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Examining Differences in Issues of Spirituality Between Couples with Children and Voluntarily Childless Couples

Cheryl L. Broneck

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EXAMINING DIFFERENCES IN ISSUES OF SPIRITUALITY BETWEEN COUPLES WITH CHILDREN AND VOLUNTARILY CHILDLESS COUPLES

by

Cheryl L. Broneck
Master's of Science, Indiana University, 1997

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
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for the degree of
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This dissertation, submitted by Cheryl L. Broneck in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctorate of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

(Chairperson)

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ABSTRACT

The demographics of the United States are rapidly changing and the traditional nuclear family is no longer considered the norm. Alternative families such as single parents, multi generational families, bi-racial families, nonmarital cohabitation, step families, and gay families are only some of the newly acknowledged family structures emerging. In the 1970s and 1980s the decision to remain voluntarily childless by choice was also seen as an alternative family structure and was researched. Unfortunately, this population is rarely examined today though projections indicate that due to a variety of factors they will probably continue to increase in number. One consistent finding in the research of voluntarily childless couples is their lower scores on measures of religiosity, compared to couples with children. However, the related construct of spirituality, which is rapidly gaining acceptance within the field of psychology, has never been considered as a variable in relationship to the choice to have or not have children.

This study examined the construct of spirituality in couples with children and voluntarily childless couples. A demographic sheet and the Index of Core Spiritual Experiences (INSPIRIT) were used to explore the spirituality between these two populations. Participants were required to be married adults and they were solicited through the Internet in both chat rooms and on several posting boards. Information was sent via email and the overwhelming majority responded through the same medium.
SPSS was used to analyze the data and analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and cross-tab analyses were conducted.

Results indicate that there was a significant difference in religiosity scores between the two groups, supporting previous research. Interestingly, there was no difference between the two groups on total INSPIRIT scores, although the couples with children did score higher on several experiential scores than the voluntarily childless couples. This study also discussed possible ways to integrate these findings into training programs emphasizing the importance of incorporating spirituality into the conceptualization of people.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Psychological theories and interventions have tailored themselves to fit the traditional nuclear family, which is still considered the norm by many mainstream psychologists (Barnard & Corrales, 1979; Ganong et al., 1990; Demo & Allen, 1996). However, recent population estimates illustrate that the number of nuclear families is rapidly declining and alternative family structures are comprising the new majority: single parents, multi generational families, bi-racial families, nonmarital cohabitation, step families, and gay families (Macklin, 1980; Okun, 1996; Stephenson, 1997). For instance, the United States Census Bureau (1995) estimates that by the year 2000 only 25% or 24,725,000 million of the 98,900,000 households will be traditional families while approximately 50% or 49,450,000 million will be alternative families. The other 25% of the households or 24,725,000 million are estimated to be single people living independently. Researchers are slowly responding to this societal change, primarily by increasing their attempts to produce literature that focuses on the experiences of more diverse or alternative families.

Between the mid-1970s and the late 1980s researchers disproportionately studied and emphasized the voluntarily childless population. These couples differ from those who are unable to have children due to infertility. The voluntarily childless are couples who choose to remain childless and proactively take precautions, such as using multiple forms
of birth control, to maintain their lifestyle (Carlisle, 1982; Silka & Kiesler, 1977). Projections for this group also show them to be a minority who are noticeably increasing in number (Boh, 1989; Schapiro, 1980; Schlesinger, 1979; Zastrow, 1973) with some analysts ultimately predicting thirty percent of American women remaining childless (Bloom & Pebley, 1982). Several researchers have voiced strong concerns that this could have serious repercussions for the repopulation of Western society (Ramu, 1984; Simons, 1986), even though some scholars persuasively argue that a more serious concern is the growing overpopulation of the planet, estimated to be at 5,983,845,150 billion by the U.S. Census Bureau (1995). Since the late 1980s, though, little or no research has been conducted on this population even though many interesting discoveries were made which continue to be relevant today.

Voluntarily Childless Couples Research

Findings

Historically, in Western society, the nuclear, middle-class family was portrayed and assumed to be the scale against which alternative family structures were measured and systematically fell short (Barnard & Corrales, 1979; Cherlin, 1978; Ganong et al., 1990; Moore, 1992). Couples with children were assumed to be normal, while couples who did not want children were viewed as deprived and psychologically unstable (Renne, 1976; Ritchey & Stokes, 1974). Researchers, being heavily influenced by societal norms, classified voluntary childless couples with a plethora of negative labels: deviant, less mature and responsible, selfish, less well adjusted, more socially distant (Houseknecht, 1982), "'self-centered', 'immoral', 'irresponsible adolescents', [and] 'child haters'" (Ramu & Tavuchis, 1986, p. 111). Prior to the 1970s, psychoanalysis was replied upon to
explain these deviant behaviors. A typical theme centered on voluntarily childless adults as those who had received less nurturance from their parents during childhood (Gerson et al., 1991); thus, "a so-called 'voluntary decision' to remain childless may be an unconscious expression of a woman that her own experience of having been mothered was unsatisfactory" (Smith, 1983, p. 158). Psychologists studying this area have since illustrated that it is actually a much more complex interplay of multiple variables which leads a couple to choose to remain childless.

The emergence of the feminist movement combined with the advent of effective birth control (Greenglass & Berovilos, 1985) dramatically influenced how researchers examined the voluntarily childless population, and virtually offered couples a guarantee to remain childless by choice. There was a slow shift towards a more neutral perception of this population (Ramu & Tavuchis, 1986; Schpiro, 1980) as alternative family structures became more common. Yet negative attitudes and beliefs are still held today by both researchers and the majority of Western society (Ford et al., 1996).

During the height of voluntarily childless research in the late 1970s, the majority of the studies focused on primarily four variables: incidence of voluntary childlessness; characteristics of the voluntarily childless; process involved in deciding to remain childless; and the consequences involved in this decision (Macklin, 1980). In more recent reviews of the literature, researchers have continued to consider those same general variables. The incidence of voluntary childlessness was discussed in the previous paragraphs, and the remaining three variables are further examined in the following review.
Process Involved in Deciding to Remain Voluntarily Childless

**Education and Career Choices**

The increasing educational levels and career orientation of women are perhaps the most powerful and clear-cut variables researchers can identify regarding the increase in voluntarily childless couples. Consistently, researchers have found that women choosing to remain child free are more educated, work more hours, make more money, and heavily emphasize career goals as part of their self-identity (Baum, 1983; Bram, 1985; Goodbody, 1977; Greenglass & Borovilos, 1985; Jacobson & Heaton, 1991; Moeller & Sherlock, 1981). Movius (1976) suggested that women without children may find the experience liberating and may "benefit from greater mobility, fewer family commitments, and more time for professional development" (p. 57). Poston and Gotard (1977) proposed that as female work patterns and preferences change, due to the demand for higher education, there would be an increased tendency to delay having children. Several studies have found evidence that increased educational achievement in women delays the arrival of their first child (Forest et al., 1995). Renne (1976) found that female professional and technical workers had higher rates of educational levels and childlessness. Hoffman (1977) found a similar relationship between the desire to pursue advanced degrees or careers and the postponement of marriage among both women and men. Finally, Hoffman (1974) examined the fertility trends of working and non-working women from post World War II to the early 1970's. She found that in jobs providing alternative gratification, such as white collar jobs that might provide greater income, educational levels rise and childbearing decreases. There appears to be sufficient evidence to make
the claim that “an increase in participation of women in the labour force is generally followed by a decrease in family size” (Ramu & Tavuchis, 1986, p. 109).

Two competing theories have been proposed by Feldman (1981) to explain this phenomenon. The first is that women without children “may have substituted career interest for parenthood” (p. 595). Greenglass and Borovilos (1985) supported this by claiming that “career and educational opportunities as alternatives to motherhood provide women with the psychological fulfillment that motherhood provides, given that a job or a scholastic goal is intrinsically rewarding” (p. 130). The second and more popular theory among researchers (Cooper et al., 1978; Collver, 1968; Hoffman, 1974) argues that “having a higher career level caused them [women] to consider remaining childless, since the career rewards may have been greater in their case” (Feldman, 1981, p. 595). A unique study conducted by Kenkel (1985) attempted to gauge the desire for voluntary childlessness among low SES high school youth. He found that girls wanting to remain childless had “higher social mobility orientations, are less willing to accept the position of ‘housewife only’, are more likely to prefer an urban residence, and expect to marry at later ages” (p. 509). The boys wanting to remain childless were more likely to have lower educational and career goals, wanted to live in an urban residence, and planned on marrying later.

