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Abstract

Research has shown that spirituality is an important function of a child's social, emotional, and personal development. Nevertheless, minimal research exists on spiritual attitudes and values in young children. This study examined children's development and spirituality using a modified version of the Attitudes and Values Questionnaire (AVQ). The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) developed the AVQ with the dimensions of Conscience, Compassion, Social Growth, Emotional Growth, Service to Others, Commitment to God, and Commitment to Jesus. Commitment to God and Commitment to Jesus were optional dimensions later added by ACER to focus specifically on Christian principles. Following permission from ACER to adapt the AVQ for younger children, the questionnaire was modified using the Flesch-Kincaid Readability Scale to allow for better question comprehension among the young participants, ages 5–14. Researchers contacted family members and various Christian schools in their home states across the eastern United States and asked if they would be willing to administer the modified AVQ to their students. The intention was to expand upon knowledge about young children's attitudes and values related to Christian spirituality. Specifically, the researchers were trying to find if there may be relationships among children's view of self, view of others, and spirituality. Correlations were run in order to determine if different dimensions, particularly the social growth dimensions and the Christian dimensions, were significantly related. A correlation chart compared all variables and the results indicated that there were strong correlations among the dimensions.

Keywords: spirituality, children, attitudes, values, development

Spiritual Attitudes and Values in Young Children

Though spirituality is difficult to quantify or measure, it remains essential to every human being. The ability for humans to have deeper understanding, creativity, and faith is one foundational element that separates them from other creatures. However, while this phenomenon develops within each individual, questions remain unanswered as to how it develops, when it develops, and why. There is a need to grasp a deeper understanding of how Christian spirituality relates with the attitudes and values of children. Although analyses for causation would be premature, the search for correlations may have stronger implications for how Christian spirituality corresponds with daily attitude and values.

Significance of Spirituality in Children

Spirituality encompasses a sense of belonging and understanding of the world around people. However, the idea of spirituality is abstract and difficult to define. Most of literature attempts to understand spirituality through corresponding attributes such as levels of joy, forgiveness, or contentment (Zhang, 2010). These attributes are only pieces of spirituality and neglect to effectively grasp the full definition of the concept. Spirituality focuses on the internal health of an individual, resulting in one's search for self-discovery, wholeness, and purpose in life (Cervantes & Arczynski, 2015; Scarlett, 2006; & Zhang, 2010). Sifers, Warren, and Jackson (2012) defined spirituality as an individual's personal set of beliefs that can additionally, but not necessarily, include religious practices and participation in the activity of a religious body. Spirituality frames human perception and filters how one reacts to situations around him or her based on those internalized beliefs. This spiritual part of the human psyche attempts to identify the meaning and purpose of life.

Additionally, clinical practices are recognizing the significance of spirituality. Cervantes

and Arczynski (2015) acknowledged the growth in understanding spirituality within academic and professional areas of psychology. They discovered that spirituality correlates with resiliency due to feelings of purpose and hope especially in times of crisis. Masten and Narayan (2012) explained that former child soldiers in Uganda who displayed stronger spirituality demonstrated better resilience after their tours. Again, having a perceived source of hope encourages growth and purpose in life. According to the same study, the children's positive resiliency levels were not the results of torture, but rather the ability to reintegrate. The authors suggested that spirituality enhances adaptability, which is a crucial skill in a constantly changing world.

Spirituality and Religiosity

In conjunction with spirituality, religiosity also relates to one's personal beliefs. However, there are a few technical differences between the two. Spirituality grapples with an internal understanding of life whereas religiosity focuses on outward expression. Additionally, while spirituality is hard to measure, religiosity can be operationalized by time spent in prayer, involvement in a religious institution, and rituals. Zhang (2010) defined religiosity as a group's organized system of worship, composed of traditions and dogma. Examples of religious Christian dogma include tithing, church attendance, prayer, and fasting. George Scarlett (2006) also recognized true spiritual development as a movement toward perfection, in both outward expression and through personal growth. Conversely, religiosity commonly reflects spirituality because depending on one's foundational belief system, the individual will display corresponding actions. For example, one who professes Christianity would go to church or help someone in need because those actions are congruent with what the individual professes. The issue resides in the motivations behind each action. While outward expressions can be conceptualized, the reasoning behind such a decision is more obscure. Therefore, there is a need

to define spirituality and to incorporate outward expression along with the supporting thoughts and emotions behind each action.

