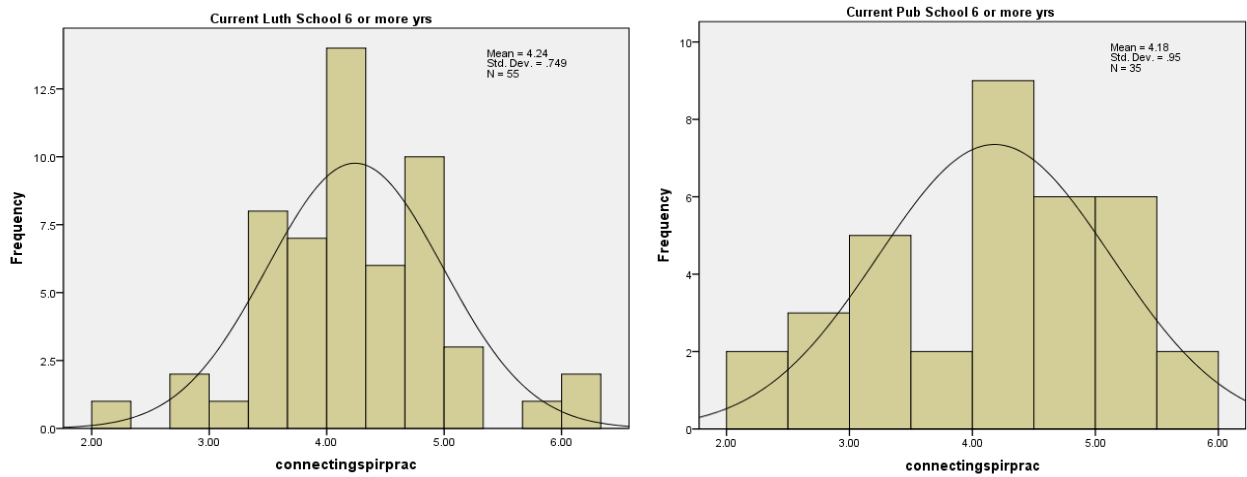

Figure 4. Histograms for STI 2.0 Connecting to Spiritual Practices Domain for Current Lutheran and Current Public School students.
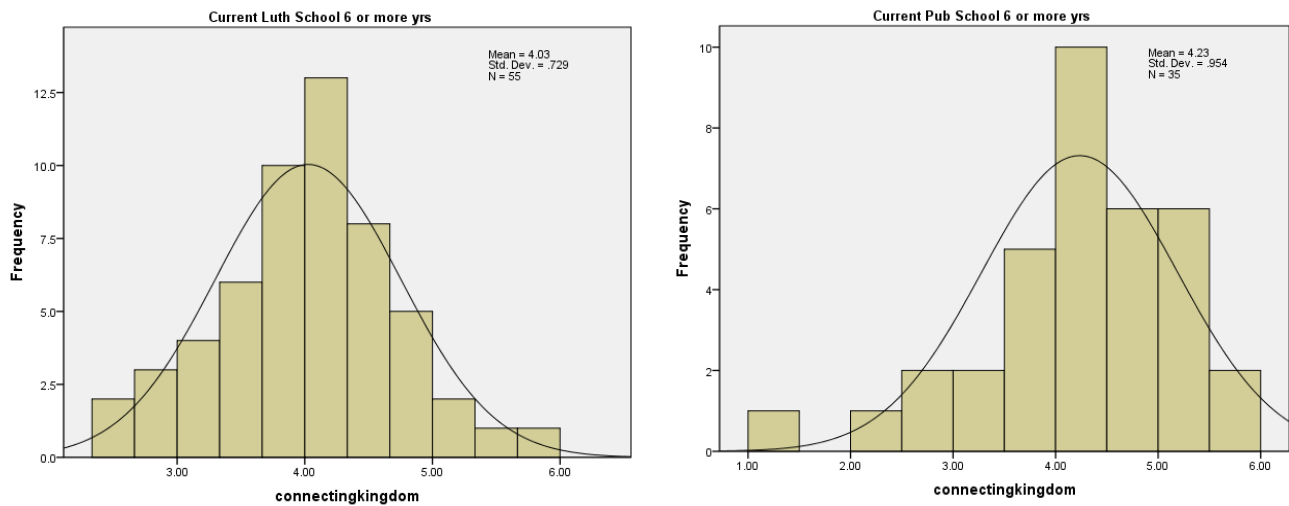
Figure 5. Histograms for STI 2.0 Connecting to God's Kingdom Domain for Current Lutheran and Current Public School students.

In addition to normal distribution, a *t*-test also assumes that the population distributions are equally varied. To verify this assumption Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was conducted with the results displayed in Table 5.