**Feminism**

Since the main body of research with voluntarily childless couples was originally prompted by the feminist movement, which questioned gender role expectations, most scientists have concluded that there is a strong link between feminist beliefs and voluntarily childlessness (Gerson et al., 1991). Feminists actively questioned the validity
of 'personality traits' and attacked the social structure and its creation, regulation, and enforcement of gender roles. One of the most popular phrases used to question gender role expectations was the 'motherhood mandate' (Kearney, 1979; Russo, 1979). The argument stated that "motherhood is on a qualitatively different plane... it is mandatory... the mandate requires that one have at least two children (historically as many as possible and preferably sons) and that one raise them 'well'" (Russo, 1976, p. 144). This mandate was originally based on biology but is now culturally and institutionally reinforced and, as some have observed, "the formal barriers to women's emancipation - votelessness, educational and occupation discriminations, and the like - are less serious and more susceptible to change than the domestic, institutional, and social customs that keep women in the home" (Blake, 1974, p. 137). A number of studies were published with this theory in mind and illustrate that the link between voluntary childlessness and feminism is not nearly that clear cut; rather, a variety of variables appears to be at work.

While more liberal attitudes were found among women remaining childless, Shea (1983) claims that it would be misleading to assume that the feminist movement is directly related to 'antinatalist attitudes' (p. 17); rather, the feminist movement may have helped to modify negative views to voluntary childlessness, thus making it a potential option. Shea (1983) also found that involvement in the feminist movement was positively related to actual and expected voluntary childlessness, although the relationship was not a strong one. Yogev and Vierra (1983) interviewed faculty women at a Northwestern University and established that there are links between remaining childless and feminist beliefs among college educated women. Houseknecht (1978) demonstrated that women wanting to remain childless had a greater acceptance of alternative roles. Finally, Russo
(1979) argued that reproductive freedom and voluntary childlessness would eventually change our perceptions of motherhood. She concluded that current research in this area was highly reflective of the motherhood mandate and advocated a need for change in three specific areas: appreciation of the context of the phenomena studied; interactionist approaches, including multivariate models and methods; and a multi-disciplinary perspective, including biological, psychological, and social and structural levels of analysis.

One area, which has only been partially studied, is voluntarily childless couples’ attitudes towards traditional and nontraditional gender roles. These couples appear to be more androgynous (Teicholz, 1977), less conventional (Magarick, 1975), and less traditional (Bram, 1985) when compared to couples with children. However, causation remains unclear. Do children change the couples’ perceptions of gender roles? Does the perception of gender roles determine whether or not a couple has children? Or is this another example of multiple variables interacting in this decision? Researchers are still attempting to untangle this question. Meanwhile, Callan (1983) shed some light on this debate when he examined mate selection preferences of single women who either wanted to remain childless or start a family. He found that women who wanted a family “rated their ideal male partner more highly on traditional masculine and feminine attributes” (p. 181). This may indicate that women, who more strongly identify with traditional definitions and roles, perceive men with these characteristics (i.e., increased masculinity and nurturing) as potential parents. On the other hand, women who do not identify as strongly with traditional definitions and roles, may choose men who are more
androgynous. Past literature has consistently demonstrated that voluntarily childless women as a group endorse more masculine or androgynous characteristics.

Consequences Involved in the Decision to Remain Childless

Social Networks and Changes Supporting this Decision

Despite enormous social and cultural pressures to reproduce, a section of the population does resist. Theorists, scholars, and society have been fascinated by how they manage to avoid this expectation. Eventually, researchers may find some individual personality traits that contribute to the decision to remain childless. However, more recently several interesting social studies have been conducted which illustrate the impact of a society to either encourage or discourage childlessness. Mozny (1992) examined family patterns of the Czechoslovakian family before, during, and after the socialist era. He found that prior to communism Czechoslovakian families had patterns similar to other European families: later age of marriage; more never married people; and a significant number of voluntarily childless couples. Yet during socialism this pattern completely changed, with voluntarily childlessness virtually disappearing due to harsh penalties, such as higher taxes, lack of housing, and less access to social opportunities, inflicted by the state on this population. Now that communism has ended the pendulum is swinging to the other end with young adults putting off both marriage and having children.

Voluntarily childless minority couples are also starting to be noticed by researchers. Unfortunately, not enough research has been done to determine whether or not voluntarily childless minority couples differ from voluntarily childless Caucasian couples. Indeed, there is a distinct lack of research in this area, which may change as an increasing number of minority members gain access to research and faculty positions.
Boyd (1989) claimed that childlessness in both races [African American and Caucasian] has been shaped by the same basic factors, including social mobility, birth control, and changing family norms... as a result of socioeconomic gains by blacks, patterns of marital childlessness by race are becoming alike and voluntary childlessness may be growing among blacks as well as whites (p. 183).

After decades of research, it is apparent that while individual characteristics and variables are important, society and social supports help to determine how they are shaped, created, and expressed. Only within the last few decades has the entire field of psychology begun to seriously consider environmental factors and their impact. In pursuing this path, many interesting and interactive theories have been developed especially in regards to voluntarily childless couples. For instance, Houseknecht (1977) provided one explanation when she found that women who wanted to “remain childless had reference group support for that decision, although they characteristically had fewer reference groups than those who looked forward to having children” (p. 285). Another contributing factor is the greater increase in leisure time that childless couples have experienced. They are able to spend more time socializing and developing networks that may help them maintain their life-style choice (Callan, 1984). Evidence of voluntarily childless couples seeking support and forming organizations catering specifically to their needs can easily be found on the Internet: Childfree Network; Childless by Choice; No Kidding!; Voluntary Human Extinction Movement; and Zero Population Group. These groups have mailings, chat rooms, exchange information, and plan social events in order to both offer and find support. In addition, many individual members maintain web
pages, which encourage an open and sometimes heated debate about the voluntarily childless lifestyle.

**Marital Satisfaction and Health**

Although researchers have argued that involuntary parenthood may have detrimental consequences on mental health and marital relations (Veevers, 1974), the research finding connections between marital satisfaction and voluntary childlessness contains several methodological problems. First, marital adjustment or satisfaction is a very broad construct that can reflect a wide variety of variables (Feldman, 1981; Renne, 1976). For instance, the inconsistency in defining martial adjustment or satisfaction has been one of the largest handicaps presented by researchers. Secondly, many of the studies did not differentiate between couples who chose to be childless, those who were infertile, and couples postponing the decision (Bloom & Pebley, 1982; Gerson, et al., 1991). Thirdly, the results presented by past researchers have greatly ranged from neutral to positive relations being associated with satisfaction (Veevers, 1979).

Houseknecht (1979) found a positive relationship between "childlessness and enhanced marital adjustment and satisfaction" (p. 259) in couples without children. When examining single women who wanted to remain childless, Callan (1986) also produced results indicating a higher satisfaction with life when compared to single woman wanting children but the childless groups rated life as less optimistic, loving and satisfying. Ramu (1984) reported that, even though the perceived level of marital happiness was higher in childless couples, "the sources of marital dissatisfaction among parents are not always children" (p. 47). However, she later proposes that "the main source of stress is an inability on the part of a couple to agree on the division of labor with regard to household
chores, including child care and methods of child-rearing” (p. 60). While children may not be a primary source of marital stress, the tasks involved in caring for them and the more traditional roles which often emerge after a couple has children may contribute to stress. As illustrated here, the connection between marital satisfaction and childlessness is not perfectly clear, yet there does appear to be a link between the two.

Another factor that has been theorized to influence marital satisfaction is the amount of leisure time the couple has to engage in various activities. This extra time would give childless couples more of an opportunity to talk, plan, and decide how they want to live their lifestyle (Callan, 1984). However, Crawford and Huston (1993) reported an interesting finding in their study: new couples with children tend to pursue more leisure activities that the wife likes but not the husband. Based on that finding they theorized the following:

Taken together with the results of an earlier study using the same sample (MacDermid et al, 1990), which revealed dramatic increases in new mothers’ participation in household and child care tasks, it is possible that this tendency for couples to create leisure patterns that reflect the wife’s preferences more than the husband’s serves as a counterweight that, to some extent, reduces the impact of the redistribution of household work on women. Wives get to do more of what they like with their leisure time but less of what they prefer with regard to the division of labor. (p. 45)

While more research needs to be done in this area before any firm conclusions can be reached, it does seem highly probable that the increased leisure time also allows for more outside socializing which helps contribute to their social network.
Division of Labor

It has been well documented that roles dramatically change in marriage with the arrival of children and that the roles tend to be more traditional in terms of division of labor (Cowan & Cowan, 1988; Cowan et al., 1985; Crawford & Huston, 1993; MacDermid et al., 1990). By this same token, childless couples report having greater amounts of equality and freedom with a more equal division of household labor (Bram, 1985; Feldman, 1981; Ramu & Tavuchis, 1986). Renne (1976) proposed the interesting question of “whether it is the presumably egalitarian nature of such marriages or the absence of children that contributes to higher rates of satisfaction among childless couples” (p. 195). While there appears to be more equality in childless marriages, researchers are unclear as to the interaction of variables or factors that produces this result.