Aspects of Christianity in Regard to Children

It may be possible to improve upon the lack of empirical research by examining the fundamental influence spirituality has on children. Biblically, the scriptures emphasize the importance of faith like that of a child. In Matthew 18:2-4, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (NIV). In Mark 10:13-15, children approached Jesus without question or hesitation. In fact, the disciples who pulled the children away from him were admonished because Jesus used the children’s approach as a paradigm for how people are to seek after God. To receive the kingdom like a child corresponds with how the children undoubtedly gravitated toward Jesus. Faith does not contain doubt because Christian spirituality is built upon faith in Jesus Christ. It is possible that children’s depth of spirituality may actually be greater than that of adults, especially during times of trial (Hufton, 2006). Judith Gundry-Volf (2000) reiterated Jesus’ point by stating that adults should adopt the innocent ways of children. She concluded that children are more preoccupied with being in Jesus’ presence than with upholding the law of the Old Testament.

Interestingly, Gundry-Volf discussed that children are solely and entirely dependent on their parents, and that the attitudes children develop consequently stem from a genuine need and desire rather than an obligation to a law. This statement provides support for the idea that a child’s faith is innate to the point of innocent dependency on his or her heavenly Father for satisfaction. The importance of childlike faith stems from the child’s dependency needs and not from the maturity aspect. Child spirituality needs to be dissected separately from other childlike

aspects in order to understand the integral parts of a child's belief systems which will then ultimately affect how they view life during maturation. Understanding basic factors in a child's spirituality is important in order to grasp how a child later develops a belief system.

Development of Spirituality Theories

Kohlberg & Moral Development

Lawrence Kohlberg's (1963) research on moral development laid the foundation for further investigation into spiritual development. Kohlberg's research focused on moral development of children more than their explicit spiritual development. He was one of the first to offer some basis for morality or spirituality in children. Kohlberg developed six distinct stages of moral development. These stages defined moral development as the transformations that occur in a person's form or structure of thought in relation to morality and values. Each of the six stages is categorized into three different compartments. In Level I, morality is derived from observations that the child makes about rewards and punishments for certain actions. Since children in this stage are young, cognitive thinking is not fully developed and they base morality on a plain set of rules. The only reason to follow these rules, in the child's mind, would either be to avoid punishment or to satisfy a specific need (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Children are naturally egocentric at this age (2-9) and that egocentrism is displayed in how they view morality.

The development of morality appears to be linked with a child's cognitive development. Piaget's (1962) findings in the area of cognitive development coincide with Kohlberg's (1963) stages of moral development. Although children in the concrete operational stage (ages 7-12) of Piaget's theory no longer reason only in objective terms, they still have not developed enough cognitively to think in an abstract manner. The concrete operational stage of Piaget's cognitive

development coincides with the Level I and Level II stages of Kohlberg's moral development.

Fowler & Faith Development

While moral development is essential for any child, the previous theories do not present the information in the context of any religion in particular. Fowler (2004) sought to specifically define Christian spiritual development. As previously mentioned, spirituality and morality are completely different entities. Fowler defined faith and spirituality as the beliefs at the core of peoples' beings, how they define the world, and how they are able to face problems that arise in their lives. Fowler's stages are written from a Christian perspective. Of his six stages (i.e. Primal, Intuitive-projective, Mythic-literal, Synthetic-conventional, Individuative-reflective, Conjunctive, and Universalizing), young children are in both the Intuitive-projective and Mythic-literal stages.