Table 5

Levene's Test for Homogeneity of Variance

	F	Sig.
Connecting to God	1.23	.27
Connecting Self to Other	.99	.32
Connecting to Spiritual Communities	.81	.37
Connecting to Spiritual Practices	2.74	.10
Connecting to God's Kingdom	2.30	.13

For each of the five STI 2.0 domains Levene's test resulted in significance levels exceeding .05. Therefore, homogeneity of variances was assumed.

The *t*-test indicated no statistically significant difference between the two groups of students within any of the five STI 2.0 domains.   Table 6 provides a breakdown of each   *t*-test conducted on the STI 2.0 domains.

Table 6

Independent t-Test results among STI 2.0 Domains

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Connecting to God	-.38	93	.71
Connecting to Self and Other	-1.02	92	.31
Connecting to Spiritual Communities	-.82	89	.42
Connecting to Spiritual Practices	.21	91	.84
Connecting to God's Kingdom	-.99	93	.32

Based upon the analysis of the *t*-test there is insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis H_{01}. There is no statistically significant difference between the STI 2.0 test scores of Lutheran adolescents who attend Lutheran high schools and attended Lutheran schools for more than six years verses Lutheran adolescents who attend public high schools and attended public schools for more than six years.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 sought to determine if a correlation existed between the numbers of years that Lutheran adolescents spent attending Lutheran schools and their STI 2.0 test scores. Participant's scores on the five domains of the STI 2.0 test were correlated, using SPSS, against the number of years that participants attended Lutheran schools. Assumption tests for conducting a bivariate correlation include normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity.   Based upon the visual examinations of the previous histograms listed in Figures 1 through 5,

homogeneity of variance was assumed. Linearity was assessed by examining the line of fit

within scatterplots created for each of the five STI 2.0 domains. Those scatterplots are listed in
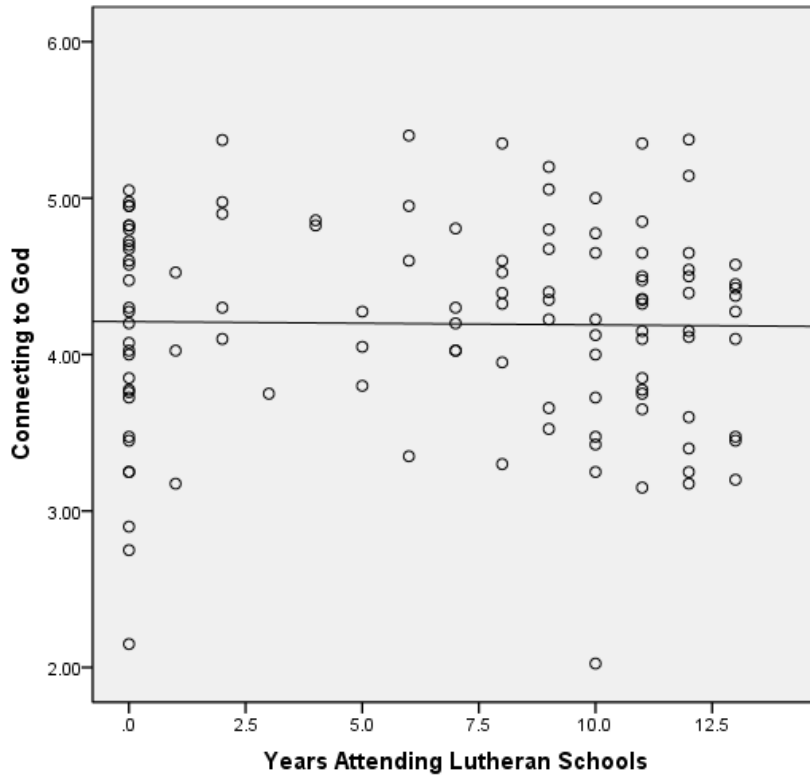
Figures 6 through 10.