Determining equality in marriage has many of the same difficulties as determining marital satisfaction. Both of these constructs are composed of multiple variables but few, if any, researchers have attempted to untangle them. Could it be that there are some areas in which childless couples are less egalitarian than couples with children? If this question is to be answered, researchers need to start labeling and identifying specific instances or variables that more clearly show this distinction. A possible example of this inequality was found in an interesting study which looked at fertility decisions in childless couples. Marciano (1979) found that the “husband’s preference for children or for childlessness controls more often than the wife’s” (p. 561). Unfortunately, the impact of this variable has yet to be explored and researchers still have not recognized it as possibly having a significant effect on the couple’s decision to remain childless.
Characteristics of the Voluntarily Childless

Personality Traits

Even though many authors have concluded that there is not one particular personality ‘quirk’ or deviant personality type that directly leads to the decision to remain childless (Houseknecht, 1979; Magarick & Brown, 1981; Teicholz, 1978; Welds, 1977), some researchers still pursue the idea. Gerson et al. (1991) found that ‘degrees of narcissism’ were able to differentiate between groups highly motivated to have children and disinterested in having children. They further theorized that ‘highly narcissistic individuals may dread parenthood because it involves the transfer of attention from the self to the child’ (Gerson et al., 1991, p. 341) therefore resulting in lower motivation to have children. In contrast, Teicholz (1978) measured three personality trait clusters (i.e., social adjustment, mental health, sex-role identity) and found that the voluntarily childless women were not less well socialized, more neurotic, nor did they have poorer feminine identifications; however, they were found to be more androgynous. Welds (1977) administered several trait scales to professional females (i.e., M.D.’s, lawyers, artists, and Ph.D’s) and found that ego maturity, as theorized by Erickson, could be achieved without the benefit of children.

Other researchers have focused heavily on gender stereotypes. Interestingly, men who are voluntarily childless by choice have been noticeably excluded by researchers. To date, there are no studies that have independently examined these men. Rather, researchers have looked specifically at women and the couple. Greenglass and Borovilos (1985) claimed that there may be a personality predisposition in women who choose to remain childless; specifically, they were found to have more masculine then feminine
traits. Feldman (1981) supported this with his conclusion that "the childless are more likely to value the masculine traits of achievement and independence for themselves, without at the same time feeling that the feminine traits are less important" (p. 597). On an autonomy scale, Houseknecht (1978) found women choosing to remain childless scored higher than those wanting children. Finally, in a five year longitudinal study, Bram (1985) claimed that at the end "there is only one significant difference among the groups: the Childless women rate themselves more highly than do the others on the item 'independent'" (p. 55). Though the literature has yet to resolve this debate it appears as if there is not a significant personality difference between women who choose to be childless versus those with children; rather, there is a noticeable difference in the acceptance of a more androgynous set of traits. It has also been difficult to conduct personality research on this population as the studies were all conducted after the decision to remain childless was made.

Religion

Religiosity has also been briefly examined by researchers interested in couples, and specifically voluntarily childless couples, but at only the most basic and exploratory of levels. Stewart and Gale (1994) claim that "client's spirituality and religion has not been accorded the attention it deserves in marriage and family therapy literature" (p.16). However, issues of religion in couple relationships have been much more frequently studied than issues of spirituality. Hansen (1987) found that "equality was more important for the high religiosity couples" (p.264). Fowers (1991) stated that "men were somewhat:at more satisfied with their marriages than women... [and] religion is a more important part of the marriage for men..." (p.209). Krishnan (1994) claimed that, when
studying Canadian couples, women who were less educated, employed, and highly religious were more likely to agree that “marriage is a permanent union that should only be broken for very serious reasons” (p.87). Snow and Compton (1996) argue that the “importance of religion in a person’s life rather than religious affiliation was a predictor of both satisfaction and communication patterns” (p.979). Finally, Cal and Heaton (1997) stated that

While no single dimension of religiosity adequately describes the effect of religious experience on marital stability, the frequency of religious attendance has the greatest positive impact on marital stability. When both spouses attend church regularly, the couple has the lowest risk of divorce. (p.382)

Religiosity (i.e., specifically, religious attendance) has been found to be consistently stronger in couples with children than voluntarily childless couples. Studies indicate that people who attend church more regularly are less likely to choose voluntary childlessness (Dietz, 1984; Heaton et al., 1992; Jacobson & Heaton, 1991; Krishnan, 1993; Macklin, 1980). To date, only two articles have been published which explore in depth the link between religiosity and couples remaining voluntarily childless. Heaton et al. (1992) conducted a study in the United States based on a 1987/88 National Survey of Families and Households and reported a negative relationship between religion and voluntary childlessness, although the voluntary childlessness rate was very low. They also claimed that couples who did not attend church, had no religious affiliation, did not believe in the Bible, and had been married in civil rather than religious ceremonies had higher rates of voluntary childlessness. Krishnan (1993) conducted a study in Canada based on the 1984 Canadian Fertility Survey and examined four specific religious factors: religious
affiliation; religious homogamy (i.e., husband and wife share the same religious preferences); religiosity; and religious marriage. The data from Canadian women led to two major conclusions:

Religiosity does not significantly predict voluntary childlessness after the inclusion of interaction variables between religious homogamy and religiosity...

[and] voluntary and temporary childlessness is less prevalent among older women, women married at younger ages, women who are less-educated, who are highly religious, and those whose husbands have higher income (p. 91).

Although both of these studies help to better define a connection between religiosity and voluntary childlessness, the number of actual studies performed is so few that at best only tentative conclusions can be drawn from them. In addition to this limited number of studies, past research on this connection has had serious methodological flaws. For instance, most of the religious conclusions made prior to Heaton et al. (1992) and Krishnan (1993) simply asked ‘Religious affiliation. Do you attend religious services or mass - yes or no? and if so how often do you attend?’.

From these questions researchers determined that childless couples were less religious than couples with children simply because they attended services more frequently. Additional study of religiosity in respect to voluntarily childless couples may be useful. However, a potentially more influential factor, spirituality, has not yet been addressed at all in the voluntarily childless literature.

**Spirituality**

Current theories (Ingersoll, 1994; Shafranske & Gorsuch, 1984) indicate that spirituality may be a separate construct, or at least a belief system, which is almost impossible to measure solely through religious attendance. Spirituality also appears to be
a very personal and individualistic expression of oneself, a reflection of how a person interprets the world, and an integration of a person’s perception of their individuality within a broader context. By exploring the issue of spirituality in more depth with voluntarily childless couples, it becomes obvious that this is possibly a conduit through which a deeper understanding may be gained or a more complete picture may emerge. It may also help reveal how the role of spirituality helps these couples work through and resolve difficult issues without the aid of traditional supports such as congregations. With all of the possible issues that spirituality may be able to address, it appears obvious that adding it into the literature only helps to enhance our understanding of a population.

**Defining Religiosity Versus Spirituality**

Since there is not a uniformly accepted definition of religiosity and spirituality among researchers, the literature is inundated with a plethora of definitions, personal thoughts, and reflections. A brief sampling, reflecting the diversity of these definitions, can be found in the following statements. Magill and McGreal (1988) describe spirituality as a personal journey toward a union with God. Witmer (1989) claims that spirituality is a belief or trust in a force or thing greater than oneself. Ingersoll (1994) believes that spirituality is best understood through a seven dimensional scale: meaning; conception of divinity; mystery; relationship; play experience, and an integrative dimension. He further proposes that spirituality is “an organismic construct endemic to human beings [and] religion is conceptualized as a variety of frameworks through which spirituality is expressed” (p.105-106). Shafranske and Gorsuch (1984) claim that “spirituality is the courage to look within and to trust. What is seen and what is trusted appears to be a deep sense of belonging, of wholeness, of connectedness, and of openness
to the infinite" (p. 233). Religiosity is then the “adherence to the beliefs and practices of an organized church or religious institution” (p. 72).

For the purposes of this dissertation, the definition advocated by Anderson and Worthen (1997) will be adopted. They define spirituality as “the uniquely personal and subjective experience of a fourth dimension [and] how persons orient their lives in light of their inner awareness” (p. 4-5). Further, these authors concluded that spirituality precedes religiosity.