The Intuitive-projective stage of faith usually develops around toddlerhood and continues into early childhood. Fowler (2004) argued that a milestone in this stage is when death becomes literal in the child's mind. The child also, through certain experiences, begins to question and crave his or her safety in different situations; danger becomes an event that cannot always be escaped. Children at this stage do not understand cause-effect relationships. They lack the ability to empathize with other people since they are still egocentric in their reasoning. In this Intuitive-projective stage, faith is associated with symbols and images that are strongly correlated with powerful feelings of love, companionship, and even guilt and fear. Fowler claimed that there is a great possibility for formation of deep and sustainable emotional orientations in the child's mind to a particular faith, despite inevitable cognitive immaturity. The emotional association can possibly explain why many mature Christians who were raised in a faith-based home claim that they came to accept their faith at a young age.

According to Fowler (2004), the next pertinent stage of faith development is the Mythic-literal stage. This stage begins at middle childhood and continues until the child develops enough in his or her own personal understanding of faith; this stage is not necessarily bound by an upper age limit. Children and adolescents in this stage of faith development are beginning to see that their previous belief that God rewards good and punishes evil is not always accurate. People begin to see God in less concrete and more abstract terms, and even possible doubts begin to form. This can be considered a turning point in a person's faith; he or she can either hold fast to his or her beliefs or abandon them for ideas that seem to give more clarity.

Possible Components of Spirituality

Despite the elusiveness of the term spirituality, the following five components represent an integrated definition of spirituality that have been empirically tested. Conscience, Compassion, Emotional Growth, Social Growth, and Service to Others are all possible facets of spirituality. Conscience represents an awareness of moral right and wrongs without needing to be reminded of such rules. The Compassion component represents an awareness of the emotional state of others and experiencing empathy for those who are hurting. Emotional Growth entails an understanding of one's own emotional state and how to regulate it enough to function clearly and practically. Social Growth can be seen in mature relationships that revolve around friendship and goodness toward one another despite differences. Finally, Service to Others is actualized through a denial of one's own needs in order to benefit others.

Conscience

Conscience refers to the internalization of right and wrong. Kochanska, Koenig, Barry, Kim, and Yoon (2010) suggested that children who obey the rules, display concern for others, and experience guilt, demonstrate a moral conscience because they exhibit a consistent standard

of values and behaviors. The researchers hypothesized that conscience develops from internalizing and pairing emotions with parents' rules. The results were consistent with the hypothesis. Children constructed their consciences through past experiences, influences surrounding them, and their own emotions. They identified what is good through the learned behaviors from their parents and interactions with friends. This also suggests predictions for future behavior because children will implement past knowledge into new and unclear situations. Children also develop a sense of an idiosyncratic perception and avoid cognitive dissonance by behaving consistently with the idea that they are good and moral.

In the study, internalization was measured through paradigms (Kochanska, Koenig, Barry, Kim, & Yoon, 2010). In the paradigms, parents instructed their children not to play with certain toys. The children who scored high on internalization complied with their parent's wishes for them not to touch the toy. These children did not have any external cues or rewards and therefore demonstrated self-control. The children refrained from playing with the toys due to their internalized beliefs and desires to preserve morality. Likewise, habits and behaviors that children commonly exhibit are recent behaviors, which are more accessible during memory retrieval. Recently learned behaviors, whether moral or immoral, are easier to recollect than older memories. If a child practices moral behaviors frequently, the authors suggest that those same behaviors will most likely resurface more frequently.

Compassion

Compassion, along with many other emotional orientations, can be difficult to define. However, a simple, more universal definition of compassion is the ability to understand another person's suffering and the desire to take that pain away. Compassion is another aspect of spirituality that needs to be fostered and developed in children. This component consists of many

aspects, including cognitive processes, empathy, sympathy, and emotional regulation (Roeser & Eccles, 2015).