Figure 6. Scatterplot of STI 2.0 Connecting to God Scores and Years Attending Lutheran
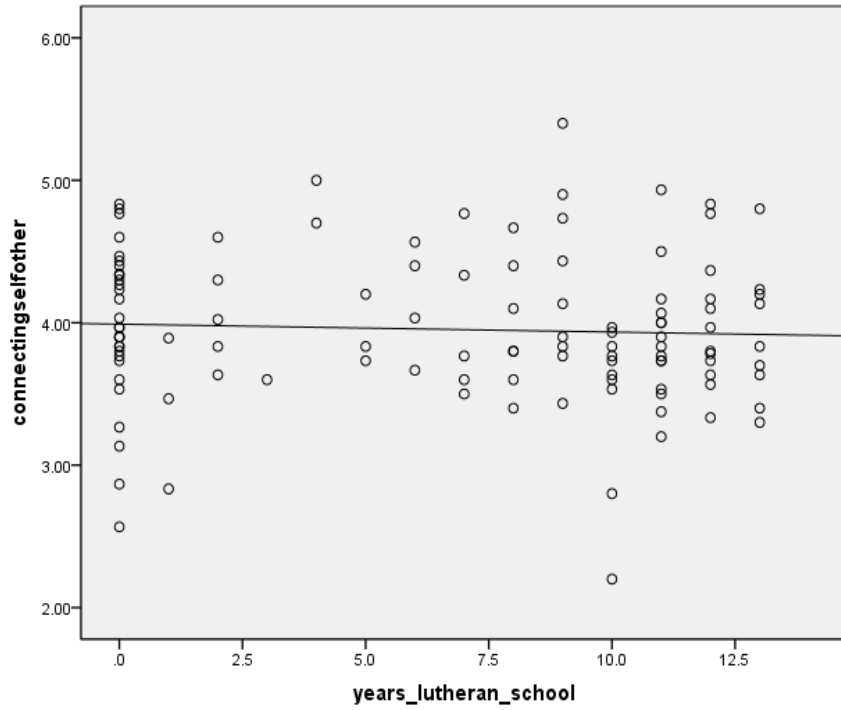Schools.

Figure 7. Scatterplot of STI 2.0 Connecting Self to Others Scores and Years Attending Lutheran Schools.
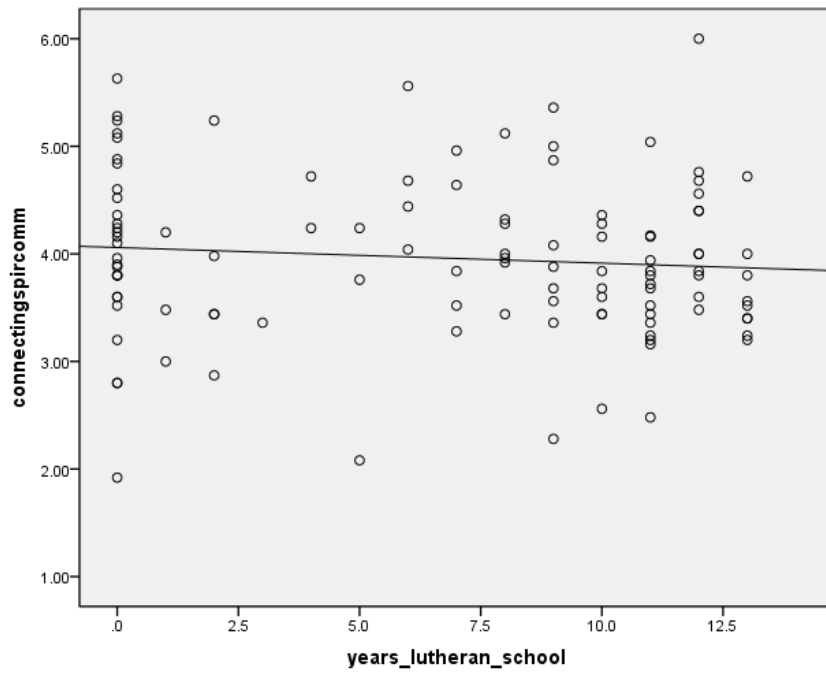