Religion refers to the specific and concrete expression of spirituality. Religion takes prior experiences of spirituality and solidifies them into particular forms: rituals, sacred scriptures, doctrines, rules of conduct, and other practices. Religion externalizes the internal encounter of human beings with the fourth dimension. (p. 5)

Despite the unlimited number of definitions, one point does become clear: religiosity and spirituality are not identical concepts and some researchers have theorized that they may even be considered mutually exclusive (Kahoe & Meadow, 1984).

When Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) became one of the first self-help groups to distinguish between spirituality and religiosity (Berenson, 1990), they began breaking down a very old spiritual ‘taboo,’ which held that recovery or therapy and metaphysical issues should not be discussed within the same context nor should therapists acknowledge a possible interaction between these two variables. This ‘taboo’ was originally encouraged and enforced by the field of psychology when it was originally attempting to make a clear distinction between itself and the field of philosophy and has been maintained since. (Hopkins, 1995; May, 1974; Stander et al., 1994). Research has since been slowly shifting “its focus from religiosity to spiritual well-being to spirituality”
By removing spirituality from a formal or strict religious tone (Johnson et al., 1987) it quickly become very popular among a variety of professional disciplines and the general public (Clay, 1996; Dombeck & Karl, 1987; Williams, 1992). Within the last ten years, the study of spirituality has made incredible strides in a variety of areas. One such example can be found in health psychology, where spirituality is incorporated as an essential part of creating and maintaining a holistic, wellness model and preventing burnout (Fahlberg & Fahlberg, 1991; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992).

In the field of psychology, addiction counselors have probably spent the most time over the years working on issues of spirituality, due in part to the heavy influence of AA. Evidence of this is found in how easily they integrate spirituality into their recovery models by using interventions such as the Spiritual Progression Charts (Royce, 1995) and Twelve Steps of AA. Booth (1984) claims that “spirituality is essential to alcoholism treatment” (p. 139) and he criticizes the tendency of alcohol recovery counselors to exclusively connect spirituality with religion. Johnson et al. (1987) contend that several factors must be addressed in order to re-establish spirituality and healthy self-esteem in recovering alcoholics, including “separating spirituality from concepts of formal religion” (p. 1).

A growing number of psychologists are also advocating for an increasing awareness of the importance of spirituality and religion in peoples’ lives (Clay, 1996; Hopkins, 1995; Lannert, 1991). Spilka (1986) persuasively argued that even though there is a “tendency to keep religion separate from psychology, there is a place for it in psychotherapy”. Adams (1995) stated that “science and spirituality are no longer seen as
diametrically opposed or mutually exclusive. The links between spirituality and psychological healing are apparent in psychoanalytic therapy” (p.201).

Training Issues

While psychologists acknowledge that issues of spirituality and religiosity are becoming increasingly important, few have enough formal training experience to feel competent or able to adequately address these issues. Even clergymen report having difficulty incorporating spirituality into their work and dealing with it openly (May, 1974)! Stander et al. (1994) proposes several ways to incorporate religious issues into family therapy training programs: “(1) culture as a framework for religious issues; (2) religion/spirituality and ethics; (3) religion/spirituality in professional ethics courses; and (4) the integration of religion/spirituality throughout curricula” (p. 27). Pate and Bondi (1992) offer spiritual and religious guidelines for counselor education training programs:

(1) Counselor education courses should include spiritual and religious values as important differences among clients; (2) counselors must be comfortable with their own spirituality before they can allow clients’ religion to have a place in the counseling process; (3) case studies should include instances in which religious values and experiences of clients are critical in the helping process; and (4) counselors should be taught to use religious counselors as allies at appropriate times (p. 108).

In addition to limited training opportunities, Meyer (1988) noted that there was no mention of religious or spiritual values in the Ethical Principles of Psychologists. These values have only just recently been added in the 1992 revisions but are not addressed as a separate entity; rather, they have been incorporated into the rather long list of diversity
elements. However, this changes does seem to indicate that spirituality and religiosity are moving from a small, grassroots movement to an institutionalized and accepted part of psychology.

As the demand for including spirituality in counseling increases, therapies focusing on it are also becoming more common. Ingersoll (1994) proposed a model of spirituality for counseling which consists of seven dimensions: meaning; conception of divinity; relationship; mystery; play; experience; and a systemic, integrative force. The concept of meaning is defined as “that which the individual experiences as making life worth living” (p. 101). Conception of divinity proves to be more complicated and describes how people relate to their perception of divinity: theistic (transcendent force or being), atheistic (refute current conceptions of divinity), pantheistic (force or being resides in all things), or panentheistic (force or being flows through everything and transcends this world). Relationship describes how a person relates to their previously identified conception of divinity. Mystery refers to the natural ambiguity of spiritual issues and traditions. Play encourages individuals to give in to pleasure or experience things that are not work related. This concept is particularly powerful for Western society as it is considered the natural opposite of ‘work.’ The individual’s experience of ecstatic human experiences and the influence of this on life’s meaning is emphasized in this construct. The last construct, dimensional integration, argues that the previously listed categories are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are integrated and used to add another level of depth to a person’s life. Finally, Anderson and Worthen (1997) claim that spirituality therapy is influenced by the following assumptions: “God or a Divine Being exists, that human kind
yearns innately for a connection with this Being, and that this being is interested in humans and acts upon and within their relationships to promote beneficial change” (p.3).

**Measurement Issues**

Finally, it has proven difficult to find reliable instruments that differentiate religiosity and spirituality. Over the last several years, a number of spirituality assessments have been created but few of them are appropriate for this study. An example of this can be found in a very popular instrument known as the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS, Vella & Allen, 1996), purported to be ‘a general indicator of the subjective state of religious and existential well-being’ (Mental Measurements Yearbook, 983). Although it is well constructed, easy to administer and score, and has good reliability coefficients, the theoretical basis from which it was created makes it problematic for the present study. The SWBS has two subscales that reflect the authors’ conceptualization of spiritual well-being: Religious Well-Being (RWB) and Existential Well-Being (EWB). Considering the past research findings in regards to voluntarily childless couples and religiosity, it would be a more sound methodological decision to utilize an instrument which does not have any subscales of religiosity incorporated into its structure. To further complicate this, there are many other ‘spirituality questionnaires’ that have either not been tested or are located in the back of various self-help books in order to give the readers an opportunity to gauge their levels of spirituality.

In contrast, the conceptual basis for the Index of Core Spiritual Experience (INSPIRIT) is the belief that there are “‘core spiritual experiences’... more concrete than an amorphous ‘belief in God’” (p.204). It was designed to test two core observations:
“1) a distinct event and a cognitive appraisal of that event which resulted in a personal conviction of God’s existence (or some form of a Higher Power as defined by the person); and 2) the perception of a highly internalized relationship between God and the person (i.e., God dwells within and a corresponding feeling of closeness to God)” (p. 204)

Since the INSPIRIT does not contain an explicitly religion-based assumption of spirituality, it addresses some of the aforementioned concerns regarding the measurement of religiosity in couples. In effect, the INSPIRIT is assumed to provide information on spirituality regardless of religiosity, and so was selected for this study.

Couples and Spirituality

The ‘taboo’ against psychology studying spiritual issues or the split between science and religion combined with the relative newness of this area have all contributed to very little research having been conducted on couples and spirituality. Hatch et al. (1986) attempted to study the link between spiritual intimacy and marital satisfaction. They found that the effect of spiritual intimacy, if any, was indirect, and operated through emotional intimacy on marital satisfaction. Roth (1988) concluded that spirituality is an important factor in perception of marital happiness. It should be noted that to date no research comparing the self-reported levels of spirituality between couples with children and voluntarily childless couples has been conducted.

Purpose of the Study

With the increased awareness among professionals of how important spirituality is in individuals’ lives and the impact it can have on health, well-being, and general lifestyle choices, more research needs to be done in this area. A better understanding of how
spirituality is interpreted and impacts a person’s life may be another means through which to better understand or conceptualize previously studied populations, such as voluntarily childless couples. As stated earlier, this population was studied most intensely in the late 1970s, when spirituality was not a common part of social science research. By including this “newer” construct of spirituality, another insight into the differences between couples with and voluntarily without children may emerge. Growing numbers of voluntarily childless couples, the overpopulation of the planet, and a finite number of resources all lend urgency to more research being conducted in this area, and a new way to approach or conceptualize this population is therefore worthy of attention. Therefore, this study attempts to answer the question: Is there a measurable difference in levels of spirituality between voluntarily childless couples and couples with children?

Hypotheses

The premier assumption of the current study is that spirituality and religiosity are two separate constructs. Therefore, several hypothesizes were proposed.

1. Couples with children will report more attendance of religious services than couples without children (consistent with past research findings).