There is a developing field of study that also examined self-compassion. Self-compassion is similar to self-esteem, however, it is not as egotistical as inflated self-esteem (Neff, 2009). Self-compassion has three components: self-kindness, a sense of common humanity, and mindfulness. Self-kindness is the propensity for people to not be critical of themselves at times when criticism may be reasonable. The concept of common humanity is one's realization that humans are not perfect and will make mistakes, but that imperfection simultaneously connects all humans to one another. Finally, mindfulness is a person's self-awareness and how he or she impacts the world. Individuals who have high self-compassion tend to have stronger intrinsic motivation to grow and change than people who have low self-compassion.

Emotional Growth

As children move from dependency to autonomy, there is general growth that occurs in the natural pattern of development. One particular area is that of emotional growth, furthered through challenging circumstances and the ability to cope with life events. Practical growth in emotional understanding (EU) comes predominantly from interpersonal interactions in which children learn to identify others' emotions, develop secure attachments, and consequently experience fewer behavior problems (Karstad, Wichstrom, Reinfjell, Belsky, & Berg-Nielsen, 2015). Typical interactions with other children at school and during play help to build necessary social skills and empathy for one another. Additionally, Karstad et al. (2015) found that parents' emotional input into their child's life and social skills predicted an increase in the child's EU. The personal connections made initially in the home apparently prime children for the emotional experiences they may encounter in the world.

Again, parental involvement appears to be a promising predictor of emotional growth and development in children, as discovered also by Wang, Hill, and Hofkens (2014). Especially during the transition into adolescence, parents have a hard time engaging their teens in a functional way. This may partly explain why teens infamously suffer from tremendous emotional dysregulation throughout adolescence. The connection between parent and child is important for children so they can continue to mature in proper emotive components, such as empathy and understanding. Successful emotional management can possibly reduce depression and problem behaviors and ultimately give teens a sense of meaning and purpose. Skilled emotional regulation in young children and teens can teach them to extend themselves to others during difficult times and ask for help in their own personal struggles.

Social Growth

Social growth increases alongside a person's physical and mental development, beginning at birth and continuing throughout the rest of life. Exposure in school to different types of people and personalities shapes the way a child forms relationships. A child's level of social growth determines how well he or she handles social situations and acclimates to new ones. With social growth comes prosocial behavior, the propensity to care for, and get along with others (Flouri & Sarmadi, 2016). The benefits of prosocial behavior extend to both the giver and receiver in the relationship as both inherit an increased sense of well-being. Likewise, Cervantes and Arczynski (2015) argued that signs of relational maturation include the ability to establish and strengthen relationships in a healthy and mutual way. Relationships that have depth and diversity show social growth as indicated by understanding, relating, problem-solving, and adapting to more than one type of person or situation. Conversely, relationships that result in separation due to trivial arguments demonstrate immaturity.

Social growth can also be evident through academic achievement. Fu, Chen, Wang, and Yang (2016) related academic achievement to early social behaviors in Chinese children. These achievement trajectories appeared to predict major features of social and psychological performance. The participants who had high sociability skills and low externalizing behaviors (e.g. aggressive and delinquent attitudes) had stronger correlations with higher academic abilities. The researchers inferred that these students had greater social competence and were less likely to externalize negative behaviors, which ultimately would contribute to the child's social success. Those who were considered low on shyness and high on social-behavioral problems scored low in academic achievement.

Additionally, Boyatzis (2012) evaluated the influence that social factors directly have on an individual's spirituality. Boyatzis found strong positive correlations between an individual's frequency of church attendance and that of the important people in the individual's life. In other words, if a child or teen's parents and friends attend church often, Boyatzis predicted that this would influence the child to attend more as well. Younger children and teens reported higher church participation when their particular social groups also affiliated with a church. These results indicate the importance of social influence, via parents or peers, on an individual's spiritual development.