Figure 8. Scatterplot of STI 2.0 Connecting to Spiritual Communities Scores and Years Attending Lutheran Schools.
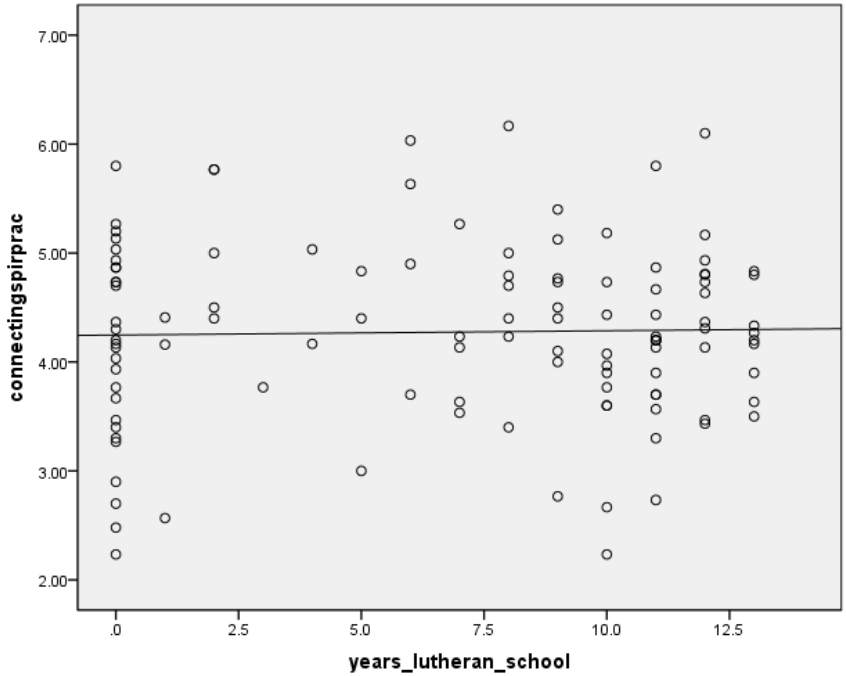
Figure 9. Scatterplot of STI 2.0 Connecting to Spiritual Practices Scores and Years Attending Lutheran Schools.
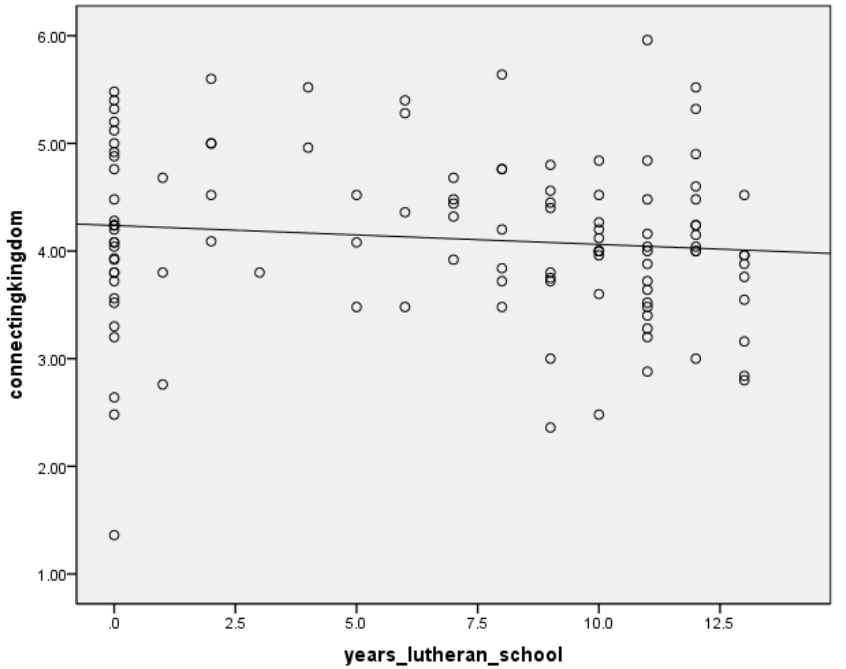

Figure 10. Scatterplot of STI 2.0 Connecting to God's Kingdom Scores and Years Attending Lutheran Schools.

The visual examination of the scatterplots indicates a linear relationship exists between the STI 2.0 domains and the number of years that participants spent attending Lutheran or public schools. The assumption of homoscedasticity can also be determined with a visual inspection of the same scatterplots. If the data is homoscedastic the data points will cluster at nearly the same width around the scatterplot. Based upon a visual inspection, the assumption of homoscedasticity cannot be maintained. Since Pearson's r requires this assumption, the non-parametric Spearman's rho test was used to assess the bivariate correlation between each STI 2.0 domain and the number of years that participants attended Lutheran schools.

No correlation was found in the data set for any of the five STI 2.0 domains. Table 7 lists the Spearman's rho test results for each of the domains.

Table 7

Spearman rho Correlations for Each STI 2.0 Domain

	r_s	n	Sig. (2-tailed)
Connecting to God	-.061	116	.52
Connecting Self to Others	-.108	115	.25
Connecting to Spiritual Communities	-.151	112	.11
Connecting to Spiritual Practices	-.014	114	.88
Connecting to God's Kingdom	-.158	116	.09

Based upon the results of the Spearman rho there is insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis H_{02}. There is no statistically significant relationship between the number of years Lutheran adolescents spent attending Lutheran schools and their Spiritual Transformation Inventory scores.

Summary

This research project used a non-experimental, causal-comparative (ex post facto) design comparing Lutheran adolescent's school attendance with their STI 2.0 test scores. Data was collected after administering the STI 2.0 to adolescents from eight different LCMS churches in the Midwest. After conducting assumption tests, two research questions were analyzed using a *t*-test and a bivariate correlation through SPSS 19.