2. There will be no statistically significant difference in spirituality scores (i.e., INSPIRIT) between the two groups.

3. There will be a statistically significant difference in measures of satisfaction (i.e., current marriage, current partner, and current career) between the genders (consistent with past research findings). Men will indicate greater satisfaction than women on all three measures.
4. There will be a statistically significant difference between the measures of satisfaction (i.e., current marriage, current partner, and current career) between the two groups. Voluntarily childless couples will indicate more satisfaction than couples with children on all three measures.

5. Assuming that there is no statistical difference found in terms of spirituality, couples who were voluntarily childless by choice will demonstrate a wider range of spiritual practices which would not be easy to express in more traditional, religious churches. For instance, they will endorse less tradition, Western religions such as Christianity, be more willing to report alternative ways in which to express their beliefs, and be more willing to explore non-Christian religions.

In addition to these hypotheses, this study will also explore whether participant gender or level of education have an impact on spirituality endorsement, as this is not yet clearly documented and might provide some additional information of interest about the INSPRIT.
CHAPTER II

METHOD

Participants

After posting the information on the web sites, 120 surveys were requested and sent out. A total of 98 couples (47 voluntarily childless couples and 51 couples with children) or approximately 82% completed and returned the surveys. Due to incomplete surveys being submitted, the return of only one survey rather than two per couple, and responses from couples who did not meet the original qualifications as stated in the consent form (i.e., being married), several surveys or couples were excluded. Ultimately, 84 couples (44 voluntarily childless couples and 40 couples with children) were included in the analysis.

Demographics

The mean age of this sample was 39.26 years, with a range of 21 to 71 years. The age at the 50th percentile was approximately 36 years and the standard deviation was 11.4. The average age of voluntarily childless couples was 38.6 and for couples with children the average age was 40.0. Ethnically, the vast majority, 85% (ten participants did not respond to this question) reported being Caucasian with Hispanics, Asians, African-Americans, and mixed backgrounds also being represented. Geographically, the participants were primarily from the United States; however, two voluntarily childless couples were not and claimed Australia and Canada as their country. In the U.S., there
was a wide dispersal of responses with the majority being located in larger cities: 20.7% from the East coast; 22% from the Southern states; 30.5% from the Midwestern and Northern Plains region; and 20.7% from the West coast.

Participants reported from one to forty-nine years of marriage with a mean of 10.7 years and a median of 7 years. Voluntarily childless couples had a mean of 9.8 years of marriage and a median of 6 years while couples with children had a mean of 11.7 years and a median of 7 years. As a group, 41.5% of the couples were previously married; however, 31% of voluntarily childless couples and 53% of couples with children reported being divorced. In addition, couples with children had an average of 1.51 children with a median of 2 and a range of one to six being reported.

Participants were also asked about their satisfaction with current careers, marriage, and partner. As a group, they were primarily strongly satisfied (47%) or satisfied (31.1%) with their current careers with only 11.6% neutral, 9.8% dissatisfied, and .6% strongly dissatisfied. The majority of couples reported being strongly satisfied (50.6%) or satisfied (43.9%) with their current marriage with 2.4% neutral, 2.4% dissatisfied, and .6% strongly dissatisfied. Finally, they were asked about their current partners and 53.7% were strongly satisfied, 40.2% satisfied, 4.3% neutral, 1.2% dissatisfied, and .6% strongly dissatisfied.

Educationally, the majority of respondents reported at least a college degree with participants reporting a wide range of levels: .6% less than high school completion; 4.3% high school degree; 1.6% associates degree or two-years post high school degree; 50% college degree or four-years post high school; 35% master level degree or six years post high school; and 19% doctorate level. Voluntarily childless couples ranged from high
school to doctorate degrees and couples with children ranged from less than high school
to doctorate degrees.

Materials

The Index of Core Spiritual Experiences (INSPIRIT) (Kass et al., 1991) was
selected for this study. It is a seven-item questionnaire that contains a total score and 13
subscores for item number 7. The questionnaire is approximately two pages long and
requires only a few minutes to complete. It is designed using a Likert scale, with answers
ranging from 1 – 4. Several of the questions have reverse scoring incorporated into the
answers. Kass et al. (1991) demonstrated that INSPIRIT has a strong degree of internal
reliability and concurrent validity, reporting a Cronbach’s Alpha reliability score of .90.
In the current study, the reliability coefficient was .86, demonstrating that the INSPIRIT
had good reliability for this sample.

The demographic sheet (see Appendix A) was created to gather relevant
background information and to help match and control several variables. While it
contained standard demographic questions (i.e. age, gender, educational levels, ethnicity,
etc.), it also had several measures that were used as a way to compare this sample with
previously established research findings for these populations. For instance, it had
questions on religious attendance, marital and job satisfaction, and geographical location.
These findings allowed the two populations to be compared not only against each other
but against previously gathered research for their respective groups.

Procedure

Both voluntarily childless couples and couples with children were recruited via the
Internet through web sites that reflected their interests. For instance, posting requests
were made to web sites and support groups (see Appendix A) frequented by voluntarily childless couples. Postings were also targeted towards web sites that emphasized parenting issues (see Appendix B) in order to enlist couples with children. Since this research project is primarily an exploratory study, there was no attempt to restrict the range on a wide number of variables (i.e., age, educational level, ethnicity, geographical location, etc.).

Several Internet search engines were used to elicit sites, which reflected specific interests of the participants. From these lists, all the sites, which had email access to a webmaster or the site’s supporter, were included on an email mailing list. After specific sites were targeted, the web master or the site’s supporter was asked to post a general request for participants along with several specific requirements (i.e., 18 or older, married, etc.). A copy of the request that was electronically mailed can be found in Appendix A.

The author's University of North Dakota Internet address was provided as a way to make email contact. After a potential participant responded with an email indicating his/her interest, a consent form, two demographic sheets, and two Index of Core Spiritual Experiences (INSPIRIT) were sent back in that order. There were three formats through which these texts were sent back to the potential participants: Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, and Rich Text. The consent form allowed for the participants to either email their answers back or to respond via U.S. mail to the University of North Dakota’s Counseling Psychology Department c/o this author. The majority of participants responded via email with only eleven out of 98 sending it back through the U.S. mail system.
Upon receiving the demographic sheets and surveys, the couples were encouraged to complete separate forms and could return the forms either together or separately. In addition, they were given codes in order to better ensure confidentiality. After this, the demographic sheets were coded and the surveys were scored. Codes and scores were then entered into a database and processed in a statistical program, the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

Analysis

This study was evaluated through cross-tabs and an analysis of variance (ANOVA). The ANOVA was chosen because of the relatively small sample size and an availability of multiple means. The Bonferroni post hoc calculation was used to adjust the alpha level for several of the ANOVAs. Scores on both the INSPIRT and the demographic sheet were used in the analysis.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Religiosity and Spirituality

Information was sought about the participants’ past and present religious and spiritual practices. Interestingly, 84% of all participants, with 87.8% of couples voluntarily childless and 82.5% of couples with children, believed that there was a difference between religiosity and spirituality. Couples with children were more likely to report having been raised with Christian religious practices than voluntarily childless [Pearson $\chi^2 (3, N = 164) = 11.77, p = .008$]. As adults, the percentage of both couples with and without children who did not engage in religious practices increased. However, the voluntarily childless couples reported a substantial decrease in Christian practices and a substantial increase in no religious practice compared to couples with children [Pearson $\chi^2 (3, N = 164) = 57.55, p = .000$].

Participants were also asked to estimate the frequency of their attendance at religious services. Past literature findings have consistently illustrated that voluntarily childless participants attend less frequently than participants with children. This study found that 90% of couples with children reported attendance but a surprisingly large number (50%) of voluntarily childless couples also reported attending services (see Table 2), although the differences between the two groups remained significant [Pearson $\chi^2 (4, N = 164) = 36.34, p = .000$]. Unfortunately, 44 voluntarily childless participants and 18
Table 1

Summary of Religious and Spiritual Practices of Both Couples with Children and Voluntarily Childless Couples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Christian (N)</th>
<th>Judaism (M)</th>
<th>Other (N)</th>
<th>None (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religion Raised With Overall</td>
<td>87.8% (144)</td>
<td>4.9% (8)</td>
<td>3.7% (6)</td>
<td>3.7% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couples with Children</td>
<td>96.3% (77)</td>
<td>1.3% (1)</td>
<td>2.4% (2)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntarily Childless</td>
<td>79.5% (67)</td>
<td>8.4% (7)</td>
<td>4.8% (4)</td>
<td>7.2% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Religion Overall</td>
<td>66.5% (109)</td>
<td>3% (5)</td>
<td>15.9% (26)</td>
<td>14.6% (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couples with Children</td>
<td>95% (76)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>1.3% (1)</td>
<td>3.6% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntarily Childless</td>
<td>39.3% (33)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>29.8% (25)</td>
<td>25% (21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

individuals with children did not respond to this question and were removed from this analysis; therefore the percentages, especially those representing the voluntarily childless couples, may be flawed or artificially inflated.