Service to Others

It appears that children have an inclination toward offering help and eagerly seek opportunities to help both adults and each other. However, community service and helping others is often delegated to young adults and older adults, rather than children (Silva & Langhout, 2015). It is possible that adults inadvertently see children's efforts as ineffective or insignificant. Despite this, when children are empowered in such a way by parents and teachers, they may

come to develop social skills such as service and leadership. In an atmosphere of encouragement and peer-based support, a sense of community can develop, and consequently lead the children to take on meaningful roles as helpers. Children can learn at an early age how to become active and selflessly engaged in their settings for the benefit of others.

The service learning strategy, which allows students to actively serve others primarily for the purpose of experiential learning outside of the classroom, has recently received recognition in educational contexts. Many prior studies on this technique have revealed positive results for younger and older students, such as knowledge application, exposure to real-world circumstances, and a better self-awareness (Bettencourt, M., 2015; Butler, M., 2013; Felten & Clayton, 2011). In a particular study on service learning, Fair and Delaplane (2014) sought to evaluate the outcome when children were paired with *grandfriends* at a senior facility. Some known benefits of this type of service include breaking stereotypes and perceptions of the elderly. Elementary students were ironically able to find commonality with their grandfriends and establish meaningful relationships which benefited both the student and adult. When Fair and Delaplane (2014) compared the children's before-and-after responses regarding perceptions of the elderly, there was more positive language and increased understanding about older adults. The children often found enjoyment in the service learning opportunity and claimed that they made their grandfriends happy, too.

Past Scales for Measurement

Spirituality Questionnaire

Past research has been done in an attempt to develop an accurate survey that would be both valid and reliable while also being user-friendly. For example, an evaluation done by Parsian and Dunning (2009) with the Spirituality Questionnaire (SQ) revealed that the SQ was a

valid scale to measure spirituality. Parsian and Dunning presented the survey to young adults suffering from diabetes to see if there was a correlation between scores on the SQ and the quality of the young adults' coping with their chronic illness. However, even though the scale was validated, the scale only measured spirituality in terms of self-perception and how one relates to the world around himself or herself. It did not necessarily consider religiosity or religious orientation.

Youth Spirituality Scale

Another scale called the Youth Spirituality Scale (YSS; Sifers, Warren, & Jackson, 2012) is a measure specifically designed to measure spirituality in children aged 8–14. The survey has twenty questions ranging from, “How sure are you that there is a God, Higher Power, or Ultimate Reality?” to “How often do you apologize?” The original intention of the study in order to develop the scale, was to create a definition of spirituality for youths that can support three distinct scales: (1) Relationship with God, Higher Power or Ultimate Reality, (2) Existential Well-Being, and (3) Relationship with Others. The original development of the survey was a study consisting of 175 public school children ranging from grades 3–9. A second study was conducted to test the convergent validity between the measure of spirituality and subscales from the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality (Idler et al., 2003). Since this scale was only validated for one age group, it cannot be generalized to a younger population.

Attitudes and Values Questionnaire

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) developed the Attitudes and Values Questionnaire (AVQ) for educational settings, which allows faculty to evaluate how well they are upholding specific values within their school. The AVQ measures five social dimensions: Conscience, Compassion, Emotional Growth, Social Growth, and Service to Others.

After the formation of the original questionnaire, Commitment to God and Commitment to Jesus dimensions were added. The AVQ has since been used in schools to measure the effectiveness of teaching students the character traits that coincide with each of the five dimensions. Commitment to God and Commitment to Jesus can be added to attain a more spiritual measure.

Need for Measurement of Children's Spirituality

A meta-analysis by Emily Hufton (2006) concluded that there is significantly less research on children's spirituality than on adult spirituality even with research claiming that spirituality is important to the overall well-being of a child. Hufton argued that, of the few comprehensive studies that have explored children's spirituality, there is one overall conclusion: children, no matter their age or stage of development, are spiritual beings. She also explained that spirituality is especially necessary for children who are suffering from illness or even a significant loss. This is probably because it gives them the promise of hope.