The first research question compared the STI 2.0 scores between Lutheran adolescents who currently attend Lutheran high schools and have attended Lutheran schools for at least six years and Lutheran adolescents who attend public high schools and have attended public schools for at least six years. The results of a *t*-test indicated no significant difference between groups on any of the five STI 2.0 domains. Therefore the null hypothesis H_{01} was not rejected; there is no statistically significant difference between Lutheran students that attend Lutheran high schools and those that attend public high schools.

Research question 2 explored the relationship between the number of years that students spent attending Lutheran schools and the five domains of the STI 2.0. Since the assumption of homoscedasticity was not maintained, a bivariate correlation using Spearman's rho was used to examine the correlation between the variables. The test indicated no significant relationship between the length of attendance and the STI 2.0 domains. The null hypothesis H_{02} was not rejected; there is no statistically significant relationship between the number of years Lutheran adolescents spent attending Lutheran schools and their Spiritual Transformation Inventory scores. The following chapter will discuss the implications of the findings and provide a final analysis of the research project.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The members of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod invest significant financial resources into supporting Lutheran elementary and secondary schools. In addition, substantial numbers of Lutheran teachers are trained every year to teach in Lutheran schools. Lutheran education leaders believe strongly that Lutheran schools exist primarily to promote and foster Christian spiritual development within their students (Cochran, 2008; Doering & Eells, 2010). However, little empirical evidence exists to determine if Lutheran schools actually make a significant difference in the faith development of their students.

The purpose of this causal-comparative and correlational study was to examine the effectiveness of Lutheran schools in promoting Christian spiritual growth in their students. Spiritual growth was quantitatively assessed by examining both the difference between Lutheran high school students and Lutheran public school students on the Spiritual Transformation Inventory 2.0 (STI) test as well as the correlation between Lutheran students' length of attendance at Lutheran schools and their STI 2.0 test scores. The STI 2.0 was specifically designed to measure relational spirituality and has been taken by thousands of Christian adolescents (Hall, 2010). The test primarily relied upon attachment theory to assess participants' connection to God and their relational spirituality. The survey consisted of 31 subscales (155 questions) and five domains. The research study took place within Lutheran churches in the U.S. Midwest using a convenience sample of youth from those churches. The independent variable was the type of school which the students' attended, Lutheran or public, as well as the number of years for which they attended. The dependent variable was defined as the participants' multidimensional scores from the STI 2.0 test.

This chapter provides a summary of the findings as well as a discussion regarding their implications. In addition the study's limitations are considered, recommendations for future research are explored and a final conclusion is offered.

Summary of the Findings

Data for this study was collected through LCMS churches which agreed to administer a spiritual development survey to their high school youth. The survey used in this study was the Spiritual Transformation Inventory 2.0 (STI) test developed by Todd Hall (Hall, 2010). The survey was administered within LCMS churches in either a paper or online format to their Lutheran adolescents ($n = 129$) enrolled in secondary schooling.

Two research questions guided the data collection throughout this study.

Research Question 1: To what extent is there a statistically significant difference between the Spiritual Transformation Inventory 2.0 scores of Lutheran adolescents who attend Lutheran high schools and attended Lutheran schools for more than six years verses Lutheran adolescents who attend public high schools and attended public schools for more than six years?

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between the number of years students spent attending Lutheran schools and their Spiritual Transformation Inventory 2.0 scores?

The first research question sought to determine if a significant difference existed between the mean scores of Lutheran adolescents who attended Lutheran high schools verses Lutheran adolescents who attended public high schools on the STI 2.0 test. A *t*-test was conducted to compare the mean scores between the two groups for each of the five STI 2.0 domains: Connecting to God, Connecting Self to Others, Connecting to Spiritual Communities, Connecting to Spiritual Practices, and Connecting to God's Kingdom.

The high associated *p* values for each of the five *t*-tests (Table 6) indicated that no statistically significant difference existed between Lutherans adolescents attending Lutheran schools and Lutheran adolescents attending public schools. Therefore the null hypothesis for research question number one was not rejected. This suggests that students attending Lutheran schools for more than six years do not score higher on the STI 2.0 than students who attend public schools for more than six years.

The second research question sought to determine the relationship between the number of years students spent attending Lutheran schools and their Spiritual Transformation Inventory scores. The Spearman r_s nonparametric test was used to measure the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. No significant correlation was found (Table 7) between the numbers of years that students attended Lutheran schools and the five domains of their STI 2.0 test scores. The null hypothesis was not rejected. This suggests that students who attend Lutheran schools for a longer period of time do not score higher on the STI 2.0 than students who attend for a shorter period of time or who do not attend Lutheran schools at all.