Table 2

Summary of Religious Attendance of Both Couples with Children and Voluntarily Childless Couples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Once per week (N)</th>
<th>Weekly (N)</th>
<th>Monthly (N)</th>
<th>Less than monthly (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Couples with Children</td>
<td>16.7% (10)</td>
<td>40.3% (25)</td>
<td>25.0% (16)</td>
<td>18.1% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntarily Childless</td>
<td>10.0% (4)</td>
<td>34.1% (14)</td>
<td>20.5% (8)</td>
<td>27.3% (11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to calculate differences on the INSPIRIT between couples with children and voluntarily childless couples. The dependent variable was the INSPIRIT score and the independent variable was whether or not the couple had children. Because several ANOVAs were calculated, to consider differences within clusters of items on the INSPIRIT, a Bonferroni post hoc adjustment was used to minimize the risk of reporting a difference actually due to chance. The Bonferroni adjustment resulted in α values of .007 (for INSPIRIT items 1 – 7T) and .004 (for items 7A – 7L).

The total mean score for couples with children was only slightly higher (20.4) than the voluntarily childless group (19.5). The norms for the INSPIRIT indicate a mean score of 20.5 with a standard deviation of 4.5. Thus, both populations are within one standard deviation of the mean of the normative sample, as well as not being significantly different from each other (F = 1.28, df = 1, 163, p = .26).

Identical ANOVAs were then performed for each item of the INSPIRIT, and differences emerged for several specific questions (i.e., 7D, 7H, 7I, 7J, and 7K). Interestingly, these questions were targeting spiritual interactions or experiences and the participant’s perception and interpretation of them. Examples of these questions’ content can be seen in the following list: (7D) an experience of communication with someone who has died, (7H) an experience of complete joy and ecstasy, (7I) a miraculous (or not normally occurring) event, (7J) a healing of your body or mind (or witnessed such a healing), and (7K) a feeling of unity with the earth and all living things. Participants were
Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, and Significance of the INPRIRIT Scores Between Couples with
Children and Voluntarily Childless Couples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Couples with Children</th>
<th>Voluntarily Childless</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Score</td>
<td>20.39</td>
<td>4.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Religion/spiritual strength</td>
<td>20.39</td>
<td>4.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Time on religion/spiritual practice</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Spirit force</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Closeness to God</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Convinced God exists</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) God dwells within you</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7T) Experience Total</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7A) God's energy/presence</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>4.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7B) Great spiritual figure</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7C) Angels or guiding spirits</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7D) Com with deceased</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7E) Meet with spirit teacher</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7F) Experience of love</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7G) Experience of peace</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7H) Experience of joy</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7I) Experience of a miracle</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7J) Healing of mind/body</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7K) Feeling of unity</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7L) Experience with near death</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates significance p<.007 (scores 1-7T)
+indicates significance P<.004 (scores 7A-7L)
Table 4

Means, Standard Deviations, and Significance of the INSPIRIT Between Men and Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Men M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Women M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Score</td>
<td>19.38</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>20.51</td>
<td>5.23</td>
<td>2.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Religion/spiritual strength</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>8.01*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Time on religion/spirit practice</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Spirit force</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>5.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Closeness to God</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>3.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Convinced God exists</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) God dwells within you</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7A) God’s energy/presence</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7B) Great spiritual figure</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7C) Angels or guiding spirits</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>10.31+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7D) Communication with deceased</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7E) Meet with spirit teacher</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7F) Experience of love</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>14.75+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7G) Experience of peace</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>2.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7H) Experience of joy</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>13.69+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7I) Experience of a miracle</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7J) Healing of mind/body</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7K) Feeling of unity</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7L) Experience with near death</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of last 12 scores</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates significance p<.007 (scores 1-7T)
+indicates significance p<.004 (scores 7A-7L)
Table 5

Means, Standard Deviations, and Significance of the INSPIRIT Scores among Educational Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>2-yr degree</th>
<th>BA/BS</th>
<th>MS/MA</th>
<th>Doctorate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Score</td>
<td>17.28</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>19.63</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>20.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1)Religion/Spiritual strength</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2)Time practice</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)Spirit force</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4)Close to God</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5)God exists</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6)God within</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7T) Total Experience</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7A)God energy presence</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>3.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7B)Spirit figure</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7C)Angels</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>2.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 (continued)

Means, Standard Deviations, and Significance of the INSPIRIT Scores among Educational Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>High School</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7D) Communicate with deceased</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7E) Meet with spirit teacher</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7F) Experience of love</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7G) Experience of peace</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>2.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7H) Experience of joy</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7I) Experience of a miracle</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>2.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7J) Healing of mind/body</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>2.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7K) Feeling of Unity</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>2.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7L) Experience with near death</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates significance p<.007 (scores 1-7T)
+ indicates significance p<.004 (scores 7A-7L)
able to rank whether or not they had these experiences and how they perceive that these specific experiences impacted their belief in God. Couples with children scored significantly higher than the voluntarily childless couples on every question except for 7K (see Table 3).

A second ANOVA, which compared scores on the INSPIRIT by gender, was also performed. The dependent variables were the INSPIRIT and whether the participants gender. While no significance difference was found in total score summaries (F = 2.22, df = 1,163, p<.007), participants did respond differently to several specific questions (i.e., 7C, 7F, and 7H). Again, three of the scores (i.e., 7C, 7F, and 7H), which examined spiritual experiences and participants' interpretation of them, were deemed significant (see Table 4).

A third ANOVA, which compared educational levels and responses on the INSPIRIT, was also examined. The dependent variable was the INSPIRIT and the independent variable was education. The groups did differ significantly in the total score of the INSPIRIT (F= 2.16, df= 6,155, p<.05). However, post-hoc analyses revealed two groups with only one member each (less than high school and not reporting). When these two cases were removed, no significant differences in the total INSPIRIT score were found (F = .87, df = 4, 157, p = .48). Also, no differences were found in the individual items of the INSPIRIT, as reported in Table 5.

A fourth ANOVA compared males' and females' satisfaction with career, current marriage, and current partner. Interestingly, career (F=8.59, df=1,160, p=.005 ), current marriage (F=8.38, df=1,160, p=.004), and current partner (F=6.32, df=1,160, p=.016) all indicated statistical significance (see Table 6).
A fifth ANOVA (i.e., one-way with p<.05) compared levels of satisfaction in career, marriage, and current partner by whether or not the person had children. No significant differences were found in career satisfaction (F=.85, df=1,160, p=.96), marital satisfaction (F=.64, df=1,160, p=.72), or partner satisfaction (F=.17, df=1,160, p=.25) (see Table 7).

Table 6
Totals, Means, and Significance of Career Satisfaction, Martial Satisfaction, and Partner Satisfaction by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Satisfaction</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Satisfaction</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Satisfaction</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates p<.05

Table 7
Totals, Means, and Significance of Career Satisfaction, Martial Satisfaction, and Partner Satisfaction by whether or not a Couple has Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Couples with Children</th>
<th>Voluntarily Childless Couples</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Satisfaction</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>1.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Satisfaction</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Satisfaction</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates p<.05
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION

To date, no studies have been conducted comparing voluntarily childless and parent populations on the issue of spirituality, though several older studies have been completed on aspects of religiosity. Based on the definition by Anderson and Worthen (1997) and the assumption that spirituality is a different and broader construct than religiosity, several hypotheses were proposed for the present study. First, a set of religiosity questions were created and tested as a control measure. It was necessary to find a way to verify that the populations responding to this survey were representative of their respective groups. The analysis indicates that there was a significant difference in terms of attending services with voluntarily childless couples indicating less attendance than couples with children, which is consistent with past research findings between these populations. This offers some support that using the Internet to recruit these participants did not result in a significantly different sample, at least in terms of the variables of interest, than previous research.

The second hypothesis stated that there would be no statistically significant difference in spirituality scores between the two groups. In terms of total INSPIRIT scores, the analysis indicated that there was no significant difference. However, when the scores were examined on a question-by-question basis, significant differences do emerge. All five of the scores that produced significant differences dealt with spiritual interactions
or experiences, the participant’s interpretation of them, and how the particular experience impacted their perception of God. For instance, they were asked if they had ever had an experience of communication with someone who had died (7D) and were then asked to rate (scores of 1-4) the extent to which it affected their belief in God. Interestingly, couples with children scored higher than voluntarily childless couples on all but one question (i.e., a feeling of unity with the earth and all living things). A possible explanation of this score could be due to a combination of factors such as the more non-Christian belief systems that the voluntarily childless couples endorse, the concern with overpopulation, and an environmental awareness.