Likewise, Cervantes and Arczynski (2015) found a profound lack of research regarding spirituality in children. The researchers examined the importance of spirituality in adults who were suffering from chronic illness, but did not have enough research available to them to discover the meaning of spirituality in children who also suffered from chronic illness. Cervantes and Arczynski also stressed the importance for clinicians to be constantly checking on their clients' spiritual states as a part of a holistic design. If a clinician focuses on only one aspect of a child's health, whether that is physical, mental, or spiritual, it is more likely that one aspect of the child's overall health will be overlooked. Therefore, a holistic evaluation of health is best for the client, yet spirituality unfortunately tends to be discounted as an important part of a client's well-being.

As previously stated, the difficulty in studying children's spirituality stems from the

multitude of definitions given to the topic. Every religion has a different working definition of spirituality, and some even argue that spirituality is completely separate from religion altogether (Ratcliff, 2004). Ratcliff also argued that spirituality has become an integral part of every society in some regard, whether it is within the context of a specific religion or not. Ratcliff found on the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) database that few articles contained the keyword *child* and within those articles, even fewer had the words *child* and *spiritual*. While there were articles that discussed why spirituality is an important aspect of a child's development, few studies sought to operationalize that development.

Method

Participants

Adolescent participants (ranging in ages 5–14, 51% male and 49% female) were recruited via research team contacts located in Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. The participants were located in three Christian schools, one church, and four individual homeschooling families, totaling 154 individuals whom partook in the survey. Administrators and parents of the participating institutions sent the research team consent, indicating their intent and permission for the children to participate. There was an estimated 674 possible participants before parental consent and child assent were collected.

Measures

The research team utilized the Attitudes and Values Questionnaire (AVQ), developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and was originally designed for adolescents in secondary schools. The AVQ uses a four-point Likert scale without a neutral option, and is divided into seven subscales, or dimensions. The seven dimensions are Compassion, Conscientiousness, Social Growth, Emotional Growth, Service to Others,

Commitment to God, and Commitment to Jesus. Each dimension has twenty questions for a total of 140 items. Since young children might have difficulty remaining engaged on a 140-item questionnaire, permission was obtained from ACER by the research team to modify the AVQ for younger participants.

The revision process involved four steps before the final draft of the modified AVQ was presented to ACER for approval. First, each question was modified to improve readability for young children. The Flesch-Kincaid tool for readability was utilized to reduce the readability level from an eighth grade reading level to a second grade reading level. Secondly, age-irrelevant and culturally-irrelevant questions were removed from the questionnaire. An example of an age-irrelevant question is, "I think it's just as wrong to cheat on income tax as to steal from a company." An example of a culturally-irrelevant question is, "I am concerned about the influence that white settlement has had on Aboriginal culture." Such questions are not relevant to young children in the United States. Third, the research team eliminated repetitive questions. While many repeated questions were omitted, effort was made to avoid compromising the repeated measures design of the scale. Fourth, the Likert scale options were revised. The original AVQ utilized options ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," while the modified AVQ has options more suited to younger children and ranging from "Not Like Me" to "Always Like Me." After the revision process, the total number of items was reduced to 61, which were then randomized using a random number generator and compiled into a questionnaire form to be distributed.

Procedure

Schools, churches, and families were contacted for participation and indicated their interest and intent to participate by returning a signed letter to the research team. Institutional

Review Board (IRB) approval was received and the data collection began. Recruitment letters and parental consent were sent to parents of prospective participants. Once the parental consent was signed, the children participating in the study were asked to give assent. Participating children were then given a printed copy of the Attitudes and Values in Young Children Questionnaire, and a teacher, parent, or guardian verbally read a script prepared by the research team. The children completed the AVQ as the verbatim directions and questions were read to them. After the children completed the questionnaire, it was returned to the research team for analysis.