Discussion of the findings

In the previous two decades many studies have been conducted which have theorized that strong attachment bonds with caregivers, mentors, and/or Christian social communities would correspond with strong attachment bonds to God (Beck, 2006; Desrosiers et al., 2011; Hall et al., 1998; Hall, 2004; Hall, 2009; Hill and Hall, 2002; Sandage & Shults, 2007; Shepson, 2010; Simpson et al., 2008; TenElshof & Furrow, 2000). Several of these studies provided evidence that there is, in fact, a statistically significant relationship between attachment bonds with caregivers, mentors, and/or social communities and attachment to God (Cassibba et al., 2008; Desrosiers et al., 2011; Hall et al., 1998; Hall et al., 2009; TenElschof & Furrow, 2000). This

study assumed that Lutheran schools would support and strengthen their students' spiritual attachment bonds through the students' long term exposure to Christian mentors and role-models, Christian friendships, and Christian community. In addition, it was assumed that students who attended Lutheran schools would score higher on the STI 2.0 test than students who attended public schools. However, no significant correlation was observed between attendance at Lutheran schools and their STI 2.0 scores and no significant difference was observed between students who attended Lutheran schools and those that attended public schools.

The most likely explanation for the lack of evidence is due to the composition of the sample population. The students in the study, regardless of which school they attended, indicated high levels of church attendance and familial religious engagement. The studies previously cited on attachment to God consistently indicate that attachment to significant caregivers and participation in spiritual communities is strongly correlated to attachment to God. This research study supports those conclusions.

Among study participants, 82% ($n = 96$) indicated that they came from married, two parent households. In addition, 60% of participants ($n = 70$) reported that, outside of regular meal prayers, their families prayed together at least once per week and some families (21%; $n = 24$) reported praying together three or more times. Furthermore, a substantial portion of the participants, 71% ($n = 83$), in this study reported attending church at least once per week and 8% ($n = 9$) reported more frequent attendance. Finally, 68% ($n = 79$) reported involvement with a ministry within their local church in addition to Sunday worship.

The sample population for the study was influenced by both the significant number of two-parent homes and high rates of religious involvement. It should be expected then that these students would score highly on spiritual attachment studies, like the STI 2.0, regardless of their

choice of schooling. Therefore, although the study did not find a significant difference or correlation between Lutheran school attendance and STI 2.0 test scores, this is likely due to the participants' high levels of attachment to God resulting from their spiritually supportive home environments and active involvement in church communities.

There is some statistical evidence within this study to support this conclusion. This study did not attempt to compare STI 2.0 test scores between subjects whose parents were married and those whose parents were divorced. However, when a *t*-test comparing the mean STI 2.0 scores between participants from two-parent homes (*n* = 96) and participants from divorced homes (*n* = 16) was conducted, a significant difference between the two groups emerged on two of the STI 2.0 domains. On both the *Connecting to God* and *Connecting to the Kingdom* domain, statistically significant differences were observed between the groups: $t(110) = 1.93$, $p < .05$, and $t(110) = 2.78$, $p < .01$ respectively. These results should be interpreted cautiously due to the small sample size of the participants from divorced homes yet the differences in scores are important to consider. Participants from divorced homes scored lower on *Connecting to God* and *Connecting to the Kingdom* STI 2.0 domains than participants whose parents were married to one another.

The study also revealed evidence that a commitment to activities within spiritual communities outside of worship had a positive effect upon STI 2.0 scores. A *t*-test comparing the mean STI 2.0 scores between subjects who reported involvement in a ministry activity within their church (*n* = 79) and those study participants who did not participate in additional ministries (*n* = 36) revealed a significant difference on two subscale scores. Significant results were observed for both the *Connecting to Spiritual Communities* subscale, $t(108) = 2.26$, $p < .05$, and the *Connecting to God's Kingdom* subscale, $t(113) = 2.78$, $p < .01$. These findings suggest that

participation in spiritual communities, in addition to Sunday worship services, positively influence STI 2.0 spiritual development test scores among Lutheran adolescents.

The implications for these findings are quite important for several reasons. First, it is essential that churches which desire their youth to be spiritually engaged and connected to God must work to strengthen families. As previously suggested by Hall (2004), supportive and stable relational interactions between young people and their significant caregivers will influence faith development in positive ways. If attachment to God, especially among adolescents, is primarily supported through primary caregivers, then churches must work to support and encourage married couples; both in their marriages and in their spiritual practices for raising their children.

Second, these findings reveal that another way to strengthen adolescents' connection to God and the church is to get them involved with ministries and activities above and beyond Sunday morning worship. Obviously attendance at Sunday services is a vital part of raising faith-filled young people. However, this study shows that those adolescents who are more involved in their churches are likely to experience a closer connection to God and to the Christian community. The Lutheran church, and by extension Lutheran schools, must find creative, meaningful, and spiritually significant ways of involving adolescents in congregational life or risk losing them to the overwhelming number of counter influences.