It is also interesting to note that the INSPIRIT is an instrument used to primarily measure spiritual experiences; however, since the initiation of this project roughly three years ago the construct of spirituality has expanded and now more clearly differentiates spiritual beliefs and spiritual practices. This study primarily emphasized the spiritual experiences but the demographic sheet administered also attempted to tap into the spiritual beliefs (i.e., what religion or set of spiritual beliefs do you currently follow as an adult) and practices (i.e., do you currently attend church or worship services and if not, is there a particular way in which you choose to express your religious or spiritual beliefs). This project found no significant difference between the two groups in terms of the total INSPIRIT score yet several differences were found in the more explicit spiritual experience questions. When these two groups were compared on spiritual practices the voluntarily childless couples indicated a wider range of non-traditional practices and a greater tendency to explore Eastern religious philosophy. The incorporation of non-
Western philosophy was illustrated when participants discussed their spiritual beliefs. For instance, there was a noticeable attempt to include the philosophies of Taoism and Buddhism into their understanding of themselves, the earth, and the universe around them.

The third hypothesis proposed that there would be a statistically significant difference in measures of satisfaction between the genders. The analysis indicates that there was a significant difference between the genders in terms of career satisfaction, marital satisfaction, and partner satisfaction. Overall, the women reported significantly higher scores than did the men and this in may have influenced the rest of their perceptions on the questionnaire.

The fourth hypothesis proposed that there would be a statistically significant difference between couples with children and voluntarily childless couples on the three measures of satisfaction. However, the ANOVA performed indicated that there was no statistically significant difference on career satisfaction, marital satisfaction, or partner satisfaction. This is contrary to the literature, which indicates that couples voluntarily childless by choice tend to report greater marital and career satisfaction overall.

The fifth and final hypothesis proposed that, assuming there was no statistical difference found in terms of spirituality, couples who were voluntarily childless by choice would demonstrate a wider range of spiritual practices. The analysis which compared religious beliefs participants were originally raised with versus beliefs they current follow endorses a statistically significant difference. Overwhelming, both groups endorsed being raised with Christian beliefs; however, current religious practices among
voluntarily childless couples indicated a significant decrease in Christian beliefs though it was still followed by the majority of participants (39.3% Christian, 29.8% other, and 25% none). One question this information raises is which came first, the shift in religious practice or the decision or become childless? Also, did the timing of this question (i.e. adolescence versus young adult) impact whether they decided to either reject or incorporate alternative ideas into their religious practices? Several participants indicated that while they primarily follow Christian beliefs they have also incorporated non-Christian practices into their rituals such as meditation, Taoism, and Native American sweats.

In summary, part of the data appears to reflect past findings in the research, specifically the significant difference in church attendance among couples with children. However, other analyses such as having children and varying levels of satisfaction are not congruent with past research, which has emphasized that voluntarily childless couples report greater amounts of marital satisfaction. Rather, both populations reported relatively high levels of satisfaction. Another variable affecting this interaction could be educational level. Because these populations were both recruited via the Internet, they tend to be more highly educated than average and as such engage in careers, which could offer them a larger income, more flexibility with their career path, and the ability to engage in flex-time options. As educational level increase the size of the family shrinks and combined with more financial flexibility this may offer women more power in the relationship ultimately leading to more satisfaction. As financial stress decreases could this also be another factor to consider?
Limitations

There were several limitations or weaknesses to this study. The participants truly reflect a restricted sample in that the majority were highly educated, active in their Internet usage, either raised with or currently practice Christian beliefs, and are primarily Caucasian American. Many of these factors do not represent the typical American citizen and the results may be difficult to apply to the average population.

The design was created to ensure that the participants were sampled from their respective populations. However, there is a significantly large population of people who have put off having children due to various reasons (i.e., education, career, etc.), who are unable to be easily separated from the voluntarily childless group. While attempts were made to leave them out of the sample based on their response to a demographic question (i.e. If not, what influenced your choice to have children), not all of the couples answered this question in a consistent manner and it proved to be too inconsistent to use as a screening tool. As for couples with children, the target sites were heavily aimed at parenting issues, which ensured first-time parents, younger parents, or more highly educated parents, which is not necessarily reflective of parents in general.

Participants were requested to be over the age of 18 and married; however, there really was no way to verify this requirement. In order to ensure that one participant did not answer more than one survey, a geographical question was added but again, there was no way to validate their addresses. Interestingly, participants were primarily located in the United States; however, several responses did come from other countries and as the
usage of the Internet continues to grow this issue will have to be addressed by future researchers.

As this study was primarily conducted via the Internet, many technological issues were encountered during the data-collecting phase. For instance, several potential participants used Web T.V., which limited their ability to access the attachments sent to them. A few participants reported that when they tried to open some of the attachments the headings were so misaligned that they were unable to decipher the survey and it had to be re-sent to them. Also, several parenting sites responded in an uninterested manner to the initial request to post for participants and refused to put it on their web site. This difficulty in convincing sites to post the request resulted in several problems: three rounds of requests had to be sent out in order to acquire a large enough sample; the author was unable to keep track of which sites agreed to the postings and which ones did not post; and some confusion with one of the demographic questions (i.e., Web site you frequent) hindered the ability to track from which sites participants were responding.

Despite the technological challenges, this use of Internet was a positive research experiences. For example, it was rare that questionnaires were sent out and completed responses were sent back via regular mail (an option offered to protect confidentiality). Rather, participants appeared to feel comfortable emailing any questions or concerns to this author. In addition, several participants also sent electronic mail comments or letters back with their questionnaires. Undoubtedly, researchers will continue to utilize the Internet as a way to reach participants and a change in the traditional and accepted patterns of interaction between researcher and participant will have to be addressed.
Implications for Research

As population demographics continue to change, voluntarily childless couples are likely to increase in number, yet they are currently being overlooked in the literature. This survey allowed for the first steps to be taken in examining spirituality among voluntarily childless couples. Future projects should continue to examine both the differences and similarities in this population when compared to couples with children.

One question raised by this study was possible motivational reasons for choosing a childless lifestyle. Theories proposed in the past have indicated that economic motivation, lifestyle concerns, and environmental awareness may impact a person’s decision to remain childless. One voluntarily childless participant reported that he chose to be childless because he remembers “growing up poor;” this indicates that comparing economic histories between the two groups may shed light on whether economics or social mobility concerns had an impact on the decision to remain childless. Several others indicated that “time obligations of career” and “overpopulation concerns” impacted their decision. This study also found indications of possible political motivations to remain childless. One voluntarily childless participant wrote the following quote.

Thank you for deciding to research this issue. It’s an important one to me as a Biologist. I believe that it is irresponsible to add more people to the world’s population and that belief is not understood by others. My actions are generally interpreted to be caused by religious dysfunction and/or psychological problems.
A comparison with a larger sample base could also produce insight into the differences within the couples. The small sample size of this study made a comparison between gender, age, and geographical location impossible to do; however, studying these variables would also shed more light on some of the decision making process. For instance, is there a significant difference in the factors influencing a person’s decision to remain childless in people older than 45 (i.e. generational differences)? If there is a difference does that mean that the decision to become voluntarily childless by choice is now easier, the same, or harder to make? It would also be advantageous to consider the importance of this research with younger groups of participants especially adolescents. Researching a younger cohort could offer a tremendous amount of insight into the development of peer relations, social support systems, personality development, career goals, and personal goals in regards to people deciding to pursue a voluntarily childless life-style. Younger groups would enable researchers to track the progression of beliefs, personal philosophy, and developing personality structure whereas today we are only able to explore these developmental issues through a retroactive methodology.

In terms of training, this study highlights the perceived importance of spirituality in a person’s life, regardless of lifestyle choice. Participants indicated that spirituality is a much more active part of their daily living than psychologists have previously acknowledged. Unfortunately, psychologists rarely receive training or coursework, which emphasizes how spirituality could be incorporated into therapy, or the general usefulness of acknowledging its importance in a person’s life. The field of psychology has also overlooked how a person’s spiritual or religious beliefs may affect their own
perceptions of the world around them or the lifestyles, which they have chosen to live. As more research in spiritual issues becomes available, it is becoming clearer that training in issues of spirituality needs to be further addressed in doctorate and master’s level coursework. While a course emphasizing different worldwide religions and spiritual beliefs would be advantageous to any training program, even a weekend seminar could benefit therapists by opening up yet another topic of diversity, tolerance, and acceptance. Yet, there is still noticeable resistance in the incorporation of this area into psychology as more conservative groups correctly argue that it is a difficult construct to develop or accurately measure and that its inclusion may muddy the waters between theology and psychology. However, the recent realization of the importance of the mind-body connection and the demand by the public to acknowledge them as a whole, lends credence to the argument that the topic of spirituality at the very least needs to be discussed by psychology and other helping professions. It seems appropriate that psychology, which is moving towards a more inclusive and holistic view of the individual, begin to also incorporate the spiritual aspects and the importance of it in a person’s life.