Results

Each participant's AVQ results was input into the IBM Statistics Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) where each question, as well as each subscale, was tested through a Pearson Correlation. Pearson Correlations were run to determine relationships between each of the AVQ questions against one another as well as each of the subscales against one another. Questions and subscales were found to have significant positive correlations with each of the components they were compared to. Participant scores were then divided into the following age ranges: 5-7 year-olds, 8-10 year-olds, and 11-12 year-olds. After running a one-sample t-test on the mean scores of the age groups against the mean of the entire population, the age group from 5-7 years old did not produce significant results, but the age groups 8-10 and 11-12 years old surpassed the cutoff points and yielded significant results. Looking at the average total scores alone, the means were 204, 202.61, and 211.29 for the age groups of 5-7, 8-10, and 11-12 years old, respectively. The overall average of the total scores for participants was 204.5. Based upon raw score alone the mean total score of the AVQ dropped during the middle years of 8-10 after 5-7, and then increased in the age range of 11-12.

Subscales indicated a positive correlation when compared to one another. More specifically, a comparison between the social dimensions and spiritual dimensions was conducted to confirm this correlation as well. For example, a correlation between Social Growth and Commitment to Jesus produces an $r = .56$. The table indicated the positive correlation between the dimensions, thus confirming that as one dimension increases, so does its comparison.

Table 1. Pearson’s Correlation for each subscale compared to each subscale.

Subscale	Commitment to Jesus	Social Growth	Compassion	Commitment to God	Service to Others	Conscience	Emotional Growth
Commitment to Jesus		.560	.466	.745	.592	.459	.450
Social Growth	.560		.632	.693	.674	.491	.692
Compassion	.466	.632		.603	.745	.598	.609
Commitment to God	.745	.693	.603		.689	.580	.645
Service to Others	.529	.674	.745	.689		.634	.585
Conscience	.459	.491	.598	.580	.634		.477
Emotional Growth	.450	.692	.609	.645	.585	.477	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A one-sample T test was run comparing the average score of the population (204.5) to each of the average scores of the age groups. Additionally, a one-sample T test was conducted

comparing each of the age groups average scores to each other. It was found that there was a significant difference between the youngest ($M=204.9$, $SD= 25.09$) and the oldest ($M=211.27$, $SD=17.55$) age groups in their statistical difference, $t(29) = 2.018$, $p = .05$. The purpose of the one-sample T test was to determine if there was a significant difference in scores throughout the span of development. This was confirmed in the results with a .05 significance between the age groups. Results indicated that the higher the age, the higher the participant scored on the AVQ.

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the demographic of salvation to the total score based on possible answers, “yes, no, and I don’t know.” There was a significant difference found between, “Yes I am saved” and “I don’t know if I am saved,” $F(2, 151) = 7.303$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .088$ (small effect size). Test of between subject effects for the demographics gender and salvation indicate a significant difference compared to the total score. Results indicate males who did not know if they were saved had lower scores.

A second between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare gender to total score. There was found a significant difference between males and females as it pertains to their comparison of the total score, $F(2, 151) = 5.465$, $p = .005$, $R^2 = .067$ (small effect size). On average, females scored higher on the AVQ than males with a 11.24 difference in a range of 210.55 to 199.31.

A final one-way between subjects ANOVA was also conducted to compare the demographic God Talk, or more specifically how often the individuals talks about God, as compared to the total score based on the possible answers, “many times a week, sometimes, not very much, and unidentified.” Results showed a significant difference between the answers, “many times a week” and “not very much,” $F(3, 150) = 5.267$, $p = .002$, $R^2 = .095$ (small effect size). These specific results indicate that how one identifies spiritually, affects the number of

times they talk about God. Individuals who reported they were saved and went to church many times a week were also found to have higher scores than those that reported otherwise.

Discussion

Since very little research exists on the topic of spirituality in young children, the results of this investigative study will be used to provide a basis for measurement of spirituality in children. The purpose of this research is to lead to an understanding of the development of spirituality throughout childhood; however, due to a lack of norms from prior research, this present study is limited from making such inferences. The responses from this study were analyzed by means of frequency counts and correlations since ACER has adapted this means for the analysis of the original AVQ. Not until further research, with this study as a basis, will more statistical analyses and predictive outcomes be possible.