Third, this study suggests that students who enroll in Lutheran schools do not automatically grow closer to God and the church than their public school peers. Students from two parent homes, who regularly attend worship, and who are more involved with their churches are doing similarly well no matter which type of school they attend. This could be interpreted as a failure of Lutheran schools to significantly impact spiritual growth but that is not what these results seem to suggest. There is no evidence that Lutheran schools are not faithfully providing

Christian role-models, Christian friends, and a Christian community for adolescents. Instead the results suggest that parental stability and church involvement are important indicators of attachment to God and that school choice alone is not a significant factor. These results provide a cautionary rejoinder to those who might assume that students who attend Lutheran schools will easily overcome the obstacles to spiritual attachment brought about by divorce and spiritually disconnected families.

Study Limitations

Several limitations, including threats to internal and external validity, can be identified within this study. Internal validity threats include the failure to control for extraneous variables that may have affected the results. Threats to external validity prevent the research findings from being applied to settings apart from those being studied. The implications for this study can only be adequately assessed after accounting for both kinds of threats.

The first threat to internal validity is due to the nonexperimental *ex post facto* design of the study. The results of these types of research projects must always be interpreted tentatively because it is difficult to ascertain whether the effects observed are due to the study's presumed independent variable or some other unidentified variable. In this case, since the study's sample groups could not be randomly assigned to the independent variable, Lutheran or public school attendance, it is difficult to know what pre-existing conditions may have influenced the participants prior to taking the survey. For example, this study assumed that the type of school that Lutheran adolescents' attended would have a significant effect upon their STI 2.0 scores. However, as previously discussed, it seems probable that parental attachment relationships and church attendance exerted a more powerful influence on faith development than school choice.

It is not possible to clearly separate the effect that a variety of independent variables, including school choice, might have had on the participants STI 2.0 test scores.

A second threat to internal validity may have been a compensatory rivalry between the Lutheran and public school students. Survey documentation provided to students and parents explained that the study intended to compare the spiritual development between those adolescents who attended Lutheran schools and those which attended public schools. It is possible that students from either group could have seen themselves in competition with one another and therefore answered the STI 2.0 survey questions more favorably than they might otherwise have done. If this occurred then any observed difference, or lack thereof, could be attributed to the unusual motivation of the study participants rather than school choice (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 387).

A third limitation to the study that may have affected external validity was the small composition of the sample group due to low response rate from LCMS churches. The adolescents who completed the survey ($n = 129$) came from eight Lutheran churches; though more than 40 churches were originally invited to participate. Additionally, the sample churches tended to be large and were situated in more affluent suburban areas. The researcher is confident that these results can be generalized to other Midwestern, suburban Lutheran churches. However, the small localized response rate may reduce the ability to generalize to the larger population of LCMS churches and adolescents around the United States.

Finally, as previously discussed, the sample for this survey consisted largely of adolescents from two parent households who attended church at least once a week. It is not surprising that this population was overrepresented in the sample since these are the adolescents that churches in the study reported were the easiest to recruit due to their increased attendance in

church youth activities. However, this demographic similarity can significantly impact the ability to generalize the results to the larger population of Lutheran adolescents from around the United States. A larger sample of some underrepresented groups, including adolescents from single parent homes as well as those less committed to their church communities, would have allowed the researcher to disaggregate the data to better study the effect of Lutheran schools upon specific subgroups of adolescents. A larger and more diverse sample would have improved the external validity of the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study is unique in examining the spiritual development of Lutheran adolescents. It adds to the current body of literature concerning, not only the faith lives of Lutheran adolescents, but also the effect of Lutheran schools upon spiritual development. In addition, it supports the conclusion of earlier studies that stable families and involvement in religious communities improve attachment to God. However, there are a number of recommendations to be made that would improve future research in this area.

The first recommendation is that a greater sample pool needs to be included to improve external validity. A higher number of LCMS churches from around the United States should be included in order to gain a more diverse sampling of data. This study invited more than 40 churches to participate but only eight churches eventually provided research data. In addition several of the churches involved in the study had very low response rates. Most churches indicated that getting teenagers and their parents to sign consent forms was extremely difficult. In addition, once consent forms were returned finding the time to gather teenagers together to fill out a survey was often even more complicated. Improving the response rate of churches would help to provide a larger sample pool.

Second, several church groups conveyed frustration at the length of the survey instrument. Although the STI 2.0 primary domain test questions were able to be completed in about 20 minutes, the STI 2.0 also included a large number of demographic questions that irritated some survey takers. Some churches expressed frustration that the full survey could take up to one hour to complete. A shortened version of the STI 2.0 demographic section is recommended to improve participation and reduce the time required to complete the survey instrument.