If the importance of spiritual issues become more accepted by the field of psychology, therapists would have another powerful tool to use when working with individuals, couples, and families. The acceptance of the clients’ beliefs, the willingness to address spiritual and religious issues, and the training to aid in a facilitation of this discussion could give psychologists another dimension by which to conceptualize their clients and to be better prepared to intervene. By opening this doorway, therapists could
also use this topic as a vehicle or a way to discuss an even wider number of issues such as relationships, death and dying, medical interventions, health, raising children, and other support systems.

Research exploring issues of spirituality and religiosity have implications on both individual and societal levels. Undoubtedly, there is an increasing amount of research being conducted on spiritual issues with the belief that understanding this area could bring about revolutions in health psychology and other well-being areas. There is a growing awareness in psychology that the 'mind-body' paradigm may simply not be enough to describe the human experience; rather, a 'mind-body-soul' paradigm may better reflect people and the societies in which they live.

Conclusion

For over twenty years, researchers have paid scant attention to the experiences of the voluntarily childless population, though recent census data indicates that their importance and influence may be rising. The decision to remain childless has an impact not only on those who make that choice but also on the rest of society. If researchers further explored and attempted to understand this group through a more neutral or positive lens, could this lifestyle choice become more acceptable to others? Theoretically, if more people were aware of having a choice and felt comfortable initiating it perhaps it would help to reduce child abuse, over population, and excessive demand on the environment.

This dissertation attempted to study this unique population with a relatively new construct and the results indicated that spirituality may be another means through which
this population and other understudied groups like it could be reexamined and reconceptualized. Examining the potential relationships between spirituality and family lifestyle choices has the potential to contribute to a greater understanding of a largely ignored population.
APPENDICES
Appendix A

Web Sites Contacted

Parentctr@tnpc.com  
Askus@parenting-qu.com  
Info@hipmama.com  
Stuff@alternativeparenting.com  
Comments@parentguidenews.com  
Webmaster@parents.com  
Support@parentsplace.com  
Night@pathfinder.com  
National@babybag.com  
Cyf@reeusda.gov  
Mwc@iquest.net  
Mmozer@imageplaza.com  
www.now2000.com/cbc  
www.nokidding.net  
www.vhemt.org  
www.zpg.org  
cn.org/zpg  
www.missouri.edu/~c489011/

Initial Request to the Webmasters

Dear __________

I am a graduate student at the University of North Dakota who is conducting a study about spirituality via the Internet. This study is being supported by my advisor, Cindy Juntunen, Ph.D. and has been approved by our human subjects review board, which has to examine any study that involves people. I am looking for participants who are married, over the age of 18, and are (either voluntarily childless by choice or couples with children). I would appreciate it if you could post the message at the bottom of this letter on your website. If you have any questions please feel free to email me at broneck@plains.nodak.edu. Thank you for your time and effort.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Broneck
Appendix B

Consent Form

Cheryl Broneck
University of North Dakota
Counseling Psychology, Box 8255
Grand Forks, ND 58201
broneck@plains.nodak.edu

Dear Participants:

My name is Cheryl Broneck and I am a doctoral student in the counseling psychology program at the University of North Dakota. This study is being supported by my academic advisor, Cindy Juntunen, Ph.D. I am conducting a research project comparing religious and spiritual beliefs in couples. Over the last decade, psychology has started to realize that these issues are playing an important role in a person’s general well-being and I want to further explore this issue and its effects in couples. You have been included as a participant in this study because you are part of a married couple, are a member of an Internet based couples’ interest group, and are over the age of 18. If you are under 18 or unmarried please disregard this survey.

Responding to this survey is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, there are no right or wrong answers in this survey so please do not feel as if they need to be answered in a specific way. In order to protect the confidentiality of your responses all of the forms will be assigned a number for identification purposes. The results will then be kept in a locked box for the required three years after which they will be destroyed.

It takes approximately twenty minutes to fill out both of the forms and each person is individually asked to fill out a separate set of forms. You can then return them to me either via regular or electronic mail. Emailed responses will have the return addresses removed immediately and will then be assigned a number. If you choose to return the forms via email you need to be aware of several confidentiality concerns. By downloading this file into your computer it is possible to retrieve the information from the hard drive or the caches even after you have completed and deleted the file. There is software available which would allow you to delete the cache of your computer. Also, there is the possibility that the data sent back via email can be intercepted by other computer users on the Internet because networks are not considered to be secure.

Your responses are very important to this study and I appreciate the time and effort you will take in order to complete these two forms. Return of the completed forms will indicate consent. If you have any questions, concerns, or want to be notified of my findings both my advisor, Cindy Juntunen, Ph.D., and I can be reached at (701) 777-2729. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of North Dakota.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Broneck
Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questionnaire

Age_________ Sex: Male Female State___________________________
Zip Code_________ Race/Ethnicity______________________________
Web site you frequent _______________________________________
Highest grade or diploma received ______________________________
Current job/career ___________________________________________
How long have you been married to your current partner? _________
Do you two have any children?
If yes, what influenced your choice to have children?
How many children do you have and what are their ages?
If not, what influenced your choice to not have children?

Have you been married before?
If so do you have any children from that marriage?

*****For the following three questions please use this key: 1 is very satisfied, 2 is satisfied, 3 is neutral, 4 is dissatisfied, 5 is very dissatisfied*****

How satisfied are you with your current marriage? 1 2 3 4 5
How satisfied are you with your current partner? 1 2 3 4 5
How satisfied are you with your current job/career? 1 2 3 4 5

What religion or set of spiritual beliefs did your parent(s) raise you with?__________________________
What religion or set of spiritual beliefs do you currently follow as an adult?_______________________

Do you currently attend church or worship services?__________________________
If so, how often do you attend?___________________________________________
Does your partner attend with you?
If not, is there a particular way in which you choose to express your religious or spiritual beliefs?______________

Do you consider yourself a religious person?____________________________________
Do you consider yourself a spiritual person?____________________________________
Do you believe that there is a difference between religiosity and spirituality? Yes No
If you answered yes could you explain or define the difference?______________________
Appendix D

INDEX OF CORE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

The following questions concern your spiritual or religious beliefs and experiences. There are no right or wrong answers. For each question, circle the number of the answer that is most true for you.

1. How strongly religious (or spiritually-oriented) do you consider yourself to be?
   1. Strong
   2. Somewhat strong
   3. Not very strong
   4. Not at all

2. About how often do you spend time on religious or spiritual practices?
   1. Several times per day to several times per week
   2. Once per week to several times per month
   3. Once per month to several times per year
   4. Once per year or less

3. How often have you felt as though you were very close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you outside yourself?
   1. Never
   2. Once or twice
   3. Several times
   4. Often

PEOPLE HAVE MANY DIFFERENT IMAGES AND DEFINITIONS OF THE HIGHER POWER THAT WE OFTEN CALL GOD. PLEASE USE YOUR IMAGE AND YOUR DEFINITION OF GOD WHEN ANSWERING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

4. How close do you feel to God?
   1. Extremely close
   2. Somewhat close
   3. Not very close
   4. I don’t believe in God

5. Have you ever had an experience that has convinced you that God exists?
   1. Yes
   2. Maybe
   3. I don’t know
   4. No

6. Indicate whether you agree or disagree with this statement: “God dwells within you.”
   1. Definitely disagree
   2. Tend to disagree
   3. Tend to agree
   4. Definitely agree
Appendix D

7. The following list describes spiritual experiences that some people have had. Please indicate if you have had any of the experiences and the extent to which each of them has affected your belief in God.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>NEVER HAD THIS EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>HAD THIS EXPERIENCE AND IT:</th>
<th>Did not strengthen belief in God</th>
<th>Strengthened belief in God</th>
<th>Convinced me of God's existence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. An experience of God's energy or presence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. An experience of a great spiritual figure (e.g. Jesus, Mary, Elijah, Buddha)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. An experience of angels or guiding spirits</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. An experience of communication with someone who has died</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Meeting or listening to a spiritual teacher or master</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. An overwhelming experience of love</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. An experience of profound inner peace</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. An experience of complete joy and ecstasy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. A miraculous (or not normally occurring) event</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. A healing of your body or mind (or witnessed such a healing)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. A feeling of unity with the earth and all living things</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. An experience with near death or life after death</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Other (specify)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