Limitations

The first major limitation of this study is that the overall sample size was small. While the sample could have theoretically consisted of up to 674 participants, the response after parental consent was much lower. One of the major factors that could lead to such a decrease in participation is failure of the parent to return the parental consent form to the school or church.

The second major limitation of this study is that the sample is known to be biased. The sample was selected based on the contacts of the researchers with local schools, churches, and families in their hometowns; therefore randomization was not used to select the sample. Following extensive recruitment by the researchers, three private Christian schools, one church, and four individual families agreed to participate. Because of the known evangelical Christian affiliations of the participating institutions, it is possible that children attending these school or church settings could have different traditions, predispositions, backgrounds, and

influences in the home than children who attend other school or church types. Since there is an assumption that most participants held an evangelical Christian worldview, differences may be observed in children who hold other worldview standards. The team did make attempts to include other school types in the study, such as public school systems and non-religious-affiliated private schools; while some expressed interest in participation, they declined at this time. Furthermore, the sample consisted of institutions and families located entirely in the southeast region of the United States including Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Georgia due to the fact that all of the researchers are from these regions. Therefore, differences may be observed in other geographic regions of the U.S. and certainly in the rest of the world. This study is limited in how it can generalize to young children of other geographic regions or cultures around the U.S. and the world.

The third limitation of this study is that both the reliability and the internal and external validities are unknown. The greatest limitation is that the revised AVQ for younger children had only been administered one time by ACER without a prior field study. Because of this, results cannot be compared to other data. This affects the external validity because it is not known how the results from this study will apply to the population of young children as a whole. Additionally, the improved readability of the items on the questionnaire based on the Flesch-Kincaid readability tool does not necessarily mean the items are easier for a child to understand. It is not known how children interpreted each question, therefore the internal reliability is affected because it is not known whether similar questions would be interpreted similarly and whether the results from this study were consistently representative of each child's actual attitudes and values. Furthermore, the validity of the original AVQ, which has been administered to over 5,000 secondary students, is not published by ACER.

According to a study of children by Mellor and Moore (2014), Likert scales may not be the most reliable means for gathering data. The premise of the study was that children could have a difficult time understanding the difference between increments of the scale. This confusion on behalf of the child could lead to the occasional selection of an answer that may not be an accurate representation of that child's attitudes and values; the internal validity of this study is affected due to this possibility. If a Likert scale is used, Mellor and Moore suggested fewer increments and no neutral option. For the purposes of this investigative study, a four-point Likert scale without a neutral option was implemented because it is believed to be the most effective means of measurement given in a Likert scale. Ideally, open-ended responses with researcher-child interaction is favorable when collecting data from children, however, this method is not practical for the purpose and nature of the study. Studies in previous years with other team researchers in the Department of Psychology at Liberty University implemented studies that included drawings and allowed for more open ended responses; these studies greatly influenced and formed a basis for the present study.

Future Research

Areas in which future research could expand this study includes the development of a standardized scale that indicates the development of spiritual maturity in young children throughout childhood. No known reliable scale exists to measure the development of spirituality throughout childhood, therefore its development could help researchers, parents, schools, churches, and other interested individuals to understand the levels of development of spiritual attitudes and values in young children. Additionally, continued distribution of the revised AVQ for Young Children will help determine the validity and reliability of the scale. Increasing the sample size, including other cultures and geographic regions, including a greater variety of

school types and churches, and implementing studies with open-ended responses will help accomplish this goal. Finally, similar studies should be conducted to understand the spiritual attitudes and values in young children of other religions and worldviews. Though the current study has been designed for use in the evangelical Christian tradition, other studies could research the spiritual attitudes and values in children of other faiths, traditions, and worldviews to understand the holistic view of spiritual development in young children. Such a study could also help evangelical Christian researchers understand the spirituality of children of the evangelical Christian tradition in contrast to children of other traditions.

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