A final recommendation for future studies is to gather more data from adolescents who are only marginally involved in church activities or who attend worship less frequently. The sample of this study included a significant majority of subjects who regularly attended church. This made it difficult to determine if Lutheran school attendance made a significant difference in their STI 2.0 scores. However, adolescents who are members of churches, but are less committed, might provide more focused attention on the effect of Lutheran schools for those adolescents that are not as significantly influenced by their church communities. The difficulty with this suggestion is that this population is extremely difficult to survey precisely because they are not regularly committed to their church community. Nevertheless, by including more data from this population, it would improve the external validity and provide a measure of the impact that Lutheran schools have upon this group.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the results of the Spiritual Transformation Inventory test given to 129 Lutheran adolescents. The STI 2.0 test was administered through eight large Lutheran churches in the United States Midwest. Respondents completed either an online or paper version of the test which included 155 STI 2.0 questions divided into five spiritual domains. The

Lutheran adolescents' mean STI 2.0 domain scores were analyzed to determine if a significant difference existed between students who attended Lutheran schools for six or more years and who currently attended Lutheran high schools verses students who attended public schools for six or more years and who currently attended public high schools. No significant difference was observed between the groups.

A second analysis was conducted to discover if a correlation existed between the numbers of years that students attended Lutheran schools and their STI 2.0 domain scores. The data revealed no significant correlation between the independent and dependent variables. Although the two research questions considered for this study did not elicit significant results this is probably not due to the failure of Lutheran schools to strengthen the faith of their students. Rather it is more likely due to the positive influence of confounding variables such as the high numbers of study participants who reported regular church attendance, involvement in additional ministries within their church, and the large percentage of two parent households.

Additional study data supported this conclusion. Strong family relationships play a significant role in the spiritual development of adolescents. Study participants from two parent homes scored higher on the STI 2.0 than those from divorced homes. In addition, adolescents who reported involvement in church activities beyond Sunday worship also scored higher on the STI 2.0 than those who were less involved. Several authors have suggested that such links are likely since, according to attachment theory, relationship with God is mediated by an individuals' relationship with significant caregivers and spiritual communities (Beck, 2006; Hall, 2004; Sandage & Shults, 2007; Sarazin, 2011; Simpson et al., 2008).

This study serves as a reminder that faith development is a multifaceted and complicated process. Fundamentally, Christian faith depends upon the work of the Holy Spirit coming to

dwell within the believer (John 3:5, 14:26; Acts 2:38). The work of the Holy Spirit is mediated through the proclaimed Word of God (Rom. 10:17) and through the teaching and modeling provided by significant caregivers and the church (Matt. 28:20). The churches of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod have attempted to fulfill this duty to proclaim the Gospel and teach and model the faith in many ways. For the youth this responsibility has been supported especially through the formation of Lutheran primary and secondary schools and the calling of commissioned minister teachers. However, adolescent faith development also depends upon both spiritually nurturing homes, and involvement in faithful worshiping communities of fellow believers. Through these three pillars of spiritual support, homes, churches, and schools working together, Lutheran adolescents have a much greater chance of developing a deep and abiding trust in Christ's atoning work for them.

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APPENDIX A

Liberty University IRB Approval Letter

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The Graduate School at Liberty University

January 24, 2013

Michael James Weider
IRB Approval 1497.012413: Lutheran Adolescent Spiritual Development: The Effect
of School Choice on Spiritual Transformation Inventory Test Scores

Dear Mike,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the
Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection
proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to
human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms
for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your
research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

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Research Study Recruitment Script

Dear member of _____ Lutheran Church:

You are invited to participate in an important research study being conducted by Michael Weider; a doctoral student from Liberty University as well as a first-year student at Concordia Seminary. This study is seeking information to better understand the spiritual development of Lutheran adolescents especially concerning the impact of school choice on faith development.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete an online survey about your religious life and relationship with God. It should take approximately 30 minutes for you to complete the online survey. You may complete the survey at home or on a specific day at church which your youth leader will inform you about. Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal identifying information will be required.

In order to participate, you must have your parents sign the Parental Consent form and you must sign the Participant Assent forms. Both forms must be signed and returned to your youth leader before you can participate in the research study. After both forms have been turned in your youth leader will provide the details on how to complete the study.

Your participation is greatly appreciated and will make a significant difference in understanding Lutheran adolescent faith development. If you have any questions you may ask your youth leader or contact Mike Weider directly at mjweider@liberty.edu.

Thank you very much for your consideration to participate in this research study.